

## **English Access Microscholarship Program SUMMER CAMP 2014 (PH International – Armenia)**

July, 2014, was a month of highlights and intensive learning for 54 Armenian students enrolled in the Access English Microscholarship Program implemented by PH International. Throughout July 22-25, 54 high students and their teachers from 3 regional towns of Armenia, Nor Hachn, Dilljan and Chambarak, the three program sites, got together with the Program Manager and the support facilitators (Kristina Abrahamyan, the English instructor of Nor Hachn group, and Asya Torosyan, the English instructor of Chambarak group) in a central camp in Aghveran, a regional resort complex, to participate in intensive English language summer camps organized within the two-year English Access Microscholarship Program. The program offers the only free-of-charge option for English classes in most of the participants' communities.

Having begun the program in Sept., 2012, with little to no competence of English, the students became actively engaged in different English sessions related to leadership, youth role in movements for social change, on career choices, on cross-cultural differences between Americans and Armenians, on environmental issues, on crowdsourcing and crowdfunding, etc.

The program budget allows only limited opportunities for cross-site joint events, so the annual camps are the only major opportunities when the students from all 3 sites spend considerable learning and leisure time together, so the first day of the camp was devoted to the reunion of all students. To check how well they had gotten to know one another after the real-time and virtual networking within the 2 years of the program, the students tried the False-True icebreaker where each student offered to the rest of the students and teachers 1 false and 2 true statements about themselves while the audience was to guess what is true and what is false. The group was proud to record that they knew one another quite well and had made a solid Access team.



Through the short creative, fun videos that the students of each site had prepared, they shared with one another their high moments within the Access program. All videos showed flashbacks of the important

events the students initiated or participated in, highlighted a diversity of enhancement activities through which the students reported personal and academic growth, improved English language abilities and exposure to the U.S., knowledge of other cultures, increased personal responsibility for their life, closer bonding with their community, etc.

Afterwards, the students worked in cross-site teams to reflect on the specific benefits of the Access program, responding to the following set of questions in team presentations:

- Examples of at least 2 very interesting facts that the students learned about the USA,
- Names of at least 2 interesting new people that the students met during Access,
- Examples of at least 2 happy events/activities that they participated in during Access,
- Examples of at least 2 useful qualities that Access trained in them,
- Examples of at least 2 important ways in which they impacted/changed their other non-Access friends, family, and community members.



It was during this session that Mr. John Heffern, Honorable U.S. Ambassador in Armenia, and Hasmik Mikayelyan, the Educational Cultural Assistant of the Public Affairs Section, visited the Access students, observed them in action, interacted with each team and sat at their presentations. The Ambassador posed a lot of interesting questions to each team and shared additional information regarding the thoughts that the students delivered in their presentations. Other students from the audience also joined the conversations and offered their thoughts about the questions the Ambassador had. After this interesting and interactive exercise, the Ambassador awarded the students with Certificates of Participation, praised them for effective participation in the program and in the camp, and wished them good luck with their English learning and all future endeavors.

Afterwards, during the break in the nice forest scene, the Ambassador took a group picture with the students and teachers, interacted with them in a relaxed, informal atmosphere to learn more about the impact of the 2-year program on the students' lives and in their communities. The Ambassador thanked PH staff and the teachers for their effective work, praised the students for their excellent participation in the program and in the camp, while the students, the English instructors and the Access staff of PH reciprocated his words, expressing their appreciation to the U.S. government for this useful and much needed program in rural communities of Armenia, and they specifically thanked the Ambassador for his very active personal involvement with this program.



Following this very meaningful time with the Ambassador and PAS staff, a group of active alumni of U.S. government programs visited the students and shared their ideas and advice of success in personal and professional life:

- Luba Balyan: An alumna of multiple exchange programs on environmental issues, co-founder of the Armenian Society for the Protection of Birds (ASPB), and currently National Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program Coordinator;
- Hripsime Amirkhanyan: An alumna of PH's 2010-11 "Armenia-Turkey-U.S. Youth Leadership Across Borders Program"; 2013 Fellow of U.S.-based Atlas Corps, and currently the Ambassador of Globalgiving in Armenia;
- Lusine Simonyan: An alumna of (IVLP) International Visitors Leadership Program; currently Director of the Child Development Center.

