

# SUMMER–FALL 2010



## YOUTH, ADULTS, AND COMMUNITY COME TOGETHER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

What started out as a simple environmental poster contest for children turned out to be so much more...

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## MARTUNI SPORTS SEMINAR UPDATE

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## ARMENIA SUMMER CAMPS



- Girls leading our World Camp
- Boys Reach Out Camp
- Strong Youth Powerful Future Camp
- Environmental Leadership Camp
- Future Young Leaders of Armenia Camp

*Learn more about those Camps starting from page 10*

## A 18 SWEARING-IN CEREMONY



U.S. Peace Corps Armenia conducted a swearing-in ceremony for the eighteenth group of volunteers serving in Armenia. U.S. Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch presided

over the ceremony, which has become an annual event. During the event, 55 Peace Corps Trainees demonstrated their knowledge of Armenian language and culture ...

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## A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS IN GYUMRI

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## FRIENDS WITHOUT BARRIERS

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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.

**US PRESIDENT  
JOHN F. KENNEDY  
MARCH 1, 1961**



# 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 700 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

### 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.

### English Education

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

### Community Health Education

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

### Environmental education

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

### *Peace Corps Ministry Partners are:*

Ministry of Economy  
Ministry of Education and Science  
Ministry of Health  
Ministry of Nature Protection  
Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs

# A 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 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

## A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS IN GYUMRI



On November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Amanda Pascal , an A17, Peace Corps Volunteer in Gyumri and Haik Balian, a Birth Right Volunteer, together organized a Domestic Violence Awareness Day. It was an active response to the death, of domestic violence victim, Zaruhi Petrosyan. Amanda and Haik decided to organize a day in order to enlighten and familiarize the residents of Gyumri about domestic violence in Armenia. To target a greater community and encourage more attendance they promoted the event in conjunction with a taste of Armenia culture. It was an event to behold. The Women’s Photo Exhibit from Emily Haas (A-17) and Paige Prince (A-16) brightened the room throughout the event. It captured the eyes and attention of the attendees with interesting photos and stories of women in Armenia. Along with a photo exhibit, there was a special performance from Birth Right Volunteer Sima Cunningham. This talented singer hails from Chicago and is American-Armenian. The crowd read all the photo stories and listened to music before Amanda and Haik introduced guest speakers Heghine Mkrtychyan from Ajakits NGO in Gyumri, and Sona Grigoryan from Women’s Support Center in Yerevan. The speakers talked about DV statistics in Armenia, as well as traditions and accepted traits in Armenia that could lead to domestic violence. Sona Grigoryan played a documentary film about a DV story in Armenia and many event participants discussed the film afterwards. The event had about 25 participants ranging from 17-40+ years old. The week after the event, Amanda and Haik met with NGOs in Gyumri to speak about their event and discussed plans for sustainability and the need for events focused on Domestic Violence throughout the community.

- Amanda Pascal (A17 Volunteer)

## YOUTH, ADULTS, AND COMMUNITY COME GETHER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

GAVAR, ARMENIA (September 2010) – What started out as a simple environmental poster contest for children turned out to be so much more in Gavar. In April 2010, Bryan Hall, a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer assigned to a local environmental organization Gegharkunik Aarhus – Gavar Center, worked with his counterparts, Liana Asoyan and Marine Mazmanyanyan, to coordinate a region-wide environmental poster contest in conjunction with Earth Day 2010. With a poster contest theme of anti-littering, the center received over 80 entries from children in grades five through eleven. Over fifteen schools and ten towns/villages throughout the region participated. The organization awarded seven winners, one from each grade.

The story could end here, but Bryan along with another U.S. Peace Corps volunteer, Nicole Cashin, brought up an idea to extend the reach of just a simple poster contest. Recently, Nicole and her counterpart, Arpine Baghdoyan, had worked with their organization, Gegharkunik Chamber of Commerce & Industry, to install a new playground for the Gavar community. One of the major sustainability issues facing the new park was littering. Bryan and Nicole presented an option to take the Earth Day poster contest winners and create a mural on the school adjacent to advertise anti-littering for the playground/park and community.

Gegharkunik Aarhus – Gavar Center loved the idea. Instead of writing a grant for the project, Bryan worked with his counterparts to solicit donations from the community and get people to volunteer their time for project. In the end, the regional and local government supplied funds and resources for the project along with several immediate and extended community members giving donations. The organization also worked with local youth and artisans to volunteer their time to the project.



