

# FALL 2011

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Peace Corps . Armenia

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## *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

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Phone [37410]524.450, [37410]562.565  
Fax [37410]557.991  
E-mail [pcarmenia@am.peacecorps.gov](mailto:pcarmenia@am.peacecorps.gov)  
Websites <http://armenia.peacecorps.gov>

US Peace Corps | Armenia  
33 Charents Street, Yerevan 0025

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# ABOUT PEACE CORPS

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps to promote world peace and friendship by challenging students 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 730 Volunteers have served in villages, towns, and cities around Armenia. Currently 96 Volunteers work in:

- Community and Business Development
- Teaching English as Foreign Language
- Community Health Education
- Environmental Education

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

## PEACE CORPS ARMENIA PROJECTS

### Community and Business Development

- NGO capacity building
- Small and medium enterprise development
- Business and IT training for students of local colleges and other community members

### English Education

- Teaching English
- Teacher professional development
- Resource development
- Community development projects

### The Peace Corps Mission

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

### Community Health Education [CHE]

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

### Environmental education [EE]

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

### *Peace Corps Ministry Partners are:*

Ministry of Education and Science  
Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs  
Ministry of Economy  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

## A LETTER FROM THE COUNTRY DIRECTOR



Dear Ministers and Staff of the Republic of Armenia, staff of Non-Government Organizations, stakeholders 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 96 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,

David Lillie  
Country Director  
United States Peace Corps, Armenia

## AIDS PROJECT REACHES ARMENIA FAR AND WIDE TEACHES OTHERS TO CONTINUE SPREADING AWARENESS

This summer and fall, AIDS awareness and prevention has been substantially ramped-up in Armenia thanks to the work of Peace Corps volunteers and the Armenian Red Cross. A two-faceted project completed this fall involved the creation of a new SMS Aids Initiative as well as a conference last May that helped train 20 Armenians to carry out a total of 60 AIDS awareness and education seminars in cities and villages in Armenia from as far north as Vanadzor to as far south as Kapan. A total of 1,252 individuals have attended and benefitted from these seminars in the first round, and funding has been secured for the coming year as well.

While Peace Corps volunteers attended the seminars (all 60 of which were conducted through the summer, up until Sept. 15) the Armenians involved in the project ultimately ran them. For Peace Corps volunteers, the primary work took place at a ToT (Training of Trainers) conference held last April. Over the course of three days, volunteers and Armenians (many of whom were Red Cross workers or former FLEX graduates) sat together, listened to presentations on AIDS and its increasing incidence in Armenia, and conducted public speaking trainings that, in the end, greatly aided the Armenian counterparts in increasing their awareness of the issue and confidence to inform others about it in their own communities.

Taking place in a country where progressive ideas—especially ones related to sex and gender—sometimes get brushed under the cultural table, a major goal of the conference was simply to get those in attendance more comfortable talking about the issue.

“The conference was really successful; you could see our counterparts getting more and more confident discussing and presenting the material,” said Lizzie Noonan, a volunteer in Armenia’s Syunik Region who attended the conference and aided with the trainings. “I think what most of the volunteers who attended liked most was seeing this change take place right before their eyes.”

After the conference, each team of three (one volunteer and two Armenian counterparts) was responsible for conducting six presentations in or nearby their respective communities where they live and work. Since a primary goal of many projects that Peace Corps volunteers are involved in is not only to use their skills to enact change, but to pass on those skills to people within the host-country so that progress will continue long after the volunteer has left, the completion of the final presentations on Sept. 15 marked a milestone for sustainable AIDS awareness and prevention work in the country.

“The point of the ToT conference, and I think what sparked interest in it to begin with, is that in the past, seminars were just done by the American volunteers and then were finished, this time the point was to get it being done by Armenians,” says Noonan.

Funding for the ToT conference as well as its accompanying SMS initiative was received from PEPFAR (the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) and applied for together by Peace and the Armenian Red Cross.

