

Let the Christmas Spirit Rise

Imagine... It is the last weekend of the 2012 year, the sun is shining, and everyone seems to be in a hurry, rushing through the central square of Gyumri as they finish their final errands in preparation for the New Year celebration. But what is that sound? Is it Christmas carols playing from the loudspeakers? It seems a bit early for such songs, since it is just the 29th of December. You stop to listen more closely to the lyrics, "...*A pokój na ziemi.*" The music is Polish! As you listen to the music, you begin to notice the colourful tables set up around the square, adorned with flags of different countries and filled with plates of food and sweets, decorated with candles, fir branches, and small giveaways. Young volunteers from all over the world have gathered to present the unique ways in which Christmas is celebrated in their own countries, through sharing everything from homemade desserts and warm drinks to the traditional music, decorations, and customs of their respective countries.

In late December, this vision was turned into reality for residents of Gyumri, all of whom were welcome at the International Christmas Market. This special event was the first of its kind in Gyumri, planned and organised within the framework of the International Club at YIC and led by Sona Sahakyan. The international participants, who presented seven different countries- Austria, Germany, Poland, Denmark, Portugal, Romania, and the USA- worked together with several active YIC members to prepare the day full of international Christmas celebrations and traditions. And as a result, on that special afternoon, far away from their countries of origin, you could smell the Polish *pierogi* cooking on the gas stove, try to find the almond in the Danish milk-rice, create a decorative straw star to hang on the German/Austrian Christmas tree, warm up with a cup of hot apple cider from the States, learn about Romanian Christmas customs, and have a taste of spiced Christmas Cake from Portugal.

By EVS Volunteer Johanna Teubler



Upcoming Clubs

Mondays:

15:00 – Russian Club

(Gagik Grigoryan)

16:00 – Intermediate English Club

(Volodya Khachatryan)

17:00 – Conversational English

(Kimberly VanKirk)

Tuesdays:

16:00 – Intermediate English Club

(Volodya Khachatryan)

17:00 – Spanish Club

(Iustina Pascari)

Wednesdays:

15:00 – Portuguese Club

(Luís Carvalho)

16:00 – Photography Club

(Luís Carvalho)

17:30 – English Club for Beginners

(Siranush Minasyan)

Thursdays:

15:00 – European Club

(All EVS volunteers)

15:00 – EyoU Club

(Aleksandra Zięba and Victoria

Walter - *Last Thursday of each month*)

16:00 – Georgian Club

(Arman Melkonyan)

17:00 – German Club

(Anna Schott & Johanna Palomita)

Fridays:

14:00 – Polish Club

(Aleksandra Zieba)

15:00 – Farsi Club

(Galya Hovhannisyan)

More info on Facebook:

[https://www.facebook.com/
www.yic.am](https://www.facebook.com/www.yic.am)

"The Little Christmas Tree"

"Once upon a mountain top, three little trees stood and dreamed of what they wanted to be. The first little tree looked up at the stars twinkling like diamonds..."

This is the opening line of the successful play, presented in the HUYS orphanage in Gyumri on December 27th. It tells the story of a lonely little fir tree, who wishes to become a Christmas tree, and whose wish finally, with the help of various forest animals and a shooting star, comes true. The children at the orphanage did a great job as actors, and the directors - international and local volunteers from YIC - were very satisfied with the children's performance. Both the children and the volunteers received many positive comments and recognition, and the orphanage staff were especially impressed by the children performing in English.

The project began a couple months ago at the end of November when the eight EVS volunteers prepared "The Little Christmas Tree" play for the children. Together with local volunteers, who assisted with translation, the group visited the orphanage twice a week, where they helped the children rehearse for the play and made creative decorations for the scenery.

Although the process presented a lot of challenges, including language struggles and learning to work with very active children, there was always something to laugh about and the warmth and openness of the children encouraged the volun-



teers greatly. Both parties- the children and the volunteers- learned a lot while working on the project, whether improving their English skills by speaking confidently onstage or finding a common language with which to communicate with the children. In the end, everyone involved shared an unforgettable experience.

