

UNHCR – KASA PROJECT

“REFUGEE INTEGRATION THROUGH SOCIAL-CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND SELF-RELIANCE OPPORTUNITIES”

Newsletter - issue 1 January-June 2020

“JOIN-THE-COMMUNITY” PROJECT VOLUNTEERS BUILDING BRIDGES DURING PANDEMIC

Since 2014, around 300 volunteers have been enrolled in KASA Swiss Humanitarian Foundation projects playing an important role in helping refugees and asylum-seekers build a new life, create and develop in Armenia.

Join the Community is an integration project for refugees and asylum seekers who have culturally diverse background, arrived in various timeframe and face social difficulties. The aim of the project is to provide platform to exchange cultural specifics of different countries and to explore Armenia in its diversity.

At the beginning of this year, some 14 new volunteers of the UNHCR-KASA Join the Community project actively engaged in the work with the residents of the Reception Centre for asylum-seekers by organising cultural and thematic club activities and following the COVID-19 emergency situation switched on to online mode with the total number of 12 sessions organised so far.



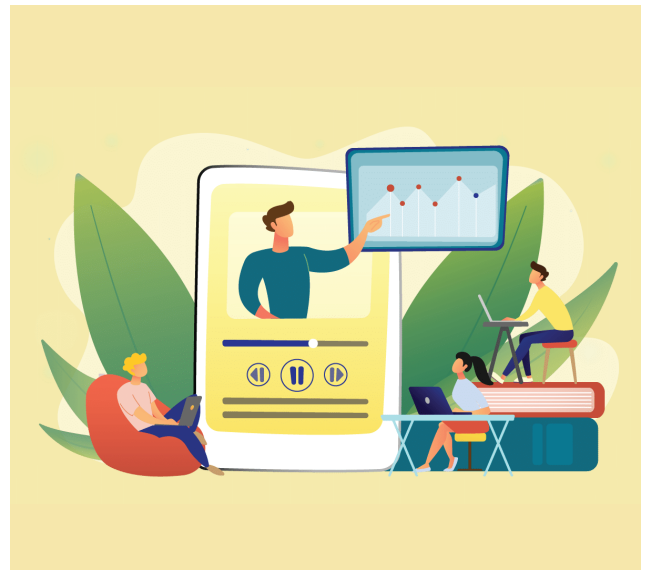
Even though communication through online platforms was sometimes troublesome at the beginning, the volunteers managed to ensure quite interesting and innovative online activities that the participants greatly enjoyed and benefited from. With regard to the participants’ exposure to cultural heritage, customs and traditions, the volunteers came up with an idea of demonstrating and sharing online some interesting news articles and videos, music and dances, useful links to educational and awareness-raising materials, as well as colloquial vocabulary and quizzes. The group expressed that they enjoyed the online sessions very much, stating that they also wished to have some face-to-face meetings and participate in social and public events, when the situation in the country is normalised.



ARMENIAN AND RUSSIAN CLASSES IN A NEW FORMAT

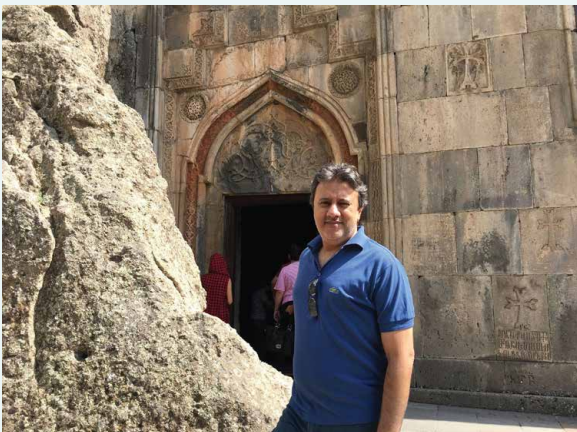
The lockdown inspired KASA for exploring some new technological ways to share knowledge, including language education in the best way. Using online tools usually requires a computer or smartphone and internet connection which was predicted to be one of the obstacles the participants would face.

Thanks to the peer support by KASA and refugee volunteers, some of the Reception Centre residents gained new digital skills enabling them to install relevant applications and set accounts in social media. They benefit from and enjoy the Armenian and Russian language classes and consult with their peers on technological issues when necessary.



Language learning has played a big role in Baback's life, in particular. As an Iranian, he grew up speaking Farsi, but learnt English working as an IT specialist. He considers himself as Armenian he has been living in Armenia as a refugee for some 14 years now. Baback is much respected by refugees, he supports his peers and shares his know-how.

By applying his IT and language skills, he helps the participants of the Armenian language courses with necessary clarifications or interpretation, initiates dialogues and Q&A sessions.



"I learn Armenian, first of all, because I live in Armenia. My main challenge is to learn the literary Armenian as opposed to the colloquial and informal language, when I first came here. Unlearning is not that easy I must admit, so I still feel more comfortable using English on everyday basis. Secondly, I love Armenian writers and literature, especially poetry. And lastly, if I can be of support during the classes, I will be more than happy to help. Ultimately, we're all here to help one another, aren't we?"

BABACK ASHTARI, A REFUGEE FROM IRAN

Along with the online language classes, the class participants (particularly the intermediate group) often use the Skype platform for socialization and genuine dialogue on various subjects of interest. They develop their everyday communication skills by sending to each other various materials in Armenian such as poems, videos on Armenian traditions and culture, as well as awareness-raising videos and announcements, including COVID-19 emergency-related state decisions, updated news and other practical information.

