



**Over 700 life stories
every year.**

Annual Report
2019





Stories
Simran

Though 16-year-old Simran dreamed of being a journalist, the onset of her father’s debilitating intestinal disorder inspired a change in her hopes for the future. This KEI scholar currently has her mind set on becoming a gastroenterologist. She admits, however, that her parents’ fears for her journalistic career may have also played a part in her change of heart.

“In Kashmir, there’s a new conflict every day”, Simran explains.

“That’s a big challenge for a journalist”, and naturally also dangerous for those reporting from the front lines.

“As my brother told our mother, I could get a stone thrown at my forehead and wind up in the hospital, or worse, a bullet in my chest.” Simran’s father, a hawker, earns 30,000 rupees (\$440) annually for the entire household.

These days, beside her studies, she channels her passion for writing into poetry. During the devastating 2014 floods that displaced Simran’s entire family, she started understanding how poetry can be a way of processing one’s difficult experiences and provide escape and relief.

Simran has also returned, quite precociously, to editing her earlier work. As she goes back through her past poems, she ponders about her own writing, smiles, and says she cheers for herself, “I think, wow, my writing is really beautiful!”

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— NOTES FROM OUR — PRESIDENTS

At Kashmir Education Initiative we believe in and help educate more than 700 children every year. Education that is focused on competencies and not grades. Education that will empower in this process grant the supporters, volunteers, and patrons with the endless gift of gratitude. This focus on education is particularly crucial when you are living in one of the most troubled regions of the world.



In addition to our focus on individual mentoring of scholars, I believe the highlight of 2018 was the KEI Annual Scholar's Day organized by our Student Advisory Board and the restructured workshops with primary focus on developing operational and character competencies like critical thinking, problem solving, grit, and stress management and leadership.

I would like to thank all our donors and supporters who have been the bedrock of this organization. I invite you to engage with and to sign up to be a mentor or a volunteer by completing a very brief online form at: www.kashmirei.org/volunteer.

Riyaz Bashir, USA
riyaz.bashir@kashmirei.org



The mention of Kashmir brings opposing images to mind. Visions of majestic mountain peaks on one hand and pictures of mourning mothers on the other, fields of wildflowers in one image and endless cycles of death and destruction in another. Amid all this, KEI is making a small but significant effort by giving hope to some of the beleaguered children of this strife-ridden valley so they can benefit from the power of quality education.

Young and vulnerable students are able to discover their own talents and adequately prepare for careers and life through a series of robust programs that provide financial assistance, mentorship, soft skills training, experiential opportunities, and career counselling.

With the generous support of well-meaning people across the globe, and particularly from the United States, KEI creates intellectual capital by investing in individuals who are then able to overcome challenges, take on opportunities, and become a driving force for advancement.

Meraj-ud-din, Kashmir
meraj.razak@kashmirei.org

Vision & Values

We exist to enable access to education and opportunities for the development of children and youth living in Kashmir.

Non-political, non-religious nature

We are focused solely on education and opportunities for children and young adults.

Striving for continuous improvement of functions

We keep evaluating and tweaking our existing programs, in addition to piloting new ideas.

Transparency & Integrity

Our financial information is publicly available, including independent annual reviews.

Open governance structure

We have fixed board and executive terms, and welcome your participation.



Artwork by **Faisal Shah**, KEI scholar



Stories
Faisal

17-year-old Faisal wasn't alive to witness Kashmir's booming film culture, but nonetheless managed to cultivate a passion for animation through watching DreamWorks and Pixar films online. He counts "Brave" and "Coco" among his all-time favorites. Using a laptop KEI's Self Study program provided him, he's able to watch the films that inspire him, and take internet courses on animation.

"My father, who operates a small snack and household goods shop, pushed me towards a medical track at school", Faisal told us.

"But artwork does get in the way of my studies. It's all I want to do, and I can lose hours, even whole days without realizing it once I start drawing."

Faisal's father runs a small shop that brings in only 60,000 rupees (\$900) a year. Despite the economic pressures he faces as a student, Faisal's commitment to his artwork has started paying off in ways he hopes his parents will support. A Kashmiri-born, San Francisco-based writer recently commissioned Faisal to illustrate a forthcoming graphic novel. Faisal has also connected with fellow artists in Srinagar, like Mujtaba Rizvi, who has inspired Faisal to think outside the box, and consider an arts education abroad. Faisal, one day, hopes to work at Pixar Animation Studio.