The work at the orphanage, with all the challenges and rewards it involved, was something very different from the usual activities of the EVS volunteers, which are primarily based in the YIC office. At the office, the volunteers share their cultures and talents with YIC members, and offer a wide variety of clubs including European Club, Spanish Club, Portuguese Club, Photography Club, German Club, and EyoU Club. Yet, as demonstrated through the success of their work at HUYS, the work done by the volunteers in the larger community is just as important.

"The tree was so beautiful that all the animals from the forest decided to come and admire him. The Christmas tree felt very happy." As the play ended and the orphanage children stood together onstage receiving much-deserved rounds of applause, they were not the only ones bearing wide smiles. For the eight EVS volunteers this was the culmination of their work and a rich reward for the many hours spent in the orphanage.

By EVS Volunteer Victoria Walter



International Volunteer Day

In 1985, the United Nations declared that December 5th would be a day to recognize and celebrate volunteering. In the words of Flavia Pansieri, Executive Coordinator for the United Nations Volunteers: “[Volunteerism] plays a healing role by rebuilding trust in a post-conflict society. And its values- of solidarity and engagement- inspire us to live sustainably, so that our human actions do not jeopardize the needs... of future generations.”

The power of volunteering was certainly not lost on the Youth Initiative Center, where volunteers and members worked together during the weeks leading up to December 5th, preparing a celebration to honor both the local and international volunteers who willingly lend their time and energy to YIC. The final event, which was open to all YIC members free of charge and hosted (in Armenian!) by two EVS volunteers, consisted of four sections- each devoted to exploring volunteering from a different angle.

The evening began with an opportunity for local members to learn more about YIC international volunteers through a “Living Library,” during which the international volunteers became human “books” for YIC members to read and discover. Once the participants had finished reading and listening to the stories, the focus turned to perceptions about volunteering—a photo exhibition that displayed various artistic interpretations of the meaning of volunteering; a chance for people to paint pictures to express their own ideas and thoughts about “what volunteering means to me;” and time for volunteers to introduce their own initiatives and projects that they hope to carry out during their time in Gyumri.



Shortly thereafter, it was time for the local volunteers and members to take center-stage. Under the guidance of YIC member Gagik Grigoryan, several YIC members used Forum Theater performance to present common misperceptions of volunteering, and audience members were encouraged to actively participate in creating potential solutions. Following the performance was the moment everyone had been waiting for—the results from the week-long voting process that allowed YIC members to nominate volunteers in a variety of unique categories. Themed music played as the winner from each category was announced and given a medal and certificate. Although the evening drew to a close shortly after the presentations, the recognition and appreciation of volunteering were elements that will continue to guide the work and efforts of YIC.

By Peace Corps Volunteer Kim VanKirk

See the next two pages for more information on the International Volunteer Day!



Forum Theatre

Forum theatre is a type of interactive performance and one of the best tools to help teach people how to solve different types of social conflicts. Traditionally, forum theatre is based on real-life situations and allows audience members to become improvisational actors in the performance in order to change the original, scripted outcome.

During the International Volunteer Day event, five YIC members entertained and challenged the attendees with a 15-minute performance during which they presented a common conflict in Armenia: a low understanding of volunteering. This is a problem many young volunteers face in their everyday lives, including many local volunteers at YIC. Within families, conflicts about volunteering can be particularly difficult- and often unavoidable.

Before writing the script, the YIC actors participated in some short warm-up activities to help them identify common stereotypes about volunteering. These brainstorming activities led to the general outline of the play, in which the main conflict took place between a mother and her daughter, who is a volunteer.

There are typically at least five actors in forum theatre: the oppressor, the oppressed, two allies, and a neutral party. In our play, the mother was the oppressor by representing a stereotypical and conservative parent who is against her daughter volunteering. The daughter - the oppressed party - represented an average young volunteer. In addition to these two main characters, there was also an ally of the oppressor- the mother's son, who shared her point of view- and an ally of the oppressed, represented by the daughter's friend from the NGO in which she volunteered. The neutral party was played by the father of the family, who didn't show any interest in the conflict.

