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## **Iraqi Refugees to Continue Benefitting from Acculturation through Learning Program**

By the end of August Save the Children was preparing to wrap up its *Acculturation through Learning Program (ATLP)* aimed at social adaptation of Iraqi refugees. Yet it was not going to be the end of services provided to the beneficiaries through the program. In view of the significant achievements of the ATLP, the US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration funded the second phase of the program implementation.

ATLP II will build on success of ATLP I, scaling up the assistance provided to refugees and contributing to ensuring a more favorable environment for their acculturation with a focus on creation of short- and long-term jobs.

ATLP aims to promote education, acculturation and livelihoods of Iraqi refugee children, youth and their parents living in Armenia. The program is in line with the Government of Armenia's and UNHCR's efforts to promote the social adaptation of Iraqi Armenian refugees. The program is being implemented in partnership with Mission Armenia local NGO.

A set of structured activities have been designed and fulfilled to address and resolve current issues related to preschool education of young children, after-school and non-formal learning of children and youth, as well as acculturation and livelihood issues for refugee households. Save the Children has also included a certain number of vulnerable local residents in the program, for a triple purpose: facilitating the refugees' adaptation through establishment of successful relationships between them and the locals, reducing the public prejudice against refugees, and contributing to alleviation of social hardships of both beneficiary groups.

**Through the program two educational and cultural centers have been set up in Yerevan Kanaker-Zeytun and Avan-Arinj communities, comprised of a daycare center for young children, a preschool education center, and classrooms for IT, language, business development and parents' trainings.**

The **daycare center** helps ensure early childhood development opportunities for young children not having access to age-relevant education. Refugee children together with their local peers enjoy their day time by playing games, listening to stories and fairy-tales, painting, singing, dancing and reciting poems. Feedback from children's parents show that time-passing at the daycare center has been both educational and entertaining, and resulted in overcoming children's excessive shyness and improving their social skills.



*Daycare Center attendants staging a performance at the close-out event of ATLP's first phase*

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## Iraqi Refugees to Continue Benefitting from Acculturation through Learning Program

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At the **preschool education center** 5-6 year-old children learn reading and writing in local Armenian, make their first steps in maths, and get ready to school.

In order to ensure comprehensive approach to promoting children's well-being, along with the operations of the daycare centers the program also has organized **parents' training**. Child education, health, nutrition and general grow-up issues are in the focus of the classes, discussions, and personal consultations. Thus, parents get access to up-to-date information and materials and use them in their everyday life. During interviews, mothers mentioned the issue of upbringing children without applying physical punishment as the most interesting theme. Some of them confessed they hadn't beaten their children from the first day of participation in the program.



**During a Child to Child class**

*Children discussing environmental issues by using an apple to illustrate how limited the cultivable land is and emphasize the necessity of taking good care of it*

**Child to Child (CtC) groups** aim to create favorable environment for acculturation of school age refugee children from Iraq. Learning and acting in a group while identifying and resolving common issues, helps tackle the existent prejudice and stigmas towards the newcomers from Iraq. Becoming already “mighty teams”, children also join to realize their own ideas and projects, such as doing good to less advantageous children at the orphanages. The greatest

revelation of CtC group activities has been that overcoming differences and building friendship can be fun.

**Building livelihoods** is a substantial factor for refugee adaptation to a new residence. Yet the Iraqi Armenian refugees lack essential skills and proficiency to compete in the current labor market. With this in view, the program has organized intensive courses on Eastern Armenian, Russian and English languages, as well as advanced IT and business development classes and personal consultations. 12 refugee and 12 local vulnerable women have been provided with long-term jobs through the first phase of the program.



*Parents discussing child nutrition issues at a training*

Thus a comprehensive approach to refugees' needs has been ensured through the first phase of ATLP. Parents have been largely involved in all activities. Over 50 percent of refugees living in Yerevan have benefitted from the program.

The success and uniqueness of the program has been conditioned by creating development opportunities for each age group separately while ensuring their active participation and joint efforts for the greater good. The feedback from the target beneficiaries has revealed a great deal of enthusiasm and interest. They were hopeful that the ATLP would be implemented for longer periods and involve a larger scale.

The ATLP II will enlarge its geography by including village Darbnik of Ararat province, where a large proportion of refugees has been recently re-settled thanks to UNHCR providing shelter. Apart from focusing on creation of business opportunities for refugees, the new program will largely incorporate gender-based violence issues into program training components both for children and adults. In addition, school teachers will be trained to eliminate public prejudice and discrimination against the newcomers from Iraq.