The students were impressed with Luba's in-depth knowledge and love of wildlife, her awareness of the country's environmental challenges and biological resources. After her PowerPoint presentation, they asked her a lot of questions about their Society's wonderful work for protection of nature and requested to be involved in her network. With her enthusiastic speech, she inspired the students and reinforced their belief that one person can really change things with their ideas and commitment to a certain social cause.

Lusine Simonyan shared with the students the important role of volunteering by presenting to them her career path from serving as a volunteer to becoming a director of a solid organization that attends to the needs of Armenian children with mental and physical disabilities. She let the students know that acknowledging the vital role of volunteers in the organization's overall capacity, her organization always hosts volunteers and, in return of their services, equips them with new knowledge and skills. At the end of



her presentation, she encouraged the students to actively seek volunteer opportunities during their University years and contribute their efforts.



Hripsime Amirkhanyan spoke to the students about philanthropy and crowdfunding and presented to them a couple of crowdfunding platforms, such as globalgiving, Kickstarter, Indiegogo, RocketHub, explained how and for which purposes each one functions, and encouraged the students to utilize crowdfunding opportunities for their future community projects and academic pursuits.

The day closed with interesting and animated talks with the guests during dinner and then with different fun games.

The second day was entirely dedicated to Leadership training which was led by Anna Zargaryan, one of the highly experienced and certified trainers of Armenia's leading Mobile operator Viva Cell, MTS's Human Resource Department, who has designed and delivered numerous trainings in many countries.

The workshop covered many interesting areas of personal development such as SWOT analyses and self-reflection, developing high level of attention to the events happening in the surrounding world and seeing one's role in that world, functions of a leader, types of leadership, etc.

The training incorporated many interactive and thought-provoking exercises, both individually as well as in groups, followed by students' many interesting questions to the trainer and to their peers. In general, the training generated a nice and thoughtful discussion about the country's socially and politically disappointing situation, about how Armenia currently lacks leaders, and how youth like Access students, can become the long-awaited leaders for social change.





During the next day of the camp, the students and their two adult counselors from the U.S. Peace Corps, John Beauparlent and Sheree Jackson, worked in mixed teams to practice their English and through a quiz, check their knowledge of the geography, history, culture, politics, arts, and other aspects of the U.S. The volunteers were delighted to see the students' strong awareness of the U.S. and commended them in that many Americans lack such thorough knowledge of their country's facts and figures.

John Beauparlent continued the camp with a session on how to effectively participate in interviews and prepare a winning cover letter, a CV or a resume. After the students, the teachers, and the trainers had discussed the possible interview performance different nuances conditioned by cultural norms and had built relevant vocabulary on action verbs for a CV and resume, they worked in groups to develop a resume for an imaginary job announcement followed by a series of mock interviews conducted in pairs. The students reported that this was a fun and also useful exercise for them and that in the future, they will definitely make good use of the offered tips and this personal experience of interviewing and being interviewed.



At the end of the day, the group watched in English the movie “Soul Surfer” based on the true story of Bethany Hamilton, a champion surfer who in her early teens was attacked by a shark and lost almost all of her left arm. One month later, due to her perseverance, diligence, and faith, she was back on a surfboard, has since won several championships, and is at age 21 a professional surfer and an Ambassador of positive change across the world. The students loved the film and were inspired by Bethany’s story, considering her a courageous person full of strength and vigor, a real role model worthy to have many followers.

Each day the formal learning sessions were accompanied with sports, singing, dancing, and other leisure activities so in the camp, the students celebrated not only their academic achievements of the 2-year English instruction but also their general personal growth, the expansion of cross-regional friendships, and useful connections with different experts.

The final morning, after taking group photos, the 54 Armenian graduates of the Access English Microscholarship program shared warm and noisy farewells, thanked their instructors and camp counselors for the wonderful opportunity granted to them, and departed for their regional sites with promises to intensively network with one another, share with one another information on interesting educational, cultural and other enhancement activities and in the future, support one another’s endeavors as one big Access family.

