



SOCIETY FOR ORPHANED ARMENIAN RELIEF (SOAR)

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2023-2024 Art Therapy and Music Therapy Projects –

Interim Report to the Jirair S. and Elizabeth Hovnanian Foundation



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Executive Summary

The Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR) was established in the fall of 2005 to provide humanitarian relief to orphaned Armenian children and adults with disabilities. In June 2023, the Jirair S. and Elizabeth Hovnanian Foundation provided a total of \$149,000 to support our Art Therapy and Music Therapy Projects. The projects are ongoing (through the summer of 2027), and we offer this interim report to illustrate their success in Armenia.

Art Therapy

Two of SOAR's supported institutions, SOS Children's Villages (Idjevan and Kotayk, Armenia), promote the development of abandoned and socially discarded children through various educational and cultural projects that stimulate creativity, enthusiasm, and intellectual empowerment. The Art Therapy Project has been a resounding success. Pottery, puppetry, and sand workshops were organized at SOS Village-Kotayk throughout 2023 and 2024, while arts and crafts and stained-glass workshops were organized at SOS-Idjevan. The therapy has helped the children express their emotions, develop team spirit, and improve their motor and communication skills.



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Music Therapy

SOAR's Music Therapy Program began in 2019 and provides the special needs children at Children's Home of Gyumri, Kharberd Orphanage, Sisters of Charity, and Yerevan Children's Home with a unique variety of music experiences to facilitate development of their communication, sensory-motor, and cognitive 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 Chairperson 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 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



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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.

Represented by 150 Chapters, 1 College Group, 5 Junior groups, and more than 600 volunteers worldwide, SOAR supports 36 orphanages, special boarding schools, day centers, summer camps, and transitional centers in Armenia, Javakh, and Lebanon. During the past 20 years, SOAR's work has expanded considerably. In 2006, distributions totaled approximately \$60,000. Since 2015, SOAR has exceeded \$1M distributions annually. SOAR's efforts not only address education, emotional support, nutrition, health and fundamental human rights, but the Programs offer educational curricula on a variety of topics that stimulate intellectual curiosity, empowerment, and enrichment.



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Quality Control

SOAR imposes a strict quality control protocol to assure that all goods and services reach their intended recipients. This protocol has 10 primary steps:

1. SOAR rarely makes cash distributions directly to the institutions. Rather, goods and services that can be procured in Armenia are purchased by SOAR staff and distributed directly to the orphanages. In-kind donations from the Armenian diaspora that can be shipped or hand-delivered are encouraged.
2. SOAR uses Microsoft Planner to retain receipts, pictures, and internal documents for all projects.
3. All purchases are memorialized with a receipt or invoice.
4. SOAR implements chain-of-custody procedures for all distributed goods or services to ensure that items have been received in the exact quantity intended. The recipient provides written documentation to indicate that the goods and services received is the quantity indicated, after which this documentation is sent to SOAR National and retained in Microsoft Planner.
5. SOAR staff, Chapter members, and other volunteers who visit Armenia make random inspections of the institutions. Discrepancies are to be reported immediately to SOAR's Executive Board Chairperson.



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6. When possible, donations provided by SOAR are engraved and/or stamped with a corporate seal.
7. Capital projects are acknowledged with a plaque and/or dedication ceremony.
8. SOAR does not transfer funds to other organizations to distribute on our behalf.
9. A zero-tolerance policy for fraud, theft, and/or deception is imposed. Malfeasance would result in the termination of assistance.
10. IRS Form 990s are filed annually, with Annual Reports dating back to 2005 available on our website.



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SOAR-Supported Institutions

SOAR supports 36 institutions in three countries: 33 orphanages, special boarding schools, day centers, transitional centers, and summer camps in Armenia; one orphan summer camp in Javakh (Georgia); and two Armenian orphanages in Lebanon.

The Ada Keshishyants Social Rehabilitation Center for Children with Developmental Disabilities (Vanadzor, Armenia) is a day center for children with developmental, emotional, intellectual, physical, and psychological disabilities.

Armenian Evangelical Boarding School (Ainjar, Lebanon) is home to approximately 75 healthy social orphans under the age of 18.

Birds' Nest Orphanage (Jbeil, Lebanon) has been home to thousands of Armenian children in the Middle East region for more than 100 years. Today, Birds' Nest houses healthy children under the age of 18.

Children's Home of Gyumri (Gyumri, Armenia) houses children with special needs under the age of 6.

Community Development and Social Support Center (Gyumri, Armenia) is a non-residential center that offers alternative care and material assistance to special needs children and their families.



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Dzorak Care Center (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 residential care center for adults with severe physical and psychological disabilities who have outgrown the traditional orphanage.

