

Faces of Peace

Saving a War-Torn Childhood

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Orphans arrive to enjoy program's 17th summer

Project Life is sponsoring six orphans in summer 2013. We welcome four children from the North Caucasus, two boys and two girls ages 9 to 11. We are especially happy to re-commence our work with Afghan orphans this year. Two boys, ages 9 and 10, will be joining us from the Jalalabad area of eastern Afghanistan. We wish them all a wonderful visit to our program!

May conference in North Caucasus celebrates 15 years of friendship

Six Project Life volunteers traveled to the Caucasus in May to celebrate 15 years of humanitarian collaboration. The American Caucasus Conference (ACC) was a chance to reunite orphans who had attended Project Life over the years with voluntary staff from the Waterport program. The conference was co-sponsored by the Foundation for Assistance to Formerly Displaced People, the Nazran-based agency that works to select needy orphans.

"The purpose was to celebrate 15 years of cross-cultural cooperation and programs. We wanted to assemble the orphans all in one place to see what Project Life meant to them and how they are doing now. We also wanted to send a message of hope and harmony to the people of the North Caucasus who continue to suffer," said Project Life Director Linda Redfield.

Volunteers in Ingushetia and Chechnya were able to contact almost all of the orphans who had been to the States since 1998 and invite them to attend. Meanwhile U.S. volunteers visited families who had hosted orphans over the years to videotape their recollections. "It was a reminder of the deeply meaningful relationships that were formed and which in some cases continue to this day via the internet," said Linda Redfield.



ACC speakers flanked by orphans in Nazran, Ingushetia

The conference itself was held in meeting rooms in the Hotel Nazran on May 21. Twenty-five orphans who had attended Project Life over the years 1998 to 2012 were present along with their families to reunite with Project Life personnel. Orphans ranging in age from their mid-twenties down to 12 reminisced and paid tribute to Project Life. Many of their family members also spoke about the enduring value of the experience.

One of the highlights of the day was a collection of photos gathered from all the years of the program that hung on the wall of the conference room. Volunteers had selected the images so that each orphan was represented in at least one. Albion N.Y. photographer and host dad Idris Salih reprinted the original small images into an 8 x 10 format. Orphans and their family enjoyed many moments gathered around the display, recalling their trip to the U.S.

In the Nazran area, Project Life's delegation followed a jam-packed schedule that included a VIP type welcome at the airport, a visit to the Memorial Museum, and programs at the University English Club and a public school. There was a visit to the studio of the artist who painted *The Road to Life*, and an open-air folkloric dance performance. The whole group was enveloped in the hospitality of the Caucasus, enjoying many wonderful meals with orphans' families and local dignitaries.

After the official conference the group proceeded to neighboring Grozny, Chechnya, to catch up with even more children and their families.

Notable quotes from family members, orphans at ACC

Adult family members pay tribute to Project Life:

- Despite the differences in language, we are all one family.
- The work that you do is from your heart and people will never forget that.
- The program made relationships and it has enriched our knowledge of cultures.
- You cured the souls of the children.
- We have lived days feeling like it was a question of life or death. We did not know what the next day would be. Going to America was like a prize.
- If a person feels pain alone, he feels it more; but if a person works more with people from other cities and countries, he has less pain. We had a hard time with my son and now he is changing (since returning from Project Life).

Project Life graduates reflect on their time with the program:

- After the trip, I learned a lot of things. I learned about the world, about other people, that there is not war in all of the world. I came in a difficult time; when I grow up, I want there never to be war in this world. I want to work for a social organization to help the people.
- I would never have believed that in this part of the world (New York State) there are people like this. Every mother worries about their children overseas. There was never a single moment when I wanted for anything.
- We are all aware of what happened in Boston (at the Marathon). We hope that meetings and projects like this will be a powerful counter-agent to those evil forces.

Overseas chaperone shares impressions of program 2012

By Madina Parchieva

(We first met Madina Parchieva in 1998 when she was a visiting student at Columbia University. She visited Waterport to ask us to bring needy young orphans from the North Caucasus to Project Life. The next summer two orphans from that region joined us in Waterport. Madina is based in Ingushetia and worked for the World Food Program for many years. Currently she teaches ESL. In 2012 Madina was chaperone for three girls who attended Project Life. She acted as interpreter and taught Russian to our U.S. volunteers.)

I like the program very much, especially the people, their hospitality and friendliness. The children were very impressed by your beautiful English lessons, art and charity programs, as well as field trips, especially Niagara Falls. They cannot forget American ice-cream! It was the best they've ever tried.

The children benefited from the program a lot: they gained self-confidence, communication skills, English language skills. At their age they had a

unique opportunity to see another country and other people. The most precious thing for them was communicating with American children. They enjoyed it, to see the program volunteers' interest in learning Russian language.

Already on the way home I could see that Mata, the shyest among the girls, was very confident and had cheered up compared with the beginning of the summer. She wasn't as sad any more. Iman was mixing up Chechen and English words. She is a very lively girl.

It was my pleasure to teach Russian to American young people. I had all the necessary conveniences for teaching Russian classes at your school. It was an interesting group. I liked the group's attitude and motivation.



Chaperone Madina, orphans, and volunteers visit Niagara Falls last summer

Key to program is friendship volunteers say

By Dena Adler—art therapist and host parent

As an adult volunteer for Project Life, it is an honor to witness and facilitate hope, change and collaboration in the children of the world.

