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U of M 'is the hub' of Afghan book drive

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By Trevor Wilhelm

A campaign that began at the University of Manitoba to collect books for an Afghan medical institute has spread across Canada and now involves every English-language medical school in the country.

"This is the hub of the action," said Magdalena Kugath, 26, a second-year University of Manitoba medical student. "Medical students (have) a really big interest in health and helping people on an international level, so I knew from the beginning this would catch on like wildfire."

Kugath, who was the one primarily responsible for getting the 13 other universities on board, is one of 20 Winnipeg medical students collecting books for the Kabul Medical Institute.

The seeds for the project were planted in 2000 when Richard Gordon, a professor at the University of Manitoba's radiology department, watched a TV news story about the hard times facing Afghan schools.

"There were 100 books left at Kabul University including, ironically, *Paradise Lost*," said Gordon.

While it was in power, the Taliban government seized nearly all the books at Kabul Medical Institute and other educational facilities. Gordon said previous wars had also taken their toll on the country's libraries. The 650 books the students are collecting, worth \$110,000 in total, come from a list -- released every two years in medical circles -- of the texts necessary for a core medical library.

The students have collected about 10 per cent of the books. But Gordon said they won't be able to get them all through donations. They'll actually have to buy \$50,000 to \$70,000 worth of books, he said, so they're also looking for monetary help.

The students are hoping to have the books in Kabul by May.

Organizers can be contacted at kabulmedbooks@hotmail.com.