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SPOTLIGHT

Capacity to Make a Difference: Alumna Makes Strides in NGO Accountability

In the Kazakh non-governmental organization (NGO) sector, accountability is rarely discussed. NGOs are often perceived as uncomplicated organizations, always open and transparent. This perception has changed in recent years as NGOs have been under public scrutiny as a result of poor practices within the sector such as financial fraud and lack of connection with beneficiaries.

Muskie alumna **Ainur Nurtay** (2007) joined the Association of Business Women (AWE) to address these challenges and to help NGOs improve their accountability mechanisms. In October 2010, Nurtay received support from the Careers for Alumni in Public Service (CAPS) grant. This grant enabled her to work with AWE's executive officer and staff to apply accountability practices such as an open door

structure for beneficiaries, development of an independent Board of Trustees, and publication of an annual program and financial reports. Additionally, Nurtay and other U.S. government exchange program alumni conducted seven trainings on NGO accountability and transparency for twenty NGOs in Southern Kazakhstan.

The CAPS grant provided a unique opportunity for Nurtay to start discussions around the often-neglected topic of NGO accountability. As the result of the project, she was invited by the Soros Foundation Kazakhstan to share her expertise in the development of an NGO Code of Ethics. "The CAPS project is flexible," Nurtay says, "and I decided to broaden it by conducting research on accountability mechanisms among three NGOs in South Kazakhstan. The research revealed that NGOs had enormous accountability challenges. I will continue working on promoting awareness and use of accountability practices at NGOs".

Nurtay also notes that CAPS "is an important instrument in supporting Muskie alumni who are working in remote regions of Kazakhstan. It encourages alumni to pursue a career in public service, give back to their communities, and serve as ambassadors of American education and culture to their home countries."

Nurtay speaks to participants of the Youth Leadership Conference held by the South Kazakhstan Alumni Association in January 2011.



Strengthening Foster Care for Georgian Children

Muskie alumni in Georgia recently established the first Georgian Foster Care Organization (GFCO) within the framework of an advocacy project funded by the European Union Delegation in Georgia.

"GFCO, which currently boasts nearly 100 members nationwide, unites foster parents from all over Georgia who help ensure that vulnerable children who lack parental care have the opportunity to grow up in a safe, caring family environment," says **Maya Mateshvili** (Muskie 2006). "The main goal of establishing the GFCO was to protect the interests and rights of the foster parents and the children in their care, as foster care is a relatively new concept for Georgia and lacks adequate support from the state."

Mateshvili recently joined the Georgian branch of the UK-based international NGO EveryChild, headed by **Andro Dadiani** (Muskie 2002). Making a transition from managing public relations at the UN World Health Organization to being in charge of a children's rights advocacy project for an NGO has been a rewarding yet challenging career move. "Being a mom myself, I naturally care about child welfare," Mateshvili says. "So when at one of the Muskie Alumni Association of Georgia (MAAG) board meetings Andro told me about EveryChild's efforts to give children living in institutions the opportunity of being placed in a family-like environment by strengthening alternative child care services, I knew I wanted to make my contribution to this good cause."



Mateshvili and Dadiani conducted several meetings with over 100 non-kinship foster caregivers in the capital city of Tbilisi as well as in the regions to convey the goals, structure and membership terms of the GFCO to its prospective members.

Recognizing the trauma and damage caused to children who reside in institutional care, the Government of Georgia has made a commitment to close down all remaining large scale residential care institutions (orphanages) in the country over the next two years. Although it is widely thought that the best solution is to reintegrate children with their biological families, there is also a considerable need to develop alternative child care options, such as foster care, for those children who cannot immediately be reunified with families. Through GFCO, child care service providers and service users are mobilized and their capacity is strengthened to jointly advocate and engage in the policy-making process to

promote and ensure the fulfillment of rights of vulnerable children and their foster families.