-Written by Tomas Cyr PC Volunteer

## PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS IN ARMENIA USE TEXT MESSAGING FOR HIV/AIDS EDUCATION AND PREVENTION



washington, D.C., November 4, 2011 – Peace Corps volunteers Lisa Conder of Englewood, Fla., and Ashley Ottewell of Belleville, Mich., spearheaded the launch of the “SMS Information Hotline,” a nationwide program in Armenia that promotes HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention through mobile-phone-based SMS text messaging.

“The SMS Information Hotline provides potentially life-saving information that users may not be able to get otherwise,” said Conder, who had the idea to start the Hotline in 2009 after learning about a similar Peace Corps project in Namibia. “In Armenia, HIV/AIDS is sometimes referred to as a hidden epidemic. There is a general low awareness about HIV/AIDS and a lack of prevention programs and resources. People often avoid seeking

testing, counseling, and treatment because of the stigma and social taboos associated with it.”

Starting Oct. 21, 2011, community members have been able to send anonymous HIV/AIDS related questions through text messaging. They receive answers within 24 hours from Armenian Red Cross Society volunteers trained by the Armenia Ministry of Health’s National Center for AIDS Prevention. The Hotline is a resource accessible to the general public, including those in rural areas who might have limited access to accurate HIV/AIDS information.

“Having a text messaging HIV/AIDS information hotline is a perfect way to make important information accessible and empower people to make healthy lifestyle choices,” said Ottewell.

The creation, implementation, and a national information campaign on the SMS Information Hotline is funded through the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) Volunteer Activities Support and Training (VAST) grant available to Peace Corps volunteers working in collaboration with local partners.

The SMS Information Hotline is implemented in cooperation with the Armenian Red Cross Society, Armenian mobile operators, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia, and Peace Corps staff and volunteers, including recently returned Peace Corps volunteers Nicholas Hutchings of Baltimore, Md., and Brent Hines of Belton, Texas.

- Written by washington, D.C Press Office



## HYGIENE

Hygiene is a huge issue in Gavar a city by Lake Sevan that has water only in the morning. The irony of this issue concerning local schools and the health risks that could be associated with this were not lost on Joseph Andriano and Donna Grennell. Working together with Andriano's organization the Valley of Initiatives and Activities (VIA), they composed a program that would not only address the serious issues of hand washing, and dental hygiene, but also arranged for several local conditions to be taken into consideration.

One of these local considerations had to be solved even before the first demonstration could begin in local schools, the lack of water throughout the day. Each school would need to prepare water in every bathroom for the purposes of aiding the children in washing their hands and brushing their teeth every single day. This would require the schools to be attentive to the needs of the children, as well as to take seriously the health risks associated with not taking this necessary and somewhat costly step.

Once this was taken care of, the project began in earnest. The local Peace Corps' volunteers arranged classroom educational seminars involving forty five minutes about brushing teeth and another forty five minutes about hand washing. Andriano felt that, "Teaching the children was a lot of fun. I worked closely with my Counterpart and supported her in teaching the classes by making sure that all the materials were prepared. I also gave a lesson on flossing to the children, which was well received." The seminars given by Andriano included videos about the dangers associated with not engaging in these activities, tooth loss, becoming sick through contact exposures, and loss of education due to time away from school.

They obtained the majority of this material from share point in the CHE lesson plan. When asked about the importance of this program Andriano responded, "The most important part of this project is its sustainability. After learning how to brush their teeth and wash their hands, the children's' teachers and parents will keep a daily log of tooth brushing and hand-washing for each child. We believe that after one year of monitoring this behavior will become automatic for these children, increasing their overall health and welfare." Parents can now track and present to the schools an effective record of the child's education continuing at home.

The class for the parents included parenting tips, a schedule of when these activities should occur, and a visit by a dentist to arrange appointments for the children. At this time, funding is being secured to continue the program well into the future by Grennell, and it seems that Gavar will have a lot more healthy children, and healthy smiles thanks to the work done by Peace Corps.

