







The Territorial Development Agency "We Are Our Mountains" was founded at the end of 2022 by Ruben Vardanyan and partners. Its mission is to implement projects for the development and support of Artsakh and Syunik in close cooperation with state and local structures, as well as public and private institutions and organizations. During 2022 and 2023, amidst the blockade in Artsakh, the organization implemented projects worth over \$2 million, a report of which is available at this link.

Despite the fact that the founder, Ruben Vardanyan, has been in illegal imprisonment since September 27, 2023 and is still in captivity in Azerbaijan, as a committed humanitarian he is determined that the organization charitable activities in support of the people of Artsakh continue. Since October 2023, "We Are Our Mountains" has continued to help families forcibly displaced from Artsakh recover from severe shocks and adapt with dignity to new realities, promoting their social development and ensuring economic stability. Furthermore, the organization strives to enable people to realize their potential in Armenia.

In March 2024, the organization was renamed the Development Agency "We Are Our Mountains" (hereinafter referred to as the Agency).

SUPPORT PROJECTS FOR INDIVIDUALS FORCIBLY DISPLACED FROM ARTSAKH

SUPPORT FOR ARTSAKH CRAFTSMEN

Many of our compatriots, forcibly displaced from Artsakh and settled in Armenia, ran independent households in Artsakh, using crafts passed down from generation to generation. The goal of the "Support for Artsakh Craftsmen" project is to assist craftsmen forced to leave Artsakh in resuming their work in Armenia as soon as possible, thereby improving the socioeconomic situation of their families. To achieve this, the project organized vocational training courses (retraining) and provided each craftsman with necessary tools worth up to **1,300 US Dollars** to resume their work.

As part of the project, **87 craftsmen** (including tailors, jewelers, shoemakers, welders, potters, carpenters, blacksmiths, masons, confectioners, furniture makers, repairmen, and hairdressers) received support.

Out of them, 28 beneficiaries aditionally participated in the training courses.

The project also offered a valuable opportunity for some beneficiaries to connect and collaborate in their activities.

During the reporting period, project expenses amounted to approximately **88,800 US Dollars.** Given the tangible impact and effectiveness of the project, as well as the high demand among forcibly displaced people from Artsakh, plans are in place to continue and expand the project in the second half of the year.



SENFFICABIES



During the forced displacement from Artsakh in September 2023, 54-year-old Vrezh Baghdasaryan's main goal was to bring his family to Armenia safe and sound. A former military man, Vrezh, upon reaching retirement age, gathered craftsmen and opened a workshop in Stepanakert, primarily focusing on welding work.

Due to the forced displacement, Vrezh left behind not only his house and everything he had laboriously created over the years, but also the tools and equipment that were the main means of subsistence for his family.

Faced with new challenges in Armenia, Vrezh decided to find the strength within himself to restart his work. Gathering members of his team from different cities in Armenia, he began working manually due to the lack of proper equipment and tools. "For example," Vrezh explains, "a blacksmith now works by hand, but there is a blacksmith hammer that works much faster. I made the machine with my own hands, but there is a factory version that does the job faster."

Vrezh and his colleagues became beneficiaries of the "Support for Artsakh Craftsmen" project, receiving essential blacksmith tools. "Each tool is one working place," says Vrezh.

Now, Vrezh and his team are considering expanding the forge and taking on larger orders. He mentions that they have no issues with securing orders; the main challenge was the lack of tools.





The taste of pakhlava prepared by Liana is well known not only to gourmets but also to those who carefully count the calorie content of confectionery and watch their figures. Thanks to her, the fame of Artsakh aromatic pastries with honey and walnuts spread far beyond the borders of her native Artsakh, from Russia to China, from Bulgaria to Mongolia.

After being forcibly deported from Artsakh in September 2023, Liana moved to Etchmiadzin. As part of the "Help to Artsakh Craftsmen" project, Liana was provided with a confectionery oven and a refrigerated display case, which allowed her to resume her business by opening a small confectionery shop. Preserving the Artsakh taste of pakhlava is a matter of principle for Liana, as she believes in Artsakh's legacy.



PROGRAM "WINGS" FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS FORCIBLY DISPLACED FROM ARTSAKH

"The simplest way to acquire wings is by giving a pair to someone else"

The success of the pilot phase of the "Wings" rehabilitation program, launched in Dilijan in 2023, has spurred the Agency to continue its implementation in 2024. This ongoing initiative focuses on the psychological rehabilitation of children aged 4-18 forcibly displaced from Artsakh.

From April to June 2024, **76 children and 41 parents** residing in Dilijan participated in the "Wings" rehabilitation program. The program aims to replenish children's physical, psychological, and emotional reserves, while also nurturing the psychological well-being of their parents.