"GFCO will become the main driving force in efforts to advocate improvements in the levels, variety and quality of support to children in foster care and their foster parents. Foster care has proved itself as the best care alternative when living with biological or extended family is not an option. We hope that GFCO, with support from EveryChild and other partners, will be able to achieve real and sustainable changes to how the government supports and promotes foster care, amongst other family support and family substitute services," says Dadiani.

Balancing Act: Bringing Bike Safety to Kyrgyzstan

Talant Sultanov (Muskie 2004) and **Ulan Shabynov** (Muskie 2005) organized the Third Annual Bicycle Run in Bishkek on May 15, 2011. Sultanov and Shabynov became active cyclists during their studies in the U.S. under the Muskie Fellowship and decided to bring the cycling culture to Kyrgyzstan. The goal of the event was to popularize bicycles in Kyrgyzstan, to promote healthy lifestyles, and to enrich cultural life in Bishkek. Nearly 500 people attended the Bicycle Run, which was supported by the Bishkek Mayor's office, the American University of Central Asia (AUCA), and several organizations and companies. The Bicycle Run finished in the center of Bishkek with a concert and performances by the bikers.



Shabynov and Sultanov prepare for the race.



Shabynov (*third from left*) and Sultanov (*far right*) celebrate with fellow cyclists including the President of AUCA, Andrew Wachtel (*third from right.*)

Engaging Religious Leaders to Combat Human Trafficking

Muskie fellows often draw on past professional experiences when contributing to course discussions and academic conferences. **Halina Dzesiatava**, a 2010 international affairs fellow, enjoys sharing knowledge gained from her work at the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) office in Minsk. This spring, she presented at a conference on religion, human trafficking, and modern slavery hosted by the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology. Dzesiatava's experience at the conference tied together her past professional experience with her studies at Tufts University and plans for future work at home in Belarus.

Dzesiatava's presentation, "Countering Trafficking in Human Beings in Belarus: Religious Community Response," explored best practices in cooperation with religious communities to combat human trafficking. By including examples from Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, Dzesiatava engaged the audience in thinking about trafficking issues in this at-risk region.

In addition to her own presentation, Dzesiatava was also able to learn from leaders in the field of anti-trafficking and religious leaders interested in the topic. "The conference was exactly what I expected it to be and even more," said Dzesiatava. "The participants included religious leaders, NGO representatives, academia and prominent actors in the sphere of counter trafficking activities. The presentations ranged from purely academic papers... to presentations

by outstanding leaders on the necessity of addressing demand side in trafficking and prostitution."

Dzesiatava hopes to continue working on anti-trafficking and migration issues after completing her Muskie fellowship. "Migration is a not a new phenomenon, however, the scale of world migration is unprecedented now," explained Dzesiatava. "Upon my return to Belarus I would like to continue to pursue my professional interests in this sphere by contributing to developing effective mechanisms on regulating legal migration to benefit both migrants and the society."



Dzesiatava (*left*) presents with Dr. Ami Angell (*right*)

Supplementing University Education in Today's Virtual World



Nvard Manasian relished seminars and projects as a Muskie fellow, enjoying the challenge of rethinking the purpose of university education. Born out of that experience, her blog <<http://nvardmanasian.wordpress.com>>

is a one-stop-shop for students in her Global Governance and Inter-national Organizations course at Yerevan State Linguistic University.

The site features links to networks and organizations dealing with Global Governance issues. Manasian encourages students to analyze the anatomy of learning and diagnose problems in the course. She encourages students to identify where the class needs to improve or adapt its pace and depth to ensure that students can manage the workload, absorb the main ideas, and reach the course objectives. Manasian hopes the site will become a tool that transforms the students' classroom experience, allowing for individualized learning through blogging and reading. She adds, "We are at the initial stages of a very long road, which will make the learning a truly pleasant experience tailored for the needs and capacities of each individual learner."

Learning Through Service

What is the relationship between a lemonade stand, a budget simulation exercise, and an art-covered rocket? Each of these community service activities helped 2010 Muskie fellows gain new skills and better understand the community where they live and study.