Ultimately, the mural was painted by volunteers along with a trash clean-up. An opening event was organized; children whose posters originally sparked the mural idea, local youth, local leaders, and local volunteers gathered to discuss the importance of trash management in the community and in Armenia. The event was heavily attended and the local media did a story on the project. The project was a great success from local volunteerism and local donations to increase awareness, but also to start a dialogue with the youth and adults of the community about protecting their own community – everyone should understand their civic responsibility.

\* *Gavar is the regional capital for the Gegharkunik region in the Republic of Armenia.*

-Bryan Hall (A 17 Volunteer)

# Community Health Education Program

## MARTUNI SPORTS SEMINAR UPDATE

Building off of the wildly successful Sisian Sports Seminar held in early August, Bill Simonson and Paul Bloomer traveled to Martuni to hold a three-day seminar for sports coaches and teachers of physical education in the Martuni region. We would like to say 'շատ սպրեւ' to Katie McKillen and Ashley Ottewell who led the first day's session on gender in sports. The second day focused on proper and effective coaching, for which Paul drew on his extensive experience to provide a provoking and impactful session. The third and last day started with a short lesson on general health and nutrition in sports, and wrapped up with an interactive first aid presentation.

Among the participants there were five PE teachers, two coaches, and a number of youth group Volunteers who were eager and involved in the seminar, and of course appreciated the gifts of balls, tee-shirts, and water bottles given out, thanks to a donation from the International Alliance for Youth Sports.

With ever iteration of the camp, the material and presentations are modified to address the needs of the communities in the most effective way. As said before, the sport seminars are a work in progress, and we look forward to the next one!



*Paul Bloomer teaches the importance of leadership and management*

-Nicholas Hutchings (A17 Volunteer)

# Teaching English as a Foreign Language Program

## FRIENDS WITHOUT BARRIERS

When North-American [Ben Schwab](#) decided to start a Turkish language group in the small town of Sisian, Armenia, he was looking for extra motivation to study and a way to kill the empty hours that seasonally hovered over his Peace Corps volunteer experience. He searched CouchSurfing for native speakers who could help, and found [Fatih and Melek Birinci](#), a couple who were willing to share a bit of their time once a week. A year later, these practice sessions via Skype had achieved more than vocabulary building, setting the path for friendship in spite of politics and history.



### Turkish via Skype

With a cheap advertisement on local television, Ben drew just the right number of people for weekly Turkish classes in his living room. Every Monday evening, the four students would learn a new lesson and then practice with Fatih and Melek via Skype. "We would sit on my couch in front of my computer and repeat things. If we were to practice [talking about] our daily schedule, Fatih would be patient enough to hear everyone say, 'Then I woke up, then I had breakfast, then I went to work,' and correct us." Since their first lesson, the Armenians found striking similarities between Turkish and their mother tongue. "Words like bottle and candle, for example, are the same. And a lot of food items are equal, too," explains Ben.

### A Difficult Past

Similarities can be difficult to see in face of these two countries' historical and political conflicts.

Relations between Turkey and Armenia have been strained since World War I, when a large portion of the Ottoman Armenian population was killed. While the Armenian Republic and a number of scholars worldwide claim that what happened constitutes genocide, the Turkish government, as well as the Republic of Azerbaijan, claim that the number of Armenian victims has been exaggerated and that massacres were committed on both sides. In the present day, Turks and Armenians still tend to view each other warily. If Melek hadn't deliberately sought out information about her family's past, she might've never found out about her Armenian ancestry -- her parents and closest relatives thought best to keep this information secret. Her desire to explore Armenian culture and connect with Armenian people led her and Fatih to create the [Turkish-Armenian Friendship](#) CS group a year and a half ago. The group works as a forum for discussing these countries' sensitive issues as well as a space for mutual collaboration. It was here that Ben initially posted his request for help with his Turkish language club.

*Friendship between  
Turks and Armenians  
is possible. If you're  
realistic, you can say  
that.*

### A Realistic View of Turkish-Armenian Relations

Fatih and Melek's first visit to Armenia, this past July, met both the objectives of meeting Ben personally and taking part in an event he created as an opportunity for Turks and Armenians to listen to each other. The Turkish-Armenian Dialogue drew teachers, students, NGO representatives, and the local press and featured moving speeches by Fatih and Venera Shogunts, representing Turkey and Armenia respectively.

