

PEACE CORPS ARMENIA

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



SPRING 2012

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PEACE CORPS MISSION

1. Helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
2. Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the Armenian peoples served.
3. Helping promote a better understanding of Armenians on the part of Americans.

PEACE CORPS MINISTRY

- Ministry of Education and Science
- Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs
- Ministry of Territorial Administration
- Ministry of Diaspora
- Ministry of Economy
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs

ABOUT PEACE CORPS

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps to promote world peace and friendship by challenging Americans to live and work in developing countries. Since then more than 200,000 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in 139 host countries.

Volunteers serve for 27 months in their host countries, learning language and culture and living at the same level as the people they serve.

The Peace Corps Armenia program was established in 1992. Since that time over 700 Volunteers have served in villages, towns, and cities around Armenia.

Currently about 90 Volunteers work in the following areas:

- Teaching English as Foreign Language
- Community and Youth Development

Peace Corps is an independent agency of the United States government.

KENNEDY'S PROMISE

We will only send abroad Americans who are wanted by the host country, who have a real job to do, and who are qualified to do that job. Programs will be developed with care, and after full negotiation, in order to make sure that the Peace Corps is wanted and will contribute to the welfare of the other people. Our Peace Corps is not designed as an instrument of diplomacy or propaganda or ideological conflict. It is designed to permit our people to exercise more fully their responsibilities in the great common cause of world development.

U.S. President John F. Kennedy
March 1, 1961

PEACE CORPS ARMENIA PROJECTS

English Education

- Teaching English
- Teacher professional development
- Resources development

Community Health Education

- Preventive health education
- Nutrition training
- HIV/AIDS awareness
- Health resources development

Community & Youth Development

- Organizational Development
- Youth Development

Environmental education

- Environmental agencies development
- Creation of resource centers
- Environmental educational camps



LETTER FROM THE COUNTRY DIRECTOR

Dear Ministers and Staff of the Republic of Armenia, staff of Non-Government Organizations and Volunteers:

I am pleased to report that Peace Corps Volunteers and their Armenian counterparts have been working very hard over the last year to improve schools, non-government organizations, and businesses. I hope you will enjoy reading this report which highlights some stories of their successes. Currently about 90 Volunteers serve across the country, largely in rural communities where they work with schools teaching English, leading environmental and health clubs, and working with local NGOs and businesses. They strengthen nongovernmental organizations and help to expand the range of community services.

Peace Corps wants to thank our partners and other stakeholders especially the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Nature Protection, the Ministry of Healthcare, the Ministry of Economy, and the Ministry of Sport and Youth.

Thank you for your support of our programs. We would also like to thank the many teachers, school directors, community leaders, and host families that give so generously of their time to make these Americans feel welcomed and at home in Armenia.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Lillie".

David Lillie
Country Director
United States Peace Corps, Armenia

PCV: Alyssa Schlange

PCVs Involved: Kathleen Lestina

LORI REGIONAL PUBLIC LIBRARY'S HEALTH BRIDGE CONNECTS COMMUNITY TO HEALTH INFORMATION SERVICES

VANADZOR, ARMENIA – Libraries can be more than just a place to check out books or read newspapers. Libraries are capable of reaching out to support their community's needs in new and innovative ways. The Lori Regional Library in Vanadzor was one of 14 public libraries internationally to win an EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) Public Library Innovation Program replication (PLIP) grant to support the changing needs of their local communities and to support sustainable development. The 14 new grantee libraries are implementing community development services in the areas of agriculture, support for vulnerable children and youth, employment services and health services based on model programs that have been successful. Many people in Armenia, especially the poor and vulnerable, do not have access to medical care or health care information. This EIFL/PLIP grant helps the Lori Regional Library support an innovative solution to a socio-economic problem.



