

Next-Gen TCF Alumni Moving From Pakistan's Slums Into Elite Professions

The Citizens Foundation has set former students on the path to academic and professional success in the US and Europe—and they are determined to give back.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- For thousands of boys and girls in 1,687 schools run by [The Citizens Foundation](#) in Pakistan, there is equal opportunity for every child to learn in a quality K-10 school environment, to experience personal growth and development, and prepare for the workforce in a rapidly changing world. With a little help from [TCF](#) to level the playing field, more than a thousand girls and boys from underprivileged families have made it to Pakistan's upper-tier universities. And, regardless of gender, many are in professions of their choice—from engineers, IT specialists, and accountants to healthcare, the civil service, banking, teaching, and school management.

Armed with undergrad university degrees, some are moving on to institutions in the US and Europe.

Here are short-version stories of three impressive TCF alumni pursuing professional education, preparing for careers as diverse as neurological medicine, filmmaking, or public service—many miles from home, but TCF and Pakistan are never far from their thoughts.

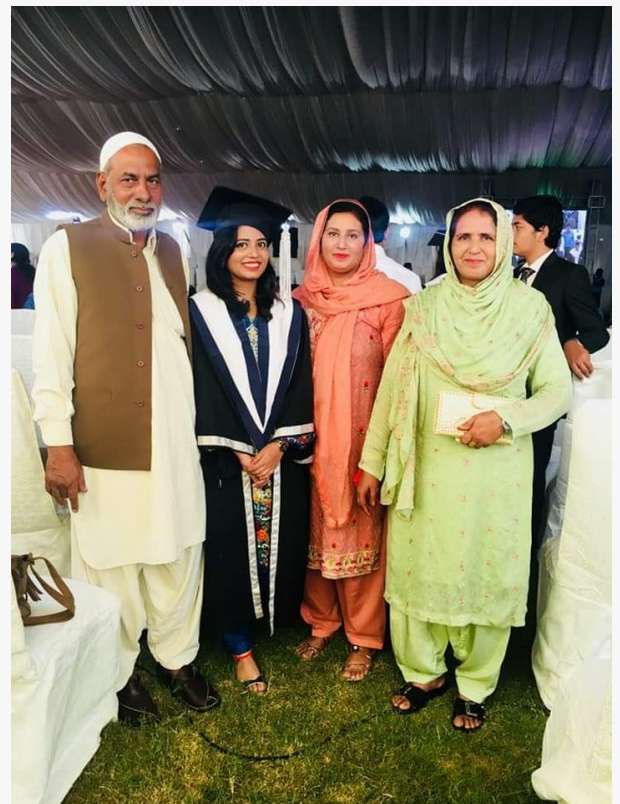
“

I feel TCF school is like a mother who never leaves your hand, who always supports you no matter what.”

Iqran Rasheed

ZAFAR ALI

Zafar grew up in a large, struggling family, the oldest of ten kids, in Landi Kotal—a dusty village deep in the infamous wild west of Pakistan's former 'Federally Administered Tribal Areas' or FATA—close to the Afghan border. Back in



Dr Sidra Saleem with her family at graduation

the day, his father earned a meager \$150-a-month as a long-haul truck driver, delivering goods and supplies from Karachi to US military bases in Afghanistan.

Not seeing a bright future for his family, his aging father wisely decided to move the family to Karachi about 12 years ago, gave up driving a truck, and now drives a taxi in the big city. More important, his father is at home every night with the family.

Zafar's first experience of school education was in a single-room public school in Landi Kotal with as many as 50 children sitting on the floor. But he thrived in what he calls the "marvelous" TCF school in Karachi, completing a 10th-grade education. Intimidated by the thought of competing against students from elite private schools, he explored college admissions with guidance from TCF, and he was one of the five out of hundreds of applicants) to be selected for a scholarship to a 2-year International Baccalaureate program with United World Colleges in Bosnia-Herzegovina. With growing confidence and resourcefulness, his next scholarship was to a four-year degree at Lewis & Clark University in Portland, Oregon, where his major was political science and economics. He aspires to go into elected public service and is currently at Syracuse University in New York on a scholarship for graduate study leading to a doctorate in public policy.



Zafar Ali



Iqran Rasheed

"I often wonder how far I have come," says Zafar "but I will go back to Pakistan. I don't know exactly what I will do but I will go back. I will not forget where I come from."

SIDRA SALEEM, MD

Dr. Sidra Saleem is a physician and second-year neurology resident in Toledo, Ohio, with no time to spare—and she loves it.

Sidra grew up with her parents, grandparents, and four siblings in an urban slum in Karachi where money was tight and living conditions were harsh. But by 6th grade, she was dreaming of being a doctor. The teachers at her TCF school encouraged her to work towards a medical college scholarship. At the end of 12th grade, she ranked in the top 25 out of 10,000 students in Karachi. A scholarship to the five-year program at Dow Medical College in Karachi was next and included four weeks of elective study in pediatric neurology at the University of Illinois Chicago Medical Center and a 4-week rotation in general surgery. She returned home to complete her licensing requirements and worked in hospital jobs but kept looking for a neurology residency in the US—applying to nearly two hundred programs. The marathon struggle paid off when she was accepted to a four-year neurology residency in Toledo, Ohio.

“The people who used to tell my parents not to send us to college, now appreciate what my parents did for me and my siblings, and they even come to me for medical advice,” said Sidra, whose personally narrated story in [Newsweek.com](https://www.newsweek.com) got global attention recently.

IQRAN RASHEED

Growing up as one of six children, money was a difficult subject to raise with Iqran’s father who wasn’t earning enough for any discretionary spending. But the education of the young ones was a family priority. The only choice was to send the kids to the free public schools—until a TCF school opened in the slum neighborhood. Iqran recalls that his early years at the public school were spent “... literally sitting next to a pile of trash, not knowing whether a teacher would show up”. But he treasures the experience at the clean and organized TCF school. “I feel TCF school is like a mother who never leaves your hand, who always supports you no matter what,” he said.

Passing 10th grade at the TCF school, Iqran went to intermediate college in preparation for university. With a little help from TCF and its Alumni Development Program, he was accepted on a four-year scholarship to Habib University, a fairly new institution offering liberal arts programs. He majored in Communication & Design and, in his final year at HU, Iqran produced and screened his technically exquisite short film, *Aadat*. The bold 13-minute film is on the culturally sensitive subject of homophobia and features a male sex worker in Pakistan. It has received international acclaim, has been screened at film festivals including the Indus Valley International Film Festival, and also won the Merit Award in the USA’s Best Shorts Competition.

The film helped Iqran to receive a 2-year scholarship to a prestigious master’s program of documentary film direction spread over three countries in Europe and funded by the EU. He is currently in Lisbon, Portugal, and will continue his study in Budapest (Hungary), and Brussels

(Belgium) before returning home to Karachi. The young and visionary filmmaker has not forgotten his roots. Now he has the world in his camera sights.

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