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# Serving the Young: A Volunteer's Assessment of Youth Development Non-Governmental Organizations in Northern Kazakhstan

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Daniel Wienecke

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*“And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.”*

- John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, 1961

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report will provide a summary of professional and academic activities related to my service as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Kazakhstan, Central Asia.

This report is first and foremost the story of my Peace Corps experience, told from the perspective of an NGO Development Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) serving at youth development organizations and educational institutions in northern Kazakhstan. The foundation for my service has been rooted in my graduate studies at the Illinois State University Stevenson Center and through my Peace Corps training. This report does not necessarily represent the ideas, goals, or policies of the Stevenson Center or the U.S. Peace Corps; rather, it is primarily autobiographical and based upon my individual perspective working as a volunteer within the sphere of youth development. I have attempted, however, to merge personal experience with theories of community and organizational development derived from coursework at the Stevenson Center and from Peace Corps training materials. My intent is to combine this theory with my practical experience in order to form general conclusions about serving youth development NGOs, educational institutions, and young people in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

### *Illinois State University Stevenson Center – Master’s International Program*

In January, 2004, I began my graduate studies in Political Science at the Illinois State University Stevenson Center through the Peace Corps Master’s International Program. This interdisciplinary program combines Peace Corps service with graduate coursework in politics and government, economics, or sociology. Students who participate in this program spend approximately one year attending classes before leaving for two years of service in the U.S. Peace Corps. I entered the program with the knowledge that I would take classes preparing me for work in the sphere of community development. I felt that a firm knowledge of community development practices and the management of NGOs

would be useful in my future profession. More specifically, I felt that this particular graduate program would provide a strong theoretical and practical basis for two years of Peace Corps service. The study of community development and NGO-related practices, while still fairly new as an academic discipline, is swiftly becoming a growing interest for students, scholars, and professionals in the U.S. and the world over, a trend that I believe suggests the increasing significance and professionalism of NGO-related activities throughout the world; and a trend that I think provides hope for those involved in the socially-oriented goals connected with NGOs.

My decision to choose the Peace Corps Master's International Program for my course of study was mainly rooted in the fact that, long before beginning my undergraduate education, I had thought about joining the Peace Corps and wanted my service to be more beneficial to myself and others. The best way to do this would be by gaining an academic understanding of such an abstract idea as "community development" and how to go from theory to reality. I entered the program with a strong interest in the sphere of community development, international relations, and the various roles played by American and international non-governmental organizations. I also entered the program with some experience working at NGOs and non-profits in the U.S., and with experience living and teaching abroad. The Master's International program, I felt, would provide a strong link between my previous experiences and future ambitions. Lastly, I believed at the time (and still do) that a combined graduate degree in political science, along with two years of Peace Corps service, would open doors for future employment opportunities in the U.S. and abroad.

### *Internship*

At the same time that my classes at the Stevenson Center were providing me with coursework and theory related to the sphere of community development, I had one year of practical experience working as an intern at a non-profit organization in Bloomington, Illinois called the McLean County Community Compact. The mission of the McLean County Community Compact is to "facilitate the preparation of school-age youth for a more effective transition from formal schooling to the world of work"

(www.communitycompact.com). As such, most of the programs organized at the “Compact” were designed to prepare school-aged children for their future by engaging them in such activities as job shadowing, leadership conferences, food drives, and academic competitions. Like the non-governmental organizations I have worked with in Kazakhstan, the “Compact” was an organization with a fairly small staff who accomplished its organizational mission by partnering with businesses, educational institutions, and other non-profit organizations.

While interning at the organization, I had an excellent preparation for my Peace Corps service. My two main projects at the Compact were: 1) organizing a job fair at a rural high school and 2) coordinating a “Teens in Prevention” (TIPS) leadership conference for 100 students from ten high schools in Bloomington-Normal. Much like my work in Kazakhstan, to successfully reach my project goals required me to meet face to face with many teachers, advisors, students, business representatives, and representatives of other non-profit organizations. I learned the value of “foot work” over phone calls and the importance of building strong personal relationships. And like in Kazakhstan, I learned that a smile and a heartfelt “thank you” can be more important than a strategic plan. In sum, the McLean County Community Compact was also a classroom that prepared me for the challenges and rewards of working within evolving youth development organizations.

### *Peace Corps Service*

It is important to mention at the beginning of this report that half-way through my service I changed host organizations. After more than one year with my original host NGO, I made the decision to move to another organization. The reasons for this change will be elaborated upon later. By means of introduction, however, it is important to mention that any general theories I ascribe to my NGO and community development activities in Kazakhstan are largely based upon comparisons, contrasts, and observations of these two organizations.

Lastly, this report is *not* the full story of my Peace Corps experience: it has been written while still in service. The completion of this report comes at a time when I have approximately two months (out of twenty-four) remaining as a volunteer. This report is not meant to be an exhaustive description of my service, but rather, a document that highlights what I consider to be my most significant activities, accomplishments, and even failures, as a Peace Corps Volunteer.



### **ESTABLISHMENT AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE U.S. PEACE CORPS**

The U.S. Peace Corps was created in 1961 by executive order of President John F. Kennedy. The Peace Corps Act was signed into law by Congress on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1961 with the following declaration of purpose:

The Congress of the United States declares that it is the policy of the United States and the purpose of this Act to promote world peace and friendship through a Peace Corps, which shall make available to interested countries and areas men and women of the United States qualified for service abroad and willing to serve, under conditions of hardship if necessary, *to help the peoples of such countries and areas in meeting their needs for trained manpower*, particularly in meeting the basic needs of those living in the poorest areas of such countries, and *to help promote a better understanding of the American people on the part of the peoples served and a better understanding of other peoples on the part of the American people.* (*Peace Corps Kazakhstan Volunteer Handbook, p. 3*).

The purpose of the Peace Corps has been, since its creation forty-five years ago, to promote “world peace” and “friendship” by giving able and willing U.S. citizens the opportunity to perform social work abroad. Volunteers make available social and technical services by providing training (or simply dialogue) to interested persons and organizations. The overall mission of the Peace Corps is essentially social: volunteers should spend their time with the people, learning their language, culture, and traditions, and in turn, teaching ideas or skills that will help them meet their needs. As stated in the Peace Corps Act, volunteers work to promote “a better understanding of American people” as well as to promote “a better understanding of other peoples.”

Although I have often had doubts throughout my service, such as questioning the effectiveness or necessity of my work or my ability to pass along technical skills, I have found that on a daily basis throughout my life in Kazakhstan, that by communicating with the people in both their native tongue and mine, I have been able to live up to the purposes contained in the Peace Corps Act.

**JOB ASSIGNMENT**

I remember the moment quite well when I first received my invitation to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer. The time and setting were apropos: I was working at my internship with a small, non-profit youth development organization located in the flat, grain-covered land of central Illinois. The time of year was October and the weather was starting to get cold and windy. Amid this background, I learned that in a few short months I would be working at a similar kind of organization as a PCV. I did not know it at the time, but the place where I would be working is located in a flat, grain-covered land with often cold, windy weather. I had been invited to serve in Kazakhstan, Central Asia through the “NGO Development Track.” My invitation stated, among many things, that PCVs serving in this track would help developing organizations focus on the following: “improving organizational operations; gaining access to information and resources; training in data gathering, analysis, and problem solving” (*A Welcome Book: Kazakhstan*, 2003, p.5). While I did not know at the time what organization I would work with or what work I would do, I did at least know that I would spend my two year’s of service primarily serving at an NGO.

My decision to accept was fairly easy. I had already known, and worked with, a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) who had previously served as an Education volunteer in Kazakhstan and she had given me a positive testimony of her service. What excited me more than simply having learned about Peace Corps Kazakhstan from a first-hand source, however, was the feeling that serving as an NGO volunteer was perfectly suited to my academic studies and professional interests. No soon-to-be volunteer can truly predict, or even reasonably grasp, what his or her Peace Corps experience will be like; yet, I accepted the assignment with a sense of optimism, adventure, and determination. Now looking back at my original thoughts and emotions I do realize that of course I was naïve in many ways: like most people mentally preparing themselves for the Peace Corps, I set for myself expectations that were probably too high. All things considered, since accepting my job assignment, my personal and professional experience has turned out to be interesting, challenging, fun, intellectually stimulating, rewarding, and worthwhile.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF KAZAKHSTAN**

Before describing in detail my work experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Kazakhstan, a brief history of the country is important to provide a cultural, historical, and societal foundation for the environment I have been working in.

### *Early Kazakh Society*

The earliest evidence of Kazakh society and culture dates back to roughly 500 BCE. At this time, the Kazakh people were largely nomadic hunter-gathers who roamed the vast steppe in covered “yurts” (tents) and organized themselves in a tribal system. The Kazakhs were internally divided and formed three separate tribes, or *zhuzes*: the Great Horde (*Ulu Zhuz*), located in south-eastern Kazakhstan; the Middle Horde (*Orta Zhuz*), located in central and northern Kazakhstan; and the Little Horde (*Kishi Zhuz*), located in western Kazakhstan near the Aral Sea. Not unlike the Mongol empire located to the East, the various Kazakh hordes were a conglomerate of smaller tribes gathered together under the leadership of a single khan (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia Deluxe, 2005).

Due to the harsh weather and the wind, the three Kazakh *zhuzes* did not build large cities and did not develop an extensive agricultural system. Rather, the Kazakhs traveled according to the season and sustenance was mostly gathered by hunting wild game such as horse or deer (Mayhew, Clammer, and Kohn, 2004, p. 86). The Kazakhs early love affair with meat is still evidenced today as most families in Kazakhstan eat meat with nearly every meal. In fact, the Kazakh national dish, *besbarmak*, is cooked with horse or sheep meat and noodles, and is customarily served at most family and national celebrations.

### *Russian Imperialism*

The Kazakhs started to lose their traditional status as nomadic “steppe roamers” when a combination of political agreements and outright imperialism by the Russian Empire to the North transformed the region along more European lines. In 1731, and again in 1742, the Kazakhs swore loyalty to Russia in order to receive protection from a Siberian tribe called the Oyrats. Later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Empire interpreted these oaths as

permission for the tsar to annex Kazakh territories. Thereafter, the Kazakh tribes engaged in a number of futile uprisings against their Russian neighbors. By 1870, it is estimated that one million (out of a population of four million) Kazakhs died in revolts and famines brought upon by tsarist Russia (Mayhew et al., 2004, p. 86).

### *The Soviet Union*

Imperial Russian control of Kazakh territory in the 19<sup>th</sup> century later led to the incorporation of Kazakh territory into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) during the 1920s and eventually to the creation of the “Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic” (K.S.S.R.) in 1936 (Mayhew et al., 2004, p. 87).

Under the control of Moscow, the Soviet Union used and abused the territory of Kazakhstan. The K.S.S.R.’s greatest value to the U.S.S.R. was its natural resources (such as wheat, coal, iron, and oil). Despite this natural wealth, however, the Soviets experimented with some environmentally disastrous agricultural projects that heavily polluted the region’s land, water, and air. The worst of these environmental experiments was the irrigation of the Aral Sea which reduced the sea to one-third its original size, polluted the air and ground surrounding the sea, and virtually destroyed the sea’s population of fish (Cernea and Kudat, 1997, p. 100). Additionally, as the Soviets considered Kazakhstan to be a large and remote wasteland, various areas were often used for nuclear testing (Mayhew et al., 2004, p. 86).

Throughout the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, the territory of Kazakhstan was used first by Stalin as a “dumping ground” to deport a wide variety of ethnic groups, and later, as a place where Khrushchev encouraged ethnic Russians to emigrate and find work on farms and in factories. Stalin deported and shifted around thousands of ethnic minorities in order to displace unwanted minorities, to punish ethnic groups whose relatives fought against the U.S.S.R. in World War II, and to build factories on the undeveloped Kazakh steppe. Later, in the 1950s, Khrushchev initiated the “Virgin Lands” campaign wherein over 800,000 Russian and Ukrainian migrant workers were invited to settle in northern Kazakhstan and harvest wheat (Mayhew et al., 2004, p. 87).

Evidence of Stalin's and Khrushchev's game of ethnic dominoes remains in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century as Kazakhstan is currently home to large numbers of ethnic Germans, Koreans, Ukrainians, Roma, Uighurs, and Tatars. So immense were Stalin's and Khrushchev's migration policies that in the 1950s the number of ethnic Kazakhs in the territory of Kazakhstan was only 30% (Mayhew et al., 2004, p. 87). Understandably, in present-day Kazakhstan there is a large push by the government and ethnic Kazakhs to revive Kazakh language, history, culture, and traditions in schools, universities, government, television, radio, media, and at public events.

### *Independence*

In 1992, shortly following the break-up of the Soviet Union the previous year, Kazakhstan became an independent, parliamentary democracy. Since that time, Nursultan Nazarbaev has served as the acting president. The government has three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. The Republic of Kazakhstan is divided into fourteen administrative regions referred to as *oblasts* which are managed by an *akim* (similar to a governor in the U.S. system) who is selected by the president.

### *The Emergence of Non-Governmental Organizations*

Since gaining independence, Kazakhstan has been steadily making the transition from a centrally planned economy with a socialist government, to a free-market democracy. In this atmosphere, the civil society of Kazakhstan has witnessed the introduction of "NGOs" (non-governmental organizations).

*A Welcome Book: Kazakhstan*, a pamphlet I received before accepting my invitation to serve in the Peace Corps, states the following about NGOs in Kazakhstan:

NGOs in Kazakhstan range from small, loosely organized groups of individuals with a single-purpose mission to well-funded and well-managed organizations with a complex set of objectives. Many of these NGOs need to increase their organizational capacity in order to achieve sustainability. They need help in working with communities to define

community needs and to develop strategies for accomplishing their goals  
(*A Welcome Book: Kazakhstan*, 2003, p. 8).

These newly formed NGOs, while springing up rapidly throughout Kazakhstan, have encountered serious developmental challenges since their inception. First is simply the problem of recognition: any organization that strives to be successful wants (and needs) to be recognized by the public and its potential clients. As the average NGO in Kazakhstan has operated for less than ten years, even highly successful and well-organized NGOs still struggle to gain recognition. Next is the challenge of preparing the public (and private sector) for the idea of an NGO. As most NGOs engage in non-commercial work, selling the idea of an organization that does not exist solely for profit or to produce a product is often difficult for many people, businesses, and potential sponsors to grasp.

In her work, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*, Martha Brill Olcott describes some of the political challenges the newly independent Central Asian state has faced concerning NGOs. Olcott (2002) asserts:

Even when political life in the country was at its freest, in the early 1990s, Kazakhstan was moving toward a kind of managed democracy where the ruling elite set strict barriers on those engaged in independent political actions [ . . . ] The constraints make it impossible for independent local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to attract a broad membership (p. 95).

In her assessment of the political obstacles facing Kazakhstani NGOs, Olcott (2002) adds: “The freedom of action afforded most NGOs in Kazakhstan is steadily diminishing, particularly those that are genuinely independent of ties to the government” (p. 183).

Olcott’s assessment of NGOs is primarily based upon her observation of Kazakhstan’s political system. As the Peace Corps is strictly a non-political organization, I have chosen not to focus very much on the political challenges facing young NGOs in Kazakhstan. Rather, my observations and actions have been spent mainly concentrating on what a Peace Corps Volunteer and local citizens can realistically do with the time and materials they have in order to successfully help develop grassroots NGOs.

