



SOCIETY FOR ORPHANED ARMENIAN RELIEF (SOAR)

150 N. Radnor Chester Rd., Suite F200, Radnor, PA 19087

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2021 Art Therapy Project –

Final Report to the Jirair S. and Elizabeth Hovnanian Foundation



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Project Summary

The Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR) was founded in the fall of 2005 as a charitable organization that provides humanitarian relief to orphaned children living in Armenia. One of SOAR's supported institutions, SOS Children's Villages (Kotayk, Armenia), has promoted the development of abandoned and socially discarded children through various educational and cultural projects that bring energy and stimulate enthusiasm. For CY2021, the Jirair S. and Elizabeth Hovnanian Foundation provided \$9,300 to promote an art therapy project at SOS-Kotayk. The project, like in CY2020, was a resounding success. Three workshops – pottery, puppetry, and sand – were organized with more than 40 SOS children throughout 2021. The children who participated in puppetry workshop experienced the joy of acting on stage, performing “Hayk and Bel,” “Sasuntci Davit,” and “Anahit.” The children in the pottery workshop made mugs, candle holders, and Christmas decorations, while the children in the sand therapy group acted out scenes with family members. The therapy helped them express their emotions, develop team spirit, and improve their motor and communication skills.



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Creation and Management

George S. Yacoubian, Jr. and Erica Yacoubian began their adoption process in 2005. Throughout the spring and summer, they went through home study and various levels of domestic governmental approval. While in Armenia during the summer of 2005, George saw Liliana for the first time. He submitted Liliana's adoption dossier to the Armenian government in the fall of 2005, received preliminary approval in December 2005, and obtained final adoption approval in March 2006. Liliana Sara Yacoubian arrived in the United States on April 23, 2006.

Dr. Yacoubian founded the Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR) in the fall of 2005 as a charitable organization that provides humanitarian relief to orphaned children living in Armenia. He has served as SOAR's Executive Board Chairman since 2005 and provides oversight and guidance to all SOAR operations worldwide. In early 2006, an experienced and talented Board of Directors was assembled, a network of Partners in Armenia was recruited to assist with distributions, and the web site was launched. Between 2006 and 2008, SOAR established itself as the only charitable organization whose singular mission is to provide humanitarian assistance to orphaned Armenians around the world. In late 2007 and early 2008, SOAR launched its first two Chapters – in Los Angeles



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and Washington, DC. In 2009, a National Board of Trustees was created to annually review SOAR's fiscal operations and distributions. In 2010, SOAR launched its Sponsorship Fund, which today is the primary mechanism through which micro-level children's needs are addressed. Since 2005, SOAR's work has impacted thousands of children, with the penultimate goal to provide institutionalized children with the same educational, emotional, medical, and social support as their non-institutionalized counterparts.

In 2016, SOAR expanded its mission, recognizing that, after a decade of helping children in residential settings, it was necessary to take the proactive step of attempting to reduce the institutionalized orphan population in Armenia. Toward that end, SOAR now supports several day centers, all of which provide services to children *at risk for institutionalization*. SOAR also established its Services to Children in their Own Home (SCOH) Fund. The SCOH Fund works with residential institutions to deinstitutionalize and reunify children with biological families and provides home-based services after reunification to reduce the economic, social, emotional, and professional barriers within the family dynamic that may trigger reinstitutionalization.

Represented by 145 Chapters, 6 Junior groups, and more than 600 volunteers, SOAR supports 40 orphanages, special boarding schools, day centers, summer camps, and transitional centers – in Armenia, Artsakh, Javakh, Lebanon, and Syria. SOAR prides itself



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on collaboration, creativity, cross-cultural respect, fiscal responsibility, loyalty, and transparency. During the past 15 years, SOAR's work has transcended all reasonable expectations. In 2006, distributions totaled approximately \$60,000. Since 2015, SOAR has exceeded \$1M distributions annually. SOAR's efforts not only address the major humanitarian constructs of education, emotional and psychological support, nutrition, health and hygiene, dental and vision care, and fundamental human rights, but the Programs offer educational curricula on a multitude of topics that stimulate intellectual curiosity, empowerment, and enrichment.