ENTRENEURSHIP AND LEMONADE

In Glendale, Arizona, business fellow **Boris Pilipenko** of Kyrgyzstan and international affairs fellow **Ekaterine Danelia** of Georgia served as organizers and mentors for the Lemonade Day Project. Lemonade Day is a national initiative to teach youth the basics of entrepreneurship and business through organizing lemonade sales. In addition to sharing their knowledge of business, Pilipenko and Danelia also shared their cultural backgrounds with youth and Lemonade Day organizers. Naomi Gunnels, City Director for Lemonade Day, commented that, "The cross-cultural communication and collaboration was not only valuable at this time but may increase the impact of [the project's] principles in the future and throughout the world — incredible!"

Pilipenko and Danelia felt that the project could be adapted for use in their home countries. "Teaching entrepreneurship and financial literacy from an early age is crucial to grow a strong and vibrant private business sector in any country — developed or emerging," said Pilipenko. "Interaction between students and children and perhaps industry professionals is essential. Our society needs good role models."



Pilipenko and Danelia (right) gather with other Lemonade Day organizers.



Rzayeva and Shalashvili at the Empower Portage event.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Empower Portage is a grassroots initiative designed to reduce poverty through education, social networking, and community dialogue. **Maia Shalashvili**, an international affairs fellow from Georgia, and **Gulnay Rzayeva**, a business fellow from Azerbaijan, got involved in the initiative this spring. Both fellows volunteered at a poverty simulation event where community members were given the budget for a family living in poverty and acted out the interactions between the family and local organizations.

Rzayeva also drew on her studies at Kent State University to develop a marketing plan for the organization. "I come from a country that has poverty but to my knowledge we don't have organizations that do work like Empower Portage," she said. "I was interested to see how they are attacking this problem."

COMMUNITY SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS

The 2010 Muskie cohort completed more than **5,640** hours of community service at **136** organizations in **39** states.

71% of supervisors report fellows participating in community **service beyond Muskie program requirements.**

DREAM ROCKET

Liudmilla Potryvaeva, a public policy fellow from Russia, put her non-profit management experience to work in her community service for the Dream Rocket Project in Huntsville, Alabama. The Dream Rocket Project is a collaborative community art project bringing together youth from communities around the world to create 8,000 fiber panels to wrap the Saturn V Moon Rocket. Potryvaeva has worked to encourage submissions on the "Dare to Dream" theme from Russian youth.

Potryvaeva enjoyed working with the Huntsville community and was inspired by the international scale of the project, which has already brought together submissions from 19 countries. "Although I have enough experience of working in non-profit organizations in Russia, no one project was so exciting to me before," said Potryvaeva. "It makes us to go beyond our daily routine activity, and it really inspires to dream."



"Zhanna is an incredible asset to the Boys & Girls Club! The kids have definitely benefited from having her teach them about her home country and culture."

Rebecca Forman of Boys and Girls Club of Binghamton, describing Zhanna Harutyunyan, SUNY-Binghamton public administration fellow from Armenia.

"Marianna assisted greatly with marketing efforts and community volunteerism. She was very helpful and reliable. She was invaluable."

William Gilmore of Arlington Parks and Recreation, describing Marianna Tanina, University of Texas Arlington public policy fellow from Tajikistan.

BUILDING MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

92% of community service supervisors intend to **continue professional contact** with the Muskie fellow in the future.

88% of supervisors say that hosting a **fellow increased their organization's understanding** of the fellow's home community.

Communication in Crisis

Tariyel Jalalli (Muskie 2007) received a research fellowship from the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs to examine a case study of regional flooding which took place in spring 2010 in Azerbaijan. The case study examined how the government implemented communications during the flood. Jalalli analyzed media coverage of government activities, official statements and news releases of the Azerbaijani government and online discussion of the crisis. His textual analysis of the comments of government officials and government news releases was conducted to see how the government framed its own activities. He found that in 38% of articles, media coverage of the government's

activities was negative. In 15% of analyzed articles, the media considered the government responsible for the breakdown in communications during the time of crisis.