KEI Competencies

The three pillars of support KEI offers are financial assistance, mentorship and building competencies through experiential learning.

KEI organizes trainer-led interactive workshops in all districts of Kashmir throughout the year. This KEI competency building program fills a critical gap and equips each workshop, focusing on specific competencies such as time management, public speaking, leadership, self awareness, or teamwork.

The workshops are hands-on and adaptive—we take the time to understand attendees’ learning patterns and match their styles and needs with appropriate methods. KEI scholars consistently rate our competency workshops among their most valued learning experiences. The experience of learning together, with, and from each other deepen the sense of community and creates a supportive peer-group among KEI scholars.

Mentorship Program

“The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches, but to reveal to him his own.” Benjamin Disraeli

At KEI, we believe that our scholars represent beautiful diamonds in the rough that achieve their full lustre through the sculpting provided by our mentorship program.

KEI is always looking for mentors who have valuable life experiences and wisdom to share with its scholars through the various stages of their evolution. So yes, we are looking for you!

Our mentoring relationships are introspective, mutually beneficial partnerships in which both parties develop an enhanced self awareness, emotional satisfaction, and leadership skills.

KEY MILESTONES

We achieved significant growth, going from 24 mentors at the beginning of the year to 104 at the end, with plans of going to 150 in another year. At the end of 2018, we had successfully completed Phase Two of our 2017-2018 program, which involved successfully developing 80 mentorship engagements.

2019 will see us increasing program scale and efficacy by piloting mentorship in groups, beyond the high school scholars that we have focused on so far. Given the backdrop and environment in Kashmir, your support today is even more critical than it has ever been to the success of our mission. We entreat upon all of you to **make a difference, become a leader and engage as a KEI mentor today!**

Our mentors need to be conversationally proficient in Kashmiri or Urdu. To learn more and to engage, email us at: mentorship@kashmirei.org

Mentorship Stories



Mahima Singh
Mentor

It has been almost one year now since I began my mentorship journey with Fallah Keen, my mentee. Every minute of my time spent with Fallah was full of sheer amazement and admiration for her dedication, passion, hard work, and, most of all, understanding and acceptance of the fact that despite the challenges of being affected by the political conflict, she must move forward on her personal, academic, and professional journey to fulfill her goals in life.

I began this mentorship journey thinking it was a one-year commitment to help shape a young lady's future. Little did I know that my mentee, Fallah, would end up helping me see my own life from a different perspective.

**It has been an honor being Falla's mentor.
I wish Fallah a lot of success in her life.**



Fallah Keen
Mentee

I have found that my self exploration would have been incomplete without meeting my mentor. She provides me courage to explore a career as a doctor.

I have no words and adjectives to describe my mentor but her willingness to share skills, knowledge and experience.

Her mentoring has helped me by:

- **improving personal and communication skills**
- **improving my studying skills**
- **increasing my confidence and motivation**

She asks me to look inside and look at what makes me feel warmth and passion in my core. She reassured me that the journey to discover my passion is an important one and that it would take time and energy.

I'd like to thank Kashmir Education Initiative and especially my mentor, Ms. Mahima Singh!

Scholarship Programs in Numbers

Below is a snapshot in numbers of the High School Scholarships Program (HSSP) that supports students in the 9th through 12th grades, and the Undergraduate Scholarships Program (UGS) that supports students pursuing bachelors level studies in Kashmir:

	HSSP	UGS
Total scholars in the program in 2018	604	30
Total applicants in 2018	585	112
Total new scholars selected in 2018	149	15
Total financial assistance disbursed in 2018	US\$121,000	US\$4,350
Total distinctions in board examinations	302	NA
Total students who scored 90% or above*	131	NA
Professional degree entrance qualifiers^	22	NA

*Scoring 90% or higher earns the student a high honor roll distinction



The streams reflect areas of study that students in Kashmir must choose right after their 10th grade; a student aspiring to a career in Science chooses the Science Stream, while someone interested in Fine Arts and Languages chooses the Arts Stream.