Computer Training

The grant writing was a shared project initiated by Kathleen Lestina, United States Peace Corps volunteer, and Lilit Hunanyan, American Corner librarian. (<http://www.eifl.net/lori-regional-library-armenia>)

With grant support, the Lori Regional Library was able to create a health and medical information center, which provides access to health e-resources. The center is staffed by librarians and doctors who received advanced training in the use of the Internet and researching health databases online. These doctors and librarians are training volunteers who will help out in the center. The Health Bridge was also equipped with medical books, journals and DVDs.

The computers allow access to the interactive website, healthbridge.do.am, which has a confidential online

question and answer service. Health Bridge is staffed by doctors from the community who partnered with the library for the project.

The announcement of the launch Health Bridge services on November 17, 2011, was well attended by representatives of medical institutions and non-governmental organizations and attracted local media coverage. Reports about it were aired on Lori TV and 9 Channel TV, and published in local newspapers in Armenia. (For further information, visit <http://liblori.do.am/>)

The Grand Opening Ceremony took place on December 16, 2011. That month, the doctors, librarians and volunteers began computer training, which focused on researching comprehensive online medical databases. With their new skills, librarians are able to locate and refer community members to reliable e-health resources, and doctors are able to consult with patients online.

“Our library can support the work of busy health clinics, and improve free access to health information for people with limited financial means. As women often serve as the health information caretakers for their families, we will especially reach out to women. We have tremendous support from library staff, our partners, volunteers, and others in the community,” said Ms. Kocharyan, Director of the Library.

As a follow up to receiving the grant, over 30 librarians from Africa, Latin America and Europe attended a meeting – the first between grantees from the two phases of EIFL-PLIP. Lestina was invited to the workshop, which presented an exciting opportunity for grant receivers from different parts of the world to meet each other and to exchange ideas, knowledge and experiences.

Keynote sessions were led by librarians representing Phase One grantee libraries who implemented successful community development services during 2010-2011. The librarians were from Bosnia and Her-

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zegovina, Serbia and Macedonia. They shared their experiences of working with community groups and provided guidance for the 14 new grantees that are replicating their services. The agenda included capacity building in the areas of communication, impact assessment, and advocacy. Site visits were also made to the Ljubljana City Library, the Radovljica Public Library, and the Kranj City Library (the newest Slovenian library building).

It was a rich, rewarding experience for all the participants as eloquently expressed in an email by one participant, after returning to her home country. *“Dear honest PLIP team and so charming our new friends, thank you very much for wonderful unforgettable time. Obviously, it was the most exciting meeting and the most innovative project of our library ...we are very pleased to remember the beautiful country, lovely people, so modern, excellent working Slovenian, and grantees libraries, inspiring projects’ teamwork – which we have learned from experience. Thank you very much for good ideas and heartfelt communication. Sincerely, Valentina Kaunas County Public Library, Lithuania.”*

EIFL is a global library initiative that aims to update the role that libraries can play in community development. To make a lasting impact in a sustainable way, EIFL promotes libraries and their partners to advocate for themselves to gain recognition as key players in the field of international development. The Lori Regional Library will continue to help people in their community through the use of technology, imagination and determination.



PCV: Austin Sherwindt

PCVs Involved: Mary Ann Harty

FOCUS ON CHILDREN NOW AND PEACE CORPS GROW TOGETHER

GAVAR, ARMENIA – In 2005, two Peace Corps volunteers, Terra and Jason Sprague, had a chance meeting with an Armenian Diaspora about organizing a project to improve the infrastructure of Gavar’s



Good Hope NGO, Arabkir Rehabilitation Center of Gavar presented a special certificate to Terra Sprague

Special School, a boarding school for children with special needs in the Gegharkunik region. Little did they know that what started in a single school would gather enough momentum and support that, in 2007, a non-profit organization would be created in Glendale, California to continue aiding Armenian youth. Since its inception and with the aid of Peace Corps volunteers, Focus on Children Now (FCN) has provided donated clothing, shoes, school supplies, toys, and medical supplies to over 85,000 Armenian families and youth.

