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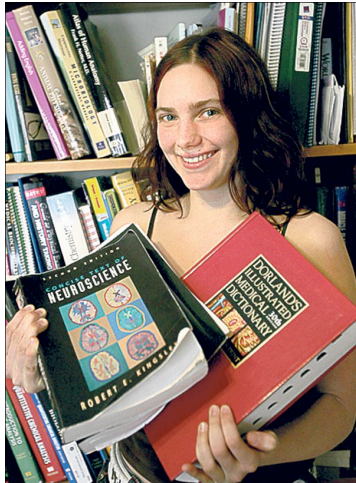
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Violence halts book program Medical libraries in Afghanistan suffer

Mon Mar 5 2007

By Jen Skerritt



Wayne Glowacki/ Winnipeg Free Press

Jodie Brown: 300 books collected.

More than 700 books are still sitting at the Canadian Forces base in Winnipeg and another 700 are at the University of Toronto waiting to be shipped to Khandahar and Kabul. The group can't afford to ship the textbooks privately, since each box would cost about \$300.

"I guess medical books aren't at the top of the list," Brown said last week.

Students collect donated medical textbooks from fourth-year medical graduate students and doctors. The books sent to Afghanistan are less than 10 years old, and older books that are donated are sold and profits are used to purchase books on how to treat war and landmine injuries.

Brown said medical students in Afghanistan have outdated texts or often no books at all. Many have been destroyed in the war, and there is no way to gather up-to-date medical know-how. She's been corresponding with a student in Herat who was overjoyed to see new textbooks from Canadian students.

ESCALATING violence and attacks in Afghanistan have halted a University of Manitoba program to help restock medical libraries in the war-torn country.

Books with Wings was launched in 2001, after Dr. Richard Gordon saw an appeal for books from the head librarian at Kabul University on CNN. Since then, U of M medical students, along with help from five other Canadian universities, have helped send more than 6,000 textbooks valued at \$150 each to universities in Kandahar, Kabul and Herat.

Student co-coordinator Jodie Brown said students have already collected about 300 books to send to Khandahar this May, but isn't sure how or when they will get there.

Initially, Canadian Forces were sending the books to Afghanistan for free, but stopped last year when the need to send more military equipment trumped the modern medicine books.

Brown said the group is waiting to hear whether there will be room for some books on upcoming flights and is hoping a private sponsor will step forward to pay for the shipment.

What did I think of that movie? It was a little slow and predictable, not like my Corolla Sport.

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Despite the shipment setback, Gordon is intent on continuing the project for at least another three years. He said they've received a lot of positive feedback from the books that have arrived in Afghanistan, and the program has helped create international connections.

Gordon is helping a student attending university in Herat learn math online, by creating problems and answering his questions from the other side of the world.

"Eventually, they'll have the tools they need," Gordon said.

In the meantime, Brown said students will keep collecting books in the hopes that they'll eventually reach their final destination in Afghanistan. "I thought it was a really good way to create a peaceful connection with a country that doesn't have a lot of peaceful connections," she said.

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