In their 10th grade state-wide exams, five KEI scholars scored 98/100 or higher

In the class 12th board exams, three KEI scholars were ranked among the top 20 across Kashmir:

4th Rank - Science Stream

7th Rank - Arts Stream

19th Rank - Arts Stream

^Entrance qualifiers are the students that passed entrance examinations and got accepted into professional colleges like Med School, Engineering School, etc. In Kashmir, qualifying exams (called entrance exams) are highly competitive.

Global Opportunities (GO) Program

Encouraged by the success of our scholars in securing scholarships at prestigious institutions like Wellesley College in Boston and placements in a global youth leadership program (Miracle Corners of the World, Young Leaders Access), we decided to create a program focused on Global Opportunities.

The goal of the GO Program is to facilitate and maximize access to existing academic and professional development opportunities worldwide. The GO Program aims to connect KEI scholars to academic, competency-building, and career development opportunities funded by educational institutions, other non-profits, and organizations focused on education and youth development around the world. These opportunities include higher education scholarships and educational grants like those offered by Fulbright, Islamic Development Bank, and Tata Trust among others.

Our targets in 2019 are to:

Create a clearing house of information on global opportunities on our new TARUK* database platform. Give our scholars access to information from our database through our website and updates through our social media pages.

Expand the Global Friends of KEI network that can help connect our scholars to opportunities and provide them guidance and advice.

Continue to conduct information sessions in Kashmir on admissions processes to colleges and universities with a special focus on academic and experiential opportunities outside of Kashmir.

*Technology Automation and Repository Unifying KEI (TARUK).
Read about TARUK in a subsequent section of this report



Please reach out to us at globalopps@kashmirei.org to explore becoming a part of our Global Friends of KEI network.

Volunteering & Internships

The success of KEI and its programs is owed largely to dedicated volunteers and interns who bring their skills, expertise, energy and selflessly contribute their time to help us achieve our goals.

KEI Internship Experience: Elena Cicognani

The month I spent volunteering at KEI was an incredibly moving, educative, and unique experience. Having never been to Kashmir before and deciding that I would spend a month at KEI's Srinagar office, I had little idea of how my day-to-day life would look and/or what to prepare for. Before I arrived at KEI's Srinagar headquarters, the organization's U.S.-based directors and volunteers made themselves completely accessible to me, and got involved in brainstorming an actionable, hands on project for me to work on during my stay in Kashmir. We decided to craft a series of the scholars' own stories to get a personal portrait of Kashmir Education Initiative's effects on their lives as well as the larger community.

Conversations with KEI scholars and their families in their homes, around biscuits and kahwa, occupied the majority of my time in Srinagar. Chats with scholars at the KEI office were also frequent, as many treated the office as a home away from home, a place to connect with their mentors, friends, and do schoolwork. Each successive meeting added a different perspective to life in Kashmir, including at times, the singular and seemingly insurmountable difficulties Kashmiri students face. Nevertheless, each scholar I spoke to, had a passion they indulged with boundless ambition and discipline, despite the obstacles presented by frequent school closures and economic limitations.



I spoke to a young man who taught himself computer animation through YouTube videos after KEI furnished him with a laptop. He dreams of working at Pixar. A young girl I spoke to has led her soccer team - the only competitive women's soccer team in Kashmir - to several victories in the inter-scholastic tournaments across India, and dreams of playing in the UK. A recurring thread that really struck me, particularly from children 13, 14, and 15 years old, was the incredible patience, hope, and inextinguishable hunger each of the scholars have for education. Realizing the extent of the scholars' fortitude, and the role KEI has in reinforcing it, was immensely humbling.

I would highly recommend volunteering for KEI. The fruits of the organization's labor became obvious to me the moment I started talking to scholars, and getting a sense of how much their hopeful attitudes towards education and their passions were bolstered and encouraged by KEI.

As someone interested in education reform and nonprofit work, my month at KEI was an invaluable on-the-ground crash course in the unique problems facing youth in areas suffering from frequent political unrest. The Srinagar staff have an expansive personal background in this field, and getting to work alongside them and be mentored through organizing workshops was enormously educative.