The Spragues first came to Armenia in 2004 as Peace Corps volunteers. Terra split her time between teaching English with two host country national teachers, providing teacher training workshops, and running after-school programs at a community center in Gavar, a small town west of Lake Sevan. Jason dedicated his time to building the capacity of business owners through work at the Gegharkunik Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Like all volunteers, Terra and Jason lived with an Armenian host family; unlike most volunteers, however, the two extended their Peace Corps service in Armenia for a third year and remained with the host family during their entire time. Armenia had such a profound impact on Terra and Jason that they named their first child Anoush, which means ‘sweet’ in Armenian.

As Peace Corps volunteers, the Spragues started working on a project to bring Gavar’s Special School out of disrepair. The Special School was the only educational institution in the region catering to

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children with mental and physical disabilities. At the time of the project, 120 children attended the school, 40 of whom lived on the premises. After a serendipitous encounter with one of the future founders of FCN, the new collaboration got to work. In 2005, individuals who would become the founding members of FCN provided and installed 12 gas heaters at the school. In 2006, the work extended to raising the \$85,000 needed to restore/repair/replace the school's roof. In 2007, the people rallying around this cause officially formed FCN. Terra was invited to become a founding member of the NGO and has continued her service to Armenia ever since.

Witnessing the generous support and enthusiasm of the Armenian community in California, FCN officially opened its doors as a registered non-profit organization in 2007. Since the beginning, FCN has focused on providing basic life necessities to impoverished children, driven by the motto to "Break the poverty cycle, one child at a time." FCN has organized the collection and distribution of thousands of pieces of new and good quality used clothing and shoes to disadvantaged children and their families. The organization also sends care packages containing toys, school supplies and bedding to numerous schools, after school educational and cultural centers, nursing homes, special schools, soup kitchens and orphanages. Over the past six years, FCN has shipped over 5,280 boxes containing more than 440,000 articles as part of their Humanitarian Aid Program.

Focus on Children Now continues to take pride in and rely upon its relationship with Peace Corps volunteers in Armenia. Kariné Abolian, President of FCN, estimates that over 40% of the donated materials have either been distributed directly by Peace Corps volunteers or by organizations introduced to FCN by volunteers. Terra serves as the crux of this relationship, liaising between the California-based FCN team and Peace Corps volunteers in the rural Armenian regions most in need

The Peace Corps volunteers whose partner organizations and communities benefit from FCN's work are also very thankful. Peace Corps volunteer Mary Ann Harty's host community of Dsegh, a village in the Lori region, has already received 55 boxes (over 3,800 pieces) of clothing. According to Harty, "Dsegh is thrilled with the FCN program. Thanks to their clothing drives, children no longer walk to school in sweaters and lightweight pants. We have received coats in every shipment and Mr. Shekoyan [the Dsegh School Director] has personally selected and fitted more than 30 children before my eyes. He knows who needs clothing; who is too shy to ask or to reach out to select their own. He is a big fan of FCN, as am I."

Terra was recently honored at a special ceremony in Gavar, which was attended by the staff of Good Hope NGO, Arabkir Rehabilitation Center of Gavar, local Peace Corps volunteer Chris Sherwood, and the parents and children who have benefitted from FCN's donations. Terra was presented a special certificate and thanked by the community members for all her help through FCN.

According to Terra, "FCN continues to rely upon the relationships we have with PCVs throughout Armenia. Our organization is currently seeking links with new businesses and entities to continue bringing needed shoes and warm clothing to disadvantaged children in the rural regions. Working with Peace Corps volunteers in the distribution of these items is an integral part to the success of our Humanitarian Aid Program, and we are very thankful to have this partnership!"