## DEFINITION OF NGO

The simple definition of an NGO, let alone the activities these organizations engage in, is not always precise. Indeed, the literature referring to the sphere of activities generally connected to NGOs does not provide a clear definition. Rather, these organizations have been ascribed with various names, acronyms, descriptions, and even limitations regarding what does and does not constitute an NGO. For example, in Russian and in English, “NGOs” in Kazakhstan are ascribed with more than a dozen different terms and acronyms.

David Lewis (2001), author of *The Management of Non-Governmental Development Organizations*, provides two working definitions for NGO. Lewis’s first definition is a very loose one drawn from the international law literature of Charnovitz. In his definition, Charnovitz asserts that “NGOs are groups of individuals organized for the myriad of reasons that engage human imagination and aspiration” (Lewis, 2001, p. 36). This definition seems to view NGOs more as a collection of individuals with idealist goals, rather than as physical organizations, businesses, or offices. Under this definition, almost any group of people who have come together with a set purpose could be described as an NGO: book clubs, after-school programs, sports teams, Bible study groups, etc. For Charnovitz, the activities NGO participants engage in connected with “human imagination” and “aspiration” is more significant than a formally structured business, office, or organization.

While Charnovitz’s definition of NGO may be unsatisfactory in terms of what constitutes an “organization”, it is actually appropriate to use this definition in regards to NGOs operating in Kazakhstan. Indeed, some Peace Corps Volunteers have included as part of their primary or secondary projects spending time trying to develop groups, organizations, or offices that are not legally registered entities. Furthermore, according to one Peace Corps technical training session, while the government of Kazakhstan reports approximately 4,000 NGOs in the country, there are only about 1,000 that are functioning organizations.

Lewis (2001) counters Charnovitz's relatively open categorization of "NGO" with a second definition: "NGOs are organizations concerned in some sense with social or economic change – an agenda normally associated with the concept of 'development'" (p. 36). This definition focuses more on the *organization* and purpose aspect of NGOs, while still remaining the part of Charnovitz's definition that refers to social change. This second definition would seem to suggest that organizations are established with the expressed purpose of bringing about some form of social and/or economic change. Lewis (2001) continues, "'non-governmental organization' is therefore used to describe a subset of third sector organizations concerned with development, human rights, and social change" (p. 38).

Lewis's second definition of non-governmental organization better suits the NGO environment I have witnessed and served with. In particular, the NGOs that I have encountered in Kazakhstan generally fall into the category of organizations that have as their primary mission social or economic advancement. In Kazakhstan, and throughout the world, NGOs are often viewed (even relied upon) as organizations that provide services not generally provided by the government or private sector (*An NGO Training Guide*, 2003, p. 1). According to *An NGO Training Guide for Peace Corps Volunteers*, NGO "is the most common name used internationally for an organization formed to help others" (*An NGO Training Guide*, 2003, p. 29). Thus, a simply working definition for NGO is an organization that provides services with the expressed intention of bringing about social, economic, or developmental change.

As a volunteer, I generally refer to Lewis's second definition of NGO when I explain to local people from Kazakhstan and friends in the U.S. the sphere I have been trying to develop. A small, but important, role that I believe NGO Volunteers can play is simply explaining to people unfamiliar with NGOs what they are and what sets them apart from private sector businesses. Before any societal action can take place, people should first be aware of the apparatuses that can be used to bring about meaningful change. Raising awareness of what, exactly, a non-governmental organization is helps draw attention to the social and economic activities these organizations are engaged in. I have found



throughout my work in Kazakhstan that the simple *presence* of an American at a local NGO can draw a lot of attention to the *activities* of the organization. Being an outsider often means that people not only become interested in you, but in turn the organization you are working with. The advantage this gives a foreign volunteer is that they can use their unique position to draw the interest and help of local volunteers. Indeed, according to *A Welcome Book: Kazakhstan*, one important role NGO Peace Corps Volunteers can perform is to “motivate local volunteers” (*A Welcome Book: Kazakhstan*, 2003, p. 9). I have found that my position as a foreigner has helped attract a large amount of local volunteerism and participation at the organizations I have worked with.

#### *Four Characteristics of NGOs*

During Pre-Service Training, each trainee received a copy of *An NGO Training Guide for Peace Corps Volunteers*, a publication written for the use of all NGO and capacity building Peace Corps Volunteers. The training guide lists four main characteristics that distinguish NGOs, as defined by a London-based NGO study group called The Commonwealth Foundation. Originally published in 1995 in *Non-Governmental Organizations: Guidelines for Good Policy and Practices*, The Commonwealth Foundation defines the following four main characteristics of NGOs:

1. **Voluntary:** NGOs are formed voluntarily by citizens with an element of voluntary participation in the organization [...]
2. **Independent:** NGOs are independent within the laws of society, and are controlled by those who have formed them or by elected or appointed boards [...]
3. **Not-for-profit:** NGOs are not for private personal profit or gain. NGOs may, in many countries, engage in revenue-generating activities, but must use the revenue solely in pursuit of the organization’s mission [...]
4. **Not self-serving in aims and related values:** The aims of NGOs are to improve the circumstances and prospects of people and to act on concerns and issues detrimental to the well-being, circumstances, or prospects of people or society as a whole. (*An NGO Training Guide*, 2003, p. 19).

From what I have witnessed working at non-profits and NGOs in the U.S. and Kazakhstan, this description of what constitutes an NGO is fairly accurate. Particularly,

the NGOs I have worked at or assisted in northern Kazakhstan have been non-profit organizations whose mission has been to help improve some aspect of society. These organizations and their daily activities have been more or less independent; albeit, often operating under duress generated by the city government. Lastly, these NGOs employed full-time, paid staff members, but were largely dependent upon the assistance of local volunteers.

## **KAZ-16 AND PRE-SERVICE TRAINING**

I first arrived in Kazakhstan in March, 2005 where I first spent two months in Pre-Service Training (PST) before officially becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer. Every Peace Corps group undergoes approximately ten to twelve weeks of formal training before the volunteers actually go “into the field.” Individual groups and country program serve different needs, thus every group’s training is designed differently. My training group was titled “Kaz-16”: “Kaz” is an abbreviation for Kazakhstan and “16” refers to the fact that my group was the sixteenth group of trainees to arrive in the country since Peace Corps began working in Kazakhstan in 1993 (*A Welcome Book: Kazakhstan*, 2003, p.4). The Kaz-16 training group consisted of 25 trainees, mostly composed of individuals in their mid-to-late 20s who had some background in business, NGO or non-profit work, or academic studies in the humanities.

### *Peace Corps Kazakhstan and NGO Development*

While Kaz-16 was indeed the sixteenth group invited to serve in Kazakhstan, it was only the second group to focus primarily on NGO development. The first group involved in NGO development was the “Kaz-14s” who began their respective services one year before the arrival of the Kaz-16s. Aside from the Kaz-14s and Kaz-16s, almost all other Peace Corps groups in Kazakhstan were trained primarily as teachers of the English language.

The Kaz-14s should be credited with helping the Kaz-16s in a number of ways: by conducting training sessions during PST, by providing trainees and volunteers with advice on lessons learned and ideas for projects, and by often serving as mentors to the Kaz-16s during their service at site.

### *Goals of NGO Development*

The NGO Development Track in Kazakhstan covers five general program areas: Health, Business Development, Women’s Issues, Environment, and Youth Development. After training, each of the Kaz-16 PCVs was placed within an organization whose activities

focus on one of these five areas. All of the organizations volunteers have been placed with fit roughly into Lewis's definition of NGOs as organizations concerned with "social or economic change" (Lewis, 2001, p. 36).

The over-arching goal of NGO Development Volunteers in Kazakhstan has been to help assist and develop organizations in Kazakhstan's relatively new non-profit sector.

### *Training site*

Our training was conducted in the city of Kapchagai, a town of approximately 40,000 people located an hour's bus ride from Almaty in south-eastern Kazakhstan. With a population of over 1,135,000, Almaty is Kazakhstan's largest city, and is arguably the most metropolitan city in Central Asia. While Kazakhstan was part of the Soviet Union, Almaty served as the regional capital of the "Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic." After becoming an independent state, Almaty served as the country's first capital from 1991 to 1997 when the capital was moved north to the city of Astana (in Russian, "Astana" literally means "capital") (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia Deluxe, 2005). Almaty's size and proximity to our training site allowed the Kaz-16 trainees the opportunity for visits to NGOs and donor organizations working there, the option of cultural and educational excursions, and rapid transportation to the Peace Corps office in Almaty, thus providing trainees availability to the headquarters for medical check-ups, training sessions, and access to materials from the Peace Corps resource center.

Kapchagai is largely a bedroom community: a considerable percentage of people living in the city commute daily to Almaty or neighboring cities for work. The city itself, while actually less than 40 years old, is a model of Soviet decay. The majority of the shops and apartment buildings that line the city are designed along the concrete, rectangular, utilitarian guidelines that characterize most Soviet architecture. Sadly, the city is troubled with high unemployment, a high crime rate, drug addiction, dilapidated or unfinished buildings, and is covered in litter.

Despite its numerous set-backs, however, I felt that Kapchagai was an appropriate training site. The city contained more than enough elementary schools to hold our training sessions in. Training sessions were mainly divided into language training and technical training: language training was held in small groups in the morning and was split-up among four different schools; technical training consisted of all trainees meeting together in the afternoon at one local elementary school.

Aside from the formal education that trainees gained from informational sessions and language lessons, our homes in Kapchagai also served as places for learning. Each trainee was required to live with a host family throughout the ten weeks of training. As most of the host families who chose to house a trainee did not speak English, trainees were placed in an excellent position to improve their Russian and practice communicating in spite of a language barrier. Host family stays also provided trainees with a strong, direct link to the local culture. By the end of training, most trainees actually became very close with their host families. Speaking for myself, my host family (and especially my host “Mama”) were kind, good-humored people whom I truly enjoyed staying with.

### *Language training*

Throughout the course of PST, Trainees spent approximately two to four hours each day, six days per week, learning the Russian language. Language courses were conducted by “Language and Culture Facilitators” (LCFs). Our LCFs consisted of five Kazakhstani citizens who each had prior teaching experience. Classes were broken down into very small numbers: the average class size was five. My class consisted of seven trainees and was located in an unused theater storage room tucked away in a local high school.

In addition to teaching basic conversational Russian and grammar, the LCFs also taught “Technical Language” pertinent to NGO Development Volunteers. The Technical Language component consisted of learning acronyms affiliated with NGOs in Kazakhstan, useful questions to ask NGO directors, and practice communicating with people who work at NGOs.

The language training was one of my favorite, and what I consider to be the most useful, aspects of training. A strong working knowledge of the Russian language can prove essential for the success of a volunteer, especially for those working directly with NGOs. Triumphs and challenges with language are an essential part of working in another culture. The topic of language will continue to be discussed throughout this report: the importance of being able to communicate in Russian, even at a basic level, has had a tremendous impact in my ability to serve as a volunteer.

### *Technical training*

After language training, technical training sessions were conducted in the afternoon. All twenty-five trainees gathered together in one room for a series of lectures, discussions, or hands-on activities related to Peace Corps service. Sessions varied from health and safety, lessons learned from previous volunteers, capacity development, gender roles, community development practices, and how to work specifically within certain spheres. In addition to technical sessions held at the training site, trainees were occasionally divided into smaller groups and taken on site-visits to various NGOs in Almaty.

Throughout the process of NGO site-visits, lectures from guest speakers, and testimonials from the Kaz-14s, the Kaz-16 Trainees were exposed to information from over 30 different NGOs in Kazakhstan.

### *Failing successfully*

A recurring theme which was reiterated throughout training, and indeed was told to us upon our first day arriving in Almaty, was to be ready to “fail successfully.” From the start, the Kaz-16 group had been prepped to work in challenging situations. While this may not be the sort of idealistic, optimistic, or uplifting advice one wants to hear while preparing to go “save the world”, this message was both appropriate and timely. Our country director, as well as Peace Corps managers and trainers, frequently repeated “fail successfully.” This phrase meant that we should be prepared for things to fall apart, for projects to fail to come to fruition, and to be ready to work in an often frustrating atmosphere. This phrase also meant that when placed in such a position, volunteers

should look for the best in what may otherwise seem a hopeless situation and to be aware of the small victories.

For what it is worth, I actually think “fail successfully” was very good advice, especially for NGO workers. Speaking from my experience, the process of beginning work at an NGO in Kazakhstan was more difficult than I had anticipated. My expectations and those of my first NGO director often did not match up; furthermore, several plans or projects I had in mind failed to get off the ground. I think it was wise for our trainers to purposely “set the bar low” from the beginning. Many of the volunteers I trained with, including myself, were humbled when we first began our Peace Corps work and realized that we were not accomplishing the grandiose schemes we had previously envisioned. Nonetheless, despite the period set-backs and humbling moments, I do not consider myself a failure. To the contrary, I feel that I have been able to accomplish quite a bit during my service, even if the end results have been modifications of my original intentions.

#### *Site Announcement*

Before the end of our two-month training, the Kaz-16 trainees were informed of the organizations and cities where they would serve. We received our site announcement several weeks before the end of our training. The reason for this is that we were each given a one week “practicum” wherein we traveled to our cities in order to meet with our soon-to-be directors and host organizations.

I learned that I would be working in Kostanai at an NGO called the “Youth Center.” At the end of April, three weeks before the end of Pre-Service Training, I spent one week in Kostanai meeting with my director, the other Peace Corps Volunteers who were serving there, interviewing potential host families, and becoming familiar with the city I would call my home for the next two years. Overall, practicum was a very useful week because it allowed me to see my future host organization, speak formally and casually with my director, and learn my way around the city before actually beginning my service.

### **A BRIEF HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE KOSTANAI OBLAST**

My place of service is located in north-western Kazakhstan in the city of Kostanai, capital of the Kostanai *oblast* (region).

Kostanai is the largest city in the region with an approximate population of 230,000. According to a census taken in 2005, the population of the region is 980,000 (*Kostanai Region*, 2005, p. 1). The Kostanai oblast borders three Russian provinces to the south and four Kazakhstanai provinces to the south and east. The region itself is rich in wheat, forest, coal, gold, and iron ore. In fact, according to a pamphlet entitled “Kostanai Region”, locally published by the *Association of NGOs*, the region produces “100%” of granule iron ore, bauxite, asbestos, and 90% of iron ore for the entire country (*Kostanai Region*, 2005, p. 1). The region contains 15 institutions of higher education, 23 colleges, 715 secondary schools, and 68 hospitals.

The city of Kostanai is laid out in a grid wherein the main streets run parallel to each other and is designed along the straight-lined, functional architectural patterns popular during the Soviet era. Most streets seem to stem from either the city center or from the main street, Al-Farabi, which runs directly from the train station at the West end of the city to the Tobol River at the East end. Because of this design, there are several points throughout the city where one can stand in the middle of the street and see clearly from one end of the city to the other. The city center itself is a pedestrian zone which encloses a large park.