Ben's Turkish guests couldn't have been more impressed by Armenian hospitality. They were constantly approached by locals who were curious to know exactly what language they were speaking. Though their presence in the country was always met with surprise, they even received gifts and were invited into people's homes. "Since I [returned to] Turkey, I recommend that everyone go to Armenia," says Fatih. According to him, this suggestion is met with as much bewilderment by the Turks as the invitations he directed to Armenians to visit Turkey. If there's one thing Turks and Armenians seem to agree upon, it's that visiting each other's country is a bad idea.

Fatih, who works as a school psychologist, is a firm believer in education as a key element to eliminating such misconceptions. Or, in his words, "as the educational level increases, prejudice decreases." He also thinks CouchSurfing can be of great help in bringing Turks and Armenians together. Peace between these two countries is not, in his opinion, a goal detached from reality. "Friendship between Turks and Armenians is possible. If you're realistic, you can say that."

-Printed in International Magazin

# ARMENIA SUMMER CAMPS 2010

## GIRLS LEADING OUR WORLD CAMP

From June 26, 2010 – July 3, 2010, the Stepanavan Youth Center NGO in cooperation with Peace Corps Volunteers organized GLOW (Girls Leading Our World Leadership) Summer School for young Armenian girls. Stepanavan Youth Center was established in 2001 and has been conducting youth programs on local, national and international levels.

66 girls and 7 junior counselors (selected among GLOW 2008 and 2009 alumnae) from grades 8 through 11 were selected out of over 250 applications received, representing 10 Marzes. The summer school took place in Lusakert at the Lusakert Rest House, with the curriculum consisting of 8 days of interactive training on leadership, health education, career planning, gender, human rights and personal discovery.

The camp's main goals included:

- Educate girls about positive options for their future in order to provide them with a well-rounded view of different women's roles in society
- Enable camp participants to build their leadership skills and self-esteem through group activities
- Discuss key women's health issues that are not typically covered in the Armenian school systems and providing a safe environment to ask health related questions
- Introduce engaging learning methods to encourage creative thinking and expression
- Create a network between the camp participants, counselors, and guest speakers

Sessions were taught by 6 Armenian counselors and 9 American Peace Corps Volunteers. The whole camp was run in "home groups", giving the camp participants a chance to develop close relationships within their group, learn vital skills in teambuilding, and create a support network that will hopefully extend beyond the camp into the rest of their lives.

Sponsors included the US Embassy Democracy Commission, Peace Corps Partnership Fund, American Councils, OSCE and various in-kind sponsors. Contact Person: Lilit Simonyan.

-Mary Chiba (A16 Volunteer)



## BOYS REACHING OUT CAMP



There were two Boys Reaching Out Camps this summer. The first camp was July 21-25, for children between the ages of 10 and 13. The second camp was August 19-22 for children between the ages 14 to 16. Both camps were planned for 30-35 children. The camps are residential since the students come from all over the country.

The curriculum included communication skills, teamwork, self discovery, negotiation and conflict resolution, leadership, making good decisions, gender rules, volunteerism, HIV/AIDS, and tobacco use.

Some lessons differed, depending on the age group. For example, with the older group, we went into more detail about HIV/AIDS and gender roles. We also discussed safe sex. The camp was lead

by Arman Sahakyan of the New Generation NGO, based in Gyumri. Four Volunteers have participated in the camp.

-Steven Babish (A17 Volunteer)

# STRONG YOUTH POWERFUL FUTURE CAMP

On June 12<sup>th</sup>, 38 children, 8 Armenian volunteers, and 4 Peace Corps Volunteers arrived at the Village of Yaghdan in the Lori Marz, or region, of Armenia. For 10 days, this group participated in the Strong Youth Powerful Future Camp, which was sponsored by the Capacity and Development for Civil Society (CDCS) and World Vision. While all of the children, 12-16 years old, were from Lori Marz, many different villages were represented. As such, the village of Yaghdan played an integral role in sponsorship, donating camp facilities, housing, and food for all camp participants and counselors.