About Focus on Children Now

Focus on Children Now, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization with the motto: "Break the Poverty Cycle, One Child at a Time." FCN's 100% volunteer team, working with a loyal donor base and a trusted network of partners, has been helping impoverished children in need of basic life necessities since 2005 through its various programs. In 2009, FCN started its second initiative: the Children's Nutrition Program. Through this program, FCN provides daily nourishment to over 600 children in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. FCN's Children's Nutrition Program complements the Humanitarian Aid Program as it focuses on communities that need help by providing daily nutrition during the school days. FCN's Education Program is the latest program the organization has adopted to implement technology-based solution to address the educational needs of disadvantaged students. For more information, please visit their website at <http://www.focusonchildrennow.org>.



KINDERGARTEN GETS NEW BATHROOM FACILITIES



NOYEMBERYAN, ARMENIA – On December 5th, 2011, Armenian Peace Corps Volunteer Danelle Wassink was giving a presentation at a local state college about her Peace Corps experience during a vacation in the United States. She was showing students the Peace Corps Partnership Donations web page when she noticed that her own project had just been fully funded. In just three months, over \$2,000 had been raised to help Public Kindergarten #1 in the town of Noyemberyan remodel an inadequate bathroom facility and provide sanitation and hygiene education and training to students, parents, and teachers.

Kindergarten #1 has been in operation for over 80 years in the town of Noyemberyan. It provides free year-round education and care to children 2 to 6 years of age. Constant use of the building coupled with limited upkeep and repairs has made renovating the student bathroom a priority for the school and PCV Wassink. Remodeling of the bathroom began in March 2012. Rusted-out squat toilets and sinks without running water were torn out and replaced with new toilets and sinks that had plumbing to bring in running water. Uneven floors and crumbling walls were patched, and broken windows were repaired.

Wassink recognized that proper sanitation and hygiene training was necessary to maintain and properly use the school's improved facilities. Teachers researched activities and themes and together with Wassink, taught sanitation and hygiene lessons to students. In May, parents will participate in health training sessions that will be presented in cooperation with the local Armenian Red Cross.

Bathroom remodeling and sanitation projects have been common priorities of Armenian PCVs in the past but Wassink found that funding the project through a Peace Corps Partnership Program grant made her project unique. The community of Noyemberyan was extremely appreciative of the funding as they recognized its source – friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors of Wassink in the United States. Wassink also reports that the donors themselves were able to track the progress of the project through pictures, Wassink's personal blog, and other forms of social media. Working together, two communities with assistance from the UPS Foundation were able to provide meaningful health and sanitation training to students, parents, and teachers as well as a new bathroom facility.



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PCV: Tom H Cyrs

PCVs Involved: Aaron Sosebee, Marion McNamara (organizers)

VOLUNTEERS ORGANIZE REGIONAL SPELLING BEE

GORIS, ARMENIA – On April 22nd, 40 students from 17 different schools in Armenia's southern Syunik region competed in a region-wide English spelling bee. The concept of a bee, while commonplace in America, was both novel and exciting for the students participating, who came from various villages, towns, and cities all across Syunik to compete in the region's central town of Goris. The students, volunteers, and Armenian English teachers who attended all enjoyed taking part together in some good-natured competition that many Americans know so very well from their elementary school days.

The students who attended had all been winners in the local spelling bees organized across the re-

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gion last fall, and were accompanied by a total of 13 volunteers who help teach in Syunik’s various towns and villages, as well as several Armenian English teachers who chaperoned and cheered the students on.

While the practice of memorizing and regurgitating word spellings is a rote activity by nature, both the students and the teachers involved were able to take away a lot more from the competition than just memorized lists of words.



“It’s great because the kids get to work on written and spoken English at the same time,” said Peace Corps volunteer, Aaron Sosebee, who helped organize the competition and worked with teaches in the village of Shaghat, just north of Sisian. “One of the hardest things about learning English is that it’s not spoken exactly like it’s written, and this gives them an opportunity to understand words, how they are written and spoken, and the differences and patterns involved.”

