Theme - A journey from hope to belief

A free and open society demands creative new ideas and the means to test and share those ideas. Peace Dialogue is committed to providing the place, space and time people need to make people more aware of the choices they can make as individuals in order to have a more civil society, promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts and to have and hold an expanded awareness of the place of human rights. Further, we realize that a free, diverse and democratic society requires a safe and comfortable place for them to develop; share and talk about their ideas and to be around others who have also have a deeper awareness and understanding of these issues. For this reason, we have always allowed those who are interested in continuing to grow explore and produce media dealing with these issues to have a safe and open place to do this, and so our facility is open to all who wish join the effort to improve the civil condition in Armenia.

We invite all to come and interact with staff and friends in a safe and open environment. We provide them with internet access and places to sit, read and relax. We also give them the resources to work on projects and ideas that advance our mission. One of the goals of this Global Giving Initiative is to provide more and better resources for them to do this work. Our six year old video camera is no match for the creative minds who want to make new more engaging films. Our one MAC computer is no match for the creative energy the cartoon and film makers bring to their desire to influence society and our way out of date projector leaves young audiences wondering where is the 60 inch High Definition monitor that shows off their skills as media creators for a new Armenian conciseness of hope. One big issue inspired by this group is the conditions they and all average Armenians face in their transportation options. The deplorable condition of the buses and marshutnis, the autonomous actions of many drivers in regards to the treatment of passengers, the irregularity of the routes and schedules and the lack of answers when complaints were filed forced us to devote some of our own resources to this problem We have petitioned the Mayors’ office on numerous occasions but have yet to receive satisfactory answers. We are still asking questions and have retained a lawyer to see if we can enforce some accountability on this most important of public services.  Besides providing a place to deal with everyday issues like transportation, this group recently made a movie that presented a broad and enlightened view of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and how that conflict has affected the lives of three men, all of whom were caught up in the conflict. In addition, we have continued a project called CINE-MOBILIZATION were movies that deal with the social, political and civil rights issues are screened and act as a catalyst for discussion. A new program called Conversations on Critical Thinking in English attracts young people looking to improve critical thinking and their ability to communicate complex ideas in English.

Peace Dialogue started with the hope that we could make a difference in the way Armenian society looked at and reacted to issues around conflict, human rights and the critical thinking needed to run a truly democratic society that embraces the diversity of culture and ideas it holds and do it all in a peaceful way. We have been doing this since 2009 through grassroots organizations and hands on workshops, presentations, trainings, public actions, and research, both here and in our neighboring countries of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Russia, and Ukraine. We have created an online presence that reaches deep within Armenian society and around the globe. We now believe that we are making a difference in Armenia’s transition into a peaceful more civically active community that accepts diversity.

We continue to learn and understand more and more about how the people of Armenia understand the concepts of peace and democracy in the context of their history, present conditions and the future that they and their children will live one day. We commissioned and published online a sociological research project to bring greater understanding of the full effect this context has on society so we can more finely tailor our work and help bring the young people of Armenia to a broader understanding of the choices they actually have. Unfortunately, we find that many of our fellow countrymen have yet to reach a level of hope, let alone a belief that change can and will come. We have lots more to do but we need the ideas and input of the next generations to continue to be involved with us and we need the resources they require to tell the stories they see as key to their better future.

Most post-Soviet countries like Armenia inherited intractable issues and conflicts; because of this we all face many internal and external challenges. There are violent conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia, internal ethnic conflicts in the Russian Federation in the North-Caucasian region and most recently a violent conflict between Ukraine and Russia. The effect of all these conflicts creates a deep sense of insecurity throughout the region and makes it very challenging to promote peace and non-violent forms of conflict resolution

This pervasive atmosphere of fear, mistrust, and apathy, along with the militarization of the culture hinders the activities of civil society actors and the development of a civil society that respects both democracy and diversity. This applies especially to members of the younger generation who did not grow up under the Soviet system but live with their parents and grand-parents sense of what is and what is not possible. Unfortunately for too many of them, leaving the country is the best option they have.

‘Patriotic’ reconstructions of history, with images of victimization and heroism are widespread and are used to legitimize human rights violations and the lack of civic engagement. The perceptions of a collective identity, national, religious or cultural norms and strict adherence to traditional gender roles are all used to construct a single story of “victims“, “heroes”, “internal and external enemies”, the “ours” and the “others”, as well as for the legitimization of violence.

The value and role of the individual is rarely addressed in our society. This tradition harkens back to the Soviet era, when individual were seen as a mere component of a greater society. Any manifestation of diversity and pluralism, as well as any new ideas, interest in change, or the expression of a need for more civil decency and the promotion of human rights is regarded as a deviation from the national value system and as such most likely is the result of foreign influence and should be immediately suppressed. Individuals are seen as faceless creatures that are endowed with the obligation to serve the national interest with few if any inalienable rights, especially not the right to be involved in the decision making process.

The authorities are constantly reminding the citizens that the greatest value is manifested in their dedicated love and unconditional commitment to the motherland. This is done through the mass media and even the educational system. In a country at war, any criticism or appeal for civil disobedience is marked as betrayal and a willingness to sell the homeland to enemies. Nationalism is identified with patriotism and critical thinking is a problem, not part of any solution, especially a solution that would promote peace.

Promoting dialogue and critical thinking in our society and across conflict lines is both rewarding and necessary if we are to improve the situation in our country. We see a compelling need to intensify the links between communities in order to strengthen the participation of ordinary people whose daily life, attitudes, rights and behavior are affected by the existing structural weakness, cultural violence and never ending conflicts. Our belief is that conflict is not the answer to social issues.

Societies change very slowly, cultures even slower and attitudes about either one even longer. Crisis may accelerate this timeline, but crisis carries its own set of consequences, most of which are unintended and unwanted. Peace Dialogue approaches its work with a deep understanding and respect for this reality. As activists who document and empower those who openly discuss and criticize existing Armenian attitudes and governmental practices, we take a long term view of the changes and steps included in those changes. Our programs and projects are planned and implemented understanding this and are therefore constructed as multiyear multi-dimensional projects with both short and long term effects. We want all to be aware of this perspective which we at Peace Dialogue take and to please evaluate our work in terms of the long term perspective which we know is the only way true societal change takes place.

Peace Dialogue NGO, founded in 2009, was registered in Armenia with the mission to unite experienced peace activists of countries such as Armenia, Russia, Georgia, Germany and the Netherlands in order to support the active participation of civil society in the processes of peaceful conflict transformation through respectful multilevel dialogue among members of conflicting societies. Our belief is that dialogue is the only way to clearly express our interests, develop symbiotic collaborations and find ways to achieve a lasting peace. The long-term goal is to promote understanding and prevent new conflicts. The vision of the organization is that through the formation of these multilayer dialogues and through promoting the full and complete engagement of the younger generations we will be able to create a consciousness among members of society so that they themselves are responsible for peace and that they are fully vested with the right to demand peace from the authorities.