Forum theatre takes place in two parts: first, the actual, scripted performance and later, the interactive forum. Following the scripted play, the "joker," who acts as the narrator and interacts with the audience, began the forum part of the show. During this portion, the characters began to perform the play once again, but this time allowed the audience to interrupt whenever they chose. Audience members were encouraged to clap in order to pause the play, and then choose a character to replace and improvise new interactions. However, the new actors were not allowed to avoid the conflict or change the role of the oppressor, which also would lead to avoiding of the conflict. Providing the most significant aspect of forum theatre, these new, improvised interactions with audience members are designed to discover what options people might suggest in order to resolve the conflict. During YIC's forum theatre piece, audience members demonstrated several unique and creative interactions that eventually led to resolution of the conflict.

Ultimately, YIC organized the forum theatre performance to show youth - especially those who volunteer in YIC - different ways to solve similar kinds of conflicts and help people understand the value of volunteering.



The Forum Theatre actors By YIC Member Gagik Grigoryan

Winners of the nominations!

Most integrated volunteer: Kim Vankirk

Most hard-working volunteer: Gagik Grigoryan

Most inspiring club leader: Siranush Minasyan

Best volunteer initiative: Let Aregak shine brighter!

Best Armenian volunteer abroad: Ofelia Papikyan

Most helpful mentor: Tamara Khlgatyan

Most creative volunteer: Luis Carvalho



The nomination winners

International Volunteer Day



Since 2000, Living Libraries have been used as a way to promote understanding and reduce discrimination through bringing people together to learn *about* each other and *from* each other. Composed of both readers and human books, Living Libraries offer the opportunity for face-to-face interaction as the books tell their stories and the readers learn about their different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.

Living Library

During the International Volunteer Day event, the international volunteers of YIC became the living books and shared their unique stories and thoughts about volunteering to interested readers. Their stories often sparked further conversations about the values and possibilities of volunteering, and helped to break different stereotypes and misconceptions about volunteers and volunteerism.

You can find excerpts from two of the stories below:

"It was a great pleasure for me to do this volunteering work because the children inspired me and I also got positive feedback from parents and people from my village. This and to gain some experience with children were the two reasons why I did it. I look back to these three years and remember the smiling faces of my kids and how they told me their stories of their kindergarten or their school. I miss them!"

From *My Volunteering Story* by Victoria Walter

"Some people think I am crazy for leaving America to volunteer for such a long time! Many people ask me if I get homesick. Yes, I do. Of course I do! I miss my family and my friends, and I especially miss my nephew, who is seven years old. But I volunteer because I want to live in a world where people help each other, and because I believe that volunteering makes our world a little bit better"

From *Why I am not crazy* by Kim VanKirk



FOR KARNUT

HELP OUR PROJECT COME TRUE!
PLEASE, SAVE YOUR PLASTIC
BOTTLES EVERY DAY AND
BRING THEM TO YIC.
LET'S DO IT!



IF YOU WANT TO CONTACT US:
• LUIS: luis.yic@gmail.com
• OLA: ola.zieba@a2.pl
YOU'RE MORE WELCOME!

An interpretation of volunteering from the photo exhibition



An environmental initiative from EVS volunteers Aleksandra and Luis

Ofelia volunteering in Germany

Meet Ofelia, who began her 12 months EVS project in Leipzig, Germany in July and is working at a preschool.

I don't know where to start because it seems like these last 5 months have been a dream. I can't believe how fast things have happened during this time.

I remember the summertime - shopping, having a nice summer in Leipzig with my friends, the first day at my workplace; parties, problems, stress, traveling, my on-arrival training, my courses... everything.