Gavar Orphanage (Gavar, Armenia) houses healthy children under the age of 18.

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

Kharberd Orphanage (Yerevan, Armenia) houses children and young adults with severe physical and psychological disabilities.

Mari Izmirlyan Orphanage (Yerevan, Armenia) houses children with special needs between the ages of 6 and 18.

Nakashian Children's Support Center (Yerevan, Armenia) houses approximately 20 healthy adolescent and teenage girls. The residents receive language and job skills training, computer instruction, life skills training, and psychological support.

Orran (Vanadzor, Armenia) is a day center that provides support to approximately 200 children at risk for institutionalization.



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

Our Lady of Armenia (OLA) Center (Gyumri, Armenia) houses approximately 28 healthy children between the ages of 6 and 18.

Our Lady of Armenia (OLA) Center Summer Camp (Tsaghgadzor, Armenia) hosts approximately 800 children throughout the summer, in multiple, two-week 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 (Tashir, Armenia) is a day center that provides meals and after-school activities to approximately 30 orphaned and otherwise needy children.

Our Lady of Armenia (OLA) Educational Center Summer Camp (Tashir, Armenia) hosts approximately 50 children 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 (Yerevan, Armenia) is a day center that offers food, educational, and therapeutic services to approximately 55 children and young adults with disabilities.



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Shirak Marz Child and Family Support Center (Gyumri, Armenia) provides day services to families whose children are at risk for institutionalization while serving as a residential setting for children without permanent familial care.

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 houses approximately 25 infants and toddlers with severe physical and mental disabilities. SOC-Spitak houses approximately 15 teenagers and adults with severe disabilities.

SOAR’s Transitional Centers (Gyumri and Yerevan, Armenia) are house older teenagers who have outgrown the traditional orphanage but who are not yet ready for independent living. The residents go to college, assist with SOAR’s online business, are enriched by SOAR’s academic programs, appreciate volunteerism, learn essential life skills, including home and money management, build self-confidence, and prepare themselves for emotional, fiscal, and professional independence.



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SOLENA Day Care Center (Gyumri, Armenia) is a non-residential, day center that provides services to families with special needs children: substance abuse counseling; job training for parents/caregivers; academic tutoring; nutritious meals; and psychological counseling. SOLENA offers a continuum of care to facilitate integration within the community and to help reduce the need for institutionalization.

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. SOS operates a wide range of childcare and family strengthening community and educational activities.

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

The Voice of the Armenian Church Summer Day Camp (Tsaghkadzor, Armenia) 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.



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Warm Hearth (3rd Village, Arinj, and Jermik Ankyun (Armenia) are care homes for adults with disabilities.

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

Yerevan Special School Number 11 (Nubarashen) (Yerevan, Armenia) is a state boarding school housing approximately 45 children with special needs.

Yerevan Ajapnyak Community Children's Social Care Center (Yerevan, Armenia) was founded in 2005 to support and assist with integration special needs children under the age of 18. The Center provides educational and professional orientation services; psychological services, including play therapy, art therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy; and primary health care and medical consulting.

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



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Art Therapy

Introduction

Art therapy has existed since the 1940s when psychologists first used it 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 expressions, including drawing, painting, coloring, or sculpting.

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. 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:



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- **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 and gives children the opportunity to appreciate perceptual differences among and between people.



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SOS Kotayk

Puppetry workshop and children's mobile puppet theater. Up to 25 children between the ages of 8 and 15 learn puppetry, master puppet actor's skills, and perform for approximately 150 children in SOS Kotayk and the surrounding communities. The theatre introduces national values to the children, teaches them to distinguish between good and evil, educates their worldview, and enriches insights.

Pottery workshop. Up to 15 children between the ages of 8 and 15 participate in pottery to develop motility of fingers and to reduce stress and aggression.

Sand therapy. Sometimes children are unable to verbalize emotional states, particularly in the face of trauma, neglect, or abuse. Intended for children between the ages of 3 and 15, the non-verbal nature of sand therapy helps children achieve feelings of comfort and security. This method of therapy serves as a valuable and powerful outlet for children and an incredibly insightful method of gaining access to traumatic experiences.



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SOS Idjevan:

Stained glass. Up to 20 children learned the skill of stained glass, which uses art media, the creative process, and the resulting artwork to explore feelings, reconcile emotional conflicts, foster self-awareness, manage behavior, develop social skills, improve reality orientation, reduce anxiety, and increase self-esteem.

Arts and crafts. Many types of art forms are used in the arts and crafts including drawing/coloring, painting, sculpting, finger painting, weaving, and collages. This mode utilizes the creative process to help people explore self-expression and, in doing so, find new ways to gain personal insight and develop new coping skills. During these courses, the children learned to manage their behavior, emotions, and aggression through collaboration, gaining a sense of calmness.

