

FEMALE CLIMBERS IN AFGHANISTAN

Sinem BİLSEL

Zahra Nooristani is an 18 year old girl learning to climb. She is wearing a traditional, black headscarf, blue coat and trousers. At the back of her coat, there are big white letters: Afghanistan. She steps on the side of a mountain. She is holding a thick rope. The city Kabul is behind and far below her. She is worried but she accomplishes to down herself successfully. She is one of the thirteen women on Afghanistan's first ever women climbing team: "Ascend".

Marina LeGree is an American aid worker who worked in Afghanistan for many years. She was working with an all-female basketball club. One day, she heard about a group that climbed the highest mountain of Afghanistan - Mount Noshaq. Two members of this group were Afghan men. She decided to help the women in Afghanistan to achieve the same honor.



She began "Ascend". It was an easy job to train women to climb mountains of Afghanistan but finding women to join was not as easy. Women were interested in climbing but their families were not. They were worried about their daughters' safety. They were afraid of Taliban.

Afghanistan had been ruled by a political group called Taliban for many years. Taliban restricted women's rights. Women couldn't work, drive or go to school. They couldn't leave the house without the permission of a male family member.

Taliban lost its power in 2001. Afghanistan is slower to change, though. Taliban still has an impact on Afghanistan. Therefore LeGree and her team struggled to find women to join "Ascend". It took time to build trust in families. Finally, they gathered the 13 women of the team Ascend. Their ages vary between 16 and 22, and they are so excited to be there.

Once, one of the older members of the team said: “Climbing is amazing. It feels like you are just born and you have a chance to rule the world.”

Of course, it wasn't easy to learn climbing. Especially under the conditions they had. They had to run, lift heavy things, climb, and be trained hard. They also struggled with the lack of equipment. One of the main problems was the place they were trained in. Ghazi Stadium was known by many but not in a good way. It was used for killing people in by Taliban. Many women had been killed there because of breaking Taliban's extreme rules.

Despite all of the hard conditions, women in Ascend went training every day because there was much more than just training. Ascend gave them conflict resolution, leading and mental health help. It may seem unusual but climbing does not only require physical strength. It's team work and they need to know how to cooperate to solve problems and lead when it is needed.

On August 6th, 2015 they did their first major climbing. They wanted to climb the highest mountain of Afghanistan but there was a fighting near its base so they climbed the other mountains in Afghanistan, which were all taller than 5000 meters.

The women on the team “Ascend” achieved something which had never been done by Afghan women ever before. Not only this, but they also went to a school, talked with young girls and encouraged them to work for their dreams. They don't only climb mountains; they also lead a generation to achieve more than they do.

Reference:

<http://spotlightenglish.com/listen/female-climbers-in-afghanistan>