

MISSION MOMENT

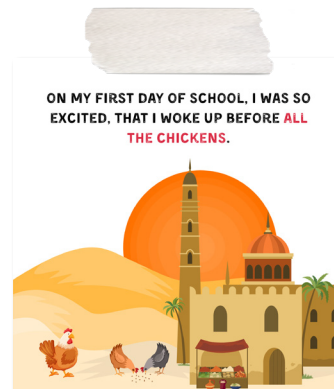
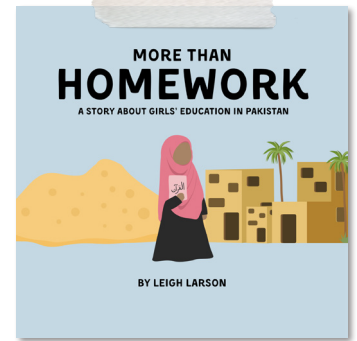
WHERE COMPASSION BECOMES RESILIENCE

For more than three decades, Week of Compassion has partnered with Community World Service Asia (CWSA) to accompany vulnerable communities in Pakistan. In 2025, that long-standing partnership took on a new dimension through the International Disaster Response Immersion Program, as seminarian Leigh Larson joined CWSA for ten weeks of ministry and learning. Leigh Larson, a student at Phillips Theological Seminary and a candidate for ordination in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), brought her gifts as a chaplain, author, and scholar into a context of profound challenge and resilience.

In rural villages in Pakistan, Week of Compassion and Community World Service Asia support communities by feeding and educating girls who might otherwise be denied schooling. In rural villages where law enforcement is minimal, many households do not send their girls to school, and if they do, it is generally up to the fifth grade. Child marriage is common, and some households do not find value in educating their daughters and prioritize domestic training to prepare their daughters for young marriages instead. Families often view daughters' education as unnecessary, but when a daily meal is provided, parents are more likely to send their girls to school.

The federal government built girls' schools roughly a decade ago, but they sit empty as 'ghost schools'. Community World Service Asia has partnered with these communities and their interested citizens to fund lunch meals for the girls' schools six days a week, while the local communities provide the teachers and firewood to prepare and heat the meals.

Today, more than 450 girls in three villages attend classes up to the eighth grade, receiving not only food and lessons, but also affirmation of their inherent worth. This is a remarkable improvement, considering many of the girls in the region received no education at all three years ago.



Widows in these communities, left without economic support after their husbands died, are given goats that produce milk both for the school meals and for their own income generation. Leigh witnessed firsthand how something as simple as lunch can change a child's future: "These schools are breaking cycles of poverty and child marriage. They are places of hope."

The summer immersion program itself was jointly envisioned by Week of Compassion and CWSA, building on CWSA's long tradition of hosting exchange programs. At a time when humanitarian organizations face shrinking operational space and evolving staff structures, the opportunity was timely. These efforts not only strengthened CWSA's profile but also reinforced the importance of solidarity and shared learning. "Support from partners like Week of Compassion is especially valuable during a time when the humanitarian sector is undergoing major shifts," partners said. "Their collaboration helps sustain impactful work."

Through Leigh's eyes, we glimpse not only the struggles of refugees, farmers, and schoolgirls in Pakistan, but also the profound impact of Week of Compassion's partnership with CWSA. Together, we are helping communities reclaim dignity, confront climate challenges, and open doors of opportunity. As Leigh was quick to note, gratitude and justice are not mutually exclusive. This is the heart of Week of Compassion's work: always finding **A NEW WAY** to walk alongside our global neighbors, in the way of Christ, where compassion becomes resilience, and hope takes root.

This story is excerpted and edited from the reflection 'Rooted in Partnership: A Summer of Learning in Pakistan,' shared through Week of Compassion's media in September 2025.