For several of us, SOAR is our life's work, and we are blessed with a dedicated and selfless cadre of supporters who share our short-term aspirations and long-term vision. We are faced with an enormous responsibility. Our greatest trepidation is not inadequacy or a belief that we are ill-equipped to assist the orphaned children we have embraced as our own, but rather that we have influence and power beyond measure. Our daily routine involves a compulsive desire to assist the abandoned, the sick, the impoverished, and the abused. As SOAR's light shines, we hope that we are unconsciously giving our orphaned population the will to do the same.



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Quality Control

SOAR has a strict quality control protocol to assure that all donations, in their entirety, reach the intended recipients. This protocol has six primary elements:

1. SOAR rarely makes cash distributions directly to the orphanages. Rather, goods and services that can be procured in Armenia are purchased by SOAR's Partners and distributed directly to the orphanages. Donations from the Armenian diaspora that can be hand-delivered directly to the children are encouraged.
2. SOAR implements chain-of-custody procedures for any distributed goods or services, providing assurance that these items have been received by the orphanages in the exact quantity intended. These procedures have three steps:
 - a. SOAR staff sign for the shipments and/or attest to the type and quantity of goods or services procured in Armenia. This invoice includes an exact description of the type and quantity of goods and services.
 - b. The recipient orphanage's director signs this same invoice, indicating that the exact type and quantity of goods and services received is the quantity indicated.
 - c. Both invoices are mailed to SOAR's Executive Board Chairman.
3. SOAR staff, Partners, Chapter members, and other volunteers who visit Armenia make random inspections of the orphanages. Any distribution discrepancies are to be reported immediately to SOAR's Executive Board Chairman.
4. When possible, donations are engraved and/or stamped with a corporate seal. Capital projects are acknowledged with a dedication ceremony and plaque.
5. A zero-tolerance policy for fraud, theft, and/or deception is imposed. Any malfeasance would result in the termination of assistance.
6. SOAR utilizes Microsoft Planner, which allows SOAR to retain all receipts, pictures, and internal documents for all projects.



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SOAR-Supported Institutions

SOAR supports 35 institutions in four countries: 30 orphanages, special boarding schools, day centers, transitional centers, and summer camps in Armenia; one Armenian boarding school in Artsakh; one orphan summer camp in Javakh (Georgia); and three Armenian orphanages in Lebanon.

Armenian Evangelical Boarding School (AEBS) in Ainjar, Lebanon, is home to approximately 75 healthy, social orphans.

Birds' Nest Orphanage (BN) in Byblos, Lebanon, opened shortly after the 1915 Armenian Genocide and has been home to thousands of Armenian children for more than 90 years. Today, BN houses approximately 20 healthy, social orphans.

Boarding School #1 in Stepanakert, Artsakh, houses healthy and special needs children between the ages of 4 and 16.

Cardinal Aghajanian Orphanage (CAO) in Ainjar, Lebanon, is home to approximately 25 healthy orphaned boys.

Children's Home of Gyumri (CHG), a state orphanage in Gyumri, Armenia, houses approximately 85 children with special needs ages 6 years and younger.



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Community Development and Social Support Center (CDSSC) in Gyumri, Armenia, is a non-residential, state center that offers alternative care and material assistance to special needs children and their families. The Center started its activities in 2012.

Dzorak Care Center in Yerevan, Armenia, served as an orphanage for 400 children during the 1940s. In 1959, it became a boarding school for children from underprivileged families. Today, Dzorak is a state care facility for adults with severe physical and psychological disabilities who have outgrown the traditional orphanage.

Gavar Orphanage, a state orphanage in Gavar, Armenia, houses approximately 45 healthy children under the age of 18.

The Holy Cross Armenian Church of Javakh Summer Day Camp in Akhakalak, Georgia, serves social orphans living in poverty from the nearby villages. The Camp provides the children with a safe, clean, fun, and spiritual environment during the summer.

House of Dreams was founded in 2019 to work with children who have special educational needs. They provide individual speech therapy and offer age-focused programs on literacy, mathematics, sand therapy, drawing, logic games, and art therapy.