#### *Historical Kostanai*

Kostanai’s physical proximity to Russia is mirrored by its history: arguably, Kostanai is closer to Russia than Kazakhstan in terms of historical development. Originally, the city was established in 1879 by Russian settlers from the southern outskirts of the Russian Empire. One of the main reasons the city was first established was so Russian settlers could develop agriculture and animal husbandry (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia



Deluxe, 2005). Thereafter, Kostanai developed from a provincial agricultural town into a Russian military fort.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Kostanai region, as well as other provinces in north Kazakhstan, experienced some of their most significant physical and cultural changes under the leadership of the Soviet Union. In 1954, Soviet premiere Nikita Khrushchev initiated a comprehensive agricultural reform project entitled “Virgin Lands.” True to its name, the main idea behind the program was to cultivate previously unused land. To encourage the industrial development of the USSR, farmers were lured with the promise of free land in places like the Kostanai region. Over 800,000 farmers, mostly ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, moved to north Kazakhstan and the surrounding region (Mayhew et al., 2004, p. 87). These industrial farmers are commonly referred to as the “pioneers.” The role of the pioneers still holds a strong place in history. Indeed, the modern equivalent of “Boy Scouts” and “Girl Scouts” in Kazakhstan and most post-Soviet countries is called the “Pioneers”; Kostanai’s largest outdoor memorial is dedicated to the pioneers; and the city community center where my first host NGO was located is called the “Pioneer’s Palace.”

#### *Present-day Kostanai*

At present, the Kostanai oblast is developing rapidly. International and domestic business is sprouting throughout the city and in the region. The city of Kostanai boasts a full-sized soccer stadium, a public swimming pool, concert halls, an indoor and outdoor skating rink, internet clubs, dance clubs, restaurants, museums, a movie theater, grocery stores, and a Western-style department store.

## **THE YOUTH CENTER**

The NGO where worked during my first year of service is a youth development non-governmental organization called the “Youth Center” (in Russian, Молодёжный Центр). The Youth Center was founded in 1996 by its current director with the support of the local *akimat* (city government) and the Phillip-Morris company.

The Youth Center’s offices are located in the Pioneer’s Palace, a multi-purpose building located in the city center that, in addition to housing many different organizations and offices, serves as a community civic center. The offices of the Youth Center consist of two rooms plus a small hallway. In the main room there is a large roundtable used for meetings, a small roundtable with computers and printers for staff members, a desk and computer for the accountant/secretary, and a tea break table. Adjoining this room is the office of the director. Linking these two rooms is a small hallway used for storage and impromptu meetings. While most gatherings would take place in the main room of the Youth Center, the various community rooms of the Pioneer Palace were used to conduct meetings, trainings, events, holidays, and games.

### ***I. “Profi-2005”***

The first major program I witnessed hosted by the Youth Center was “*Profi 2005*”. Every year, since 1996, the Youth Center has carried out an occupational skills competition entitled “ПРОФИ” (pronounced “*Pro-fee*”; generally translated as “*Profession*”). During the “*Profi*” competition, young people between the ages of 18 and 35 from Kostanai and cities throughout Kazakhstan come to Kostanai in order to enter a contest to test their professional skills. The main idea behind “*Profi*” is to support the professional development of young people by putting their skills to the test in a hands-on contest setting. Each year, those individuals whose work is judged superior receive prizes and certificates based upon their performance. Rather than take place during a single day, the “*Profi*” competition takes place over a period of several weeks in a series of different locations.

The “*Profi-2005*” competition included the following occupational fields: culinary arts, computer programming, web-design, medical work, emergency rescue aid, driving, modeling, cosmetology, business management, and youth entrepreneurship.

### *Seeking Sponsorship*

My first major task at the Youth Center was to find sponsors for the competition. Apparently, no one had provided sponsorship for the competition during the previous two years. My director mainly wanted sponsors willing to donate prizes, such as CD players, radios, televisions, and electronic equipment, for the winners of the competition. For my first assignment, I did not “fail successfully,” I simply failed. I spent the better part of six weeks searching for sponsors only to come up with nothing.

The approach that I undertook to seek sponsorship had been to send letters of request to various potential donor organizations both within and outside of Kazakhstan. To do this, I first translated a copy of a press release about the competition from Russian into English. Next, I spent time on the internet researching various businesses and potential donor organizations. As the only internet access at the Youth Center was connected to the phone-line of my director’s work computer, I ended up spending a lot of time (and money) using a local internet café. Ironically, a lot of my work during my first few weeks was not performed while at work.

As mentioned, my efforts produced no results. I did receive some inquiries about the competition; however, I did not find anyone willing to sponsor the contest or donate prizes. To add to this, at this point I had only studied the Russian language for less than three months and I was barely conversational (at best); it was difficult to describe to my director the problems I was having and to seek her advice. I did seek the support of local university students who helped translate meetings with my director; however, on a day-to-day basis communication during the sponsor-seeking process was slow and difficult. Needless to say, I was upset and frustrated that I failed my first major work assignment.

### *Advertisements*

Aside from working directly on sponsorship, I did assist other staff members by helping advertise “*Profi-2005*.” This was done mostly by walking around Kostanai and gluing posters and stickers to bus stops, buildings, and signs throughout the city. I did this during the warm summer and was usually accompanied by two or three teenagers who visited the Youth Center. Although my efforts to secure funding were a failure, at least I was able to help draw some public attention to the competition.

### *The “Profi 2005” Competition*

The competition took place over a period of several weeks and in different locations throughout Kostanai. A small role that I played was to help the staff set-up and take apart the rooms where competitions took place. This included transporting materials from one place to another, decorating rooms with posters and banners, and setting up tables and chairs. At the time competitions were taking place, I was asked to photograph the events. Photos were taken with a digital camera and later downloaded to my director’s computer; these photos were then used for a slide-show at an award ceremony held at the closing of the “*Profi 2005*” competition.

### *Power Point*

Several months after the conclusion of “*Profi 2005*”, my director was asked to go to Kazakhstan’s capital, Astana, in order to give a Power Point presentation to the Ministry of Education regarding the contest. As she was unfamiliar with the Power Point format, I was able to teach it to her. Together we designed an hour-long presentation containing photos, graphics, and information in Russian explaining “*Profi 2005*.” To my delight, not only did the presentation go over well, but my director received one of the top awards for her work. My director later used the Power Point format for other Youth Center presentations in Kostanai and throughout greater Kazakhstan.

## ***II. The Youth Parliament***

One month after the end of “*Profi 2005*”, the Youth Center began its third year of running the Youth Parliament (Молодёжный Маслихат). The Youth Parliament is a club where young people from schools and universities in Kostanai meet weekly in order to simulate the activities of local government. The Youth Parliament serves many functions: as a leadership development program; as an after-school club; as practice in teambuilding, organizing, and public speaking; and as a positive, social environment. In many ways, the Youth Parliament functions the way a student council or the Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts does in the U.S.

The Youth Parliament functions by electing a president and dividing the young participants into seven commissions which each have a title, a chairperson, and the task of devising projects relevant to their respective commissions. Projects generally ranged from community clean-up days, visits to the local orphanage, dances, speaking events, and various social or educational activities for young people. Meetings of the Youth Parliament took place one month after the beginning of the academic school year and ended in late spring at the end of the school year.

My primary task in the Youth Parliament was to assist students in the various commissions and to guide the “Commission on International Relations.” In this capacity, I worked closely with an English-speaking law student who was also the president of the Youth Parliament. The number of participant in the “Commission on International Relations” changed throughout the course of the school-year; however, it was mostly composed of approximately 10 to 30 school and university students.

### *International Day of Students and Intellectual Games*

Two projects I worked closely on with the “Commission on International Relations” were a festival held on the “International Day of Students” and an intellectual games night based on world trivia. For the “International Day of Students” we decided to organize a

concert for students from Kostanai's universities. The event was essentially a talent show where student participants from each university had the option of singing a song, performing a dance, or acting out a humorous skit. Performances ranged from international songs and dances to humorous skits based on fairy tales. We held the event in January in the big hall of the Pioneer Palace civic center and invited universities from throughout the city. Over 200 students attended the concert.

The next big event for the "Commission on International Relations" was hosting a game-show style contest held in February in the offices of the Youth Center. Unlike the concert held on the "International Day of Students", this event was kept small and only members of the Youth Parliament were invited to attend. Approximately 30 students attended an intellectual competition that included trivia and games related to world geography, politics, history, and culture.

### *Challenges*

The two biggest problems I encountered while working with the Youth Parliament were as follows: 1) language barrier; 2) youth insistence on finding sponsorship. The language barrier has been a consistent challenge throughout my Peace Corps service. While I have been able to successfully communicate and have conversations with young people in Russian, leading a group of 20 to 30 teenagers who are speaking loudly and interrupting each other is much more difficult. I took the following steps to work around the language barrier: ask questions frequently; study Russian; use the help of English-speaking students. I learned over time and practice that if I had a big idea that I wanted to share with everyone, it was better to explain it first to one or two people individually, and then to ask them to explain the idea to the group.

Aside from language, another problem that came up while working with the "Commission on International Relations" was being asked frequently by the youth to find sponsorship. Very often the pupils and students who participated in the Youth Parliament would ask me to find sponsorship from international organizations. The frustration with this is that many of the youth simply expected me to be able to find money without

having a solid plan (or reason) for using this money. For instance, the president of the Youth Parliament on many occasions asked me to track-down funding sources from Almaty. The problem was that I would be asked to search for funding without first discussing the reason or necessity of this funding. To work around this, I first explained the president of the Youth Parliament and the participants the need for a concrete plan and budget before searching for funds. Next, I encouraged the youth to start simple by asking for small donations from their parents, relatives, teachers, and local businesses. Finally, I recommended that the Youth Parliament organize projects in the city that would not require money (such as debates, round-table discussions, and trainings). For the most part, the inconvenience of being asked to search for funds was eventually diffused.

### ***III. Youth Parliament Outreach Project SPA Grant***

From November, 2005, to February, 2006, a large part of my time at the Youth Center was spent working on a grant proposal. The proposal requested assistance from a grant program operated by the Peace Corps called the “Peace Corps SPA (Small Projects Assistance) Program.” The grant proposal I wrote and submitted for the Youth Center was written to sponsor a series of leadership and character-building trainings led by the members of the Youth Parliament. The idea for the proposal was to help members of the Youth Parliament conduct leadership, psychological, and team-building trainings in Kostanai and in two other cities in the oblast over a period of several weeks. The inspiration for this grant proposal came from a training session held in November, 2005, the city of Rudny.

#### *Visit to Rudny*

On November 8<sup>th</sup>, ten members of the Youth Parliament and three staff members (including myself) conducted a day-long training session outside of Kostanai in Rudny, a city of about 80,000 located one hour from Kostanai by bus. The primary purpose of the visit was to introduce the Youth Parliament to students, educators, and school administrators in a city where the program currently did not exist. In addition, as the training sessions were entirely youth-led, this training gave members of the Kostanai Youth Parliament an opportunity to hone their leadership and facilitation skills in a new

environment. Rudny was chosen as the site for conducting the training session for three reasons:

- 1) After Kostanai, it has the second largest population in the region (Kostanai: 216,000; Rudny: 80,000)
- 2) It is a relatively short bus ride from Kostanai (approximately one hour)
- 3) A large percentage of school students from Rudny move to Kostanai when attending higher education. Therefore, previous exposure with the Youth Parliament in Rudny would ideally make students interested in the Kostanai Youth Parliament.

### *The Grant Writing Process*

The idea for the grant was mainly developed between my director, one Youth Center staff member, and I. Our idea was that 10 student leaders from the Youth Parliament would conduct trainings in Kostanai, Rudny, and one other city, Lisakovsk, over the period of several weeks. Ideally, the students would introduce new games, ideas, and strategies to teachers and students throughout the three largest cities in the region. At the same time, the leaders of the Youth Parliament would develop their own leadership, planning, and facilitation skills.

The possibility of securing a grant that would help pay for project materials (such as pens, folders, and paper) and transportation costs (bus tickets) seemed plausible. Unfortunately, the staff member who had originally helped me develop the idea for the project moved out of the city shortly after we began the grant-writing process. While I would rather have not completed the grant proposal alone, I was able to get the grant written and accepted after several delays. To be more precise, due to holidays and errors on my part, the grant proposal was rejected and sent back to me for revision three times before finally being accepted by the grant commission. The delays in receiving funding from the grant actually caused my director (and I) a great deal of anguish: several times during this process she explained her frustrations with Peace Corps; she even told me many times that in the future she would not work with the Peace Corps.

### *Project Implementation*



The “Youth Parliament Outreach Project” finally became a reality in April, 2006. The Youth Center organized four training sessions for students and school teachers held at the Pioneer Palace. The trainings were led by members of the Youth Parliament and consisted of the following: a general introduction and mixer, five different break-out sessions led by pairs of students, and a final closing session. The training sessions were divided over the course of two Saturdays set one week apart. During each day, the same training was given to one group in the morning and repeated in the afternoon for another group.

While the trainings that took place within Kostanai were a success, the training activities that were supposed to take place in two cities outside of Kostanai never occurred. The main reason for this is that the president of the Youth Parliament and most members of the group were too busy at the end of the school year to conduct out-of-town training sessions. In addition, my director at the time had become busy opening up another side business and was seldom available to meet with.

### *Project Conclusion*

The Peace Corps SPA grant project did not work as well as I had hoped it would. While the grant funding did help support several youth-led trainings that took place within Kostanai, I am sorry that the Youth Parliament was not able to conduct any additional training sessions in Rudny or Lisakovsk. I would not consider the project to be a complete success; however, I also do not think it was a failure.

I would like to think that I took away some valuable lessons from this experience. Firstly, I wished that I had actually drafted the grant with the main coordinator of the Youth Parliament instead of partly with one co-worker and mainly by myself. For future grant proposals, I believe that the potential recipients of grant funding should play an equal role as the one writing the grant proposal. Secondly, I wished that communication with my director had been clearer. There were several points throughout the writing of the grant, being awarded the grant, and the implementation of the project that my director and I did not understand each other (partly because of a language barrier and partly due to

disagreements over project outcomes). In hindsight, I should have used the assistance of my Peace Corps manager more often as a mediator between my director and I. Lastly, as this was the first grant proposal I had written for my host organization, I should have started out with a simple project proposal instead of building up something so big, and thus more difficult to implement. By starting smaller, I think I could have set for my director, the president of the Youth Parliament, and myself more realistic expectations about what kind of youth project the organization could carry out through Peace Corps SPA grant funding.

(Please refer to Appendix A for a copy of the Youth Parliament SPA Completion Report)

#### ***IV. Debate Club***

In October, 2006, I started running an English-language Debate Club. The idea for the club came from a university student I knew who attended the English Club of another Peace Corps Volunteer and who also happened to be a student at the Kostanai Social and Technical University where I eventually began teaching as a secondary project. The student whose idea it was to start the club played a large role in helping me plan the club, recruit members, and organize various debates and meetings.