“I think that just the opportunity of getting together with other students and seeing that academics are important to other kids, too, is

really a good thing,” said PCV Marion McNamara, who also helped organize the bee and works as a teacher trainer in Goris. “I think sometimes the very hard-working students maybe feel lonely or out of place and it’s great for them to be rewarded for their hard work and to engage with other students like them.”

Armenian teachers, as well, were able to take away lessons from the experience, including the opportunity to work closely with volunteers in preparing their students and in getting to cheer them on in a form of scholastic competition that is not so familiar in Armenia

“It helps give teachers a new perspective on competitions, and shows them a new way of organizing events for neighboring communities to participate in, together and against one another,” said Sosebee.

Between the smaller, regional competitions held last fall and the final, Syunik-wide competition just held, students also gained the opportunity to leave their villages for a day, meet other youth their age from different places, and see other towns in their region – an opportunity that is often quite rare for rural youth in Armenia. This year’s Syunik-wide spelling bee was organized by Peace Corps volunteers with the help of the Armenian National Institute of Education, as well as other teachers and directors of the local schools where the volunteers serve. Funding for prizes, which included books, tote bags, and certificates, was provided by British Councils and American Councils of Armenia. Funding for transportation for the volunteers, students, and teachers was provided by the U.S. Embassy to Armenia.



ARMENIAN ENGLISH STUDENTS COMPETE IN POETRY CONTEST

YEREVAN, ARMENIA – Upwards of 80 students fidgeted in their chairs nervously in a packed auditorium as their names were announced. As they were called up to the stage, one by one, rounds of applause followed by nervous silences fill the room again and again. Suddenly a grandfather in tears of joy proudly waved a certificate in the air after his grandson’s name was called. No, this was not the scene of a college graduation or some very prestigious international awards ceremony – it was the closing of the Armenian National Poetry Recitation Contest, and emotions were running high. Put together by Peace Corps volunteers and the Association of English Language Teachers of Armenia (AELTA), this year’s second annual National Poetry Recitation Contest was the culmination of a lot of hard work from volunteers, Armenian English teachers, and, of course students, ranging from the 7th to 12th grade, who spent months preparing to perform a favorite English poem. The event was held at Yerevan’s American University on Sunday, May

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U.S. Ambassador John Heffern and contest organizers Stephanie Conrad and Bella Minasyan stand with this year's national winners from the 7th grade.

13, and in attendance were Armenian students, parents, and teachers from villages and towns in regions of Armenia both near and far. The ceremony also included a surprise visit from U.S. Ambassador to Armenia John Heffern, who many of the students were excited to meet.

Work for the contest started in early 2012, when volunteers and local Armenian English teachers began preparing their students for the regional contests. Interested students were given poetry sampler sheets, which included works by authors ranging in style from Langston Hughes and Carl Sandburg to William Shakespeare or Lord Byron. They were also given the option to find a poem of their own outside the sampler, if they

wished. From there, students worked with PCVs and English teachers at their schools to memorize, and perfect diction and interpretation of their poems. They were judged on these criteria both at the regional and national levels. First place winners at the regional level were invited to the national contest in Yerevan.

For the organizers and teachers involved in the contest, the real rewards came in seeing their students recite their poems with confidence and with their own personal style.

“There were a couple of recitations where as they were reciting, what was going through my head was just; this is what the contest is all about,” said PCV Katrina Lefrancois-Hanson, a volunteer in the town of Hrazdan who has helped organize the contest for two years running. “For example, the winner of the 11th form, recited ‘Oh Captain my Captain’ and when she finished reciting, you could hear a pin drop in that auditorium. The audience was captivated.”

While the contest was certainly an opportunity for all students involved to gain confidence and presentation skills with a foreign language, it was also a great opportunity for those students who would normally remain behind the scenes in a routine drill-and-test language learning atmosphere to excel on center stage.

