



NARRATIVE PROJECT REPORT

ART THERAPY FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN KOTAYK

Funding: SOCIETY FOR ORPHANED ARMENIAN RELIEF (SOAR) - ARMENIA

Implementing partner: SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES ARMENIAN CHARITY FOUNDATION

Project site: SOS Children's Village Kotayk, Kotayk Province

Implementation period: October 10, 2022 – November 20, 2023

Reporting period: October 10, 2022 – November 20, 2023

2023



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1. INTRODUCTION

Currently art therapy is becoming increasingly popular in working with children and youngsters. The psychological problems of children left without parental care are diverse. Often, children find it difficult to express their own feelings, fears, sense of loneliness, which leads to unacceptable behavior, aggression, violence, conflict and adjustment difficulties. We highly appreciate the opportunity to support the children in our care through art therapy. We witness improvements in children's actions, self-esteem, self-confidence, relationships, communication, and integration as a result of its efficacy. Thoughts and feelings that would normally be difficult to define can be represented using imagery, color and shape as part of this creative therapy process. It is not about the final result, it is about healing through the creative process. Art and art therapy have been shown in studies to provide a variety of physical and mental health advantages.

Since October 2022 to November 2023¹ SOS Armenia with the financial support of SOAR Armenia continued to implement “Art therapy for vulnerable children in Kotayk” project.

The main goal of the project is to assist in social inclusion of vulnerable children through art therapy.

The project was presented with three workshops:

1. *Puppetry workshop and mobile puppet theatre*
2. *Pottery workshop*
3. *Sand therapy*

Each of the workshops had their huge contribution in the development of social skills, improvement of the emotional state and overcoming negative emotions and aggression.

2. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

2.1. Project description

The art therapy classes lasted 10 months. The pottery course was held twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays for two hours. Sand therapy sessions were conducted on Mondays and Saturdays for a total of two hours. And the puppetry workshop course took place on Tuesdays and Fridays for 2.5 hours. The schedule appears as follows.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
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¹ The project was planned till October 9, but it was prolonged with the agreement of SOAR to November 20. The agreements on prolongation with the staff is attached to the report.



14:00-16:00 Sand Therapy 15:30-17:30 Pottery workshop	15:30-18:00Puppetry workshop	
Thursday	Friday	Saturday
15:30- 17:30 Pottery workshop	15:30-18:00 Puppetry workshop	13:00-15:00Sand Therapy

2.2. Project beneficiaries

Initially, the program planned to have 50-55 beneficiary children from the SOS Children's Villages organization, but since the children of the Family Strengthening Program were also included, the total number of beneficiaries increased. The direct beneficiaries of the project are **85** children **55** of whom are from SOS Children's Village Kotayk, as well as **30** beneficiaries of Direct Family Strengthening program, who also participated in workshops. This did not result in increased material costs, but as a result of the project's expansion, the total cost was 27,874 drams higher, which was taken over by SOS Children's Villages. As social inclusion is one of the most important strategic goals of this project as well as SOS Children's Villages international organization, we encourage the participation of the children from the community in hobby groups. When the Direct Family Strengthening program psychologist and social worker conduct a family assessment and determine that the child needs psychological assistance and that it would be beneficial to include him in an art-therapeutic group, the given child becomes a member of the relevant group if possible.

The indirect beneficiaries are about **160** children for whom the children's theatre made performances. Two performances were held in the reporting period. One was held in summer with more than **100** audience. The second was held in November for more than **60** children displaced from Artsakh. The children also received gifts made by the students of the pottery group.

Below please find the number of children in each workshop.

Workshop	Total number of beneficiaries	Number of beneficiaries from SOS	Number of beneficiaries from community	Age group
Puppetry workshop	29	16	13	8-14 years
Pottery workshop	29	23	6	5-17 years
Sand therapy	27	16	11	3-10
Total	85	55	30	



2.3. Project activities

a. Puppetry workshop and mobile puppet theatre

This year the kids learnt a variety of subjects at the puppetry workshop. Making Balkan dolls, for example, or happy-faced textile dolls, the puppets required for the performance were prepared, and some of the older puppets were changed for the upcoming performance.

The children were visited by various representatives of the field of puppetry and puppet theatre. One of the guests was a puppeteer and author of many children's performances Aghasi Melkonyan. He told the children about his path as a puppeteer, the recent plays he presented, and the festivals he participated in, then showed them how to construct a toy frog that can be used in a play and transformed into many other animals by adding a few features. At the end, the children presented their play to him and Agassi offered suggestions and made comments.

Besides Aghasi, the children were visited by "Avetis" puppet theatre. The artists of the theatre presented a performance, called "Christmas" and held a master class with the children attending the hobby group.

The children performed "Talking Fish" and "Stupid People" fairy tales. The plays were performed twice. One of them in the culture house of Kotayk village for local kindergarten and school pupils. This performance was attended by almost 100 children.

For the second occasion, the youngsters performed the same fairy stories in the village of Arzakan for more than 60 children displaced from Artsakh. The group's students were overjoyed that they could make Artsakh children happy; they had worked hard to prepare for this performance. Among the group's students there are





youngsters from Artsakh who were relocated to SOS Children's Village during the 2020 conflict. The event was both exciting and responsible for these children.

b. Pottery workshop

The pottery classes are held in a pleasant atmosphere with classical music. Most of the children have been attending the group for a number of years. They are now expertly making the things they love, and they are not hesitant to use complex shapes. These children also frequently teach beginners the fundamentals of pottery. Children make different crafts, such as cups for coffee and tea, plates, candy jars, clocks, candle holders,



different statuettes, Christmas ornaments. Most of the children make gifts to present to their beloved people- mothers, siblings, friends. You can see different pottery crafts in almost all of the SOS family houses. Recently children prepared gifts for the children displaced from Artsakh, who came to watch the puppetry group performance.

An excursion to Mane Tiles handmade mosaic and ceramic tile workshop was organized during the year to let children learn about the details of the production process. They learned new details even though many processes were familiar to them. The staff of the company was pleasantly surprised by the children's knowledge in pottery crafting process.

c. Sand therapy



27 children attend the sand therapy group, **16** of whom live in SOS village and **11** in the community. Children always enjoy attending sand therapy classes. Here they can play with both natural and kinetic sand, and create sand art on a light-up table. The leader of the group organizes discussions on controversial themes. Children discuss family, friendship, love, compassion, communication, and their anxieties. With

the help of one another, they get interesting scenes with sand and miniature toy figures. Sometimes the group leader conducts individual sand therapy with some of the children. This helps the child overcome a variety of psychological issues, as a result of which he integrates into the group and begins to work and communicate with other children.

Success story

A. lives in the community and his family is a beneficiary of Family Strengthening Program. He is 5, but until recently he had speech problems. On the suggestion of a special educator, the child began attending art therapy sessions. A. joined pottery and sand therapy sessions. Initially there were many difficulties with A's integration, but gradually he became more relaxed and enjoyed attending classes. Individual lessons were also organized with him and now the boy is able to pronounce short words or say the first syllable of the names of objects.