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Project Title: “Building Bridges in Mostar”

Vision for a Sustainable Initiative

There are **two** main goals for this project for peace. **First**, the project aspires to help bring together Bosniak and Croat youth in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina by having them interact and learn together during a three-week summer institute. **Second**, the project will develop leadership skills and an entrepreneurial work ethic among these youth by fostering connections between them and local organizations. Through these goals for both community and individual development, I hope to contribute to a stronger society where both individuals and groups take action for positive change.

When and Where

Bosnia’s post-war society is still largely divided along ethno-national lines, namely its governance structure and education system. The existence of multiple curricula and ethnic segregation within schools cause further distrust and animosity among the post-war generation. Moreover, with a youth unemployment rate of well over 50%, Bosnia’s young people face staggering socioeconomic barriers as they try to enter the country’s labor market. In addition, civil society is dominated by international organizations, with a severe lack of funding going toward ethnically inclusive educational initiatives. Bosnian-led projects often lack political independence, community backing and resources.

In June and July 2014, I seek to apply my project’s vision to Mostar, a city whose Bosniak and Croat communities are among the most divided in all of Bosnia. By working closely together with community organizations, this project will offer Mostar’s youth free English language practice with native speakers, which is in great demand, as well as many other educational and social opportunities. It will also act as an important ‘hub’ for a number of civil society networks within the city with which we have strong ties, offering multiple prospects for young participants to be directly involved in local development. The project ultimately aims to act as a powerful model of ethnically and socially integrated education and community development in the city by facilitating cooperation and building support networks among fellow citizens of Mostar.

Area Experience

I will be in the Balkans starting February 2014 for my semester abroad through the SIT program *Serbia, Bosnia, and Kosovo: Peace and Conflict Studies in the Balkans* and will enhance my regional knowledge through ethnographic research. I will physically be in Mostar from March onwards and will meet with my contacts to further develop this project for summer 2014. My two teammates will join me in Mostar by the beginning of June to finalize preparations.

Next, I was also part of a team of interns who **together organized, implemented, and instructed at twin summer institutes in Tuzla and Dobo**j during summer 2013. Every year, the institutes teach English language and practical skills to 150-200 youth in Tuzla and Doboj and encourage their volunteerism. The parent organization BILD (Bosnia Initiatives for Local Development) also holds social and volunteering events that mix students from Tuzla and Doboj, which are located in two different ethno-political entities formed under the 1995 Dayton Accords.

Before the institutes, our responsibilities included disseminating promotional materials, presenting at a socioeconomically diverse array of schools, interviewing candidates, and reviewing their written applications. During the institutes, we taught courses we had designed ourselves, set up classrooms, tracked and ensured attendance and student satisfaction, and organized social and volunteer activities. I will apply our practical and interpersonal lessons learned from our time in these institutes to a well-rounded summer program in Mostar.

Local Partnerships

To begin, I have multiple connections in Bosnia and Mostar. Freya Nowell, one of my fellow teachers from summer 2013 and a continuing teammate for this project, has spent the past five

summers volunteering for *Our Kids*, a charity based in Mostar supporting the livelihoods of children and young adults at the Egipatsko Selo children's home. *Our Kids* is keen to cooperate with us by offering volunteer opportunities to this program's youth. I can also utilize further contacts of *Our Kids* in Mostar, which include educational institutions and other charitable organizations.

Generously, *Our Kids* has offered **subsidized housing** for my team as well as at least **three Bosnian youth who have indicated their desire to be teachers for this program**.

In addition, I have a working relationship with the United World College (UWC) in Mostar. My brother, a UWC-Canada alumnus, and UWC-Mostar alumna Irma Husić have helped me arrange UWC-Mostar's **classrooms** for use throughout June until the beginning of July. UWC-Mostar will also generously publicize this project and help attract both students and more Bosnian teachers who would like to participate in this summer program. UWC-Mostar is an ideal partner as it is centrally located, shares a vision for peace building through education, and already partners with local organizations for community development aimed at ethnic and social reconciliation. By working with organizations connected to *Our Kids* and UWC-Mostar, this project's students will build relationships with each other and other community members while increasing their awareness of social issues in Mostar.

Last summer, the British Council in Sarajevo provided members of my team with invaluable English language teaching and study materials, encouraging us to disseminate these among Bosnian students wanting to improve their English language skills independently. I have kept in touch with the British Council and will continue to rely upon their support for advice on grassroots and integrative educational projects that have been successful in Bosnia and in particular the Mostar area.

Finally, my teammate Sho Igawa will work with the Japanese Embassy in Sarajevo to organize programming outside of the summer program's classroom. He worked with the Embassy and Bosnian students in Dobož to organize and implement a Japanese culture festival in summer 2013. He is eager to arrange for Japanese musicians and/or artists to visit this program's students in Mostar. A field trip to Sarajevo for the students is also a hopeful possibility.

#### Summer Program

The program will conduct classes from 8 am to 1 pm to escape the summer heat of Mostar; each class will last 90 minutes. At 1 pm, the program will adjourn for lunch, allowing students to go home or elsewhere for their meal. Later in the afternoon, students will meet again for voluntary social activities (such as sports, the arts, and debate) and volunteer projects. Classes and extracurricular activities will be decided according to student demand. Many of the after-school activities will be planned and carried out by the students themselves with the team's secondary guidance. Courses are likely to be the following: professional writing and/or creative writing, university entrance preparation, art, music, dance, international politics, and social entrepreneurship.

After three weeks of classes, the program will hold a closing ceremony to celebrate the students' accomplishments. Their families will be invited to see student speeches, presentations of their hard work, and entertainment, all designed and implemented by the students themselves.

#### Lasting Impact

Through our summer program in Mostar, many Bosniak and Croat youth will find their niche in social initiatives that last beyond summer 2014. Moreover, my team will maintain regular contact with as many youth as possible via social media and e-mail, to offer guidance and mentorship. Finally, my team plans to recruit a new generation for this project's replication in summer 2015, drawing from its university networks.

With the faces of preexisting Bosnian friends in mind, my team brings passion and experience to this new initiative in Mostar. Their concerns about rampant corruption, nepotism, joblessness, and ethnic divisions still echo in our heads, so we desire the means to return to Bosnia once more.