#### *Club Philosophy*

From the beginning, the student who helped found the Debate Club worked very closely with me to recruit a planning team and define the goals of the club. The planning team (affectionately referred to as “I-Team” or “Idea Team”) consisted of five English-speaking students from different schools and universities. The I-Team developed and drafted the guiding philosophy of the club which was later written into a mock-constitutional format. The main philosophy of the Debate Club was to combine *theory* and *practice* with the expressed goal of helping participants improve their speaking, presentation styles, and English, through practical experience. It was agreed upon that anyone of any age, occupation, and speaking-level would be welcome to participate in the club. This is in contrast to some schools and universities who barred students not from their institutions from participating in like clubs.

### *Advertisements*

After meeting with my director to determine the best time and location for the Debate Club, the next step was to advertise. As the primary audience for the club was university students and high school pupils who speak English, the I-Team and I made flyers in English and posted them throughout Kostanai. In addition, we visited various English-language classes at universities and advertised the club in person.

### *Theory and Activities*

Each week, before the main debate or activity started, I would provide the club attendees with theory about speaking and encourage them to think about the relevance of this theory in connection to their own speaking styles. Some examples of theory included: the “10 Tips for Public Speaking” (downloaded from the internet from “Toastmasters International”), a list containing Russian and English phrases entitled “Structuring Your Views”, a hand-out about how to write an argumentative paragraph, and a print-out about the historic Lincoln-Douglas and Kennedy-Nixon debates. Throughout the course of the Debate Club, I purposely avoided debates that were in any way related to politics. If a political discussion would arise, I usually changed the subject. The reasons for this were that I did not want to cause problems for my NGO and I did not want club participants to mistakenly think that the Peace Corps is involved in politics.

Some of the following activities were used throughout the running of the Debate Club: structured, parliamentarian-style debates where two groups containing two team members each spar against each other in a formal fashion; simple “agree/disagree” warm-up discussions; a “values continuum” where students must stand in a line based on how they feel about certain questions asked; “1-minute” impromptu speeches; discussions based on articles in *Newsweek*; a mock budget battle; a mock talk show; and general open discussion.

One of my main goals when guiding such activities was to teach critical-thinking skills to the Debate Club participants. My invitation to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer states that English education in Kazakhstan is increasingly focusing on teaching “decision making, problem solving, and critical thinking” (*A Welcome Book: Kazakhstan*, 2003, p. 8). I have found that while pupils and students in Kazakhstan are often much better at remembering and reciting facts than their peers in the West, all too often there is no critical thought process used to give these facts relevance. The Soviet Union bred students, teachers, and employees to be submissive: questioning authority was then (and still is now) often seriously frowned upon. I am proud to say that many of the people who attended my club started to become much more critical thinkers. I encouraged them to question each other, to question me, and to question themselves. I was often happy with the results I saw.

#### *Challenges: Fees and Locations*

The biggest challenge I encountered while running the club was charging a participation fee. When I first started running the club, it was free of charge and open to the general public. After several weeks of operating the club, however, my director strongly insisted that I charge a fee of 100 Tenge. While this amount is not very expensive, the majority of university students are not employed and do not have a large amount of disposable income. My director flat-out refused when several members of the club and I spoke with her to try and lower the cost. In turn, many students who had attended the club soon lost interest and drifted away. This set-back caused me to re-advertise the club in order to attract new members.

The second main challenge the I-Team and I came up against regarded finding a place to host the club. We did not always have a set place to hold club meetings and often we had to improvise. Most meetings were held in a large community room on the second floor of the Pioneer Palace. Yet, often other groups were given priority to use this room at the same time the Debate Club met. Our first solution to this problem was to use a large lecture room located in a university close to the Youth Center. This lecture room was the ideal place to hold meetings and served the group well for several weeks; however,

before long the university began doing repairs and eventually no student groups were allowed access to the room. After being denied use of the lecture room, the I-Team sought other locations, only to find that mostly of them required a rental fee we could not afford. Eventually, the Debate Club moved back to the Pioneer Palace. When the large community room was occupied by other groups, the club would simply relocate to another room or location.

### *Conclusion*

Overall, leading the club was still a very good experience. Every week, between 5 to 25 pupils, students, and adults would attend. Usually the same people would consistently attend every week, and debates and activities were usually lively and interesting. During the time that I led the Debate Club, I saw both the students' ability to speak English and their ability to speak publicly improve greatly. I got to know many of the club participants very well throughout the course of the club and I was able to participate with them in other venues and activities throughout my service.

### ***V. English Clubs***

In addition to running the Debate Club, I started two other English Clubs at the Youth Center. As these clubs were founded several weeks after starting the Debate Club, they were set with a fee from the beginning.

The first of these clubs was the "Drama Club." This club was for school pupils and was held in the early afternoon shortly following the end of the school day. This club consisted of creating dialogues, enacting humorous skits, and singing songs in English. Materials were largely drawn from books I borrowed from the Peace Corps, the internet, local teachers, and from games and books my parents mailed to me from the U.S. Attendance was sporadic: usually between 4 and 15 school pupils attended this club.

The second English club was simply called "English Lunch." This was held on Sundays at noon and held in a small café located in the Pioneer Palace. This club was less oriented

on games or discussions; instead, it was mostly spent helping club participants with their homework, teaching them basic dialogues, or simply having casual conversation.

Like the Debate Club, I generally enjoyed conducting these clubs. Through the course of running these clubs, I was able to create linkages with my NGO by introducing pupils and students to the Youth Center. Indeed, several of the youth who participated in the “Drama Club” or “English Lunch” returned to the Youth Center throughout the week to participate in other activities.

### ***VI. Professional Development Seminars***

In March and April, 2006, two Peace Corps Volunteers, one Fulbright researcher, and I organized two business development seminars supported by the Youth Center and held at the Pioneer Palace. The basic idea of these seminars was to teach business ideas, customs, leadership, and etiquette to English-speaking students, teachers, and adults. Twelve participants attended the March seminar and sixteen attended the April seminar.

#### *Location and Challenges*

One of the greatest challenges in organizing the seminar was finding a suitable location to host the seminar. For the March seminar, I was able to secure one medium-sized meeting room and one large hall located in the Pioneer Palace. These rooms were also being utilized by other community groups, so every evening of the seminar the coordinators and I had to work around the schedules of these various groups. Despite the hassle of working around other groups, the rooms themselves, however, were actually very well-suited for the seminar. For the April seminar, we were not able to use the same medium-sized meeting room we had used before and instead had to use the round-table located in the office of the Youth Center. This turned out to be a bit of an inconvenience for several reasons: 1) the space was smaller (for this seminar we had more people) and 2) the room itself doubles as an office, so staff members were walking around, answering phone calls, and generally speaking loudly throughout the lectures. Despite these minor inconveniences, the seminar still operated according to plan.

*Seminar Cost*

The cost of the seminar was 2,000 Kazakhstani Tenge (approximately \$15.50 USD). The money was used to buy nametags, pens, drinking water, food and drinks for the coffee break, and to print certificates. Money was also used to print workbooks each participant was given on the first day. Each workbook was approximately 90 pages in length and contained the following: copies of each presentation; supplemental information about resumes, cover letters, leadership, public speaking; and information in Russian about the sponsors of the seminar. The funds remaining after the seminar were donated to the Youth Center.

*Seminar Schedule*

The seminar took place over the course of five evenings and included mostly Power Point presentations, lectures, and hands-on activities. Sessions were conducted by individuals and in pairs. The overall plan for the seminar was that each day would progressively build upon the previous one. Day 1 began with an entry survey, a general introduction and ice-breakers, and was followed by a session on resume writing. Most of the participants had never written a resume in English or in Russian, and many of them planned to search for careers that required them to write a resume in English. On Day 2, we tried to get the participants enthusiastic about the subject matter by delivering presentations about finding work to suit your personality and about leadership and public speaking. Day 2 was considered the “motivational” day of the seminar in that the sessions were designed to excite and pique the interest of the participants. Day 3 included team lectures on professional etiquette and preparing for job interviews. The last session on interviews was a preparation for the simulation that would take place on Day 4.

(Please refer to Appendix B for the “Professional Development Seminar – Entry Survey”)

Day 4 was one of the highlights of the seminar. During this day, participants were required to bring with them copies of their newly-written or revised resumes to a series of mock interviews. The majority of the participants had no previous experience with interviewing. The interviews were carried out by the four seminar coordinators with

outside assistance from one VSO volunteer, one micro-financing consultant from Germany, and one business consultant from Kostanai. For this session, six tables were set-up in a large hall located within the Pioneer Palace. The “interviewers” each sat behind a table where seminar participants would sit down for a ten-minute interview. Seminar participants had practice interviewing with six out of seven interviewers, thus giving them each a total of 60 minutes worth of interview practice in English. The rationale for this was to: 1) to give the participants more practice of interviewing, 2) to give them practice with people who have different speaking and interviewing styles, and 3) to give the interviewees a long period of time to interview. When participants were not interviewing, they spent their time in a break-room set-up with coffee, tea, and snacks. During each night that interviews were conducted, I would sneak back into the break room and to discover that most participants were excitedly talking about their last interviewers and preparing for their upcoming ones.

The last day of the seminar began with feedback from the interviewers. The PCVs and other interviewers began by providing participants with oral and written feedback regarding their interviewers. Participants then were able to ask questions about their strengths and weaknesses, as well as for suggestions for areas needing improvement.

(Please refer to Appendix C for the “Professional Development Seminar – Exit Survey”)

### *Sponsorship and Support*

For the seminar, we were able to receive in-kind sponsorship from two non-governmental organizations in Kostanai: the Business Development Foundation of Kostanai (BDFK) and Fund “HELP.” The aim of BDFK is to

support the initiatives of the economic development in the region in partnership with international donor organizations and governmental institutions, local business community and other NGOs (BDFK “Informational Overview”).

BDFK provided us with the use of their projector which we used to deliver Power Point presentations. Normally, the use of such a projector would be approximately 2,000



Kazakhstani Tenge per hour (\$16.00 USD); however, we were given use of the projector without having to pay any fee. Fund “HELP” is a NGO whose aim is to keep people off of drugs. “HELP” provides psychological advice for people addicted to drugs and alcohol; organizes public events to raise awareness of drugs, alcohol, and HIV/AIDS; and leads extra curricular activities, such as paintball and break-dancing, for at-risk youth. “HELP” provided us the use of their book-binder in order to make seminar workbooks.

Our connection with the sponsors was mostly rooted in personal relationships and familiarity. To thank them for their support, we asked the directors of the respective organizations to sign the certificates of participation. We also included in the workbook information about their respective organizations. And of course, we stopped by the office after the seminars to give our thanks along with a box of chocolates.

### **KOSTANAI SOCIAL AND TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY**

In September, 2005, four months after officially becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer and starting my work at the Youth Center, I began a secondary project teaching at the Kostanai Social and Technical University. Volunteers are strongly encouraged to take upon themselves additional responsibilities by starting secondary projects. Secondary projects are a way for the volunteer to give more back to the community by extending their services elsewhere. One of the best aspects of being a volunteer is being able take advantage of opportunities that may not be available in the U.S.; namely, having the freedom to choose secondary work. In my case, I wanted my secondary project to be connected to higher education. Since becoming a volunteer, I had a strong interest and desire to teach at a university. Although I had prior teaching experience, I had never formally taught at a school or university and I was eager to make the most of my unique position as a volunteer and English-speaking foreigner.

As Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take money for services performed, I would be offering a university with a free teacher, a free service, and even a bit of extra prestige. I ended up teaching various courses at the Kostanai Social and Technical University (KSTU), thanks largely to my host mother who works as a doctor at the university's medical office. When I told her about my idea of teaching a few extra classes a week in English, she arranged for me to meet with the dean and the Office of Foreign Languages. Soon, I began conducting classes four to six times per week.

Teaching provided me a short break from speaking Russian at my NGO and gave the students (and teachers) at the university an opportunity to practice their English with a native speaker. My average class size was 15 to 20 students and consisted either of students interested in working as translators/interpreters or as English teachers. During the lessons, I would speak slowly, repeat myself often, and ask questions frequently to check for understanding.

*Country Studies*

From September to December, 2005, I taught “Countries Studies” to two groups of students from the second and fifth year, respectively. At universities in Kazakhstan, students are placed into groups based on their field of study. This means that students take all of their classes together with one group of students throughout their entire university education.

I was afforded a great deal of liberty regarding the subject matter for “Country Studies.” I was not required to teach any particular curriculum, but rather, was given suggestions from other teachers based upon what they thought would be interesting and useful for the students to learn. Throughout the course, I gave lectures and delivered Power Point presentations on American History, the United Nations, cross-cultural communication, and current events. I began every lesson by asking the question: “what new news is there?” I encouraged the students to read and watch the news every day and would begin each lesson by simply talking with them about current events. Before long, I noticed that in public my students would come up to me and ask “what new news is there?” What's more, I used articles from *Newsweek* to give the students examples of news articles written in English. In addition, at the beginning of each term, I introduced the idea of a course syllabus to my students and fellow teachers. The students had not used a syllabus before in their previous classes and were interested in the concept of a written plan/philosophy for the class.

(Please refer to Appendix D for the “Country Studies” syllabus)

*Home Reading*

From January to May, 2006, I taught “Home Reading” to four groups of students from the second, third, and fourth years. This was essentially a literature course where my main task was to assign them a book to read in English and to teach them about it. I was

surprised (and disturbed) to learn that some teachers who taught the subject in the past would simply have their students spend the entire lecture time reading in class. When I taught the course, I used a combination of lectures, debates, and dialogues based on the reading material. As English was the second (or third) language of the students who attended my classes, as much as possible I would check for understanding and encourage class participation.

From the beginning, the biggest challenge I faced in teaching this class was to find the students materials to read. Usually, local teachers who taught this class would assign the students a book and then tell them to find this book wherever they could. If they were lucky, the university or city library would have at least one copy for them to use. However, often students had no choice but to try and order the book from an outside source (such as the internet or a publishing company). Students would then share the books they managed to find.

Although not a panacea for the problem of limited materials, I found a relatively inexpensive way for each student to have copies of their assigned reading materials. One Peace Corps friend of mine had given me a CD containing electronic copies of over 200 “e-Books” written in English. For the “Home Reading” class, I would choose one novel that I thought would be interesting and appropriate for the reading-level of the students I was teaching. Then, I would ask one student to be responsible for giving me a writeable disk in order to make copies of the book. After that, the students could print the book at a copy store for a fairly small fee. This turned out to be the cheapest and easiest solution to the problem of scarce reading materials, not to mention the fact that students could keep the books after the class and make notes and translations in the margins as needed. In addition to the assigned novel, I would add to the disk supplemental information about the author and other reference material I thought would be useful.

From the “e-Books” disk, I was able to assign the following novels to my students: Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*; C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; and William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies*. At the end of each term I also

copied to the disk other books and materials the students could use in the future for teaching and personal reading.

(Please refer to Appendix E for the “Home Reading” syllabus)

### *Fall 2006*

From September to December, 2006, I taught “Country Studies” to one group of fifth year students and “Home Reading” to one group of fourth year students. I did have experience teaching the students of these groups during the preceding year; however, for this term, I swapped subjects with each group.

For the Fall 2006 term, I modified the subject matter and pace of the course based upon the year and language-level of each group. During this term, I ended up teaching fewer total classes than in the previous year.