PEER SUPPORT: ESC VOLUNTEERS HELPING DISPLACED PEOPLE

Magda, a volunteer from Poland has been in Armenia for several months within the framework of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) Program. She joined KASA Foundation to contribute to the institution's humanitarian and educational programs and activities. Upon declaration of the state of emergency in mid-March, she decided to stay quarantined in Armenia and continue to carry out her mission. From the very beginning of her ESC she expressed readiness to participate in UNHCR-KASA's "Refugee Integration through Social-Cultural Orientation and Self-Reliance Opportunities" program and thus contribute to the agencies' efforts to promote refugees' inclusion in the society. Magda is responsible for compiling newsletters related to the program, conducting Russian language courses for refugees and asylum seekers.



Working with displaced people has been my priority during my ESC mission in Armenia, and I truly appreciate this opportunity. I had a chance to take up a role of a Russian language teaching assistant for a few months, when I worked alongside an experienced teacher working with refugees. This gave me an insight into different teaching methods and peculiarities in terms of practical language learning, as opposed to academic education which I'm most familiar with. I understood that adjusting the material to the needs of class participants is crucial in teaching, be it formal or non-formal education.

The Russian club reopening in May made me assume the role of a club leader. I see it as a perfect platform of informal meetings for displaced people interested in Russian language, literature and culture. I love sharing with them scenes from my favourite TV series, songs from iconic Russian films and lovely cartoons. I also share with them some interesting facts, tell about the Russian people, talk about their customs, their sense of humour and many other interesting traditional values and peculiarities. In my opinion it is essential to create a pleasant and friendly atmosphere in the club since its aim is not only teaching, but also socialising, sharing and learning, engaging them in useful and interesting activities which is particularly important during the ongoing lockdown..

MAGDA

“YOUTH COALITION” BREAKS THE BOUNDARIES

Youth Coalition is a group of active young people comprised of refugees and locals. The members of youth coalition incorporates advocacy tools and human rights into their scope of activities through implementation of SDG oriented actions in cooperation with the state, local authorities, opinion leaders and the Civil Society actors.

Young people in Armenia continue to demonstrate exceptional eagerness to engage in social and humanitarian activities and contribute to their communities. After last year's active engagement in promotion of SDGs through community-based activities and environmental projects, the group of young people grew by enrolling other local and refugee youth. The meetings organized for YC members revealed the need to initiate activities around the following 4 SDGs.



During SDG sessions I realised how many problems there are in the world and I learnt to look at our local issues through the global perspective. After having attended the training I also understood that there are many people like me out there who aren't aware of those problems, and so I decided to take up the responsibility to talk about them, to share the knowledge I have gained during YC training sessions and activities. I would like to show others how important it is to care, as caring starts from raising awareness.

NARO, A YOUTH COALITION MEMBER

I'm very glad that the COVID-19 emergency situation didn't stop us from carrying out our activities. We entered a new and interesting online life which turned out to be equally beneficial and somewhat exciting. However demanding online meetings and training might seem, there are also some advantages this new format brings. For instance, long discussions over disputable topics have been turned into online polls. Doing this is a true timesaver in the effective implementation of project activities. Another thing is that many volunteers only know each other from virtual meetings and so the vision of finally seeing the other members in real life is extremely exciting and motivating in terms of further collaboration on the cause that unites all of us.

VARDI, A YOUTH COALITION MEMBER



Youth Coalition have been involved in various educational and social projects by switching to online modality after the COVID-19 emergency situation was introduced. The group of some 30 participants benefited from SDG refresher sessions and awareness raising on COVID-19 emergency, brainstormed on new initiatives with focus on further promotion of SDGs in an online modality or real activities once the situation is normalised.



The youth also started preparing for the promotion of World Refugee Day 2020 commemoration going under the tagline “Everyone Can Make a Difference, Every Action Counts”. The Youth Coalition and Join the Community volunteers led by Darya Jumel, an ESC volunteer from France, engaged in a special video shooting to call the public for solidarity with refugees and to demonstrate their empowerment and humanitarian work.

The result of the video project will show the fulfillment that can be achieved through working with displaced people and their genuine commitment and will serve as a motivator for further generations of volunteers.

GETTING REFUGEES INTO WORK: MENTORS & MENTEES (BENEFICIARIES)

Helping refugees and asylum-seekers to find employment opportunities and be oriented in a job market is a noble task. To achieve successful job placement matching refugees' professional capacities and skills, volunteers work with the beneficiaries helping them prepare a CV, get ready for written and oral interviews, search for suitable jobs by contacting agencies or studying announcements of job opportunities.

The pairing of mentors and mentees in the frame of this component of the project has a list of specific objectives and strategies to fulfill in order to successfully achieve the final goal.



The mentors were prepared to guide their mentees in accessing information on a wide range of employment-related topics, help them to create and update their CVs, motivation letters and portfolios, build relationships with local contacts such as employers, other support charities and foundations as well as facilitate referrals to other agencies.

The mentors also support mentees in drawing on their strengths and coping strategies and in identifying, setting and reviewing SMART goals.

The spirit of team work and mutual support emerged amongst the mentors soon after commencing the project implementation. They have willingly shared job opportunities with each other, helped with CV templates' creation and with translations. As a result of such joint efforts two mentor-mentee couples united and came up with a business startup idea that is soon to be implemented.

"My husband was very proud of me and my readiness to support refugees and he decided to help me in this important and useful activity thus having his input, too. As he is an IT specialist, he can arrange job interview online practical sessions for all the refugees who would be interested in such an opportunity".

VARDUHI, MENTOR

Working with local mentors also fosters trust and collaboration, motivates refugees for engaging in job search parallel to shaping up their knowledge and communication skills, as well as raising their awareness on the local labour market. In addition to generating income, work makes refugees feel wanted and valued by the society. They feel equal with locals, ready to contribute to the society and its development. As stated by refugees themselves, a decent job helps them feel integrated, they feel self-sufficient and independent when making income.

This newsletter was prepared by KASA in partnership with UNHCR



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