In addition to core components like art therapy, sports activities, and the development of resilience and leadership skills, the program now includes elements of social integration. This encompasses community events involving local residents, field trips to Yerevan, and hikes in Dilijan and its surroundings, all designed to familiarize children with their new home.

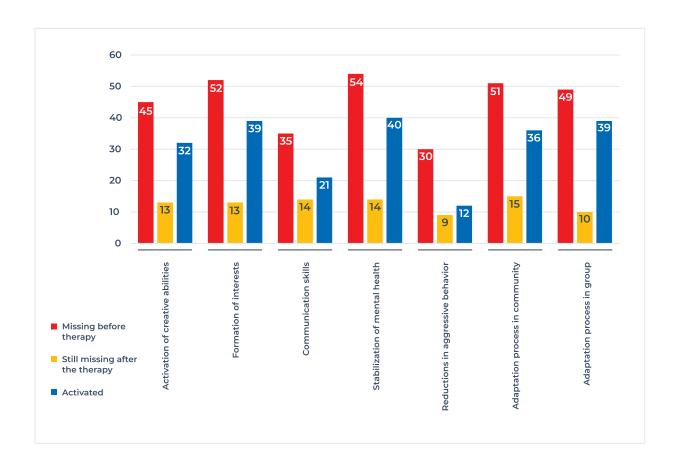


The main partners for the implementation of the program in Dilijan were:

- Dilijan Community Center
- "Climate Uturn" Educational Platform

Based on psychodiagnostics assessments and parental feedback, it became evident that children predominantly faced challenges such as insomnia, anxiety, fear, uncertainty, mistrust, hopelessness, overexertion, and emotional instability.

The comprehensive interventions and targeted efforts of the Wings program yielded significant improvements in these issues among participating children by the program's conclusion. Observations indicated marked progress in the psychological well-being of most children, reflecting a positive shift towards resilience, stability, and hope for the future (see graph).



Simultaneously, it was decided to continue supporting participants who have not fully overcome their traumatic experiences and require ongoing specialist assistance for complete recovery.

Acrucial lesson learned from the program's previous phases was the essential role of family involvement in achieving sustainable results. The attitudes and behaviors of parents and other family members significantly influence children's outlooks, behaviors, and values. Therefore, an integral part of the program was the psychological healing of families through both individual and group therapy.

Seventy percent of parents who completed the therapy sessions stabilized their psychological state, with the remainder expressing a desire to continue working with specialists in subsequent stages.

A post-program survey, in which 70% of parents participated, revealed unanimous agreement among respondents that the program effectively helped children restore their psychological resources, fulfilled their expectations, and met their hopes.



Additionally, feedback from parents and children highlighted that the social integration component and orientation to their new residence conducted through educational excursions, community events, and hikes were highly popular and valuable among participants.

Thanks to our generous donors, the Agency will not only sustain the program in Dilijan but also expand its reach. In July, we will launch a program in Gyumri, benefitting about 40 children and their parents.

The overarching goal of the Wings program extends beyond immediate participant impact. By preventing the transmission of trauma to future generations, the program aims to foster a ripple effect of healing and resilience.

During the reporting period, program expenditures totaled approximately **32,600 US Dollars.**



SENFFICABIFS



"Our children have gained self-confidence, become proactive, and integrated into their new social environment. The work with parents was also excellent, which greatly contributed to the overall effectiveness of the program."

Parent-beneficiary, "Wings" program

"As children who have experienced so much, we've learned never to give up in the face of difficulties. We've started believing again, embracing our childhood, and smiling once more."

11-year-old participant, "Wings" program

"Thanks to the Wings program, we've gained deeper insights into the challenges faced by the forcibly displaced population from Artsakh and have tailored the program to meet their needs. An essential aspect of the program is integrating individuals forcibly displaced from Artsakh into community life."

Armine Hovhannisyan, Director of the Dilijan Community Center

«LEADERS2LEADERS» CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

LEADERS is a transformative continuous development program designed for graduates of the Matena International School of Leadership and Professional Development in Artsakh, structured on the principle of peer-to-peer learning. The program's implementation has been made possible through collaborative efforts between the Development Agency "We are our mountains", experts and alumni from the Matena International School of Leadership and Professional Development, the International Coaching Federation of Armenia, and graduates from renowned educational institutions such as Harvard and Oxford.

The program aims to foster comprehensive processes of advanced training and retraining, enhance the competitiveness of participants in the job market, support the development of entrepreneurial initiatives, and importantly, establish a robust network of like-minded leaders.





