

Title of Project: Creating Comprehensive Educational and Social Opportunities for Marginalized Children
Country where the project took place: Republic of Armenia
Sponsoring College: Gettysburg College
Student(s), Student's Home Country, Student's College: Mariam Aghayan, Republic of Armenia, Gettysburg College
Project blog or website address: <http://instagram.com/armeniaproject> ,
<https://www.facebook.com/armeniaprojectmariam>

Section I

b) This project aimed at educating disabled, homeless, and children of war-torn families English, healthy living, computer literacy, and social skills. These objectives were met through provision of high-intensity, interactive workshops during 21 days.

c) Fundraising was a crucial component of my budget. This project would have not been nearly as successful as it was were it not for St. Peter's Armenian Apostolic Church fundraiser during the annual Armenian festival. Sunday School children donated to this cause and so did multiple private donors. Also, most of the people I worked with offered in-kind contributions, which made this project feasible.

d) It was an absolute pleasure and honor to travel to my native Armenia to lead a team of dedicated people, including a World Health Organization doctor, teachers, and peers. Having the support of my team made it possible to accomplish my project goals within a short period of time. At first, I was weary of the fact that almost all of the children seemed very shy and uptight whenever I would walk into the room. Thankfully, I know of the Armenian customs and let them know that during my project I wanted the student teacher relationship to be relaxed and friendly and that they should never fear to ask any questions in class. Because of the way they were raised it took them a few days to not call me by my full name and stand up every time I would walk into the room. I love the fact that they were able to be open-minded and get comfortable in the classroom, because that made my job much easier. I was their English instructor and used unorthodox methods of language instruction to teach them a foreign language. In a short time span, my 68 students managed to create strong bonds with one another and their professors. Sometimes my students would approach me and ask about life in the U.S. and wonder if movies provide the correct depiction of our day-to-day lives. I think it really helped that we didn't have a language barrier, although my students were sometimes confused as to why I speak Armenian if I live in the U.S.

I was in absolute awe of how thankful all of the students and their relatives were of our initiative. They truly seemed to value the high quality education that was being offered to them and would truly take an advantage of everything by asking to stay late and continue to either study or play sports. I will never forget the last day that we all spent together. After taking pictures with the thank-you posters they designed, they all rushed and nearly tackled my fellow teacher, Seda Orbelyan, and me in an effort to give us hugs and to simply thank us. Until the very last second that we were still standing in front of the Mayor's Office after saying goodbye, I had students and relatives come up to me and ask to extend the project duration or to at least promise that I will offer the same opportunity next summer.

I am so thankful to your foundation for giving me this amazing opportunity to impact the lives of so many people. I know that this initiative reached more than 68 people. Their family members and friends have all approached me to individually thank me, the Mayor's office sent over the head of the educational department to attend our closing ceremony and she spoke very highly of our efforts, but most importantly, the community became aware of the pressing issues that these children faced. My project was featured in two news articles and on the national news programs twice as well. People Because of all the fundraising and in-kind contributions, I was able to expand my project into the neighboring region. I reached out and collaborated with the Governor of Vayotz Dzor Province in Armenia and donated over 100 textbooks and novels to an NGO in Vayk, the capitol of Vayotz Dzor, which delivered the books to children in hospitals and orphanages.

Section II

Peace for me would be defined as the absence of conflict and the presence of our unalienable Rights as well as the basic human rights put forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Ignorance and intolerance are both deadly traits and thankfully over the summer the children I worked with got to interact with people from various socioeconomic backgrounds and had candid talks about different religions, ethnicities, and equality of sexes.

I cannot express how grateful I am to have been welcomed in the United States and been able to fit in. I certainly love the country where I was born and raised, but I am also eternally grateful to the United States and to my parents for sacrificing so much to make attending a U.S. college a possibility. I truly believe that a good education will enable me to advocate for international human rights issues and make a positive impact. Above all, I am thankful to the Davis Foundation for giving me this amazing opportunity to go back to my home country and to make a real change there.

I went into this project thinking that the greatest benefits these children will get will be their English knowledge or their computer skills. What I quickly came to realize was that it is difficult to learn on an empty stomach. My dedicated team was able to provide healthy and organic food to 68 children everyday during the project. Their faces would light up every time it was lunchtime. I also quickly realized how strong the bonds between these children were. They stood up for one another and defended each other from bullies, when we were walking through the city to go to the museum. The bonds in the classroom also translated to great camaraderie on the soccer field, which was essentially cement in the back of a local school, since the school we were using didn't have a gymnasium. From the instance when my team and I passed out the soccer uniforms the children were gleaming and sprinted to grab the soccer balls to start playing. I hope in the future this initiative will get expanded into other regions of the world.

“Raising a well-educated and fully-integrated generation of children is the greatest way to achieve peace. It is difficult to learn on an empty stomach, so we have to make sure to take care of the basics first and guarantee that our children have access to basic human necessities.” –Mariam Aghayan

These are the links to the articles/news reports.

<http://armenpress.am/arm/news/767453/kapanci-60-erekhayi-hamar-irakanacvum-e-krtakan-tsragir.html>

My project is featured in this from 8:20-11:55

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TizH6af1RPU>

<http://sosi-tv.com/1359--.html>

My project is featured in this from 10:00-12:10

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znQILqSECyI>