Kharberd Orphanage is a state orphanage in Yerevan, Armenia that houses approximately 200 children and young adults with severe disabilities.



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Mari Izmirlyan (MI) Orphanage is a state orphanage in Yerevan, Armenia that houses approximately 100 children with special needs between the ages of 6 and 18.

Naghasyan Children's Support Center (formerly Mer Hooy) is a private home in the Arapkir district of Yerevan for approximately 25 teenage girls. The girls receive language and job skills training, computer instruction, life skills training, psychological support, and hope, confidence, and love.

Orran, "haven" in Armenian, was established in Yerevan as a non-residential Center in April 2000. In 2009, a second Orran center was established in Vanadzor. Today, Orran supports approximately 95 seniors and 200 children across Armenia.

Our Lady of Armenia (OLA) Annie Bezikian Youth Center in Kanaker, Armenia, houses girls between the ages of 16 and 22 who have outgrown the traditional orphanage and are transitioning to independent living. The Center is operated by the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, a religious order of nuns established in 1847.

Our Lady of Armenia (OLA) Center in Gyumri, Armenia, houses approximately 28 healthy children between the ages of 6 and 18. The Center is operated by the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, a religious order of nuns established in 1847.



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Our Lady of Armenia (OLA) Center Summer Camp (Tsaghgadzor, Armenia) hosts approximately 800 children throughout the summer, in four 16-day sessions. The Camp provides nutritious food, physical rest, recreational activities, and religious-educational experiences both to orphan and otherwise needy children throughout Armenia.

Our Lady of Armenia (OLA) Educational Center in Tashir, Armenia, is operated by the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and provides meals and after-school activities to approximately 30 orphaned and otherwise needy children.

Our Lady of Armenia (OLA) Educational Center Summer Camp in Tashir, Armenia, hosts approximately 50 children ages 7-15 for four weeks throughout the summer. The Camp provides nutritious food, physical rest, recreational activities, educational opportunities, and religious experiences to children from the Tashir community.

Prkutyun in Yerevan, Armenia, is a day center that offers food, educational, and therapeutic services to approximately 55 children and young adults with disabilities.

Shirak Marz Child and Family Support Center located in Gyumri, is a merger of two childcare centers: Gyumri Social Childcare Center and the Orphanage of Fridtjof Nansen. The new Center is a hybrid facility that provides day services to families whose children are at risk for institutionalization while serving as a residential setting for children without permanent familial care.



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Sisters of Charity (SOC) (Bethlehem and Spitak, Armenia) is a Catholic religious order established by Mother Teresa to tend to “the poorest of the poor.” SOC-Bethlehem is a private orphanage outside of Yerevan that houses approximately 25 very young children with severe physical and mental disabilities. SOC-Spitak is a private orphanage that houses approximately 15 teenagers and adults with severe physical and mental disabilities.

SOAR’s Transitional Center is a residential setting for older teenage girls who have outgrown the traditional orphanage but who are not yet ready for independent living. Opened in November 2019, these young women are enrolled in a college or university; assist in a SOAR-cultivated business; are enriched by SOAR’s academic programs; learn the value of volunteerism and essential life skills; build self-nurturance and self-confidence; and prepare themselves for emotional, fiscal, and professional independence.

SOS Children’s Villages’ (Idjevan and Kotayk, Armenia) provides care for children without suitable parental care. In 1990, SOS Children’s Village in Kotayk opened its doors for children who had lost their parents in the earthquake. SOS Children’s Village in Idjevan was founded in 2009. Presently, SOS in Armenia operates a wide range of childcare and family strengthening community and educational activities.

Vardashen is a state boarding school in Yerevan, Armenia, that houses approximately 53 children who exhibit socially dangerous behavior between the ages of 6 and 18.



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The Voice of the Armenian Church Summer Day Camp is held in Tsaghgadzor, Armenia, and hosts orphaned children between the ages of 10 and 16. The Camp, held in July, offers the children comfort, love, compassion, and care, while simultaneously instilling in them the love of Christ and the history of the Armenian Church.

Warm Hearth (WH) (3rd Village, Arinj, and Jermik Ankyun Geghanist) offers residential living to adults with disabilities who have outgrown the traditional orphanages.