The curricula for the camp came in three distinct areas: the English language, Creative Thinking, and Leadership. Campers studied the subjects on each of four days, improving vocabulary, embracing inner artistry, and learning the many facets of leadership. After these sessions, the children were broken up into three groups to engage in teambuilding activities. Given the camp's residential nature, campers had ample time to devote to these fun, competitive activities, learning how to best function as a team in the meantime. Later, campers worked on and presented group projects on each of three capstone days, which were also augmented by a day's excursion to the stunning nature surrounding Yaghdan. Throughout the camp, the Armenian volunteers and Volunteers also benefitted, learning about

teamwork and leadership, logistical management, and teaching methodology.

Campers and counselors alike were sad to leave Yaghdan on the last day, having learned much and formed strong friendships. This sadness was tempered by a sense of optimism, though—everyone felt armed with new tools to improve Armenia. As instructed in the camp's closing ceremony, campers and counselors stand ready to apply new ways of thinking and avenues of leadership to work for positive change in their communities.

-Kyle Doran (A 17 Volunteer)

## ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP CAMPS

Environmental Leadership Camps (ELC) Camps were non-residential 5 day camps, with snack and lunch provided to the children and counselors. The funding of all camps was through a Democracy Grant awarded from the United States Embassy. The application process for the campers included an application form with pertinent questions gauging the applicant's interest and reasons for wanting to attend camp.

The four Student Leaders from each of the ELCs were selected to attend the camp in Ijevan based on their performance during all three sections of the ELC; Team building, Leadership, and Environment. Selection was made based on PCV and Armenian counselor impressions, as well as in some cases a voting process by their fellow campers.

While the Team Building component of camp varied group by group, based on the abilities of the participating children, the Environmental and Leadership sections of the individual camps were uniform. The Environmental curriculum was very straight forward, with games incorporating themes such as animals, plants, ecosystems, natural resources, and our responsibility. All of the games included detailed debrief questions, that connected the fun and actions of that particular game to the real-life applications of the subject matter. The Leadership curriculum included daily themes exploring the roles of a leader and important leadership qualities. Themes included respect and personal awareness, communication and cooperation, as well as the importance of reflection. These themes were expressed during individual and group games and activities, all of which included some amount of group discussion and debrief.

Environmentally related service projects were planned and implemented by all children attending the camps, working in their 4 small groups, or as one large group. Each group had one hour of project planning per day for 3 or 4 days before their projects were carried out. During these sessions, proper project planning strategies and project components such as impact, feasibility, sustainability, and budget were discussed.



-Patrick Welz (A 17 Volunteer)

# FUTURE YOUNG LEADERS OF ARMENIA CAMP

The inaugural Future Young Leaders of Armenia (FYLA) girls' camp was held this summer from August 1 to August 7 at School #1 in Vanadzor. The camp was created and managed by Sona Sargsyan, a young English teacher from Vanadzor. The seven day camp was held entirely in English, with participants ranging in age from 14 to 17 and who represented Vanadzor, Stepanavan, Berd, Vayk, Yerevan and Kapan. Peace Corps Volunteers Chris Edling, Dave Murphy and Heather Mailander led sessions in Careers, Computer skills and Theatre, with English teacher Ani Ghukasyan leading sessions on Leadership and volunteerism. Several guest speakers were invited to cover the topics of Anorexia/Bulimia, First Aid, skin care and Human Rights and Trafficking. The camp was funded through a FLEX alumni grant, and was considered a great success by all. It is hoped that there will be a chance to continue and expand this camp in future years.



-Heather Mailander (A 16 Volunteer)

## A 18 SWEARING-IN CEREMONY



AUGUST 5, 2010, CHARENTSAVAN, ARMENIA: U.S. Peace Corps Armenia conducted a swearing-in ceremony for the eighteenth group of volunteers serving in Armenia. U.S. Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch presided over the ceremony, which has become an annual event. During the event, 55 Peace Corps Trainees demonstrated their knowledge of Armenian language and culture learned during their training program. They performed Armenian songs and shared their experiences with their host families during these first weeks.

Before moving to their permanent sites, Peace Corps Volunteers completed ten weeks of language, cultural, technical, and safety and security training to prepare them for two years of service in towns and villages throughout Armenia. Volunteers will collaborate with Armenian counterpart organizations in the areas of English language education, business and community development, health education, and environmental education. Representatives of government ministries, the governor of Kotayk Marz, the city mayor of Charentsavan, and other representatives from international and local organizations were invited to the Swearing in Ceremony.



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.

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