The inaugural module took place in November-December 2023 with 25 participants. In 2024, the program continued with 30 participants engaging in two new modules: "Building the Future through Self-Awareness and Setting Goals" and "Promoting Employment and Career Development."

Initial outcomes revealed that approximately 50% of participants secured employment, with around 10% finding jobs in their respective fields, even though employment was not the main goal of the program.

Notably, participants identified project management and social media marketing as emerging specialties in demand. Training sessions in these areas are planned for the upcoming program module.

The total program expenditure for the first half of the year amounted to approximately **22,900 US Dollars**, generously covered by trainers providing their services pro bono.



Loreta Khachatryan, originally from Artsakh, shares her experience with the Leaders2Leaders Program



During the Azerbaijani blockade in Artsakh, we had the chance to participate in the Matena Leadership School program online. It was a lifeline for us. After the tragic events of September, we relocated to Yerevan and already re-joined the program here. What makes this program truly invaluable and distinctive is its ability to not only foster our success and integration into the new reality and job market, but also empower those around us whom we share our newfound knowledge and skills with, thereby strengthening our community.

The Leaders2Leaders program has illuminated the path forward and instilled confidence to move ahead with assured strides. To quote Ruben Vardanyan, every crisis harbors both threats and opportunities. This program has equipped us not with fear, but with the tools to overcome challenges and seize new opportunities in this transformed landscape. I liken the journey of this program to climbing a mountain when halfway through, you discover a renewed vigor. Now, all that remains is to summit.

FRENCH LANGUAGE FOR ARTSAKH STUDENTS

Between March and June 2024, additional French language lessons were organized at Yerevan Secondary School No. 48, named after Misak Manushyan, for students in grades 4-9 from Artsakh. These students, who had been forcibly displaced, settled in Yerevan and enrolled in a school specializing in French language studies. This pilot project aimed to help these displaced children catch up on lessons missed due to the blockade and displacement, master new educational material, and keep up with the school curriculum.



The classes were tailored for 24 students from Artsakh, divided into two age groups: grades 3-5 and grades 6-9. The lessons were led by French teachers from the school.

Teachers and parents reported that the extracurricular French lessons were effective and significantly aided the children in their academic progress. Additionally, the supplementary courses provided a sense of familiarity to the children, positively contributing to their emotional well-being.

The total cost of the project exceeded **1,400 US Dollars.** The success of the initiative has paved the way for its continuation into the summer months.



Marie and Ashot, originally from Stepanakert, attended School No. 2 named after their grandfather, Artsakh hero Ashot Ghulyan (Bekor), where French language instruction had not yet begun. After being forcibly displaced and enrolling in Yerevan's School No. 48 named after Misak Manushyan, like other students from Artsakh, they faced challenges with learning French. However, thanks to a three-month additional course, they quickly mastered the material. Marie developed a strong fondness for the French language and plans to continue studying it in the future.



«TREE OF LIFE»: BENEVOLENT INITIATIVE CULTIVATING AN ORCHARD IN TATEV

Continuing the projects of Ruben Vardanyan and expressing the continuity of his charitable mission, the Development Agency "We Are Our Mountains," in collaboration with partner organizations, planted a new orchard in Tatev, near the Tatev Monastery and the "Wings of Tatev" cable car.

The garden was planted as a symbol of life and a new beginning, reflecting Ruben Vardanyan's contribution to the prosperity of his people and the Motherland. Each tree in the orchard expresses the support of the project participants for Ruben Vardanyan and our other compatriots illegally detained in Azerbaijan.





A total of 1,000 trees were planted in the new garden, including apple, pear, cherry, and plum trees.

This garden, located in the heart of Tatev, is unique in that **around 300** individual supporters from 23 countries and over a dozen organizations took part in its creation, uniting their desire to do good and expressing their support for Armenian prisoners illegally held in a Baku prison.

Tree planting began in April and continued throughout the month, culminating in the opening ceremony of the garden on May 25. As part of the event, the symbolic "Tree of Life" was planted a plane tree (chinar, tnjri), symbolizing perseverance, mercy, nobility, and longevity, and is associated with many traditions in Armenian history.



Today, when the founder of our organization, Ruben Vardanyan, is in prison in Baku, it is more than important to continue his work and bring his ideas to life. The creation of a garden for Vardanyan has always been a symbol of a new beginning, which is why this project was initiated.

Grigory Martirosyan,

General Director of the Development Agency "We Are Our Mountains"







Tatev is one of the symbols of the Armenian spiritual and national liberation revival. Today it is very important to draw inspiration and strength from our national-spiritual sources for our new awakening. To restore our wounded national dignity and break the destructive chain of despair and disappointment, the speedy and safe return of our prisoners held in Baku to their homeland is also very important.