Student Advisory Board

Chairing the KEI's Student Advisory Board (SAB) has enabled me to give back to an organization and a people that I deeply care about. Through the process, I have grown as an individual and formed meaningful relationships with other members of my Student Advisory Board.

KEI's SAB began with the idea of creating a tightly knit community of scholars. It aimed to voice their concerns, solicit their feedback and make recommendations that meet their evolving needs. Our biggest milestone was the Annual Scholars' Day 2018, which brought together our scholars, families, patrons, and volunteers with the common goal of celebrating the hard work of our scholars.

People applauded not just their own, but the whole cohort and displayed great comradeship. As I stood on the stage, I felt a sense of accomplishment when I saw a glimpse of the community that KEI's SAB aspired to cultivate. When I look back at what we as a team have been able to accomplish in this first year, I feel a great sense of contentment. Although our aspirations are high, we are driven by making lasting contributions to KEI.

The SAB is working to create a strong online community to facilitate conversations and to share career opportunities with our scholars. I look forward to establishing a long-term plan to leave a strong legacy and lay the foundation for creating the best version of KEI for our scholars now and in the years to come.



The SAB wants to dedicate this year to deepen the bonds of fellowship among KEI scholars and organize Annual Scholars Day 2019. ”

Chairperson, KEI SAB
Maheen Akram

Annual Scholars Day 2018

Cultivating Community

Looking back on the year that went by, we feel a sense of achievement and pride particularly from having brought together the KEI family, our well wishers, and supporters to celebrate the journey that we started more than a decade ago.