Based on the results of his research, Jalalli prepared policy recommendations, the main being a creation of a governmental institution responsible for governmental communications in Azerbaijan. Jalalli works as a PR consultant at the Asian Development Bank Azerbaijani Resident Mission and teaches Organizational Communication/Organizational Behavior at Khazar University. His research interests include crisis communications, campaign communication management, issue management, and social media.

Active Alumnus, Active Citizen

As a winner of British Council's Active Citizens Program in Azerbaijan, **Fargani Aliyev** (Muskie 2007) was invited to take part in the Azerbaijani Students and Alumni International Forum (ASAIF) in Strasbourg, France, in March of this year. The Forum was attended by several Ministers, Ambassadors of Azerbaijan, members of Parliament, heads of youth organizations, Azerbaijani students and alumni abroad, as well as representatives of European Parliament and Council of Europe. The fundamental goal of ASAIF's Strasbourg meeting was to explore and create new means and possibilities to invest in invaluable young talents of Azerbaijan and stressed the importance of investing in human capital.

Participation in the forum presented a unique opportunity for Aliyev to share his ideas with influential members of

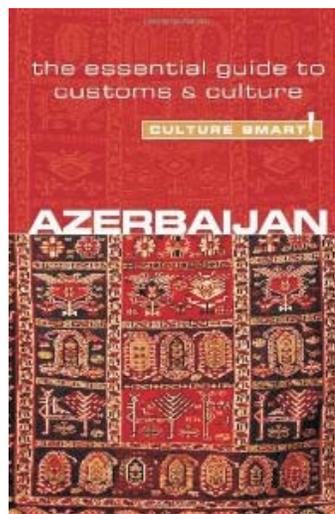
the Azerbaijani government. "As we discussed the future human capital development strategies in Azerbaijan, I emphasized the need for opening leadership departments and launching leadership programs within universities," said Aliyev.

Aliyev has also established the Education, Development and Leadership Center in Khachmaz, a place where active community members can learn conversational English through paid courses as well as enjoy free-of-charge English conversation clubs led by native English speakers, use Wi-Fi, technical equipment and meeting space. The Center also provides consulting services and resources to various NGOs, community groups, unions and individual citizens on various aspects of developmental issues.



Aliyev, far right, with other attendees at ASAIF 2011.

ALUMNI UPDATES



A journalism graduate of the University of Missouri-Columbia, **Nikki Kazimova** (Muskie 1998) has furthered her education by obtaining cross-cultural training credentials and working as a trainer delivering cultural orientation programs for newcomers to Azerbaijan. As a combination of her journalism and cross-cultural careers, Kazimova wrote a book about Azerbaijan for the "Culture Smart" series published by the Kuperard Publishers in London in 2011. In recent months, she has published newspaper and magazine articles on arts and literature for Transitions Online and for Echo newspaper and conducted interviews for the Women's Voices project funded by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation. Kazimova is also working on a piece of fiction that will soon be posted online as a part of a cross-border conflict resolution project in the Caucasus. Kazimova also took the initiative to start a series of public lectures by Muskie alumni that has been successfully carried through by the U.S.-Educated Azerbaijan Alumni Association (AAA). Through the recently launched Muskie Academy, alumni were invited to teach courses on the subjects of their expertise and many responded with fascinating lecture subjects. Delivered from March to May 2011, the seminars were popular with students eager to learn from graduates of American universities.

Nara Martirosyan (Muskie 2005) recently joined Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) as an Education Program Manager. COAF <www.coafkids.org> implements a comprehensive rural development program in the Baghramyan region of Armavir marz with a focus on education, healthcare, psychosocial assistance, infrastructure renovation and economic development. She also received approval for a Summer Academy grant proposal made in cooperation with colleagues at Syunik Benevolent NGO in Vayots Dzor, funded by the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations with funds from the German Federal Foreign Office. The project is entitled *Establishing a Human Resources Network for Peace in South Caucasus* and aims to prepare young trainers in conflict analysis, conflict management, conflict transformation, conflict mediation and conflict resolution. The Summer Academy will take place during the second half of June and first part of July and will involve young activists from Armenia and Georgia.