Sadly, there is a very low retention rate for university teachers in Kostanai: many young English teachers find work as translators or as secretaries after their first year of teaching. This is mostly because of low payment for teaching, long work hours, and a serious lack of appreciation from the university administration. In fact, many young teachers look at university teaching as a “springboard” for finding other work. Ironically, by returning to teach for a second year, I was one of the senior staff members of the Faculty of Foreign Languages.

### *Thoughts on Teaching*

While my teaching work at the university has been extremely rewarding, I am glad that I have not served primarily as an Education Volunteer. Indeed, I have viewed my teaching experience as: 1) an interesting and rewarding side project; 2) a nice change from the often unpredictable pace of NGO work; and 3) a way to create linkages between the university and my NGO. Regarding this last point, many of my students at KSTU have been active at English Clubs, seminars, and activities supported by myself and the other NGOs, volunteers, and organizations I have assisted.

Teaching has been a great secondary project for me: I have been able to become acquainted with several students and teachers throughout Kostanai; I have taught subjects that I myself am interested in; I have gained practice in teaching; I have encouraged students to “think critically,” to ask questions, and to read the news; and I have introduced new games, theories, and teaching techniques to students and teachers.

### **CHANGING ORGANIZATIONS**

In June of 2006, approximately half-way through my service, I made the decision to change host organizations. There are many reasons why I decided to change work, but the main reason is that I felt that my relationship with my director had been deteriorating for a long time and I was seriously concerned that it would not be possible to continue working together for another year. In addition, I came to the conclusion that the independent work I felt I already had been performing successfully at the Youth Center (such as leading English Clubs and organizing seminars) could easily be replicated in another environment.

The decision to change work did not come easily or quickly. More precisely, I had been having doubts about working at the Youth Center for several months before finally deciding to contact my regional manager and arranging to change my primary assignment.

My Peace Corps regional manager very diplomatically arranged the switch for me. My manager had been aware of my relationship with my director through meeting and speaking with her on several occasions; she was not surprised when I first approached her with the idea of changing NGOs. My manager was able to meet separately with both the director of the Youth Center and my soon-to-be host organization. She explained to the director of the Youth Center that I would shadow another NGO and help them during the summer; after this period of time it would be my decision which organization to devote my service.

Before changing host organizations, I had researched and spent time observing another youth NGO in Kostanai: The Association of Children and Youth. In fact, during my first summer as a PCV, I spent two weeks working at a camp managed by the organization. In addition, throughout my first year I periodically attended meetings and events held by

local volunteers and members of the organization. Many of my friends, acquaintances, and children I would frequently come into contact with were active at the organization. Needless to say, I felt that I had significant understanding of the organization before making the final decision to work there. The last thing I wanted to do was to dive head-first into an empty pool: I told myself that *if* I were to change host organizations, it would have to be based upon a well-educated decision and not just a strong desire to find other work.

### *Reasons Volunteers Change Organizations*

Speaking from experience and based upon conversations with other Peace Corps Volunteers and my regional manager, making the decision to change host organizations can often be a difficult moral or professional challenge. Volunteers do not want to offend their local staff members by changing work and they do not want to give Peace Corps Volunteers a bad name. They may feel guilty about leaving co-workers or local volunteers behind (in my case, one of the hardest aspects of deciding to change work was thinking about leaving behind the children I had become familiar with). An individual volunteer can also feel like he or she is alone in making the decision to change work: this is far from the truth. Many PCVs, from both my training group and other training groups, have changed host organizations at some time during their service. Lastly, PCVs who change their work may feel as if they have “failed their assignment.” At first I felt this way. I made the decision, however, to take pride in what I had accomplished at my first organization and take with me important lessons for my upcoming assignment.

From an organizational viewpoint, there are many reasons why volunteers change work. One reason is that there is simply not enough, or not appropriate, work for volunteers to perform. Often volunteers are presented with tasks that they are unable or unwilling to do. An example is being pressured to obtain financial resources for the organization, a frustration that I have touched upon at many points throughout this report. Host organizations can easily view their international volunteer, whose ability to speak and write in English, as a ready and available source for grant-writing or finding sponsors.



At the Youth Center, early on I felt that perhaps one of the main reasons why my director agreed to host a volunteer was to have an additional staff member who could be used to find money. Part of my reason for having a deteriorating relationship with the Youth Center director is that I felt she was taking advantage of me to obtain additional funds. All three English Clubs I ran were on a fee-basis. I believed then as I do now that the amount of money asked for participation in such clubs was too high for young people to pay. Furthermore, I never saw any of the money that I helped generate from clubs and seminars put back into the organization. Simply put: I do not know where this money went. Additionally, aside from revenue generated from clubs and seminars, my director had expected me to obtain funds through the Peace Corps grant program at a pace that was unrealistic. When grant money was not coming in as fast and as soon as she expected it to, my director and I began to get into several arguments about the nature and value of my work.

#### *Local Community Volunteers*

Foreign volunteers are not the only ones who feel the need to change their work situation. Indeed, many of the youth who volunteered at the Youth Center shared similar frustrations with me and also decided to reallocate their time by assisting other organizations. In fact, shortly after I changed host organizations, four teenagers who had been active at the Youth Center started volunteering at the Association of Children and Youth; others began volunteering at different NGOs. These youth shared with me their reasons for the change: 1) lack of appreciation; 2) frequent arguments with the director; 3) limited leadership opportunities; 4) dedicating time to activities not connected with the mission of the organization; and 5) a desire to try something different. Since changing organizations, the aforementioned teenage volunteers have become active, responsible members of the team at the Association of Children and Youth.

#### *Non-profit or For-profit?*

I would like to explain further what I mean by “dedicating time to activities not connected with the mission of the organization” as this was a point of concern for me and local volunteers while serving at the Youth Center. In addition to managing the Youth

Center, the director also operated two for-profit day care centers. Regarding NGOs in general, I do believe that it is morally acceptable for a for-profit business connected to a non-profit or NGO to financially assist such organizations.—and that such enterprises should be encouraged. I do not, however, think that NGOs, their staff, volunteers, or resources, should be used for the benefit of private business, especially when funding for the NGO comes from grants or local government sources. According to *An NGO Training Guide for Peace Corps Volunteers*, “NGOs are not governmental organizations or for-profit businesses.” (2005, p. 29). During my last few months at the Youth Center, I gradually saw the office’s resources and youth volunteers being used for the purposes of private financial gain. A copy machine that had been awarded through grant funding was used to make fliers advertising my director’s day care centers and youth volunteers who came to the Youth Center were pressured to post these advertisements around the city, and even chastised when they were not able to do so. Essentially, the material and human resources of a non-profit agency were being used for the financial gain of the director’s for-profit organization.

### *Final Thoughts*

To conclude, I am very glad that I made the decision to change NGOs. My original intuition was right: at my new organization I have been able to carry out activities that I felt were successful at my former NGO. By changing organizations, not only have I been able to continue doing what I felt was productive before, but I have been able to take on additional tasks and side-projects. Furthermore, I have not been pressured to be a source of financial support for the organization, although I have provided some assistance in helping research potential donor organizations. Since changing NGOs, the quality (and quantity) of my work has improved greatly, not to mention the fact that I have personally been much happier.

## **THE ASSOCIATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

The Association of Children and Youth is a NGO located on the first floor of an apartment building in the center of Kostanai. The “Association” acts as an umbrella organization incorporating other youth organizations, groups, and clubs from throughout the city. The layout of the office itself is quite simple: there is one medium-sized room for the director; one large meeting/activity room; a smaller room for the accountants and secretaries; a medium-sized room set-up as a classroom (and storage room); and a bathroom.

The organization manages a large variety of character-building activities for children, youth, and students. Examples of such activities include: summer camps, athletic training activities for students, team-building trainings, leadership conferences, dances, student forums, work with disabled children, and facilitating round-table discussions. The Association of Children and Youth frequently partners with other NGOs, schools, and organizations throughout Kostanai, the Republic of Kazakhstan, and southern Russia.

### ***I. Rovesnik (Ровесник) Summer Camp***

My first major task at the Association of Children and Youth was to work as a camp counselor for a children’s summer camp called “*Rovesnik*” (in Russian, “age cohort”). “*Rovesnik*”, a sub-department located within the office of the Association of Children and Youth, organizes several summer camps for school children and university students throughout the Kostanai oblast. Every year beginning in the Fall, *Rovesnik* begins to search for university students interested in working as camp counselors. These students are recruited mainly by previous summer camp counselors who advertise at universities and arrange various meetings, games, activities, and training sessions.

The counselors and office staff who organized the *Rovesnik* summer camp for Summer 2006 had already planned for me to work with them long before I made the decision to

change host organizations. In fact, one of the camp organizers showed me an advertisement he had printed in Russian, which included among other things, the phrase: “come make an acquaintance with a volunteer from America.” I was happy to hear that they were thinking of me and that I could be used for advertising purposes. Many of the students and office staff who organized the camps for the summer of 2006 had worked with me at camp the previous year. Needless to say, before the summer had begun I was willing and ready to work as a counselor: I already was familiar with the format of the camp and I already had practical experience working at a camp organized by *Rovesnik*. Furthermore, my Russian had progressed considerably since the previous year; thus, I knew that I would be able take a more active leadership role at camp.

*Rovesnik* organized a total of five different summer camp sessions beginning in late May and ending in early August. The first session lasted one week and was exclusively for children with developmental disabilities from an orphanage in Kostanai. Approximately twenty children, ages 8 to 16, attended this camp. The second, third, and fourth sessions were for school children ages 8 to 17 and were each two weeks long. Sessions two and three included approximately 200 school students from the city of Kostanai and from towns and villages throughout the region. The fourth session included approximately 80 school children plus 30 children from the orphanage for children with developmental disabilities. The last session of camp lasted four days and was for university students from Kostanai and the “Kurgan” region of southern Russia. In total, I attended one day of pre-camp training; worked sessions, two, three, four, and the student session; and stayed behind after the last session to help the staff and counselors clean-up the camp and engage in closing ceremonies.

#### *My Role as Counselor*

My role during each camp session was to act as camp counselor. Like the other counselors, I was given a uniform that included a T-shirt with the logo of the camp, a name-badge and whistle, and a blue pioneer scarf to wear around my neck. For each session, children were divided into “detachments” according to age. Each attachment had two counselors (usually, not but necessarily, one male and one female counselor).

Sessions two and three hosted seven groups of children; session four included four groups of school children plus two groups of children with developmental disabilities. At camp I did not have my own detachment, but instead, I divided my time by working with all of the groups. I assisted each of the counselors in monitoring their own groups and leading their children in various games, performances, dances, and creative and sporting competitions.

### *Camp Site*

The camp site itself was located in a wooded area of the Kostanai oblast known as “Borovskova”, located approximately one hour away from Kostanai by bus. The camp site included: one large dormitory building; two medium-sized dormitories; one building that served as a meeting/sleeping place for counselors; a medical building for the camp’s full-time nurse; a mess hall that seated between 80-100 people; an outdoor dance area; an outdoor stage and seating area; a “banya” and showers for cleaning; a nearby lake for swimming; and a forest.

### *Daily Routine*

Each day of the camp began at 9:00am and ended after 11:00pm. The campers (referred to as “Pioneers”) were kept busy throughout their two weeks at camp.

A typical day of camp was as follows:

9.00	–	morning exercise
9.30	–	breakfast
10.15	–	games and songs
11.00	–	studio # 1
12.00	–	studio # 2
13.00	–	lunch
14.00	–	rest time
15.00	–	practice for evening performances or swimming
16.00	–	afternoon snack
17.00	–	competitions or sports
18.00	–	final preparation for evening performances
19.00	–	evening performances
20.00	–	dinner
21.00	–	“disco” (dancing)
23.00	–	story time and lights out
00.00	–	counselor meeting

This plan was followed closely during the course of the two-week sessions; however, it was altered for rainy days and special events. The children were kept active throughout the entire day, and as such, boredom and conflict were generally kept at a minimum.

For my part, I was responsible for helping the other counselors carry out different competitions, performances, songs, and tasks for the children. During the morning “games and songs” session, the counselors would first dance on stage while the children trickled in, and then they would put on a short performance followed by three or four songs or games the children would participate in. I was often asked to sing a song or lead a game in English during these morning sessions. And of course, I always danced.

If I was not helping lead performances or games, I would accompany the different groups of children as they carried out their various tasks. During the summer, I would often act or sing in a wide variety of roles that were performed on stage or at stations placed throughout the camp. Some of the characters I played included Harry Potter, Elvis, a pirate, a cannibal, a Native American Indian chief, a U.S. Senator, a Russian *babushka* (grandmother), Batman, and everyone’s personal favorite - a chicken. Helping the other counselors conduct performances and challenges was extremely fun and rewarding. Indeed, spending my summer interacting with students and kids at a camp has been the most fulfilling and enjoyable work I have performed while living in Kazakhstan.

### *English and Baseball*

In addition to my role as actor and performer, I also acted as a teacher and coach while at camp. After the morning “games and songs” session, the different detachments would disperse and attend studio sessions led by the counselors and staff. Sessions for “Studio #1” were held on a rotating basis and each attachment would attend one session from this studio during the camp; “Studio #2” was an open session where the campers had a choice of various activities to participate in.

*Studio #1*

For “Studio #1”, I would conduct a short, one-hour English lesson. I adjusted the lesson based on the age-level of each group; however, in general I designed one lesson plan and repeated it for the different groups. The session would generally begin with a few introductory words and jokes I would tell in Russian. Next, I would teach some basic greetings and emotions and have the children act them out. Following this, I would teach some basic information (in English and Russian) about the U.S. and ask the children to repeat the information back to me. I concluded each session by either showing the campers pictures of the U.S.A. or by leading them in games and songs conducted in English. For the children with developmental disabilities, I spent the hour-long session first teaching them the Alphabet Song, followed by showing them how to write their names in English. Outside of the English studio, many of the children, regardless of their age or level of English, enjoyed practicing their English with me. Some of the older and more advanced students who planned on studying English at university especially thanked me for having the opportunity just to communicate in a second language.

*Studio #2*

For “Studio #2”, I taught whoever was interested how to play baseball. An American-style baseball bat was purchased at a sporting goods store in Kostanai and racquetballs covered in thick layers of scotch tape were used as improvised baseballs. For our baseball field, we found a medium-sized clearing in the woods and used rocks for bases. The clearing happened to be located in front of the home of man who was the caretaker of the camp: much like real American backyard baseball, we had to climb the neighbor’s fence several times in order to retrieve our foul-balls.

As not everyone who came out to play baseball spoke English, I did my best to explain the rules of the game in Russian. Through pantomiming and help from the kids, I was able to teach the basic idea and elementary rules of the game to several children. Most of the campers who played the game were male teenagers, however, several girls and younger children also came out to play. None of the over 70 children whom I taught to

play the game had ever played baseball before. At camp, baseball became very popular and the other counselors soon began thanking me for giving their Pioneers something they found exciting and new. In fact, baseball became so popular among certain campers that by the end of the camp I eventually ended up coaching the game twice per day.

