



# Profile: Ashgar

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Polio vaccinator in Pakistan

I first joined the polio programme in 2003 and worked as a vaccinator for two years. I was really happy because I felt more respected. People got to know me and I got to know them. It was a lot of responsibility, to meet targets, but I was happy to do it.

Even during the Talibanization of our area, I continued to work for a year. The Taliban tolerated it, because they knew my family. Then one day, the Taliban Commander spoke to my father. He said, “Your son cannot work on this polio thing anymore.” My father was frightened and he told me: “You have to stop.” I was angry, but I had no choice. Soon after this, polio campaigns stopped in my district for six years.

When I heard they were starting again, it was good news. Even when there were still threats after we resumed, we adapted. After so many years without services, my community was asking – where are the vaccines? Where are the medicines? They travel to other districts and see that others are getting services, and feel we should not be denied.

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When I told my father I was applying – he said: No! I had to convince him. So I said: this time the work is different. I will be working in be working in my own community. We will have the full support of the elders. And even more important - it is a now a full-time job, with management responsibilities. I asked him: where else can I find this kind of job? We have no opportunities here. Did he want me to go back to working in a silk factory? So at last he said: yes.

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I remember the first house-to-house polio campaign we did after six years. When we stepped out on the first day, really I didn't know how people would respond to us. Some people had heard rumours about the vaccine from the Taliban, but these were the easy ones to convince. It was more difficult when people tried to hide their reluctance by saying “my children are not at home.” We would tell them “in the end it is your decision whether to this thing for your child”. And they responded to this, they felt more empowered. They were tired of being imposed on.



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The support of my supervisor and the elders is so important. These men are very senior and people listen to them. We must persuade gently and with respect. The nature of our community is that if you talk forcefully then they will respond with a double force.

As the campaign went on, we felt more and more confident. We noted down the names of the children, even those who were travelling, so that next time we know exactly where everyone is. There were sometimes security issues crossing checkpoints. But we asked for identity cards to show that we are working on a humanitarian cause and they will help us a lot.

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No matter what happens, I want my name to be included in the list of people who have contributed to eradicate polio. Whenever I feel doubt, I remember that I worked for this cause during the worst time. Now that things are better I have no excuse.

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