YWORLD™
We build strong kids, strong families, strong communities.

case study

YMCA of Armenia

Recreation, Camping and Arts

Youth participating in YMCA of Armenia camp activities.

Introduction

Since its beginning, the Armenian National Union of YMCAs has designed programs to provide social, psychological and nonformal educational services to children, adolescents and families, with special emphasis on families in need. In 1995, YMCA of Armenia began several winter and summer camp programs (educational and sports activities) for refugee children as well as disabled and orphaned children. This first set of camping experiences yielded great success in providing the children new hope for life and a better future.

From 1996 to 2002, YMCA of Armenia went through an institutional development transition. Different camp activities helped young YMCA leaders develop leadership skills and abilities. The Pambak YMCA campsite—at that time the only YMCA camp facility—was a place where other YMCAs could visit for training workshops and assemblies.

In 2003, with the financial support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the U.S. Embassy in Armenia, YMCA of Armenia organized a summer camp program for children from 10 remote rural communities, highly populated by refugee families. This was the pilot project for the "Refugees Integration Initiative for Armenia 2004 – 2006." The outcomes of this summer camp demonstrated the strong potential of YMCA of Armenia in organizing camp programs and the importance of camp for both participants and YMCA youth. Through YMCA World Service, YMCA of the USA provides technical and financial assistance to support YMCA of Armenia's camping programs.

Plan and methodology

Children summer camps include a week-long training for 20 camp counselors. Campsite preparation occurs at the same time. After their training, counselors plan two shifts of camp activities for 60 children from the targeted communities. During camp, children have the opportunity to meet youth from communities throughout Armenia, including the city of Vanadzor. Activities include basic computer training and basic English instruction. The highlight of the camp activities is the nonformal education on human rights, children rights and democracy basics using arts, music, and drama.

Unlike other organizations, the YMCA's camp programs put into practice the values of caring and responsibility. All camp counselors are young YMCA volunteers and are carefully selected and trained to work with the beneficiaries' social and special needs.

Challenges and keys to success

The main obstacle to organizing camp programs is obtaining sufficient resources. In addition to securing funding for daily operations, YMCAs need to manage the costs of capital renovations to the campsite.

The key to the success of the Armenian YMCA camp program lies in its method of delivering services through young people and dedicating time to their personal development. After each summer camp, YMCAs recruit more committed and motivated volunteers and members in the targeted communities, bringing new initiatives and activities to the community. Young camp counselors also have opportunities to develop new skills and abilities, such as in the field of social work.

Achievements to date

Each year, the YMCA reaches about ten thousand children, young people and families. At present, there is one active YMCA campsite and a second under development. About two hundred children at each session participate in activities organized at the campsite and outdoor tent camps. Former camp participants often return to serve as camp counselors, developing a new generation of members and volunteers.

Future plans

Today, thanks to partners and the European Alliance of YMCAs, YMCA of Armenia is growing towards a large-scale camping and recreation program. The second campsite will serve as a YMCA resource center offering additional camp programs that cater to the needs of local communities, such as rural areas or those highly populated by refugee families. With a second campsite, YMCA Armenia can soon launch revenue-generating projects to help fund a percentage of its annual core budget.

testimonial

"Going back to school after the YMCA summer camp, I started to organize different activities for the school children on my own. I was eager to share the new event planning skills and games I learned at the camp. I can say that those fourteen days, spent at the Pamback YMCA camp, were the best in my life!" -- Mariam Sholyam, 16