ALUMNI SHORTS · ALUMNI SHORTS · ALUMNI SHORTS · ALUMNI SHORTS

Dimitri Gvindadze (Muskie 2003) was appointed Minister of Finance in Georgia. A graduate of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, Gvindadze previously served as Deputy Finance Minister.

Maksym Klyuchar (Muskie 2009) joined the United Nations Development Program in Crimea, Ukraine as a Gender Coordinator.

Vitaliy Razik (Muskie 2003) was elected Director of the Regional Charitable Foundation, Law and Democracy, a Ukrainian NGO engaged in human rights protection. Since his election, Razik has

conducted seminars for public officials on amendments to the law on anticorruption.

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Submission guidelines:

If you are interested in making a submission to the Muskie Messenger, please fill out the online news submission form <<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/muskieneews>> or email muskie_messenger@irex.org by August 31, 2011. ECA and IREX reserve the right to edit submission content. Not every submission will be printed.



Bureau of Educational
and Cultural Affairs

www.exchanges.state.gov



ALUMNI OPPORTUNITIES

US Government sponsored exchange alumni are eligible to take part in various Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) supported conference and training activities. In addition to events that support large audiences, individual alumni may apply for small grants that fund the organization of community service activities, conferences, publications, Internet-related activities, research trips, training programs, the creation of associations and other activities.

ECA Alumni Programming for Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program Alumni

State Alumni Website: The State Alumni website is an online community by and for alumni of US Government sponsored exchange and training programs. As of May 2004, the website has over 8,500 registered users. The content of the site is updated every day and alumni are encouraged to submit information to the website for posting. Features of the website include: calendar of upcoming alumni events, job listings and career development information, searchable database of alumni and US host families who have registered at the site, grant opportunity listings, live online discussions, discussion forum, alumni news, alumni resume database, articles written by alumni, feedback form/online survey, live online guest speakers, photo gallery, and the Alumni ListServ. <<https://alumni.state.gov>>

The ECA Alumni Small Grants Program (ASGP): Alumni may apply for a grant of up to \$3,000 to conduct a community development or professional development project. Fundable project ideas include coordinating a community service project, launching a pilot program at an NGO or organizing a training program for professional colleagues and/or other alumni. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. <<http://www.irex.org/programs/asgp/index.asp>>

Project Smile: Project Smile is a community development program aimed at helping youth, the elderly and the disabled in Eurasia. Each grantee will receive up to \$250 to perform public service in their home city. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis. <<http://www.irex.org/programs/smile/index.asp>>

Alumni Events: IREX and the US Embassy organize monthly alumni events in all 12 countries of Eurasia. These events include workshops, conferences, trainings, roundtable discussions, happy hours, movie nights, seminars and lectures. Larger scale events include job fairs that allow alumni to have their resumes reviewed, learn about the current job market in their home country, and meet with potential employers. IREX local offices and the Embassies encourage alumni to actively participate in the development and implementation of such events.

MUSKIE FELLOWSHIP

About the Muskie Program

The Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program is a program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the United States Department of State, and implemented by IREX (the International Research and Exchanges Board). Since 1992, the Muskie program has provided opportunities for Master's level study in the United States to more than 4,000 of the most talented citizens from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

Through their academic studies, internships, and community service, fellows come in close contact with Americans and make direct connections with American universities, businesses, social-service organizations, schools, and other institutions, allowing them to develop a deeper understanding of U.S. values and ideals, such as democratic leadership.

Goals

Promote mutual understanding, build democracy, and foster the transition to market economies in Eurasia through intensive academic study and professional training. Returning Muskie fellows contribute professionally, engage in democratic processes in their home countries, and strengthen relationships between the U.S. and their home countries.

Additional Information

For more information about the fellowship application process, please see <<http://www.irex.org/programs/muskie>>.

Universities interested in hosting a Muskie fellow can visit <<http://www.irex.org/application/muskie-host-application>> for more information and to join the Muskie Host Universities listserv.