One of the special aspects of the Project Life program is the bonds formed between the visiting children and the young volunteers who spend time with them. Fauzia, Sabine and Tamara range in age from 16 to 10. They met recently to discuss what they are learning from the experience and their vision for the future.

The volunteers compared last year's group size to past summers and stated that they liked the opportunity to have more one to one time with the new children. Without having boys in the group, they noticed that the energy was not as forceful and aggressive.

However, the volunteers said that as the young girls became more relaxed, they were often silly and playful with one another. The girls observed that playing the card game *Uno* is a great way to connect as it is a colorful game, easy to learn, and not based on language.

Fauzia, whose parents have both died, spoke about her feelings of loss and how she relates to the war orphans. In 2004, she and her brother traveled from Afghanistan to be part of Project Life. Fauzia spoke lovingly about all her U.S friends, her family back home and her U.S. host family and said, "No matter where I eventually live, I will miss something."

The other two girls said they have not experienced so much loss and loneliness, yet they see how life is much harder for those who have. The volunteers were asked what they thought the children miss most when they go back home and all three said, "The friendships and people they meet during Project Life."

The discussion on future ideas revolved around connection, diversity and travel. The volunteers like the program best when at least two countries are represented; they lit up when sharing memories of the summers when it was a classroom of children from the Ingushetia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Sri

Lanka and the USA. They hope this can be the future.

They recognize that being consistent in communicating with the children after their return is difficult due to language barriers. The girls proposed the idea of meeting monthly during the year to use Facebook and the Project Life website to maintain ties.

They also eagerly suggested two trips they would love to be a part of. One is to the Statue of Liberty before the orphans return home.

The other trip they would like to take is to Russia to visit the many friends they have made over the past years. Typically, the last words uttered at the airport by the departing orphans to their U.S. friends are "Come to my home!"

PROJECT LIFE WAR ORPHANS

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WHOM DO WE SERVE? Orphaned children of war and civil conflict. Children are 9 to 12-year-olds with high socio-economic, psychological, and emotional needs. All children live with family members in their home countries. We do not select children from orphanages or seek permanent fostering or adoption for them in the United States.

WHY? We aim to provide peace and support for each child's rest and recuperation from trauma. Our program improves physical and psychological health, builds trust and confidence, and inspires new hope.

HOW? A three-month program of education, recreation and health care, along with hosting by volunteer American families in the western New York region. All children return to their families overseas at the completion of the program period.

FUNDING: Entirely from private donations. Please help! Cost per child is about \$4,000.

2012 D.C. trip jam-packed with fun and memories

Project Director Linda Redfield along with art therapist Dena Adler, her daughter Sabine, and Mata and Iman of Chechnya headed down the road from Waterport to Washington D.C. on a sizzling August day last summer. After a 9-hour drive the first stop was to visit friends at Youth Leaders International. There the group was treated to delicious hamburgers, salads, and watermelon. The YLI group also presented the children with free passes to the Baltimore Aquarium.

The travelers checked in at Extended Stay America in Columbia, Maryland. A donation from the Medina Area Association of Churches helped sponsor Project Life's stay. This was a great home base during the very full three days.

The next day, on one of the hottest days of the summer, the group drove into Washington D.C. to see the White House and the Capitol building. The orphans took pictures of the famous landmarks as well as the squirrels, which they don't have back home. Other Washington highlights included visiting the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, and taking the elevator up to the top of the Old Post Office Building. The girls enjoyed a bird's eye view of Washington D.C. from there.

Al and Faye Tamres of Baltimore, the in-laws of Dena Adler and grandparents to volunteer Sabine Adler, hosted the visitors for *blini* (Russian crepe) breakfast organized and prepared by Madina Parchieva. Linda and Dena tried their hand at making *blini* while Mata, Iman and Luli downed them one after another. After this the group had a full day at the Aquarium, enjoying live dolphins in the splash section and seeing many exotic fish. They returned to the Tamres home for a wonderful home-cooked meal at the end of the day.

Next day, Natkai Akbar and her sister Selai Hassan hosted the children at Splashdown Park in West Virginia. It was the third year in a row that Natkai, her family and friends have sponsored an outing and refreshments for the orphans. After pizza and continuous water sliding at the Park, the children continued their

multicultural day over a cup of tea and snacks with Meher Ahmed, a long-time friend who was in the area from Pakistan, visiting her grandchildren. Everyone calmed down from the excitement of the water park over hot cups of tea served in fine china while American, Pakistani, and Caucasus children giggled and shared their new friends around the kitchen table.

On the final day of the trip the group stopped at the fascinating Baltimore zoo. The orphans enjoyed their first-ever camel ride before climbing into the van for the journey home.



Mata tries her hand at water gymnastics in D.C.

Youth raise funds at event

World Life Institute Canada and The Voice Gavel Club of Markham, Ontario collaborated on the very successful *Youth Serving Youth* fundraiser Saturday, April 6. The event raised more than \$23,000 which was donated to World Life Institute. *Youth Serving Youth* was a combination dinner, art auction, and fashion show held at the Markham Hilton, north of Toronto. The Gavel Club members are all high school students in the Markham area.

About 220 people enjoyed a four-course meal, auction of paintings and sculpture, and an "ethnic fusion" show featuring clothing by Canadian designers. Several elected officials attended the event, including the Mayor of Markham, Frank Scarpitti. He commended the young people for their remarkable effort on behalf of children of war. Markham is an ethnically diverse city of 310,000 just north of Metro Toronto. Almost all the Gavel Club members are of Chinese heritage, so parts of the presentations were interpreted into Chinese for the benefit of the dinner guests.