### *Storyteller*

One additional role I embarked on throughout the camp was as a “storyteller” during the evening story-time sessions. At the end of each evening, each pair of counselors, along with their detachment, would gather for “The Candle.” Every night, a candle was lit and placed in the center of a dark room where each camper would go around in a circle and say what they liked or disliked about that day. After this, the counselors would often tell their groups of children a story before sending them to bed. I was invited to visit every group at least once. The stories I told varied, but a story that I liked to repeat for different groups was “The Mouse and the Lion” from *Aesop’s Fables*. This is the story of a small mouse and a large lion who survive because they help each other, regardless of their great differences in size. I used this fable to teach the children that young and old, counselor and camper, should help in each other. For some groups I told the story in Russian, while for other groups that had one or two students with high English-speaking abilities, I would ask a student to help me translate. Telling children short stories with simple morals is something that I learned while working as a camp counselor for the YMCA in Colorado Springs, Colorado. I taught this technique to the other counselors and I discovered that they soon started finding stories with morals to tell their campers before lights-out.

### *Student Camp*

My role at the student’s camp was somewhat different from the three sessions held for children. Firstly, the student’s camp was much shorter: four days instead of two weeks. Secondly, the camp was partially organized by *Rovesnik*, partially by students from the “Kurgan” region of southern Russia, and partially by the local city government of Kostanai. As such, this international student’s camp had more of a serious undertone than the three children’s sessions I attended. For my part, during the student’s camp I worked



as a photographer, accompanied the groups of students as they carried out various tasks, continued to coach baseball, and conducted different games and performances on the outdoor stage.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, I felt that my work as a camp counselor was among the most rewarding, interesting, beneficial, and fun experiences throughout my time in the Peace Corps. There are two reasons why I was able to work effectively with the staff members and children: language and communication. While at camp, I was able to communicate with the other staff members mostly in Russian. At this point, I had already lived in Kazakhstan for more than one year and had been able to converse more or less freely with my peers. While my Russian was by no means perfect, my ability to speak (and understand) at a higher level made a phenomenal difference regarding what I was able to plan and execute. As a counselor, I felt that I was truly able to assist the local staff: I helped to excite the children and keep them active; I laughed and danced a lot; I was able to teach and to coach; and I formed some strong relationships with the staff and campers.

### *Counselor Concert*

In mid-October, approximately two months after the last session of summer camp, the various students who worked as camp counselors voluntarily organized a concert held in the auditorium of the Kostanai Pedagogical University. The main goal of the concert was to advertise *Rovesnik* and to make other students interested in working as counselors. Two weeks were spent planning and rehearsing the concert. The concert included jokes, skits, songs, and dances, many of which had been performed throughout the summer at camp. I, of course, was invited to participate in the concert. In addition to playing some small roles in various performances, I performed a humorous musical skit in English and Russian to the tune of Stevie Wonder's "I Just Called to Say I Love You."

The concert itself was effective: since the performance many new students have attended weekly counselor-training sessions of *Rovesnik*. Although not a part of my regular work,

I have often dropped in on these weekly meetings in order to speak with the students, pique their interest in working as camp counselors, and to answer their questions.

## ***II. Art Therapy at Home for Children with Disabilities***

Shortly after returning to Kostanai from my summer at camp, I began volunteering at a home for children with developmental disabilities. This was arranged for me by my director at the Association of Children and Youth. In addition to being friends with the director of the home for children with developmental disabilities, my director and organization would often arrange programs for developmentally disabled children. In Russian, the place I began visiting is called «Детский дом инвалидов» - “Children’s Home for Invalids.” “Invalid” is the Russian term used for developmentally disabled; in Russian, it is not considered politically incorrect to refer to disabled people by this term. These places are frequently referred to as “internats” or simply, orphanages. Even in English, I personally prefer to call these places “children’s homes” as this is typically the direct translation from Russian (детский дом). I also feel that the term “children’s home” is a more humane label and carries with it a more positive connotation. The particular children’s home I began visiting and teaching at is only one of many in Kostanai. To my knowledge, there are approximately four or five such children’s homes in the city, two of which are especially for developmentally disabled children and youth.

The children’s home I began visiting after camp is home to more than 200 children with physical and mental disabilities. The age of the children varies greatly, ranging from young infants to some adults in their early 30s. This particular children’s home is not strictly an orphanage: some, but not all, of the children who live there do have parents who visit them occasionally. Many of the children with parents live where they do simply because their parents do not have the ability or resources to take care of them.

My role at the children’s home has been to teach “art therapy.” I first began teaching five days per week to two different groups: one group of 15 girls and another group of 15 boys; the age range of each group was from 6 to 14. From these two groups, about half of them had attended summer camp and thus already knew me. This had made my work much easier as the children who attended camp were excited to see me when our lessons

first began. In fact, even after having visited the children's home for several months, those children who attended the camp continued to ask me on a daily basis to "say hello" to the other counselors. My lessons at the children's home were conducted almost entirely in Russian, something that would not have been possible at the beginning of my service and something that I never imagined myself doing before coming to Kazakhstan.

When I first began teaching "art therapy" at the children's home, university students throughout Kostanai began to ask me: "If you yourself are not an artist, then what qualifies you to teach art to children?" Good question. The answer that I usually gave is that although I am not a specialized art teacher, the most important aspect of my work at the children's home is the time spent with the children. Aside from the staff members who work at the children's home, the children themselves have no other adults, guests, or role models with whom to speak. By simply spending time interacting, playing, and speaking with the children, the kids were given a small, but appreciated service.

In addition to teaching art and games to the children, I often would watch their plays, songs, and dances, and accompany them on field trips throughout Kostanai. I enjoyed doing this because it gave me the opportunity to meet and interact with more than half of the children from the Children's Home for Invalids.

### *The Beginning*

When I first began visiting the children's home, interacting with the children and leading various games, activities, and drawing lessons was not too difficult for me. I would begin each one-hour session with an energetic introduction followed by one or two simple children's games. After this, I would teach a few elementary words or phrases in English. As many of the children could not (or were afraid to) speak, I made sure that I did not focus too much time on English and instead taught only a few simple words in order to make the lesson more interesting for the children. Many of the children were actually very interested in learning some phrases in English and made very good progress in the short time I taught the language to them. After games and English, the remainder of the time was spent allowing the children to draw. When I first began to teach "art therapy" I

had more elaborate plans regarding what art projects I wanted the children to do. I soon learned, however, that many of the children would draw what they wanted to no matter what I said and how long I explained the lesson. Therefore, I eventually learned to relax, give them simple directions, and just be satisfied with the fact that the children were busy doing something they enjoyed.

### *Changing Groups*

I spent my first month dividing my time between the two groups of girls and boys before given a different group of children to work with. In the beginning of September, most of the children from the groups I had been teaching could no longer continue to interact with me on a daily basis because they started taking lessons at school. The subsequent group I was given was considerably more difficult to teach; namely, children who did not know me from camp and did not attend school lessons. In October, I started teaching four or five times per week primarily to one group of boys who do not attend school lessons. In general, this group was much harder to communicate with and to discipline, and therefore, much harder to teach. When I very first started interacting with this group I feared that their lack of focus and discipline was due to my low level of Russian; while there is certainly truth to this, the full-time staff has empathized with me by often telling me that this particular group is difficult for them too.

### *Simplify, Simplify, Simplify*

Despite the challenges of this group of boys, I was still determined to help them in whatever way I could. What I have learned to do is follow the advice of Thoreau: “simplify, simplify, simplify.” In order to have more meaningful sessions, rather than plan a lesson that would be over their heads, too complicated for them to understand, or too complicated for me to explain in my second language, I have tried to keep things as short and simple as possible. As with the first groups I taught, I began lessons with two or three simple games. Following this, I would either let the children listen to music and dance, or try to encourage them to draw based upon a certain theme. I learned not to worry too much about following my plans to the exact letter: many times I reminded myself that the most important aspect of “art therapy” was spending time interacting with

disadvantaged youth. Also, I received comfort when I saw that they were happy to see me every morning I would visit them.

### *Volunteerism*

Lastly, I used my experiences at the children's home as a way to try and increase volunteerism among local university students whom I knew. At my English Club and at the university where I taught, I invited students that I identified as leaders to help plan and lead activities at the children's home. If they had time, students would come with me to lead games, songs, and art lessons. I invited them to come on a voluntary basis and during times that did not conflict with their class schedules.

My best experience with the student volunteers was organizing songs and games for children for two special holidays: Halloween and "Day of American Culture." For Halloween, five students from different universities in Kostanai accompanied me and worked together to organize and lead an upbeat, 20-minute song and game session for over 50 developmentally disabled children. For the "Day of American Culture", three university students and three Peace Corps Volunteers worked with me to put on a performance that included: singing the U.S. national anthem, teaching simple children's songs in English, and leading the children in several interactive games as American Oldies music played in the background. Seeing the students' dedication, sensitivity, sincerity during these celebrations, as well as their enthusiasm that followed afterwards, was a proud moment for me. The students' earnest efforts are at the heart of true volunteerism.

### ***III. Professional Development Seminar***

During the last two weeks in October, 2006, I organized and led a seminar entitled "Professional Development Seminar," held at the Association of Children and Youth. This seminar was targeted to students and young adults who speak English and was similar to seminars I helped other Peace Corps Volunteers organize at different venues during my first year of service. The format for the seminar was based on previous seminars with some changes being made: the impetus for these changes being based upon written survey feedback from past seminar participants. The principal modification made

between the October 2006 seminar and previous ones is that this seminar included more hands-on activities. Also, at the time I was the only Peace Corps Volunteer in the city; while staff members and local volunteers at the Association helped me organize the event, I was the only presenter.

The “Professional Development Seminar” was conducted over the course of five evenings, beginning October 23<sup>rd</sup> and ending October 27<sup>th</sup>. Each day of the seminar consisted of one 60-minute session, followed by a twenty-minute coffee break, and ending with another 60-minute session. The seminar included the following sessions: Introduction, Rules, Ice-Breaker, Entrance Survey; Resumes and Cover Letters; Leadership and Public Speaking; Team-building; Professional Etiquette; Interview Skills; Interview Practice; Interview Feedback; and the Presentation of Certificates. The sessions were presented in a combination of Power Point presentations, lectures, dialogues, and simulations.

(Please refer to Appendix F for the “Professional Development Seminar Schedule”)

#### *Seminar Cost*

The cost of the seminar was 1800 Kazakhstani Tenge for every participant (approximately \$14 USD). The money was used to buy nametags, pens, drinking water, food and drinks for the coffee break, and to print certificates. Money was also used to print the workbooks each participant was given on the first day. The workbooks were about 90 pages in length and contained copies of the Power Point presentations as well as supplemental information about resumes, cover letters, leadership, public speaking, and about the sponsors of the seminar. The money that remained after purchasing material for the seminar was donated to the Association of Children and Youth; remaining funds from the October 2006 seminar were later used to buy materials for another event held by my host organization.

The deadline for registration was set for the end of the working day the Friday before the seminar began. At this point, ten people had registered. On the first day of the seminar,

however, several more people decided to register. I did have the option of turning them down as we had jumped dramatically from ten to eighteen people; yet, I decided that having so many people interested in the seminar was definitely a good sign. I did not want to turn anyone away as the office of the Association of Children and Youth certainly had enough space for extra participants and I was personally pleased to see more people interested in the seminar.

### *Local Support*

Although I was the only trainer during this seminar, I received local support from a large number of people. First and foremost was from my director, co-workers, and the student volunteers at my work. They helped me set a date and time for the seminar; design and distribute advertisements throughout the city that were written half in English and half in Russian; to register participants, transport materials, and print and assemble workbooks; to take pictures; buy and set-up things for the coffee break; and to organize several other details related to the seminar. During the night of the interviews, I received help from two English-speaking university teachers and from a friend who worked as a translator. These three young women voluntarily helped conduct nearly two hours' worth of mock job interviews entirely in English.

Moreover, I received support from the "Business Development Fund of Kostanai" (BDFK) and from the NGO Fund "HELP." BDFK allowed us to use their projector without having to pay a rental fee. This contribution was extremely useful (and necessary) to conduct the "Professional Development Seminar." Fund "HELP", a NGO involved with educational and social activities designed to keep people off of drugs and alcohol, allowed us the use of their book-binder in order to make the 18 seminar workbooks. These free contributions were a tremendous asset to the seminar: in addition to saving my host organization time and money, these contributions helped build stronger linkages between three NGOs in Kostanai.

*Social Capital*

HEREHEREHEREThe local support that made the Professional Development Seminar possible is closely connected with Robert Putnam's notion of "social capital." Social capital is a term that is swiftly becoming popular in the vernacular of both well-developed and developing NGOs, and thus very pertinent to my own volunteer work within youth organizations. The basis for social capital is trust, reciprocity, and networking. According to Putnam (1993):

Social capital ... refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms {of reciprocity} and networks {of civic engagement}, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions (Lewis, p. 50).

The "Professional Development Seminar" was the successful result of multiple members of society trusting each other enough to work toward a common societal goal. The seminar would not have turned out as well as it did had there not been a strong degree of social capital between the staff of the Association of Children and Youth, the director of BDFK, the two English-speaking teachers and translator who helped, and Fund "HELP." BDFK trusted that their projector would be kept safe and not returned in pieces; Fund "HELP" trusted us with an expensive piece of office equipment; and the director of my organization trusted me and the local volunteers of the Association of Children and Youth to plan and lead the seminar ourselves.

In addition to trust, Putnam's notion of reciprocity within society also played an important role. As the October 2006 seminar was the third time the seminar was conducted, it was apparent that those who provided local support were receiving something that was not monetary. What they received in return for their support was gratitude and recognition. After each seminar that was conducted, the director of BDFK offered the use of his organization's projector for future seminars; he was happy to hear about the success of the seminars and expressed hope that they would be repeated. For our part, we tried to provide reciprocity to our sponsors by putting their respective company logos on all printed materials, by including written information about the sponsors in the workbooks, by placing the sponsors' signatures on the seminar



certificates, and by requesting the participants to personally thank the sponsors. We also, of course, would give our supporters the traditional Kazakhstan gift of tea and candy.

#### ***IV. Halloween Dance***

At the same time planning for the Professional Development Seminar was taking place, I worked with the staff and volunteers at the Association of Children and Youth to coordinate a Halloween dance for university students. Everyone who organized or participated in the event (including the DJ, rock band, set-up crew, local volunteers, and staff members) did so without any financial compensation. My host organization charged tickets for the event; however, the money was used to rent a community event center and not for personal financial gain.

Planning this event was one of my favorite project accomplishments at my host organization. I enjoyed planning this event for the following reasons: most of the planning was done in Russian and I was able to take a very active role; I was able to call upon the help of several students, friends, and acquaintances to assist in planning the event, thus utilizing various networks I had formed; and I was able to encourage the rapidly-spreading growth of “Halloween” as a holiday gaining popularity in the former Soviet Union. The main coordinators were four student volunteers from the Association of Children and Youth and I: the five of us acted as the planning committee and were responsible for communicating our plans and progress to my director. The main elements we needed to carry out a successful dance were as follows: a time and place, live music, a DJ, decorations, participants, and security.

My director reserved a time and place for us to use, a community event center called the “Children’s Center.” This is a building where performances, dances, and competitions for children and students take place. The counselors from the *Rovesnik* summer camp often use this space for meetings and concert rehearsals. We were able to obtain music through various personal acquaintances. The first acquaintance was a vocalist/guitarist from Kostanai whom I knew through a colleague at the Kostanai Social and Technical

University. I had known that he had played in public concerts before and that he had wanted me to help him find any possible musical engagements. I also personally liked his music. Needless to say, he was an easy and willing choice to provide live music. The second musical element was our DJ, who was introduced to us by one of the students who visited my Debate Club at the Youth Center the previous year. Lastly, the Kostanai city police provided us with the services of a security officer.

