YMCA Camp in the Caucasus

Recreation, Camping and Arts

Introduction

The Caucasus Region spans the countries of Armenia, Georgia, Russia and Azerbaijan. They are home to a wide range of religious and ethnic groups, languages and cultures. The region lies at the crossroads of numerous civilizations which date back thousands of years including Greek, Roman, Persian, Ottoman and Russian. Ever since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, the region has experienced significant religious, ethnic and geo-political conflict, resulting in social upheaval, widespread displacement and economic turbulence.

In many areas around the world impacted by social and economic challenges, such as in the Caucasus Region, the YMCA offers services to meet individual health and wellness needs (including psycho-social counseling) and programs to promote multicultural understanding in an effort to end the cycle of prejudice and violence. Regional conflict often leads to a high number of refugees and internally displaced people and the YMCA is a safe refuge for people, especially children, who suddenly find themselves far from home in unfamiliar surroundings without personal belongings. The YMCA uses recreation, camping and arts programming to promote the physical, mental, social and spiritual growth of participants.

YMCA Roots for Reconciliation: Plan and methodology

The YMCA is one of the region's few indigenous organizations promoting multicultural understanding in an effort to stop ethnic violence. The **YMCA Roots for Reconciliation Program** is an innovative youth service-learning initiative that brings together young people from diverse backgrounds to share realities and opinions, strengthen leadership skills, learn about YMCA programs around the world, and foster relationships with other young leaders.

Led by YMCA Europe and funded in part by YMCA World Service in cooperation with YMCA national movements in the region (including Armenia, Georgia and Nagorno-Karabagh), the program organizes innovative camping and arts programming for thousands of children and young adults annually. The YMCAs work with famous local musicians, religious leaders and media groups to promote the importance of youth leadership, civic participation, integration and peace and reconciliation.

When young people are given the opportunity to become part of the solution, they use their creativity, values and energy to positively impact the community. Through innovative camping and arts programming, the YMCA is equipping young leaders with the skills and experience to advance diversity, cooperation and conflict resolution in the region.

Future plans

The YMCA of Armenia owns two beautiful resident camps, one on the shores of Lake Sevan and one in the mountains of Pambak near the city of Vanadzor. YMCA Camp Pambak is undergoing a major renovation (thanks in large part to Sue Aramian, a supporter of YMCA World Service and the YMCA of Armenia) which will allow for expanded, year-round programming for thousands of additional people from the Caucasus Region, Europe and North America. The YMCA of Georgia will also develop a campsite in Batumi, on the coast of the Black Sea.

In 2009, the Roots for Reconciliation initiative will be expanded to include youth and young adult participants from Russia and the United States.

YMCAs around the world use recreation, camping and arts programming to promote the physical, mental, social and spiritual growth of participants. In many troubled regions around the world, YMCA programs are designed to foster peace and cross-cultural understanding in an effort to end the cycle of prejudice and violence.

"I can say that those fourteen days spent at the Pambak YMCA camp were the best in my life."
-Mariam Sholyam, Youth Participant,

To learn more about YMCA World Service-funded programs around the world or to make a donation, visit www.ymca.net/worldservice.