“A lot of the times, the kids that win at this are not always the best students in the classroom. They are not star students,” said Lefrancois-Hanson, who mentioned a particular 12th form student of hers who, although prone to missing class and not doing well on tests, was able to place first in her regional contest with her recitation of Langston Hughes’ “Oppression.” “She just embraced it as an opportunity to do something she is good at that she loves to do,” Lefrancois-Hanson said.

At the end of this year’s contest, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd placers from each grade received certificates, prizes, and, of course, the personal pride that comes with knowing that they’ve won at the national level. And while each of these top-placed student was celebrated at the contest, not one of the 82 students who recited poems at the contest left the stage without a full round of applause. It was applause that was well deserved.

“Seeing a bunch of seventh graders get up on stage in front of over a hundred people and say a poem in their third language, competing against the best kids in the country...it almost amazes me,” said Lefrancois. “Very few kids get to do this and they know that, and getting to do this really does pump them up quite a bit.

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PCV: Steven S. Martin

PCVs Involved: Adam Wabeke, Kim VanKirk, and Trent Castleberry

DATABASE TRAINING AND COMPUTER LAB SETUP

GYUMRI, ARMENIA – Peace Corps volunteers are often called on to assess the needs of their community and provide their counterparts with capacity-building opportunities. Recently, seventeen of Peace Corps volunteer Kim VanKirk’s counterparts waited in the Youth Initiative Center (YIC) for the solution to one of their needs. That solution came in the form of Peace Corps volunteer Adam Wabeke. Wabeke had come up from Surenavan to teach the YIC staff about the importance of and the proper way to use databases. Using PowerPoint, a common Microsoft slideshow application, Wabeke demonstrated the creation of databases and how to link information, along with other complex technical uses for the Microsoft Access program. One of VanKirk’s counterparts, Gurgen Balasanyan, had previous knowledge of the application and assisted Wabeke with translation.

YIC is hoping to use the training to create a member database. As a young and dynamic organization with strong ties to the European community this project will indirectly benefit more than just the Gyumri region. VanKirk has worked tirelessly to advance the projects, ideas and capabilities of her organization, the members of which often show their appreciation for all of her hard work.

This was not the last stop on Wabeke’s visit to the northern region of Armenia. Before heading back to Surenavan he stopped in Bagratashen to assist Peace Corps Volunteer Trent Castleberry who works as a teacher of English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Bagratashen. While Bagratashen School #2 has a lab containing six computers, only one was functional upon Castleberry's arrival. Wabeke was asked to assist in making sure that the computers are operational and networked effectively. Upon Wabeke's departure from Bagratashen five of the computers were fully functional and detailed instructions were left for Castleberry to repair the final computer after the needed parts were acquired.

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PCV: Kellianne Lauer

PCVs Involved: Judy Smith, Kellianne Lauer, Kathleen Lestina, Emily Yost

ARMENIAN STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN INTERNATIONAL ART EXCHANGE

ARMENIA – This spring, Armenian Peace Corps Volunteers partnered with OneWorld Classrooms to participate in a global art exchange. Volunteers in Dilijan, Vanadzor, and Sisian participated in this year’s K-12 International Art Exchange.

In Dilijan, PCVs Judy Smith and Kellianne Lauer worked with a local art school; Armenian students of all ages created works of art, ranging from paintings of still-life objects, landscapes of Armenia, portraits, Armenian culture. In Vanadzor, PCV, Kathleen Lestina teamed with the Lori Regional Library and sponsored an art competition to gather works of art with the theme of “healthy lifestyles”. In Sisian, PCV Emily Yost worked with Sisian Art School students who painted scenes of Armenian culture.



PCVs assisted the Armenian organizations with gathering, labeling, and mailing the artwork to OneWorld Classrooms. Once OneWorld Classrooms received their artwork, workers began putting together a package of artwork to send back to each contributing organization. The groups in Dilijan, Vanadzor, and

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Sisian will all receive their artwork from around the world by the end of May. The artwork received from OneWorld Classrooms will remain at the organization and will be displayed for students and community members.