Yerevan Children Home (Nork) is a state orphanage in Yerevan, Armenia, that houses approximately 60 children under the age of 6.

Yerevan Special School Number 11 (Nubarashen) is a state boarding school in Yerevan housing approximately 48 children with special needs.

Yerevan State Day Center was founded in July 2005 to support special needs children aged 6-18 years and to facilitate their integration into society. The Center provides educational and professional orientation services; psychological services, including play therapy, art therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy; primary health care and medical consulting; and rights protection and advocacy.

Zadik Yerevan Child Assistance Center is a state orphanage in Yerevan, Armenia, that houses approximately 45 children between the ages of 6 and 18.



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Art Therapy Project

Introduction

Art therapy has existed since the 1940s when it was first used by psychologists to help clients tap into their inner thoughts, feelings, and experiences through creative expression. Therapists use patients' free form art expressions to encourage them to talk about the images and to begin to look to themselves for meaning and insight. Combined with talk therapy, it can help people deal with strong emotions, increase self-awareness and self-worth, and decrease stress and anxiety. Art therapy can involve a variety of creative expression including drawing, painting, coloring, or sculpting, to name a few.

Over the decades, art therapy has been used mainly by mental health practitioners for patients ranging in age from the very young to the elderly, war veterans, prisoners, and people with diagnosed mental disorders. By the 20th century, art therapy was a recognized field requiring certification and training in both art and therapy. Art therapy has also moved outside of mental health facilities and into other community settings such as orphanages, schools, nursing homes, residential treatment facilities, and halfway houses.



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Art therapy is a useful tool to help children to resolve issues as well as develop and manage their behaviors and feelings, reduce stress, and improve self-esteem and awareness. The proposed project was intended to accomplish the following:

- **Instill calmness.** Children of all ages, regardless of disability status, may not possess suitable language skills to express themselves, but they still have a voice. Expressive arts awaken a child's imagination and creativity to facilitate the discovery of one's senses in a serene environment.
- **Relieve aggression.** Putting feelings into pottery, theatre, and sand therapy gives children a safe outlet for negative emotions through an enjoyable activity, which accelerates the healing and growth process.
- **Establish social skills.** Children who are comfortable in social settings establish connections, communicate, and empathize as adults. Art therapy can enhance social development by providing support without judgement from peers and adults. It gives children the opportunity to appreciate differences between people and accept each individual's perceptions.



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SOS-Kotayk

The overarching goal of the current project was to facilitate social inclusion of orphaned children housed at SOS Kotayk through art therapy. Three modes were employed:

1. **Puppetry workshop and children mobile puppet theatre.** Approximately 14 children between the ages of 8 and 15 learned puppetry and master puppet actor's skills and performed for approximately 150 children in SOS Kotayk and the surrounding communities. The theatre introduced values to the children, helped them distinguish between good and evil, and educated their world view.
2. **Pottery workshop.** Fourteen children between the ages of 8 and 15 participated in pottery to develop motility of fingers and to reduce stress and aggression.
3. **Sand therapy.** Sometimes children are unable to verbalize emotional states, particularly in the face of trauma, neglect, or abuse. Approximately 12 children between the ages of 3 and 15 used the non-verbal nature of sand therapy to help them achieve feelings of comfort and security. This method of therapy served as a valuable and powerful outlet for children and an incredibly insightful method of gaining access to traumatic experiences.



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Results

The project was an overwhelming success!

Puppetry





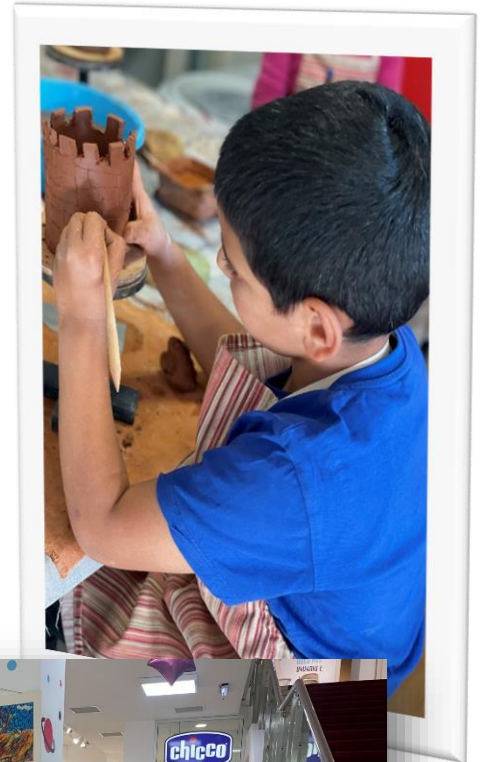
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Pottery