Participants and schedule. Approximately 50 children from each location participate in the Art Program quarterly. The painting, pottery, and sand therapy sessions are conducted twice a week for two hours each, while the puppetry workshop took place twice a week for 2.5 hours each.



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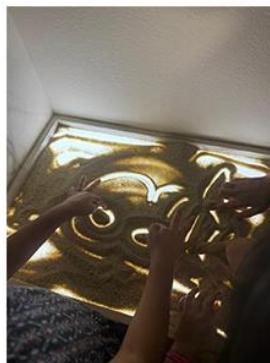
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POTTERY



PUPPETRY



SAND THERAPY



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Music Therapy

Music therapy is the clinical and evidenced-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program. It consists of using music therapeutically to address physical, psychological, cognitive, behavioral, and/or social functioning. Regular music therapy sessions are held at Children's Home of Gyumri, Kharberd Orphanage, Yerevan Children's Home (Nork), and Sisters of Charity. Participants also performed at the International Children's Day celebration hosted by SOAR (June 2024) and took part in the Side-By-Side Music Festival.

At Sisters of Charity (Bethlehem), eight children participated each year in the program, all of whom have cerebral palsy. One-hour sessions were held twice weekly. A typical therapy session included: listening to musical compositions; singing; playing using musical instruments to feel the music and its rhythm, and therapeutic movements with the music.

At Prkutyun Center ten young people over the age of 18 participated, all of whom have intellectual disabilities. One-hour sessions were held once a week. The process was divided into two phases:

1. Participants were introduced to musical instruments forming an idea of music and rhythm.



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2. The group was divided into two parts, to allow for more detailed and individual work with each person.

Goals for SOC and Prkutyun Participants:

1. Create positive emotional environment for rehabilitation.
2. Correct and develop emotional functions and abilities.
3. Correct the rhythm, tempo, emphasis and expression of speech.
4. Promote speech function.
5. Promote motor functions.
6. Promote teamwork.

At Kharberd Orpahnage, there was approximately 45 participants each year. Participants were divided into groups based on age and the severity of their conditions. A total of 9 groups were formed, each consisting of 5 participants. Initial assessments were conducted for each child, and individual case files were created. These files included evaluations of:

- Emotional state
- Cognitive abilities
- Brief psychological diagnosis
- Identified needs

Based on these, the music therapy specialist developed personalized and group intervention plans. Re-evaluations were conducted quarterly, with results presented to the supervisor. the program led to notable improvements in specific areas of the participants' development:

- Enhanced communication and interaction skills
- Improved emotional expression and self-regulation
- Cognitive and performance-related development
- Strengthened peer interaction during group sessions
- Increased self-esteem through creative expression



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Music therapy proved to be a powerful tool in promoting cognitive, emotional, and social growth and significantly contributed to improving the quality of life of the children.

At Yerevan Children's Home (formerly Nork Orphanage), 23 children participated in the program in 2023. 12 of the children were from the younger group and 11 from the older group.



Music Therapy Sessions at Sisters of Charity (Bethlehem)



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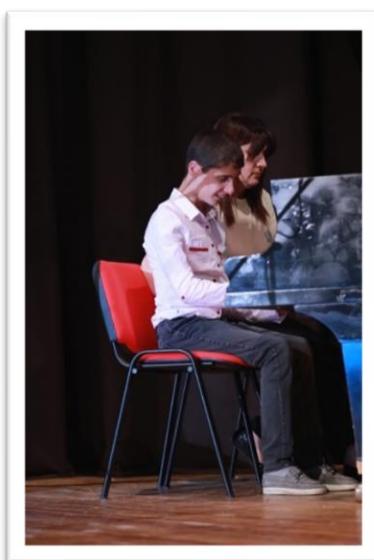
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Music Therapy Sessions at Prkutyun