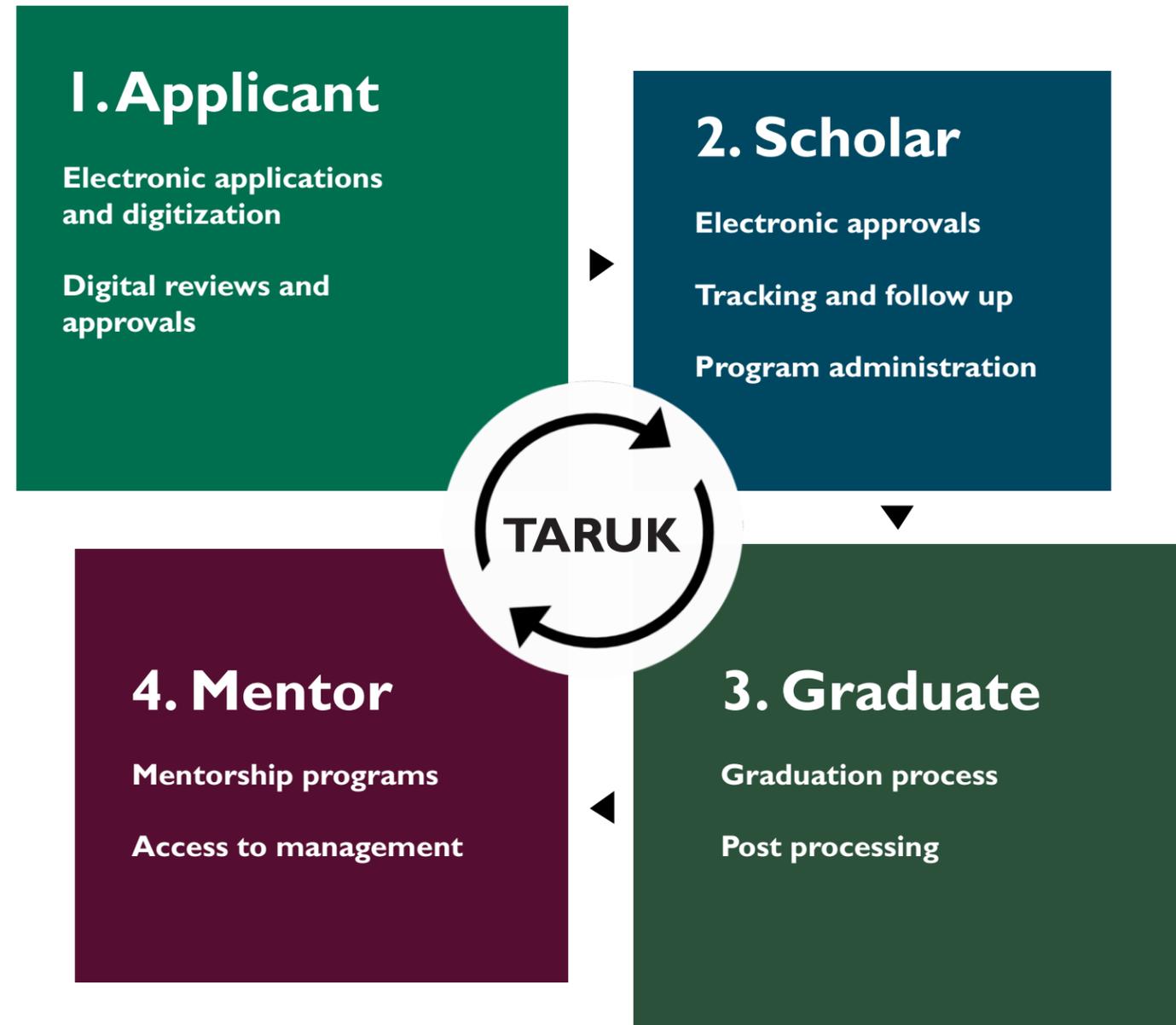


On September 2, our scholars, their parents, our alumni, volunteers, and supporters gathered at the beautiful convocation hall of Kashmir University to celebrate the first ever KEI Annual Day. Over a thousand people attended the Annual Day and marked the beginning of a tradition that we hope to continue year after year. Our scholars and volunteers come from all ten Districts of Kashmir, and some traveled long distances to participate in this event.

The all-day program included cultural performances, skits, panel discussions and speeches from preeminent members of the civil society and our Board of Directors. The event helped everybody gain a deeper understanding of our programs, their impact and our goals and aspirations for the future.

Our amazing Student Advisory Board spearheaded the planning and execution of the Annual Day. We are incredibly proud of them and all the volunteers that helped them.

We carry with a deep sense of satisfaction, the baton of the mission of KEI into the year 2019 with renewed commitment to contribute to enabling education for a lasting impact on the society.



TARUK:

Towards a Digitized, Data Driven Organization

We are excited to have launched TARUK, a technology platform for KEI operations. The first phase is focused on digitizing our scholars' information and provides a comprehensive solution to manage the journey of a KEI Scholar. This includes their application, award, KEI program participation, graduation, and engagement as KEI alumni.

TARUK will

- Improve our operations by making it more efficient to administer our programs.
- Help us communicate effectively and build deeper, long lasting relationships with our scholars.
- Enable more data driven decisions by allowing us to easily run analytics on scholar and program data.

The platform is being rolled out in phases, with the first phase set to be fully operational by Q3 2019. TARUK reflects our continued commitment towards deploying the best tools and technology to optimize our work for efficiency and effectiveness, and guide our strategy with data driven insight.

Financial Report

	2018	2017
Total Funds Raised	\$404,475.97	\$280,472.57*
Fundraising Expenses	\$16,928.20	\$15,282.00
Administrative Expenses	\$7,842.43	\$12,008.00
Program Service Expense	\$177,463.30	\$188,925.00
Total Expenses	\$202,233.93	\$216,215.00
Fundraising Expenses	4.19%	5.45%
Program Service Expense	87.75%	87.38%
Fiscal Performance	2.00	1.30
Rating as per CharityWatch Criteria	A	A

*Audit-adjusted amount due to some funds being credited in 2018

CharityWatch considers Charities with Program Service Expense > 75% and Fundraising Efficiency <25% to be highly efficient.



Stories Arbeena

Sitting in her family home perched on the banks at the back of Dal Lake—her father’s shikara, a cornerstone of the family’s livelihood, moored a few feet away—Arbeena, a 17-year-old KEI scholar, recounted many interactions with tourists from far and wide. These interactions were facilitated by her father, who is a local craftsman.

“I’m able to know how different people live,” she says. Arbeena dreams of seeing the whole world and loves Discovery Channel and travel magazines.