-Written by Steven Martin

## CANNING IN BERD

BERD, ARMENIA – Every fall, most Armenian households begin stocking up on canned goods – preserves, jam, and other products. This common practice, combined with a volunteer's own interest in cooking, led to the idea that a local organization could produce and sell canned jams, butters and sauces.

This past September, Peace Corps volunteer John Hart, with the help of other volunteers and the local Berd Women's Resource Center Foundation, designed and implemented a project making use of the tradition of canning. Volunteers worked to identify available local produce, created recipes and safety guidelines and identified local women who were interested in making and selling canned goods.

After attending a training session led by local Peace Corps volunteers, the women got to work. Working in their own kitchens, they produced blackberry, cornelian cherry and plum jams; pear, peach, and apple butters; as well as pear sauce and applesauce.

Caroline Lucas, a Peace Corps volunteer who now works with the Berd Women's Resource Center Foundation reported that the canned products, along with other crafts made by the Resource Center, were sold at the Fall Fair at the Shirak Hotel in Yerevan on November 4, and will be available at the Christmas Fair at the Marriott Hotel in Yerevan on December 11, partnering with Homeland Handicrafts.

The project has employed five local women. So far, almost the entire first batch of canned goods has been sold and the Center has already taken orders for more products. Lucas is pleased that the project employs local women who have been unable to find work for several years and now have an opportunity to make money utilizing their canning skills.

Lucas reports that the Center is keeping busy with new projects and hopes to employ more local women to make other homemade goods in time for the upcoming holidays. The Center also holds educational seminars about the legal rights of women in Armenia

The Berd Women's Resource Center Foundation was established in February 2011. For more information regarding the Center, visit: <http://berd-women.blogspot.com>

The Berd Women's Center was recently highlighted in a mini series about women in business in Armenia with the Hrayr Maroukhian Foundation. You can read about the mini series at: <http://www.maroukhianfoundation.org/english/archives/510>

To purchase products and support the Berd Women's Resource Center visit Homeland Handicrafts at: [www.homelandhandicrafts.org](http://www.homelandhandicrafts.org)



- Written by PCV Kellianne Lauer

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## VETERAN PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER EMILY DEWHIRST TO TRAIN TEACHERS IN ARMENIA

Emily Dewhirst was 17 years old when she had her first experience as an international volunteer, working in a refugee center in war-ravaged Denmark in 1947. Today, Denmark is one of the world's most developed nations, with a vigorous international aid program of its own, but Mrs. Dewhirst's international volunteer work continues. In 1996, she signed up as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Kazakhstan, working as an English Teacher Trainer in a remote rural region. Afterwards, she became an expert in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, working in China, South Korea, Italy, Bolivia and Uzbekistan. Based on her work, she published a book, *Interaction by Design*, detailing communicative methods of teaching that encourage language fluency and critical thinking. In the beginning of October, she arrived in Armenia as a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) to work with the Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) as a developer of an English-language curriculum.

RPCVs are Peace Corps Volunteers who have already completed a two-year term of service, and gained expertise in a particular field of development work, such as small business, agriculture or education. They are placed with Armenian organizations with the goal of sharing their skills and expertise over a 6-12 month period. Mrs. Dewhirst lives with a host family in Yerevan, but travels to the village of Miasnikan, Shenik and Lernagog to teach.

"My goal is to help students be comfortable speaking in the classroom, and to give teachers tools and techniques to help the students speak more. I don't want any student afraid to talk. There are dozens, if not hundreds of ways to get students speaking, and I want to help Armenian teachers learn them," said Mrs. Dewhirst.