Archbishop Vazgen Mirzakhanyan,

Representative of the Catholicos of All Armenians

On this day, at the initiative of the Development Agency "We Are Our Mountains," a pilgrimage to the Tatev Monastery complex took place as a sign of support for all Armenian prisoners.

In the Cathedral of Saints Paul and Peter, Archbishop Vazgen Mirzakhanyan held a joint prayer service for the release of the captives.

The initiative was supported by the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Tatev community, and several authoritative organizations, including:

- Armenian General Benevolent Union
- Relief Society of Armenia
- Family Foundation "G. Hovnanian"
- Tufenkian Charitable Foundation
- Aznavour Foundation
- Orran Foundation
- Teach, Armenia!
- ATP



More than a thousand pilgrims also joined the initiative. As part of the "Tree of Life" pilgrimage, several ethnographic and cultural events took place in Tatev and Halidzor. The Artsakh choir "Mrakats" presented the original works of the famous composer Marine Ales and performed Charles Aznavour's song "For You, Armenia," dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the great chansonnier.



I am deeply touched by how many organizations, individuals, including residents, joined and supported these events, the Tree of Life initiative, expressing their gratitude for the great works done by Ruben in Tatev. I thank Ruben's friends and supporters for continuing his mission and trying to make Ruben's vision a reality."

Marine Ales, songwriter, composer, and sister of Ruben Vardanyan

The Artsakh Folk Instruments Ensemble also performed musical numbers.



Thanks to the supporters of the "We Are Our Mountains" project, the future of the garden was ensured with the creation of a drip irrigation system to nourish the garden, ensuring high yields in the future. An experienced gardener, who is among those forcibly displaced from Artsakh, has been hired to take care of the garden.

Part of the funds received from the project was directed to the needs of the Tatev Monastery. Most of the funds raised were allocated to the development of Tatev youth, with "We Are Our Mountains" ensuring the participation of 12 Tatev boys and girls in the international summer camp organized by UWC Dilijan.

As of July 1, the expenditure of the project was about 64,800 US Dollars.

Our next goal is to expand the drip irrigation system to the nearby gardens that Ruben and his organizations have created in previous years.





DIRECT SOCIAL SUPPORT AND OTHER INITIATIVES

In special social cases, the Agency provided direct financial support to people in difficult life situations, including a disabled military man needing prosthetics, a large forcibly displaced family with nine children, and individuals from other social groups.

Expressing support for Ruben Vardanyan, who went on a hunger strike in a Baku prison, "We are our mountains" organized a procession to the Tsitsernakaberd memorial complex demanding the release of all prisoners illegally detained in Azerbaijan. This event took place during the torchlight procession held on April 23, as well as during the marches on April 24 commemorating the Armenian Genocide, reminding the world that genocide continues today.





As part of the cooperation between the Development Agency "We are our mountains" and the "Association for the Support of Artsakh" (France), representatives of the Agency, Narine Aghabalyan and Sona Hovhannisyan, participated in a seminar titled "Uniting in the name of Armenia and in support of forcibly displaced persons from Nagorno-Karabakh." This seminar was held on May 14 in the Senate of the French Republic.

The discussion included representatives of French support structures for forcibly displaced persons from Artsakh, as well as high-ranking diplomatic officials. They addressed issues of coordinating support for residents of Artsakh who have taken refuge in Armenia. The activities of the Artsakh Support Association, aimed at solving the problems facing the population of Artsakh, were also presented at the seminar.

Funds allocated for the above projects amounted to more than 5,400 US Dollars.

In the first half of 2024, the Development Agency "We are our mountains," together with partners, implemented projects and programs worth more than **200,000 US Dollars** (see table).

PROJECTS	Costs of implemented projects (US Dollars)	Approximate number of beneficiaries	Including direct beneficiaries
Support Projects for Forcibly Displaced People from Artsakh, including:			
Support for Artsakh Craftsmem	\$ 88 752	437	87
"Wings" Rehabilitation Program for children and their parents forcibly displaced from Artsakh	\$ 32 578	485	117
 "Leaders-2-Leaders" continuous development porgram 	\$ 22 855	135	30
4. "Tree of Life": Benevolent initiative cultivating an orchard in Tatev	\$ 64 766	7 238	1 062
5. French for Artsakh students	\$1424	108	24
Direct Social support and other initiatives	\$ 5 405	20	12
TOTAL	\$ 215 780	8 423	1 332

All work was carried out thanks to financial donations and logistical assistance from a wide range of supporters, including partners and donors, from many countries.



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