The physical art exchange is not the only method of cross-cultural interaction involved in this project. Organizations will also be able to access Global Art Google Earth Tours that will allow students to “visit” schools around the world and to see scanned art and read letters from participating organizations. OneWorld Classrooms will also create PowerPoint presentations featuring art from around the world that will be available to participating organizations.

Peace Corps Volunteers who have participated in this project think that the OneWorld Classroom Art Exchange is a great way for Armenian students to share their talents and culture with their peers around the world and learn about different cultures as well. All of the PCVs and Armenian organizations are excited to receive and display art from children around the world in their communities.

To learn more about OneWorld Classrooms, visit: <http://www.oneworldclassrooms.org>. To view Lori TV’s coverage of the art exchange in Vanadzor, view: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81KLd-eZkR4>



PCV: Alyssa Schlange

PCVs Involved: Mathew Crowley-Miano, Maggie Woznicki, Alex Lord and Caroline Lucas

PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS HOST DANCE CAMP IN SPITAK



Maggie Woznicki is teaching the dance

SPITAK, ARMENIA – For the third time this year, Peace Corps Volunteers Mathew Crowley-Miano, Maggie Woznicki and Alex Lord with the addition of Caroline Lucas held a dance camp for students at a local YMCA. After seeing the success of the program at the YMCAs in Vanadzor and Vardenis, the Spitak YMCA invited Peace Corps volunteers to work with their TenSinging group and teach them new dance styles and methods.

The camp lasted 3 days and drew as many as 25 children to the YMCA to learn a choreographed hip hop dance routine as well as breakdancing approaches.

The camp, which lasted for three hours a day, taught the students advanced stretching methods, basic health and exercise principals and new dance moves, as well as confidence and self-expression. In addition to the choreographed dance routine, participants as young as 9 years old were encouraged to develop their individuality by creating a unique hip hop walk and pose that showcased who they are as dancers. To build confidence, dancers were also encouraged to show off their own dance skills in a daily round of free style exercise. For some campers this was the best time of the day because of the valuable feedback they received from accomplished dancers about their skills and methodologies.

The camp culminated with a student performance of the newly-learned dance routine for the YMCA Spitak community. And in a surprise move, the YMCA Spitak TenSinging group turned the tables with a performance for the visiting Peace Corps volunteers, showing off their own dance skills and choreography. In the end, students learned more than a dance routine; they found a new attitude toward dance, a new confidence as well as an increased understanding of hip-hop culture, a widely misunderstood global phenomenon whose roots lie in America.



PCV: Erin Malewicki

PCVs Involved: Maggie Woznicki, Marisa Valdez, Trent Castleberry, Laura Maas, Danelle Wassink

WORKSHOP HELD TO STRENGTHEN GENDER DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNITIES OF ARMENIA

YEREVAN, ARMENIA – On April 9 to 11, 2012, the *Strengthening Gender Development in Your Community* Workshop was held in the capital city of Armenia to train participants on gender-related issues and presentation skills to conduct seminars in their respective communities.

The goal of the workshop was to train people from different regions of Armenia to organize and lead seminars in their own communities on gender related topics. The end goal is to hold 10 hours of seminars in each community, reaching at least 50 participants, by October 1, 2012.



Peace Corps volunteers nominated two people from their communities to attend the workshop; nine PCVs and 18 Host Country Nationals from different regions of Armenia participated in this training of trainers. The workshop was organized by PCVs Maggie Woznicki, Marisa Valdez, Trent Castleberry and Laura Maas who also lead many of the sessions. Peace Corps staff member, Liana Mikayelyan, also had a large role in organizing and coordinating the workshop. In addition, Psychologist/Gender Issues Specialist Sona Grigoryan and Nvard Margaryan from Public Information and Need of Knowledge NGO (PINK) lead sessions on gender, gender-based violence and gender equality. The workshop also included a panel discussion with representatives from other organizations in Yerevan.