- Written by PCV Samuel Dolgin-Gardner

## PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS AND CHILDREN OF ARMENIAN FOUNDATION (COAF) WORK TOGETHER TO HELP DISADVANTAGED YOUTH

Armenian children in the country's Argotsotsn and Armavir regions will now have a unique and unparalleled opportunity to learn English in their villages, thanks to the work of Peace Corps volunteers Sam Dolgin-Gardner, Kelsey Anderson, and Peace Corps Response Volunteer (PCRV) Emily Dewhirst. Working with the Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) they have begun to implement a program sponsored by the State Department to target children from economically disadvantaged regions who deserve extra attention in their English development. These children have been rewarded for academic excellence in their language studies with an opportunity for even greater success.

This began with COAF attaining a grant from the State Department, which would enable them to hire three English teachers who have studied and taught at American schools, and universities, and to provide world-class English language textbooks. The program funds two years of tutoring for a total of ninety students, fifteen from each of six villages, as well as two English summer camps. Dolgin-Gardner will be tutoring the students from Arteni and Dalarik, Anderson will be tutoring the students from Karakert, and our new Peace Corps Response Volunteer Emily Dewhirst will be tutoring in two villages, Lernagog, and Miasnikan.

When asked about the project Dolgin-Gardner responded, "With this project, we're really trying to focus on the speaking and listening skills. Students in the regions have few opportunities to interact with fully fluent or native English language speakers. Because English is the international language of business, government and academia, being able to speak it is an essential career skill. We're going to try to take our students to international institutions like embassies, universities and the airport so they can see how important language skills are."

Anderson gave a description of her thoughts about the program stating that, "The students in this program will attend 4-plus hours of English class per week for two years. Needless to say, their English language skills will improve greatly over the course of this program. In turn, this will open up more opportunities for them after school, including university options, possible FLEX participation, etc." Also Anderson has, "...two other English clubs and I am working with my counterparts and school director on creating an English Language Center at my school." From this statement we can see that Peace Corps volunteers are committed to the education of the whole community of learners, in addition to those aided by this amazing grant.

On October 19, 2011, U.S. Cultural Attaché Sean O'Hara welcomed students to the program at the COAF Karakert Cultural Center, distributing some of the best available\* texts about American teenage life, as well as classic literature. The students were all given certificates indicating their work from before, and denoting the future work that they would soon begin. The event was fun and entertaining for all involved, but also hinted at the future contributions each of these great students would soon be delivering to their communities through their hard work. All of these future efforts will be facilitated by the fine work of Sam, Kelsey, and Emily.

-Written by Steven Martin

Peace Corps . Armenia



## BIO SAND FILTERS BRING CLEAN WATER TO VILLAGE

in the village.

Tucked away in the southeast corner of Armenia sits the tiny and isolated village of Nerkin Khndzoresk. Recent water testing completed by the Goris Water Organization indicated an excess of harmful bacteria in the community's water supply. With the aid of Water Charity, a U.S.-based non-profit organization, local Peace Corps Volunteer, Katie McKillen, helped find the much-needed resources to construct three BioSand filters to improve water quality

Founded nearly 30 years ago as a strategic bulwark for its larger sister-village of Khndzoresk, the community of 320 residents has since suffered a dearth of resources, leading to an aging infrastructure absent of much needed improvements. In particular, the poor states of the village's water supply and drainage systems have been negatively impacting the public health of the people and their livestock. 2009 statistics from the local health post revealed that over 50% of the Nerkin community suffered from some type of infectious disease throughout the year. Outbreaks of giardia, shigella, hepatitis A, and dysentery are believed to have been caused by the drinking water.

Using locally available materials, BioSand filters work using a slow sand-filtration process in which unclean water is piped into the filter where it passes through layers of sand and gravel. As organisms, such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites, travel through the sand, they collide with and stick to sand particles. These filters are proven to remove 90% to 95% of organic contaminants from untreated water and are effective across a broad range of harmful pathogens.

After the construction of the filters in Nerkin Khndzoresk, the local Goris Water Organizations retested the purified water and approved it as safe for drinking, observing a bacteria concentration of less than 5%.