During the first three months, I was thinking that EVS was only about volunteering; and also because of the language, I wasn't able to do anything more. In the beginning, I was having difficulties and feeling very upset and perhaps even that EVS wasn't right for me.

However, after awhile the German language courses started, and day by day everything began getting better and easier for

me. I was able to do more things with the children, I could organise more things, and I became much happier! My workplace has become kind of a small family for me, the children are becoming friendlier with me, and I am really enjoying these moments.

I have already prepared two exhibitions- one during the summer, which was an exhibition for children's drawings; and the other in December, which was a photo exhibition for Christmas. During the photo exhibition, I presented all of the activities that we had done with children during these past 5 months.

I am very happy and grateful to the Youth Initiative Center for this great activity! I have learned a lot of things during my EVS project, and I still have time to learn new things. I am really looking forward to the upcoming 5 months!

By EVS Volunteer Ofelia Papikyan





“We Are Able”

Youth media program

Gyumri “Youth Initiative Centre” NGO has launched the “We are Able” youth media program with the financial support of the Royal Norwegian Embassy. The project aims at increasing the awareness and active citizenship of youth living in the different regions of Armenia through encouraging their active participation in the process of youth policy development and decision-making.

Within the framework of the project, young people will prepare reports and upload them online. These reports will focus on the following issues that exist in the 10 regions of the Republic of Armenia:

- ✓ Youth problems and ways of solving them;
- ✓ Active youth groups and NGOs;
- ✓ Opportunities for young people to participate in local and international projects.

7 young people out of 15 applicants of 16-30 years old living in Shirak region have been selected according to their applications. They will take part in one month training of media art to get acquainted with basic principles of journalism and providing information. After training course the most skillful 6 participants will be selected out of 7 young people who will help to prepare reportages and broadcast them online. According to the project manager Artur Najaryan the reportages will be broadcasted already in March.

December's Member of the Month - Siranush Minasyan

We caught the December member of the month for a short interview:

Please, tell us a little about yourself.

I was born in 1988 in Gyumri. I studied at school N 38, named after H. Sahyan. After leaving school I went to the Institute named after Mikael Nalbandyan and studied in the faculty of foreign languages. Then I continued and earned my master's degree with the same major. Now I work at the Armenian Catholic Ordinariate.

What hobbies and interests do you have?

I am fond of listening to music. Perhaps I will repeat the famous cliché but I really can't imagine my life without music. Music is the soundtrack of my life.

I also love dances. For some people it's funny but I like to dance alone when I have free time.

Which kind of job would you like to have?

Since childhood I have dreamt of becoming a dancer, but my parents never took me to dance classes. When the time came and I could decide for myself and go in for dance classes, it was already late to become a professional dancer. I can surely say that it's the only profession that makes me feel envious. I also like the profession of translator and that's the reason I started learning English.

How long have you been a member of YIC?

I have been a YIC member since February 2010. I can say proudly that I am one of the first YIC members.

Why did you decide to join YIC?

I first came to YIC when one of the founders proposed that I lead the English Club. I agreed with great pleasure, while of course being a little bit afraid of the new responsibility. At first YIC was an institution for me where I could do volunteering and gain experience, but today it's a place where I do feel myself at home.

What is your favorite project or event in which you have taken part?

The list of favorite events and projects that I have participated in with great pleasure is rather long, but I can surely distinguish the Training Course "Enough Pizza for Everyone," hosted by YIC in Dilijan. The impressions I got there are unforgettable.

What is the most interesting thing you have learned at YIC?

I have learned to work in a team and be more tolerant towards the differences with other

cultures. YIC has helped me to think in a new and open way, to be more sure of myself.

What will you advise other members of YIC?

I want them to be active, to take part in events and to make use of the opportunities to develop themselves and learn new things, of course being ready to have their own investment in developing YIC and making it more powerful.

Interviewed by YIC Member Nune Minasyan



Contacts

Address: Jivani 71, Gyumri 3107, Armenia

Cell: 077 42 66 89

E-mail: newsletter@yic.am

Website: www.yic.am

