

Umeed Partnership calls for support to help educate women in Pakistan

Island visit to promote charity

A CHARITY to help educate women in remote areas of Pakistan, is hoping to drum up support in North Wales.

The Umeed Partnership was founded by Yousuf Gill, who is on Anglesey this week to raise the profile of the charity.

Dr John Perkins, from Menai Bridge, a volunteer with the charity, said: "The visit will hopefully provide us with an opportunity to raise Umeed's profile with a series of meetings with local organisations such as Rotary, Inner Wheel and Bangor University's school of education, to explain what

By **Elgan Hearn**

we're all about.

"I met Yousuf when he was a student in Dublin and he had a vision of setting up educational centres in Pakistan's tribal lands."

Mr Gill from Punjab, in Pakistan, founded the organisation after working as a Catholic priest in the 1990s.

He said: "The project offers opportunities for empowerment of women in the male-dominated tribal communities of western Baluchistan, one of the remotest and

poorest areas of Pakistan adjacent to the border with Afghanistan.

"It's the biggest province of Pakistan but with the lowest population.

"It's a place strong in Taliban influences and many of the tribes don't recognise the border with Afghanistan, and just go back and forth.

"In the Pashtun culture women are barely allowed out of their homes.

"When I lived and worked in the area I realised that the wo-



VISIT: Yousuf Gill, pictured with Dr John Perkins, is in North Wales promoting his educational charity Umeed.

WARM WELCOME: A delegation from Britain arrive at the educational centre at Youhannabad.

men in the region received almost no education and in my eyes it was a tragic waste of talent."

He said they have recently extended their project into the slum districts of Lahore and marginalised Hindu dalit communities in the Cholistan desert, where provision of education and vocational training in the form of carpentry and wood-

work is also made for boys.

Women have been making embroidered products which are sold in fair trade shops in this country, including locally in Conwy, and to the Pakistani business community in Birmingham, Derbyshire and West Yorkshire.

Dr Perkins, who has visited the tribal areas of Pakistan, said: "In recent months and

really for years, Pakistan has suffered from bad publicity but 95% of people in Pakistan are not interested in politics.

"I have a sentimental feeling for Baluchistan, my grandfather served there in the army and my mother was born in Quetta and spent a bit of time there."

■ Visit www.umeedpartnership.org.uk.

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