*Music Therapy at
Children's Day
Celebration*



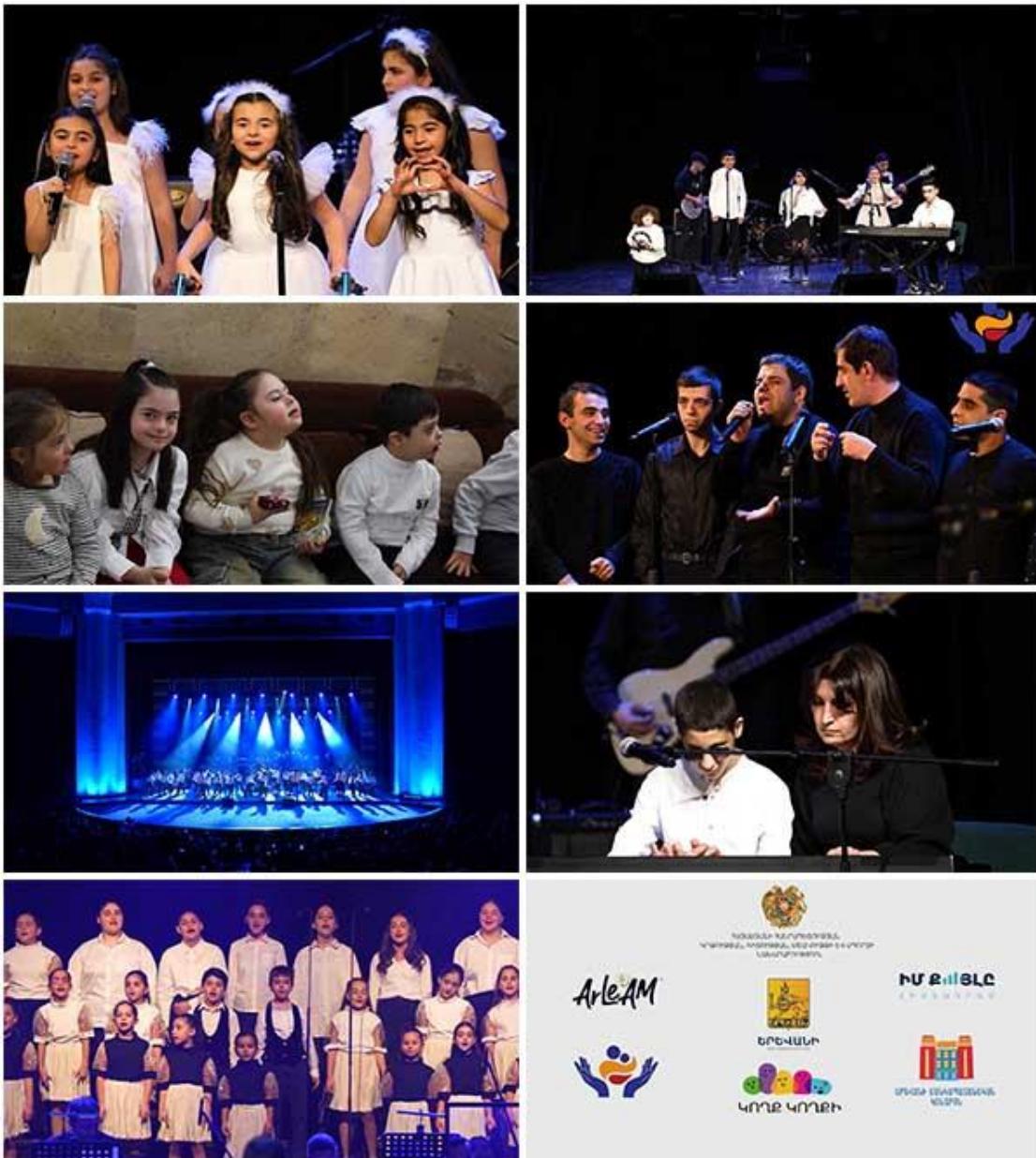


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Side by Side Music Festival



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Budget

Table 1. Combined Art and Music Therapy Budgets

	CY2023	CY2024	TOTAL (CY2022-2024)	CY2025	CY2026	CY2027	TOTAL (CY2025-2027)
Art Therapy Program	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$50,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$75,000.00
SOS Kotayk	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$30,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$45,000.00
SOS Idjevan	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$20,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$30,000.00
Music Therapy Program	\$7,442.00	\$6,780.00	\$14,222.00	\$8,280.00	\$8,340.00	\$8,940.00	\$25,560.00
Musical Instructor	\$5,600.00	\$6,000.00	\$11,600.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,600.00	\$18,600.00
Transportation/Festival	\$1,842.00	\$540.00	\$2,382.00	\$2,040.00	\$2,040.00	\$2,040.00	\$6,120.00
Sheet music and miscellaneous supplies	\$0.00	\$240.00	\$240.00	\$240.00	\$300.00	\$300.00	\$840.00



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Conclusion

Represented by 150 Chapters and more than 600 volunteers worldwide, SOAR supports 36 orphanages, special boarding schools, day centers, summer camps, and transitional centers in Armenia, Javakh, and Lebanon. In June 2023, the Jirair S. and Elizabeth Hovnanian Foundation provided SOAR with a \$149,000 grant to support art and music therapy in Armenia. As shown in Table 1, funds donated from the Foundation will allow for the continuation of both projects through the summer of 2027. We offer this interim report to illustrate the resounding success of the Programs and to thank the Foundation for their unwavering support of SOAR's mission.