In the time leading up to Halloween, my time at work was divided between organizing and conducting the “Professional Development Seminar” and helping the student volunteers think of decorations, contests, and dialogues for the emcees hosting the event. Together, we spent most of the time at the office (as at meetings at cafes, universities, and apartments) writing a script for the emcees, making Halloween decorations, putting together costumes, and carving pumpkins. When we were not planning the Halloween dance, we visited various universities throughout the city to sell tickets.

The dance itself took place on the day of Halloween, October 31<sup>st</sup>. Over 150 school pupils, university students, and other people from throughout Kostanai attended.

#### ***V. Business Skills Seminar***

In mid-December, another business-themed seminar was held at the Association of Children and Youth. For this seminar, I again worked closely with my director, staff members, and local volunteers in order to coordinate dates and times; to advertise; to transport equipment and purchase supplies; and to set-up the office. This seminar had an advantage that was not present during the “Professional Development Seminar” held in October: additional trainers. For the “Business Skills Seminar”, we were able to utilize the help of four other Peace Corps Volunteers: one from Almaty, a business NGO Volunteer from my “Kaz-16” training group; and three “Kaz-18” NGO Volunteers who had just began their service in the Kostanai oblast the previous month.

This seminar was held for three days, instead of five (mostly to work around the “International Day of Volunteers” holiday celebration my office had been organizing that

week). The format was essentially the same as the other seminars with a combination of surveys, Power Point presentations, lectures, hands-on activities, and seminar workbooks. Each of the five Peace Corps Volunteers gave a presentation on the following topics: Creativity, Team-building, Time Management, Entrepreneurship, and Public Relations. As the subjects had been different from those of previously held seminars, many students who had attended the other seminars returned to participate in this one. Overall, 18 people attended the “Business Skills Seminar.”

### ***VI. English Club***

One of my weekly responsibilities at the Association of Children and Youth has been to lead a bi-weekly English Club. As most people who came to the club were university students, club meetings were held in the late afternoon at a time when most lessons were finished.

The English Club held at the Association of Children and Youth was less formal than the Debate Club I led at the Youth Center the previous year; however, I did reuse many games, dialogues, and activities that were popular at the Debate Club. Unlike the English clubs I held at the Youth Center, I was not required by my director to charge a participation fee. Advertisements started by simply printing flyers in universities throughout the city; after this, word of mouth helped to promote the club. The average attendance per meeting was between 15 and 30 people.

The main purpose of this club was to give people of various levels of English practice in speaking and listening, as well as just a place to relax and have fun after class. Many students who visited the club already had an excellent working knowledge of English, while others had only just recently begun to study the language. Several students who visited the club did so because they wanted to find temporary work in the U.S. for the summer and had little or no practice speaking English. For the students who planned on working temporarily in the U.S., I was often asked to give advice on writing resumes, taking interviews, finding good places and states were to work, and about American culture.

As this was a club and not lecture, I tried to make it fun, interesting, and useful to the participants. I would never force anyone to speak if he or she did not want to; rather, I tried to use activities that students could participate in on a voluntary basis.

An example of some activities I conducted are as follows: structured discussions; random discussion questions draw from a hat; practice dialogues; “1-minute speeches”; board games; planning holiday events; and playing games in English. As I decided to keep the format of the club fairly open and did not force participants to speak, many students who were just beginning to learn English were welcome just to sit-in on the club and listen. To make those with lower speaking levels feel comfortable, I would often introduce myself in Russian and periodically say a few words in Russian. Over time, I noticed that some students who were initially shy or quiet when they first started attending the club eventually became some of the club’s most active, talkative members.

Leading the bi-weekly English Club at the Association of Children and Youth has been one of my favorite projects and one of the highlights of my week.

### **SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY VISITS**

Although it was not usually part of my primary or secondary assignment, there is one role I performed so often I feel it deserves mention: guest speaker. On several occasions, I was invited to schools and universities throughout Kostanai to speak to pupils, students, and teachers. Very often English teachers would invite me to their classes and tell me to simply talk about myself, culture and life in the U.S., and to answer questions. Sometimes I was asked to prepare a lecture about a specific theme (such as law in the U.S., cross-cultural communication, American history, “spelling”, family, or whatever theme that teacher had planned for the day’s lesson). Audiences ranged from a handful of school pupils or university students who had a limited knowledge of English, to overflowing lecture halls where several groups of students and teachers had been invited to sit in. Overall, during my two years in Kostanai I visited over five universities and fifteen schools giving more guest talks than I can count.

These trips were usually quite enjoyable and interesting for me. Many of the children and university students I spoke with had neither seen nor spoken with an American before, so I often became an instant celebrity during these excursions (I was sometimes greeted with applause before even beginning to speak). It occurred to me one time after visiting a school located in the outskirts of Kostanai that by delivering these guest lectures I was in part living up to the second goal of the Peace Corps: *“to help promote a better understanding of the American people on the part of peoples served.”* Throughout my various guest lectures and interactions with students and teachers, I realized that I was helping to provide first-hand information about life in America: I answered questions based on my own experiences, I did my best to dispel misconceptions propagated by American films and media, and I was able to help the students draw their own conclusions. I also found that on several occasions, especially when visiting universities, I was asked to give students advice about work, travel, and education. I felt like these

guest lectures were educational, fun, and created a positive synergy for everyone involved.

I will miss giving such presentations after my life in the Peace Corps.

**DRAWING COMPARISONS: SERVICE DELIVERY AND YOUTH NGOS**

There are some important comparisons that can be made between both NGOs I served at. From my perspective, the Youth Center and the Association of Children and Youth share the following organizational characteristics:

- Relatively young an as organization
- Primary activity is youth development
- Managed by a charismatic leader
- Small staff size (between two and six full-time staff)
- Primary activities are not revenue-generating
- Majority of work is project-driven
- Funding is obtained from grants and the local government
- Depends largely on support from local volunteers
- Participates with other NGOs
- Competes with other NGOs
- Shares building space with other organizations/residents
- Partners with educational institutions and community groups

Overall, I would describe both the Youth Center and the Association of Children and Youth as “service delivery” organizations. As defined by Lewis (2002) in *The Management of Non-Governmental Development Organizations*, service delivery is the “public provision by government agencies, private sector organizations or NGOs of services such as education, healthcare, agricultural extension, etc” (p. 202). In the case of the Youth Center and the Association of Children and Youth, the main service provided is non-formal education. Both organizations provide leadership training for youth, as well as clubs, competitions, seminars, and activities connected to nurturing intellectual growth and character development; both organizations provide some form of educational development in a setting outside of the classroom. Indeed, I do not think it is a coincidence that the respective directors of these organizations each had prior teaching experience before opening their own NGOs.

Service delivery can play an extremely valuable function in the development of new NGOs seeking sustainability because the implementation of services, if done correctly and successfully, can easily be viewed by the community.

According to Carroll (1992),

service delivery is perhaps the most directly observable and clearly visible role which NGOs play in development work. In this role, goods and services that are wanted, needed or otherwise unavailable are provided by NGOs to a particular section of the community (Lewis, 2002, p. 110).

It can be argued that both the Youth Center and the Association of Children and Youth are active leaders in the sphere of community development as they each provide social and educational programs for youth not offered by schools, universities, or other organizations. The Youth Center offered students hands-on experience with decision-making, planning, and public speaking through the Youth Parliament. This program drew wide attention from students because similar programs were not offered by most schools or universities in Kostanai. After-school programs like the Youth Parliament and the Debate Club served the community by creating a safe, open atmosphere where young people could exchange ideas, develop organizational skills, and simply play.

The summer camps, concerts, clubs, dances, and conferences managed by the Association of Children and Youth were organized at a level that could not easily be replicated by schools or universities. As such, more young people had access to a higher quantity and quality of non-formal educational programs. These programs help fill the need that children (and their parents) have to find a healthy, productive way of spending summertime and time outside of class.

### *Service Delivery and Community Development*

The value that service delivery organizations contribute to society and the development of communities is imprecise and difficult to measure. Certainly, the values, lessons, skills, and relationships youth participants take away from the camps, seminars, and clubs they attend are not always immediately visible. The emotions and ideas that are generated

by participation in character-building programs cannot be viewed through a microscope or easily drafted on a chart.

I, however, have an optimistic view of service delivery and the role youth NGOs in Kazakhstan can play in providing their services to communities: the young boy who is inspired to work as a diplomat may later look back upon the days when he learned about debate and leadership by simulating the actions of local government; the physically disabled orphan girl who is raised without parents may learn about self-assurance and find for herself meaningful work; the university student who learns English may find opportunities to work and travel places her parents never had the opportunity to see; the counselor who leads a group of children at camp may later become a successful teacher, manager, or public servant. I would agree with Riddell and Robinson (1995) that “judging NGO performance is more an ‘art’ than an exact science” (Lewis, 2002, p.137). Nonetheless, youth NGOs can play an invaluable societal role in developing this “art” by contributing to the overall well-being of the community.

#### *Framework for Analyzing Nonprofit Organizations*

While the results of social services offered by service provider NGOs are not always easy to measure, it is important to track the growth and success (or deficiencies) that exist in such organizations in order to predict and evaluate the potential for future sustainability and expansion. At present, I believe that both the Youth Center and the Association of Children and Youth are in “survival phase.” Namely, at this point in organizational development, more activity is dedicated to meeting the organization’s mission and keeping the office operating than worrying about sustainability, the transfer of leadership/management skills, and future growth and expansion.

I have included in “Appendix G” a chart entitled “*Framework for Analyzing Nonprofit Organizations: Creation, Growth, and Expansion*” which compares the Youth Center and the Association of Children and Youth in the following areas: Vision, Capacity, Resources, and Linkages; and Development, Sustainability, and Expansion. This chart is not of my own creation, but rather a tool used by NGO specialists and scholars to



evaluate non-governmental organizations. Admittedly, the chart is an incomplete picture of each organization. This is primarily due to the fact that many areas of the financial and structural management of both NGOs were unknown to me because of both a language barrier and my position as volunteer (as opposed to manager or director). Additionally, the chart is based on my observations and speculations derived from the relatively short time I spent with each NGO. Furthermore, there are some aspects of the chart that are oriented more toward Western business mentality and less connected to the daily operations and cultural norms popular through many Kazakhstani NGOs (such as “standardized systems of control”; “Board membership”; “set up systems to assure accountability”). Indeed, at both youth development NGOs where I served, almost all staff meetings were held on the spur of the moment, usually over a cup of tea.

### *Service Provider*

My main role as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Kazakhstan has been as a service provider. My work at the Youth Center, the Association of Children and Youth, the home for disabled children, at the Kostanai Social and Technical University, as well as the other places I visited, was primarily centered on delivering a wanted or needed service. These services often came in the form of teaching or leading discussions in English, communicating and interacting with youth, participating in trainings and activities, finding ways to keep young people active and mentally engaged outside of class, encouraging creative thinking, and implementing programs that promote positive lifestyles.

I believe that by taking on the role of “service provider”, especially at service delivery youth organizations, PCVs can better live up to the mission of the Peace Corps while promoting community development in the places they serve. Indeed, my greatest satisfaction while serving as a volunteer has been seeing the results of my interactions with children and youth. While I am skeptical about how much technical information I have been able to provide the staff at the two youth NGOs, the university, and the orphanage I served at, I am certain that I have been able to pass along useful skills,

information, values, and motivation to several young people who as a result, I hope, will make positive contributions to their schools, universities, and communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

By way of conclusion, I have included some suggestions that I believe could be helpful to the development of youth development NGOs in Kazakhstan as well as what I regard as the main impacts I have had on the organizations, institutions, and people I have worked with. In addition, I would like to include some final thoughts about my Peace Corps service and about how this service relates to my academic studies in community development at the Illinois State University Stevenson Center.

### *Suggestions for Developing Youth Organizations*

Based on my observations of the two youth development NGOs I have served with, as well as similar organizations whose activities I have witnessed, I have some suggestions and concerns for future growth and development.

First, youth development organizations should promote their image as service delivery organizations by seeking more public recognition and understanding. As the idea of a “NGO” is relatively new to Kazakhstan, people still need to be convinced that the provision of social and non-formal educational services is a necessary societal benefit, one worthy of supporting. This requires that schools, universities, government, business, media, children, and adults are aware of the general activities of youth development NGOs, as well as the wide-array of services these organizations provide. People are more willing to visit and participate in the activities of an organization they can trust; donors and partners are more willing to support organizations they believe will help them meet their needs as well as spread a positive image of their respective organizations throughout the overall community. Good reputations and PR take time to build up: the Salvation Army, Red Cross, Boy Scouts, Green Peace and YMCA did not become nationally-

recognized organizations within their first years of work; however, today they are internationally renowned and respected non-profit organizations.

Second, NGOs that provide services to youth should design projects for which participants are willing to pay. This is not to say that NGOs should be based solely on user-fees; yet, by implementing programs the public is willing to support financially, the organization can help recover costs while being less reliant on local government support and grants. Also, user fees can help give participants ownership in the organization and activities. In general, both the Youth Center and the Association of Children and Youth ran programs that required user fees. The biggest difference was that the Youth Center charged fees for weekly/monthly club meetings (ex: Youth Parliament, Debate Club), while the Association of Children and Youth would charge a one-time fee for a one-time service (ex: summer camp sessions, leadership seminars, trainings). The challenge, of course, is designing programs that people are willing and able to support financially.

Third, as the activities of newly-developing youth organizations are largely dependent upon support from volunteers, these organizations should find ways to thank and recognize the volunteers for their assistance. Volunteer appreciation is crucial to the sustainability and upward growth of developing organizations. The volunteers play a vital role in seeing that the ideas of the organization are put into action; as such, the least they deserve is respect and recognition for their endeavors. In mid-December, The Association of Children and Youth did an excellent job of thanking volunteers for their services by hosting an awards ceremony and disco for the “International Day of Volunteers.” The Association invited NGO leaders and service providers from throughout the region and publicly recognized them, and their community volunteers, for their efforts. Such festivities bring positive, needed recognition to developing organizations and those who aid in their development.

Lastly, youth development NGOs struggle with the challenge of maintaining sustainable leadership. As most newly-created NGOs in Kazakhstan are usually managed by one charismatic leader, the challenge presented to these organizations is continuing the

organization's initial momentum past the physical parameters of the director. Simply put: these organizations should be ready to transfer leadership from the director to others. At the Youth Center, the vast majority of decision-making was placed in the hands of the organization's director. In fact, if the director was ever sick or away on business, the office was usually shut down. The Association of Children and Youth was also largely dependent on the decision-making power of the director; however, in the director's absence there usually was an authoritative adult to take her place. I believe that such organizations should have staff members, volunteers, and responsible adults who receive training from the director regarding how to manage the organization independently. Responsibilities can be divided up and others can be trained. For developing youth NGOs in Kazakhstan, strong guidance and mentorship from the organization's director could be the key to ensuring that these organizations last more than one generation.

