

Meaningful World

The Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP)

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ATOP Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Mission to Armenia 14 – 30 April, 2017

**Humanitarian Empowerment, Healing, Transforming Horizontal Violence, Launching
Suicide Prevention Hotline, and Establishing Peace and Health Gardens**

Dr. Kalayjian, Lorraine Simmons, Dr. Leslie Popoff, and Dr. Diakonova-Curtis



With great excitement, the Meaningfulworld humanitarian team led by Dr. Ani Kalayjian arrived in Yerevan on April 14, 2017 to begin the vital work that was initiated during Meaningfulworld's last mission to Armenia in 2014, and the first mission in 1989. The current team included Ms. Lorraine Simmons (NYC), Dr. Leslie Popoff (NYC), Mr. Karen Gargaryan (Yerevan), and Dr. Daria Diakonova-Curtis (St. Petersburg). From the moment we arrived we were privileged to observe many of the traditions and customs of the rich Armenian culture, one that reflects Armenia's long history and carries with it great meaning into the present. These traditions give the Armenian culture its unique character and essence. We experienced it through kneading dough and observing the baking of flatbread in a Lavash bread factory, as well as lighting candles at the oldest Cathedral in the world, the impressive Echmiadzine Cathedral. We were blessed with banquets of traditional Armenian food prepared by our gracious hosts Luara and Sourig Parseghyan; with many ingredients which were grown and harvested in their own garden. Cultural foods included homemade organic yogurt, a variety of fragrant greens, cheese, apricot jam, sour cherry juice, sausages, and eggs hatched by the chickens in the back yard. Driving through the streets of Yerevan brought to view the stark contrast of the rich history of Armenia with a modern business and shopping center, and a bustling subway system. There is also a palpable energy brought by a growing number of young Armenians determined to return

to their roots while tending to new creative growth.

During our meetings and consultations with people from a variety of organizations and in some very high level positions, we learned that while most governmental funding for education throughout the world is at a 20% level, only 3% of the governmental budget in Armenia is allocated for education. The majority of the budget is allocated for defense to secure the borders blockaded by Turkey and Azerbaijan. Armenians struggle with the challenges of unemployment at 30%, in some towns 50%, with poverty and the resultant exodus of many Armenian men to Russia and other countries to find employment, while women are left alone to care for children and the elderly. This devastating reality made us feel the heavy weight of responsibility for the work that we came here to do.

The goals of our mission to Armenia included promoting emotional healing and well-being, working towards the transformation of the generational trauma of Genocide, transforming Horizontal Violence via discussion and distribution of campaign posters of “crab in the bucket” syndrome, and training professionals in the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model which incorporates and promotes self-care, self-healing, mindfulness, emotional intelligence, empathy, and meaning-making. In addition to these goals was the team’s commitment to follow up on the initiative that Meaningfulworld started during our 2014 mission, which was to help create a suicide prevention hotline. The need for a suicide prevention hotline is clearly evidenced in the steady increase in frequency of suicide and suicidal attempts across adolescent as well as adults, fueled by the challenging socio-economic climate and the presence of generational trauma, Horizontal Violence, and other daily stressors faced by the Armenian people. We planned to work with a broad spectrum of the neediest among Armenia’s population, as well as professionals and service providers. We worked with twelve organizations; orphans in children’s centers, Syrian Armenians dealing with the challenges of resettlement while struggling to survive in a country dealing with severe economic hardship, the professionals who are working with them, university students suffering from drafts to the army, where death tolls continue to rise along the border with Azerbaijan. We conducted workshops on empowering young girls and boys teaching the UN Declaration for Human Rights, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), EQ, mindfulness, assertiveness, and meaning-making. Through generous donations we were able to sponsor children in Yerevan, Gyumri and Ardashad. We provided financial support to an elderly man in Ardashad, severely traumatized since the death of his 19 year old son at the Karapagh border.



Our workshops were sustainable, as we asked every person to share what they had experienced and learned with a minimum of three others – family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. While we worked with 500 people directly during our 2-week mission, we were able to impact over 2,000 people indirectly.

Our mission had a three prong approach: Healing, education, and research. With an IRB approval from Luther College, we administered scientific surveys to all adults (age 18 and older)

to assess the continued impact of the trauma they experienced, their level of forgiveness, and meaning discovered. The majority expressed distress regarding the anniversary of the Ottoman Turkish Genocide commemorated on 24 April, the one-year anniversary of the 2 April atrocities caused by Azerbaijan in 2016, the earthquake in 1988, Horizontal Violence (especially related to family and domestic violence), unemployment, poverty, and “brain-drain.”



In summary, when we arrived in Armenia to begin our 15-day mission, we were excited to work with the Armenian and the Syrian-Armenian survivors, as well as meet our multiple goals set forth. We did not anticipate the depth and the breath of the connections that we would make. In 15 days we conducted 17 workshops, in collaboration with 12 organizations (UN, governmental, local and international NGO’s, community centers, faith based organizations, children’s centers, and universities), reaching directly over 500 people, and indirectly over 2000 people. In spite of many challenges, the people were open, expressive, warm, and hungry for more. Their positive attitude and sense of humor came through despite their hardships, and helped them transform their pain.

The following programs were developed:

1. Campaign on transforming Horizontal Violence through posters of lifting one another up and not being a “crab in the bucket.” Posters were donated to the collaborative centers;
2. Engaging the disabled to sew Heart-Hug-Dolls in Vanadzor, with the goal to replicate this in other regions;
3. Launching an ecological beautification project – university student volunteer project, to clean the area around the university;
4. Sowing the seeds of launching a Suicide Prevention Hotline;
5. Starting neighborhood and community associations for aesthetic and development purposes;
6. Sponsoring children in need, and expanding to supporting elders in need;
7. Engaging elders with the children in day care centers, for generational meaning-making;
8. Planting herbs (lavender and rosemary) for health and peace in every home, terrace, garden;
9. Introducing, connecting and partnering local organizations to one another. Partnership for development, SDG Goal #17.

Gratitude to our donors: Lisa Schiller, Irene Tananyan, Taleen Gergerian, Leslie Popoff, Ani Kalayjian, Lorraine Simmons, Anna Maggi, Anonymous X3, Sonja Geismar, Donna Barsamian, Desiree Fernando, Harold Weiner, Marcia Kaplan, Randolph Tegnazian, Marcy Garcia, Zuhail Avcilar, and Linda Schwartz

Founded in 1990, the Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP) Meaningfulworld, charitable organization affiliated with the United Nations Dept. of Public Information, has achieved international recognition as a leader in training humanitarian outreach professionals as well as responding to two and a half decades of global and local disasters. ATOP is committed to health, justice, peace, transformation and global education promoting state-of-the-art scientific theory on peace, forgiveness, consciousness research, internship, and the development of technical skills to train mental health professionals, teachers, psychologists, art therapists, nutritionists, alternative medicine practitioners, clergy, nurses, mediators, interfaith ministers, and lay persons committed to service the self and humanity. Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Outreach Teams have helped rehabilitate survivors from over 45 countries, and 25 states in USA making a daily difference in people's lives helping to transform tragedy and trauma into healing and meaning-making through post trauma growth, resilience, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, mind-body-eco-spirit health, visionary leadership, empowerment, artful collaborations, establishing Peace & Forgiveness Gardens to create a new and Meaningfulworld view. We work locally and globally in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East, The Caucasus, Europe, and South and North America.