The ATLP II will be implemented from September 2009 through August 2010.

Zvart Grigor Hovhannisian, 45, a refugee woman speaking at the ATLP I wrap up event:

*“I was happy to get a job of CtC facilitator, during which I not only worked but also learnt from children and local teachers. I also participated in IT and English language classes. My son Karin, 12 and my elder daughter, Gali, 9 participated in CtC classes which helped shape their understanding of various issues. My smaller daughter Aliq, 6, attended both the Daycare Center and the preschool education classes, getting much more skillful in communication with her peers and adults.”*



**“It Looks Terrific!”**

## New School Building Erected in Stepanakert

In October 2008 Save the Children began the construction of a high-school building in Stepanakert, Nagorno Karabakh (NK), thanks to the generous funding from The Lincy Foundation matched with the NK government’s contribution. Today, a huge building already stands there. The planned outer work is fully completed and the building enjoys the excited look of every passer by. The construction work will be finished by the end of spring 2010.

Below is a quick photo-report on the new education center under construction.



*A good beginning is half the work*

November 2008



*Setting a firm foundation for education*

December 2008



*One stone upon another... towards quality education*

March 2009



*Vision becoming a reality*

June 2009



*“It looks terrific!” say all, starting from ordinary residents to high-level officials.*

August 2009

### Early Childhood Development Services in Armenia



*A preschool in Vanadzor improved through a Save the Children program*

Creation of age-appropriate education opportunities for children is one of Save the Children's strategic priorities. Early childhood development (ECD) is a decisive commencement point in the lifetime educational continuum. As mentioned in Save the Children's *State of the World's Mothers (SOWM) 2009* report, "Early childhood is the most critical period of growth and learning in a person's life. What happens - and what does not happen - during these earliest years influences how the rest of childhood, adolescence and adult life unfold. When children receive good quality care and learning opportunities in their earliest years, they have better chance to grow healthy, to do well in school, and to reach their full potential in well-being and productivity."

**Download**  
**State of the World's**  
**Mothers 2009 report**

Unfortunately, many countries - including ours - are lagging behind in terms of quality of preschool education. Though the Government of Armenia has adopted a "Strategy on Improvement of Preschool Education 2008-2015", little has been done in the sphere and numerous children still have no access to proper ECD services.

In more than 600 communities out of 926 in Armenia, preschools are either non-existent or non-operational. The state of many operational institutions, including the building conditions, furniture, heating, educational and didactic materials etc is unsatisfactory. Budget deficiency is considered to be the main reason of communities' inability to ensure provision of quality ECD services.

The current share of children attending preschools is approximately 23 percent of children of corresponding age which is down by half as compared to the data of late soviet period. Meanwhile, the recent governmental educational reforms brought the school entry age down from seven to six, thus posing additional learning difficulties for the remaining 77 percent of children who skipped preschool education.

Old soviet teaching approaches are still dominant in ECD institutions, and due to lack of relevant training, many teachers do not practice modern child-centered methodologies.

Several international organizations have supported improvements in ECD sphere. Save the Children has contributed to creation of favorable care and educational conditions for around 12,000 children in 67 preschools. Recently we also piloted a concept of community-based pre-school classes preparing 5-6 year old children to enter the school. These achievements became possible through the generous support of the USAID, The Lincy Foundation and the UNICEF to whom we extend our gratefulness on children's behalf.

As shown in the SOWM report, investing in quality early learning programs is one of the most effective ways to improve children's success in school, to increase incomes and to reduce costs to society. Unfortunately, lack of donor attention towards this very important area is being noticed nowadays. Faithful to its commitment to protecting the interests of younger generations, Save the Children appeals to the donor community for considering the ECD issues in their strategies. We call for supporting young children's development issues in order to ensure their well-being today and the entire nation's prosperity tomorrow!



*Former building of the barely operating preschool in Margahovit village before Save the Children's intervention: a typical state of many rural preschools in Armenia*

**77 percent of preschool-age children in Armenia do not have access to ECD services.**  
**You can help ensure age-appropriate educational opportunities for them.**

**Donate to create bright futures for children in Armenia.**



Save the Children is the leading independent nonprofit relief and development organization helping children in need in the United States and in more than 40 countries around the world. Save the Children/USA is a member of the International Save the Children Alliance, a network of 27 independent, national organizations working in more than 120 countries to ensure the well-being of children everywhere.

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