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**VITA: Volunteer Initiative in Turkey and Armenia**

Promoting volunteerism and civic engagement through community service

“Everybody can be great... because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”― Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Statement of Purpose**

As communication between Turkey and Armenia remains limited and continuous issues persist, residents on both sides of the border continue to be affected. Young people from both Turkey and Armenia continue to feel the impact of the political tension. Since its inception, HasNa has worked with promoting constructive dialogue between varying ethnic groups who reside in Turkey, Armenia, and Cyprus. HasNa projects focus on uniting individuals from both sides of the border around the idea of bringing peace, tolerance and understanding into their communities via collaboration and communication.

Volunteerism and civic engagement are the cornerstones of a strong nation, thus implementing a volunteer based program will bring together Turkish and Armenian youth separated by the border, to work together and give back to their respective communities Volunteerism is at an all-time low in both Turkey and Armenia, with volunteerism rates of 2.5% and less than 1%, respectively (source UNDP). By exposing them to volunteerism in the United States, where over 27% of citizens are active volunteers, the youth will be immersed in a culture of volunteerism and return to their respective countries capable of promoting community involvement. It is through practical first-hand experience that these participants will create and begin their own community service projects and recruit other individuals to assist them in Armenia and Turkey. Inspiration for this program stems from the success of HasNa’s Volunteer Network Program that was implemented in Cyprus in 2007-2008.

**Objectives**

VITA: Volunteer Initiative in Turkey and Armenia aims to create links between Turkish and Armenian youth and to construct cross-cultural networks among them and their communities. The program achieves this aim through training and activities that highlight the social benefits of volunteerism and civic engagement. The program was planned with the intention that the Turkish and Armenian youth will design and implement community service initiatives in their home communities throughout Turkey and Armenia.

**Program Components**

During the two-phase program, 20 Turkish and Armenian youth from various ethnic, gender and income backgrounds will participate and gain practical experience on how to effectively be involved in their communities. The first phase will last two weeks and take place in Washington, DC. While in Washington, DC the participants will be exposed to volunteerism in the United States through training and service learning activities. They then will put in to practice what they have learned when they return to their home countries. During phase two, the participants will embark on implementing a community service initiative in their own community. Here is where they will recruit other youth to participate in various projects and activities that focus on community service (ex. assisting their neighbors, fellow community members, and the elderly, as well as helping other organizations throughout their communities). The main goal of the program is for the participants to gain an understanding of the importance of volunteerism and civic engagement so they can become active participants in the development of their communities.

**Outcomes**

1. Increased participant awareness of the importance of volunteerism and civic engagement;
2. Stronger relationships between Turkish and Armenian youth by uniting them through community service projects in their own communities and cross-border;
3. Establishment of a strong network of individuals for future collaboration and communication on both sides of the border;
4. The promotion of peace building activities, especially volunteerism, by spreading awareness about what they have learned among friends, family, academic networks, and colleagues.
5. Design and implementation of service programs throughout Turkey and Armenia.
6. All created resources will be used by HasNa for outreach and the further promoting cooperation between Turkish and Armenian youth.