The workshop was noted as a “safe space” for people to speak freely about their opinions on the issues discussed. The sessions were very interesting because the participants shared their views and experiences on the topics. The workshop seemed to be a success with positive feedback from the participants. Only time will tell once the seminars in the communities are complete.

“I learned some new things about gender development and presentation skills; I’m excited to take what I learned and use it in the seminars in our community,” commented Anna Ohanjanyan, training participant from the town of Meghri, which is in the southernmost part of Armenia.

This workshop was funded by a USAID grant and was the first gender-related training hosted by Peace Corps, but it is hoped that trainings like this will continue into future years.



PCV: Evelyn Helminen

PCVs Involved: Lizzie Noonan, Alex Lord, Lisa Conder, and Ashley Ottewell

HIV/AIDS TRAINING OF TRAINERS WORKSHOP HELD IN YEREVAN

YEREVAN, ARMENIA – In April, 2012, twelve Peace Corps volunteers and 20 of their community partners from 6 regions of Armenian gathered for an intensive workshop on HIV/AIDS transmission, prevention, and the current situation in the Republic of Armenia. The workshop, a Training of Trainers (TOT), was part of the Peace Corps AIDS Initiative in collaboration with the Armenian Red Cross Society. It lasted

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3 days and was funded by PEPFAR (the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief).

The workshop was organized by Peace Corps volunteers Lizzie Noonan, Alex Lord, Lisa Conder, and Ashley Ottewell. They gave presentations on public speaking, how to use games and activities in presenting, and led discussions around a film about HIV/AIDS.

Following the TOT, each of the volunteer/community partner teams will return to their communities to give 6 presentations, each 90-120 minutes in length, totaling 60 seminars. By summer's end an estimated 1,800 Armenians will have participated in one of these 60 seminars.



VOLUNTEERISM AND SERVICE LEARNING WORKSHOP

YEREVAN, ARMENIA – On April 4 to 6, 2012, Peace Corps' first Volunteerism workshop was held in Yerevan. The purpose was to teach about how to initiate and implement volunteer projects in communities all over Armenia.

The sessions were led by Peace Corps volunteer facilitators, as well as guest speakers invited from CDPF and Armenian Volunteer Corps to share their experience and views on Volunteerism. Ten Peace Corps volunteers (PCVs) and 19 host country nationals (HCNs) attended the workshop—half of the HCNs were from the Youth Foundation, Federation of Youth Clubs and Junior Achievements of Armenia. They discussed topics relating to Volunteerism and Service Learning.

Following the workshop participants will initiate follow-up projects in their communities in order to multiply the power of Volunteerism through planning and conducting service learning activities. All the participants were also eligible to apply for a mini Small Project Assistant grant, in order to help carry out their new volunteer projects.



INITIATIVES

Peace Corps Volunteers work on a variety of initiatives in Armenia:

Youth Development

Volunteers organize various youth camps & other activities with local partners for environmental awareness, healthy lifestyles, sports, leadership, and career development.

HIV/AIDS Education

Volunteers and their counterparts raise HIV/AIDS awareness in the communities through various activities, developing cultural-sensitive curriculum, and collaborating with national and international organizations on HIV/AIDS education and prevention.

Gender and Development

Volunteers train community and NGO members on gender analysis and organize Girls Leading Our World and Boys' Leadership camps.

Information and Communication Technologies

Volunteers train Armenian counterparts and students in using IT and have established internet access sites and computer centers.

This journal is not intended to cover all volunteer activities, and merely represents a snapshot of Peace Corps Armenia's in-country programs and activities.

For more information about Peace Corps Armenia, its activities, its volunteers, its programs or related information, please contact Mariam Arzumanyan at 010-513.511.

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