*The Vice Principal and School Engineer were amazed by the construction of the filter, stating, "I didn't understand how something so simple could actually help clean our water. Now it makes sense, it's just like a river." The success of the project provided the community members, especially the youth, with further hope for their community. One mother stated, "It's great that they can see that they can make a change and be creative. These are the skills that we need to teach our children to continue to slowly improve our village."*

Founded in 2008, Water Charity is on a mission to meet the needs of communities where quick and inexpensive solutions can be implemented to increase access to water or improve water sanitation practices. Working with Peace Corps Volunteers and their communities, Water Charity has funded the implementation of approximately 650 projects in 60 countries where volunteers are active. For example, in cooperation with Peace Corps Senegal, Water Charity is partnering with volunteers to implement a *52 Pumps in 52 Weeks* program, where Peace Corps Volunteers will work alongside community members to build one new water pump every week for one year in the Kolda and Kaolack regions of Senegal.

Averill Strasser, Chief Operating Officer of Water Charity, states, "Our organization is trying to fill the gap where low-budget and time-critical water projects make a big impact on the community. We are able to cut out much of the 'red tape' of larger aid organizations and turn around funding for these projects in one to two months". Mr. Strasser served as a Peace Corps Volunteer, himself, as a Professor of Engineering at the University of San Andres in La Paz, Bolivia, from 1966 to 1968. During that time, he led numerous development projects into the interior of Bolivia, building water systems and sanitary facilities using student and community resources.

### About Water Charity

*Water Charity is a nonprofit corporation directed toward improving the human rights and dignity of individuals throughout the world by providing them with resources that impact upon their health and wellbeing. Water Charity's "Appropriate Projects" initiative enables instant deployment of resources to do small but critical water and sanitation projects. For more information, please visit their website at <http://appropriateprojects.com/>.*

-Written by PCV Austin Sherwindt

## CHEMISTRY AND BIOLOGY LABORATORY CONSTRUCTED



VERISHEN, ARMENIA (November 2011) – In a previously worn and barren room, students attending the secondary school in the village of Verishen now have a place to learn hands-on chemistry and biology skills. The school, originally constructed in 1921 to accommodate 800 pupils, today houses only 270. The limited school budget has prohibited upkeep of the entire building, leaving many of the facility's seven wings unused and exposed. The Verishen community and local volunteer, Hedley Bond, collaborated to rehabilitate one of the school's unused rooms into an interactive science center, utilizing both of Peace Corps' funding platforms – the Small Project Assistance (SPA) initiative and Peace Corps Partnership Program (PCPP) – and the aid of the regional government.

With the lack of efficient heating systems, many of the used rooms in the school are on the building's south-facing side to avoid the harshness of the winter climate that sweeps in from the mountains north of the village. Though considerably colder during the winter months, the new laboratory is situated in one of the northern-facing rooms in one of the school's used wings. In the unused wings of the school, the hallways are in poor condition and there is neither heat nor power, thus making it a more economical trade-off to focus on the north-facing room.

To restore the room to working order, Bond and his counterpart, senior science teacher, Zarik Hakobyan, applied for a SPA grant, which is funded by USAID's Armenian office. Over the summer, local laborers brought running water to the laboratory, installed new windows and doors, constructed a fume hood for ventilation during experiments, renovated the floor and walls, and added power outlets and ceiling lights. For the room's refurbishment, Bond bolstered funds donated from the regional government with those solicited through a PCPP grant, a mechanism by which individuals can directly support Peace Corps Volunteers' initiatives. The combined amount was used to purchase furniture (6 cupboards, 16 chairs, 4 benches, 8 stools, 8 student tables, 16 student chairs, and a computer table), curtains, a computer, and an overhead projector. The majority of the furniture was sourced locally.

The school held an opening ceremony for the laboratory on November 5, with the attendance of students, teachers, community members, and representatives from the local and regional governments.