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Sand





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Budget

As shown below, total project costs for 2021 were approximately \$15,000.00 (7,000,000 AMD). A majority of the funds (\$9,263.16) were allocated for the SOS Kotayk specialists, while \$5,4473.68 were allocated for therapy supplies and transportation.



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Table 1. 2021 SOS Kotayk Art Therapy Budget

	Proposed (USD)	Proposed (AMD)	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	TOTAL
Staff	\$9,263.16	4,400,000.00 ₴	\$208.33	\$937.50	\$937.50	\$937.50	\$914.06	\$937.50	\$755.62	\$240.72	\$868.06	\$937.50	\$937.50	\$937.50	\$9,549.29
Art Project Coordinator	\$2,526.32	1,200,000.00 ₴	\$208.33	\$208.33	\$208.33	\$208.33	\$208.33	\$208.33	\$188.49	\$113.64	\$138.89	\$208.33	\$208.33	\$208.33	\$2,316.02
Puppetry workshop specialist	\$1,684.21	800,000.00 ₴	\$0.00	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$145.83	\$56.25	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$1,889.58
Puppet theatre leader	\$1,684.21	800,000.00 ₴	\$0.00	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$164.06	\$187.50	\$145.83	\$37.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$1,847.40
Pottery leader	\$1,684.21	800,000.00 ₴	\$0.00	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$145.83	\$0.00	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$187.50	\$1,833.33
Sand therapist/leader	\$1,684.21	800,000.00 ₴	\$0.00	\$166.67	\$166.67	\$166.67	\$166.67	\$166.67	\$129.63	\$33.33	\$166.67	\$166.67	\$166.67	\$166.67	\$1,662.96
Materials	\$5,473.68	2,600,000.00 ₴	\$0.00	\$71.67	\$183.13	\$550.52	\$139.63	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$223.02	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$347.39	\$1,515.35
Puppetry materials and performances	\$2,157.89	1,025,000.00 ₴	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$114.58	\$0.00	\$121.54	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$210.08	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$38.35	\$484.56
Pottery materials	\$2,578.95	1,225,000.00 ₴	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$550.52	\$18.08	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$12.94	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$213.32	\$794.86
Sand materials	\$315.79	150,000.00 ₴	\$0.00	\$71.67	\$60.63	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$52.51	\$184.80
Transportation	\$421.05	200,000.00 ₴	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$7.92	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$43.21	\$51.13
Grand Total	\$14,736.84	7,000,000.00 ₴													

Conclusion

The Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR) was founded in the fall of 2005 as a charitable organization that provides humanitarian relief to orphaned children living in Armenia. Represented by 138 Chapters, 6 Junior groups, 2 College groups, and more than 600 volunteers worldwide, SOAR supports 40 institutions and more than 1,500 orphaned children and adults with disabilities in Armenia, Artsakh, Javakh, Lebanon, and Syria.

For nearly three decades, SOS Children's Villages (Kotayk, Armenia) has promoted the emotional and social development of abandoned and socially discarded children through various educational and cultural projects that bring energy and stimulate enthusiasm. In March 2019, the Jirair S. and Elizabeth Hovnanian Foundation provided SOAR with a \$15,000 grant to support an art therapy project at SOS-Kotayk. Our aim was to incorporate art therapy into the children's lives to promote harmonious development, to overcome stress and trauma, and to express emotions, thoughts, and desires in a creative way. Because of COVID restrictions in 2020, residual funds were supplemented with general SOAR revenue to fund the Art Project at SOS Kotayk through 2021. Under separate cover we present a proposal to expand the Project at SOS in 2022.