Arbeena’s father focuses on selling what goods he can directly from his shikara on the Dal. Aside from her occasional job as a tutor, Arbeena spends her time almost entirely on studies and preparing for an undergraduate medical track placement exam. Becoming a doctor, the high school senior tells us, would allow her to “do something for [her] family, not just economically,” as more than anything she “want[s] to give them respect from society.” As a salesman, Arbeena’s father earns 54,000 rupees (\$800) annually. Before becoming a KEI scholar, Arbeena placed first in her class of 60 as a 13-year-old eighth grader.

Arbeena is an avid watcher of Sabrina’s YouTube channel, PhysicsGirl. “She built her own aircraft when she was just thirteen-years-old,” Arbeena tells us, “she’s extraordinary!”

Iterative evaluation and innovation helps KEI achieve its goal of bringing guidance and opportunities for growth to KEI scholars.



Donor Testimonial

Yasser & Sualiheen

Education is a catalyst for children's well being—this holds even more meaning in reference to children living in a conflict zone. Thirty years of turbulence in Kashmir have caused seismic changes in all walks of life. The need to play a positive role, to give back, and to contribute has never been more urgent. KEI provides a solid platform to ensure that deserving youth are given educational opportunities. KEI builds community at the micro level and shapes global citizens at a macro level.

It has been a privilege to partner with KEI since its inception and witness its organic growth. KEI is a well-managed non-profit that is guided by a clear framework and makes optimal use of funds. KEI also continues to grow and develop its programs and services to maximize impact. Examples include the impressive evolution of the KEI mentorship program and KEI's partnership with Miracle Corners of the World (MCW) under the Global Opportunities program.

As hundreds of scholars graduate with success, confidence, and hope for the future and hundreds more enroll, it is humbling to be a link in this chain that will continue to pay it forward. We are very excited about the great work that these scholars will engage in moving forward and encourage you to support KEI in whatever way you can.

Sualiheen and Yasser Maqbool live in the California Bay area with their two daughters. They have been long term supporters of KEI.

Named Scholarships

Memorialize a loved one by instituting a scholarship in their name.

We are excited to announce the signing of our first named scholarship agreement. In 2018, the Ghulam Ahmad Ashai Education Trust (GAAET), a public charitable trust in Jammu and Kashmir, pledged funds to create the **KEI Ahmad and Jana Ashai Memorial Scholarship** for pre-doctoral studies in education, social science, and law.

Over three years, under the umbrella of the existing KEI Pre-doctoral Scholarships Program (KEI PDS), scholarships will be awarded to academically outstanding candidates who are economically disadvantaged. The award, which has financial and guidance components, will assist students applying for graduate studies (to pursue Masters or Ph.D. degrees) at well regarded international universities. KEI PDS scholarships pay for standardized test preparation courses such as the GRE, pay test fees, and pay university application fees, in addition to providing comprehensive application review and guidance from experts in the applicant's field of study. We are keenly looking forward to working with the first batch of awardees of the KEI Ahmad and Jana Ashai Memorial Scholarship.

If you would like to institute a named scholarship with KEI, please email president@kashmirei.org or reach out to your contact at KEI. Come, talk to us!



Art work by Seerat (KEI Participator)



Stories

Iqra

It is rare to see Kashmiri girls play any form of sport in public. Iqra was no different.

“I had never touched a football before I was 15” she told us.

Thanks to a gym teacher she came into contact with one. Two years later, Iqra is an offensive player on Kashmir's first ever national, under 19, women's football (soccer) team.

“We've created history in Kashmir,” a beaming Iqra said. They have won three of the four national matches they've played thus far, against Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, and Delhi.

The past two years of training have dramatically changed the 17-yr old high schooler. As graduation nears, Iqra has her mind on training as much as she can, and dreams of one day being able to play professionally in London.

Iqra's mother, a housekeeper earning 18,000 rupees (\$268) annually, has single handedly taken care of her and her three younger sisters since Iqra's father passed away. She has never had enough time off work to attend one of Iqra's games. While initially hesitant, she now supports Iqra's passion. Iqra was recently admitted to Hans Raj college on a sports scholarship.

Join us in touching and
transforming lives.

Engage with us.

Office: 113 West Plain St. Wayland,
MA 01778 USA

Phone: +(1) 508-733-7304

Email: information@kashmirei.org
kashmirei.org



KEI Kashmir
Education
Initiative

Artwork: Shah Faisal (KEI scholar) - Seerat Shaheen (KEI Participator)

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