Bond, who holds a Ph.D. in Biology, states, *"It was very gratifying to see the younger kids clustered around the new displays. Having Zarik's physics laboratory next door has been a big bonus; we stored a lot of the teaching material there during renovation; we connected her sink up for little added cost during the renovation; and we have plans to do more joint physics, chemistry, and biology displays in the hallway in the months to come."*

In his opening speech at the opening ceremony, Matvey Ghazaryan, the school's principal, stated, *"For prospective projects in the educational development sphere in Armenia, the greatest value is considered to be the knowledge of an Armenian child. Any step taken by a school is targeted at solving that problem. On behalf of the school and the whole faculty, let me express my gratitude to the whole Peace Corps Staff, who found Mr. Hedley Bond and Zarik Hakobyan's project urgent and aligned with our current needs. As a result of this, we now have the laboratory. Thank you to all the organizations that made this project possible and good luck to the new lab in its future journey"*.



Meri Arakelyan, the Peace Corps' Regional Manager for Vayots Dzor and Syunik marzes, said, *"We were, of course, right to support the project and I am sure the laboratory will serve its purpose and provide valuable knowledge to students. The Peace Corps will always support and cooperate with organizations and schools as long as Volunteers, counterparts and communities have the will and desire to collaborate together. I am thrilled to be given the opportunity to be present at the opening of this beautiful and knowledge-reinforcing lab."*

-Written by PCV Austin Sherwindt

## PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS HELP TURN YMCA INTO YWCA AND INTRODUCE YOUNG WOMEN’S PROGRAMMING



Lori Marz October 15, 2011 — Spitak Peace Corps volunteers, Alyssa Schlange and Judith Berg in collaboration with the YMCA of Spitak held their first young women’s group meeting on October 15. The first meeting served mostly as a chance for the 24 girls, ages 13 to 17, from different schools in Spitak to gather and get to know one another, but it also served as an opportunity for the group leaders to get to know the girls and learn about their interests and to build trust.

This group of Spitak’s brightest girls will meet twice a month to learn about and discuss issues affecting today’s young Armenian women, such as HIV/AIDS, gender inequality, leadership, and human trafficking. The hopes of the YMCA staff and Peace Corps Volunteers are to create a safe place for these girls not only to express themselves, but also a place they can turn to, should they seek assistance outside their families. The

goal is to teach Armenian young women to become leaders in their community and to participate in community and service learning. Peace Corps volunteers will invite a number of guest speakers, not only to address the girls and educate them on issues, but also to inspire them and give them examples of successful professional women. There are also plans to develop a mentoring program with the young women, so that they can receive guidance in their future career choices.

This is the first women’s group that the YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association) is sponsoring in an attempt toward creating more women’s programming and a future YWCA (Young Women’s Christian Association). This first meeting served as a test of sorts, to determine how women in Spitak would respond to the future YWCA. There are plans in the immediate future to create two more women’s groups, one for women in their 20’s and one for women in their 30’s and beyond. These groups will focus on the same type of issues as the girl’s group but in a more in-depth manner. It is hoped that these groups will be only the beginning steps toward creating women-oriented programming for the future YWCA of Spitak.

-Written by PCV Austin Sherwindt

## PEACE CORPS BRINGS TECH TO VILLAGE SCHOOLS WITH THE “TAKING TECH AROUND” PROGRAM

It’s a cold and grey Saturday afternoon at the end of November in the village of Karnut, 8 kilometers from the city of Gyumri in Shirak Marz, Armenia. Most children in the village are at home staying warm by a cast iron stove burning cow dung. But at the marginally-heated village school, bundled in their winter coats, twenty middle- and high-school students are huddled around laptops, learning how to create Word documents in Armenian. For many students, this is the first time they’ve gotten to use a computer. For all of them, it’s the first time they’ve had any hands-on instruction in basic computer skills. The laptops, teachers and curriculum are part of the “Taking Tech Around” program, which brings a mobile computer lab to village schools near Gyumri.

Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) Darryn Glenn, wearing a North Face parka and Wool hat, walks between the desks, answering questions and offering students advice. “Metzatar aistergh” he says, speaking Armenian with the kids, “Capital letter here.” Before he joined the Peace Corps, Mr. Glenn worked in IT at Merrill Lynch. Now, he works with the Gyumri Development Center (GDC), an NGO focused on small business development and teaching technology skills. Mr. Glenn conceived the Taking Tech Around program at a Peace Corps conference, where another PCV presented the idea of a computer summer camp. “I thought, ‘why don’t I just do that during the school year?’” said Mr. Glenn.



The project was funded by a USAID Small Projects Assistance (SPA) grant, which provided funds for eight laptop computers. Mr. Glenn wrote the curriculum, which his Armenian counterpart, GDC head Aida Khachatryan, translated. GDC provided the connections with the village schools, transportation and teachers for the three-year lifespan of the program. And after that? “Well, maybe I’ll get another Peace Corps Volunteer” says Ms. Khachatryan.

- Written by PCV Samuel Dolgin-Gardner

## GENYA COLE CREATED A SUSTAINABLE PROGRAM TO TRAIN TECHNOLOGY TRAINERS IN GAVAR



Computer skills will make the difference between success and failure of Armenia in the globalized world. Yevgeny “Genya” Cole is a Peace Corps Volunteer who is dedicated to expanding the capabilities of his community in Gavar. Recently, he finished implementing a SPA grant that improved the information technology capabilities, not only in Gavar, but also in six other villages in the area. The decision about which skills to implement was based on a needs assessment, which highlighted some critical areas requiring improvement, including knowledge of hyper text markup language, JavaScript, cascading style sheets, and internet protocol. The Gavar Business center where Cole works is organized in such a way as to a hierarchy of responsibilities. By having a clear and effective decision making process established, it was possible for Cole and his organization to outline the procedure that would not only be the most effective, but also impact the most lives in the region.

Ultimately, the program that emerged was one in which Cole and two local trainers engaging twenty students for 72 hours of training, with 36 classes, for a total of eight weeks of training time. Thirty six of those hours were spent in lectures and the remaining thirty six hours were spent in lab training. The students began with introductory lessons, moved on to learning about hardware, understanding operating systems, and the use of software to create information and products on computers. The students were then tested in a cumulative final exam and those scoring 85% or higher graduated with a certificate of excellence. We can see that, “The way that these trainings will be conducted is that the students will learn the methods and then become teachers themselves; the trained will become the trainers creating sustainability.”

All of the students, who passed their final exam, were required to give three training sessions to at least twenty-four different people. These trainings included a summary report and questionnaire for the students to fill out, upon the completion of their training sessions for monitoring purposes. Two laptops were purchased with SPA grant money and used during these village trainings to help spread the information received. However, the students were not the only ones who learned from this process. According to Cole, “*There were many lessons we learned as an organization, but the biggest was how to build and structure a successful project plan and implement it. Writing a good project is one thing, but seeing your plans in action is another. We had many road bumps that were not planned but we learned how to best communicate as an organization during times of struggle and worked together to come up with solutions.*”

Upon the successful completion of the trainings, the current estimates put the total number of beneficiaries of this program to be 364 outside students, in and around the Gavar area. As a direct result of this training two people have become employed by Cole’s organization, to begin utilizing their newly developed skills, and other recipients of this training now have the skills to train others, and seek employment in a field they otherwise may not have considered qualified for before.

Additionally, a 50 page pamphlet containing summary information about this program is in development and will soon be released to various interested groups. As Cole’s counterpart states, “We are making pamphlets of the same program to distribute to all of the surrounding communities, because they will aid those communities in their development.”<sup>1</sup> Also already in Armenian.

We can see that though this project is completed, its effects on the local community and its development are just beginning. Cole sums up the project’s impact best when he says, “Through our project we sparked Gavar’s and the surrounding communities’ interest in different computer topics and motivated the community to want to learn new things about computers, and I believe that is our greatest impact because before we can teach, we first need to create people who want to learn.”

-Written by Steven Martin



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 010-524-450.