*Organizational contributions: or, "What difference did I make?"*

At the end of any Peace Corps Volunteer's service, one finds himself or herself asking: What difference did I make? What were the contributions (hopefully positive) which I passed along to the organizations and people I worked with? Was I a "good" volunteer?

These questions are not so easy to answer. For while I can testify what effect (both positive and negative) my work in Kostanai has had on me and what lessons I think I have learned, from my perspective it is not so simple to say what effect my advice, attitude, activities, and presence has had on those I have interacted and worked with. Suffice to say, any conclusions I draw and project onto the organizations, institutions, and people I have assisted are purely my own conjecture, and not necessarily shared opinions. Nonetheless, it is appropriate for my own self-evaluation and contribution to community development theory to reflect upon what impact my actions have had on the following places: The Youth Center, the Kostanai Social and Technical University, the Children's Home for Invalids, and the Association of Children and Youth.

### *I. Youth Center*

It is difficult for me to walk away from two year's of Peace Corps service with a positive appraisal of my impact on my first host organization, the Youth Center. While I felt that I was an active volunteer and a person who contributed to the organization's overall mission, I left the organization feeling as if the director and I parted on bad terms. Indeed, when our working relationship first began we each thought that we would be spending two years together.

When assessing my impact on the Youth Center, I cannot comment on the "organization" without commenting on the director: for in the case of a relatively young, director-driven NGO like the Youth Center, the *organization* is synonymous with the *director*.

At the Youth Center I felt that I was more of a hindrance to the director than an asset. As mentioned before, our goals and plans were often different and it seemed towards the end of my time there that we began to see less and less of each other. I do not want to pass blame onto my former director or to demonize her: she did do some great things for me and at the beginning of our partnership she went out of her way to make me feel welcome; despite her often over-bearing personality she was committed to her work and could be very pleasant to interact with, learn from, and joke with; and I have no regrets about serving at her organization. I would rather say that mistakes were probably made on both sides, and sometimes volunteers and organizations simply do not match up. While we parted on civil terms, I felt that my director was not sorry to see me go.

This situation begs the question: what could have been done differently so that the Youth Center would have benefited more from a PCV? While I do think that there could have been some changes made, I do not think that much could have been done to alter the final outcome.

Firstly, I think that perhaps the director had an inflated preconception of what a volunteer could realistically do before deciding to accept one. More specifically, very often NGOs who host Peace Corps and other international volunteers expect that they will be a panacea for the organization, that they will be an easy source of funding, or that they will

solve all of the organization's major problems. I, at least, often felt this way at the Youth Center. When my director was not satisfied with my work, she would ask: "Where is the growth Peace Corps promised?" Similar to the lessons taught the Kaz-16 training group, I think that NGO directors should be prepared to lower the bar a little bit when being presented with the option of taking on a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Secondly, the problem of funding (i.e. money) can be, and was for me, a source of frustration and conflict. Although Peace Corps Volunteers are not required to write grants or charge money for projects, many feel the pressure to bring funding to their organization. While I was still in the honeymoon period at the Youth Center, I assumed that I would be successful at securing financial resources. When my fund-searching efforts failed (or worse, when the grant project I managed to secure funding for was left incomplete) I felt a growing sense of despair and even uselessness. For Peace Corps Volunteers, I believe it is very important to wait until there have been strong bonds of trust between director and volunteer before even considering to look for financial resources; if this trust cannot be established, then it is best if funding is not sought after by the volunteer in the first place.

Regarding any lasting impact I had at the Youth Center, I do at least hope that I was able to pass on some valuable ideas and skills to the young people who frequented the organization. I feel that I affected those whom I interacted with at the Youth Parliament, in the Debate Club, and at the English Clubs I led. In terms of community development and NGO sustainability, I hope that I was able to inspire some youth to become active citizens, to think critically and ask questions, to interact with community members from different spheres, to learn a foreign language, to spend their time outside of class volunteering at NGOs, and to treat those they work with and for with respect. My greatest pride in this arena comes from the four teenagers who went with me from the Youth Center to the Association of Children and Youth. While I do not know what the future holds for them, my wish is that I was able to teach them about the professional etiquette, leadership, employee relation, and communication skills I believe are necessary for a NGO director, office manager, or teacher to function at his or her best.

## II. *Kostanai Social and Technical University*

Aside from giving classroom lectures, I hope that at the Kostanai Social and Technical University I was able to initiate linkages between the students and the community, in particular, by connecting students with the activities NGOs and other socially-oriented institutions. As mentioned before, through me several of my students at the university became active members of various English Clubs, volunteers at local orphanages, and individuals who supported the general activities of NGOs. Ideally, I helped plant (or nourish) the idea of what is a “NGO”, what these organizations do, and why these organizations play a valuable societal function. Even if these students do not find future employment with NGOs, I at least hope that I was able to encourage them to support the activities of NGOs.

## III. *Children’s Home for Invalids*

My visits to the children’s home stand out among of my proudest accomplishments and memories of my Peace Corps service. Not only had I never worked with physically or mentally disabled children before in the U.S., but I never imagined that I would be doing so in another country in a language not my own. Regarding the children’s home and my activities there, I feel that my greatest contribution to the institution and people there was helping cultivate social capital. Referring back to Putnam’s definition of social capital as “features of social organization [. . .] that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions” (Lewis, 2001, p. 50), I believe my greatest impact on the Children’s Home for Invalids was connecting the children and staff members there with volunteers and assistance from outside of the institution. I, as an outsider to the children’s home, established a strong rapport with the director and staff members, and in turn, together we were able to work on projects, games, and holidays for the children. Additionally, through my efforts, local students and other Peace Corps Volunteers took an active interest in volunteering their time with the children.

Ideally, my two greatest lasting contributions to the children’s home will be as follows:

1) after my completion of service, local students and Peace Corps Volunteers will still

visit and interact with the children, staff, and director; and 2) most importantly, the children will be happy that they had visitors/teachers who verified their self-worth by simply spending time with them and taking an interest in who they are. To add to this last point, no matter how long it had been since my last visit, I was always glad to see that the children remembered me and would shout out my name and run up to greet me each time I came to see them.

#### *IV. The Association of Children and Youth*

I have chosen to highlight the Association of Children and Youth as the last organization to comment on because I believe it is the place where I had the greatest positive impact. At the Association of Children and Youth, I felt that I had a great deal of freedom regarding what I was willing and able to do as a volunteer and that my director, fellow staff members, and I were on extremely good terms. At the organization, I had some success carrying out projects with the staff and local volunteers; I hosted English Clubs and seminars that had high attendance rates; I acquainted my organization with other Peace Corps Volunteers and various members of the community; I frequently engaged in meaningful conversations with my director and co-workers about American life, culture, and travel; I occasionally helped serve as a liaison to businesses and other NGOs; and I was even asked to speak on TV and at public forums about my work with the organization.

If my impact as a Peace Corps Volunteer could be measured based on my relationship with the director and staff at the Association of Children and Youth, then I am happy to say that it has been a positive impact. At the end of my service, the director and staff at the Association have been quite pleased with me, and although there are still a few months remaining in my service, already they are expressing how sad they will be to see me go. While I was indeed able to contribute some technical skills and training to the organization, and to provide them with access other resources, I think that my most lasting impact has been social. My interactions with the staff, students, and youth have been positive, and I would like to think that I provided the organization with a little extra support and motivation. Lastly, one of my greatest contributions I left the organization



with is a good impression of Peace Corps and Peace Corps Volunteers. In fact, at the writing of this report, my director is seriously considering hosting another Peace Corps Volunteer in the future.

As the Association of Children and Youth is an umbrella organization, I would like to think that my presence, hard-work, and good attitude at the organization helped strengthen already pre-existing bonds of social capital with other youth development organizations. That is, I was able to help my host organization and other organizations “facilitate co-ordinated actions” by simply speaking with other NGO directors and staff members and giving them a positive review of the Association of Children and Youth.

Serving at the Association of Children and Youth has been a mutually beneficial experience for me and for the organization. I am thankful for the time I had spent there and I believe the staff feels the same.

#### *Final Thoughts on Peace Corps Service*

As I had hoped for before entering the program, the coursework and internship provided me by the Stevenson Center was great preparation for Peace Corps service. The themes, lectures, and research projects initiated by my professors and peers provided an ideological base to build upon; additionally, my internship working on youth development programs with the McLean County Community Compact gave me practical experience with community development, initiating my own projects, thinking on my feet, and networking within the community.

Regarding my overall Peace Corps service, for me it has been challenging, educational, interesting, busy, emotional, frustrating, fun, exciting, depressing, uplifting, tiring, energizing, rewarding, and worthwhile.

My greatest challenges have been as follows:

- Adjusting to a new culture
- Communicating at work in a language new to me
- Compromising

- Learning to set more realistic self-expectations
- Working under a strict director
- Feeling helpless at times to assist others in difficult situations
- Readjusting my plans/ideas to fit cultural norms
- Obtaining monetary sponsorship
- Finding information and resources
- Living through two Siberian winters

My greatest accomplishments have been the following:

- Adjusting to a new culture
- Communicating at work in a second language
- Compromising
- Learning to set more realistic self-expectations
- Giving valuable advice to others
- Working for the first time with disabled children
- Inspiring young people to volunteer
- Teaching
- Gathering information from a variety of sources
- Being awarded a grant
- Playing with children at camp
- Building connections with NGOs and other organizations
- Organizing and managing projects in English and Russian
- Leading clubs and seminars
- Becoming a well-known member of the community
- Speaking with students at schools and universities
- Making close local friends
- Living through two Siberian winters

I have been very fortunate in my job assignment and site placement: serving with developing NGOs has been well-suited to my coursework at the Stevenson Center; and working within the sphere of youth development complements my personal interests, my past experiences in the U.S., and my future aspirations. Overall, I believe that there has been a positive synergy created between my academic coursework, my internship, and my service as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

I have enjoyed living and working in Kazakhstan: the best aspect being the hospitable people and youth who have made me feel like a welcomed guest, a respected colleague, a valued teacher, and a close friend. They will be missed.

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**Appendix A: Youth Parliament Outreach Project – SPA Completion Report**

**SPA PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT**

To be filled out by Peace Corps Staff:	
<u>Fiscal Year:</u>	<u>Project Number:</u>

**Country:** *Kazakhstan*

**Project Title:** *Youth Parliament Outreach Project*

**Community Group:** *NGO “Youth Center”/ OO “Молодёжный Центр”*

**Project Implementation Period:**      **From**    *04/01/2006*      **To**      *04/16/2006*

**Volunteer Name(s):** *Wienecke, Daniel Anthony*      **COS Date:**    *05/13/2007*

**Peace Corps Sector Assignment:** *Youth Development*  
*(ex. TEFL, Youth Development, Community Health, etc.)*

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Boys</u>	<u>Girls</u>	<u>Total</u>
<b># of Participants:</b> <i>those persons directly involved in the design and implementation of the project</i>	1	3	4	6	14
<b># of Beneficiaries:</b> <i>those persons who receive an indirect benefit from the project</i>	10	20	50	50	130

1.	<u>What happened during the project? Did the community reach the goal of its project?</u>	<p><i>The “Youth Parliament Outreach Project” consisted of four separate training sessions, provided to school teachers and school pupils. The training consisted of a total of four training sessions divided over two separate days. Training sessions took place in the “Palace of Pioneers”; large group and small group training sessions were completed using one large meeting room and five smaller class rooms. The training was organized and executed by the following people: one director, two staff members, two university students, and 10 teenage school pupils.</i></p> <p><i>The community-identified priority this SPA Project addresses is helping provide youth, teachers, and community leaders with youth leadership training programming in spite of limited human and financial resources.</i></p> <p><i>The goals of the “Youth Parliament Outreach” project are as follows:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>1. to further develop leadership and facilitation skills among young leaders already active in the Kostanai Youth Parliament</i></li> <li><i>2. to promote the Youth Parliament in the cities of Rudny and Lisakovsk</i></li> </ol> <p><i>The community group did successfully accomplish the first goal as 10 young leaders active in the “Kostanai Youth Parliament” were able to design and implement four well-attended training sessions. The community group involved in the project, however, failed in reaching the second goal as training sessions were not conducted in Rudny or Lisakovsk.</i></p>
2.	<u>If the Project goal was not achieved, why?</u>	<p><i>The second goal of the project was not realized for the following reasons:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>1. University student youth leaders responsible for organizing the</i></li> </ol>

		<p><i>trainings could not find time to carry out trainings outside of Kostanai due to conflicting academic schedules</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. <i>The project was not finished before the end of the school year; after the end of the school year, school teachers and pupils were not available to attend training sessions</i></li> </ol>
	<p><u>How did the project build capacity? What new skills have been acquired by the project participants? (Be specific in terms of who acquired new skills, and refer to the indicators you chose in the Project Abstract to describe the change.)</u></p>	<p><i>The Youth Parliament Outreach Project helped two Youth Center staff members, two university students, and ten school pupils involved in the Kostanai Youth Parliament build capacity in the following ways:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Youth trainers were responsible for designing the following: one general greeting and introduction session; five separate master classes, each led by two or three youth and repeated five times to small groups; and one large-group closing session.</i></li> <li>2. <i>Youth trainers and supervisors worked closely with the Youth Center director and PCV in order to determine precise dates, times, and training locations.</i></li> <li>3. <i>Youth trainers worked with the building managers at the Palace of Pioneers in order to secure six separate rooms that were used from morning until late afternoon over two separate days.</i></li> <li>4. <i>Youth trainers had practice in public speaking, facilitation, arranging logistics, and passing along skills to other youth.</i></li> </ol> <p><i>Those school teachers and school pupils who attended the training sessions were exposed to the following ideas:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Greater awareness of youth programming</i></li> <li>2. <i>Increased civic-mindedness and school-activism</i></li> <li>3. <i>New ideas for socially positive games and activities</i></li> <li>4. <i>Increased interest in volunteerism</i></li> </ol>
<p>4.</p>	<p><u>How has the larger community been affected by the project? What has changed in the community as a result of the project? (Be specific in terms of who or what organization has been affected and use any indicators from the Project Abstract that will describe the change.)</u></p>	<p><i>The Kostanai community has been affected by the Youth Parliament Outreach Project in the following ways:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>The 10 youth trainers have had practice in team-work, public speaking, facilitation, and organization through the design and implementation of four separate training sessions.</i></li> <li>2. <i>The approximately 30 Kostanai school teachers that have attended the youth-led training sessions and have learned about: civic-mindedness and school activism; psychological games that can be used for teaching; and the activities of a youth organization where children can spend constructive time outside of the classroom.</i></li> <li>3. <i>The over 100 school children who attend the training sessions learned about: civic-mindedness and school activism; youth volunteerism; opportunities for children to develop personal and social skills outside of the classroom; and about the activities of an organization where they can volunteer and interact with a large number of young leaders in a positive atmosphere.</i></li> </ol>
<p>5.</p>	<p><u>What unexpected events (positive or negative) did you encounter during the project and how did you deal with</u></p>	<p><i>Two negative unexpected events occurred during the implementation of the project concerned communication with my NGO director. First, while my director was pleased to be awarded the Peace Corps SPA grant, she did not want to execute the project as had been originally written into the</i></p>

	<p><a href="#">them?</a></p>	<p><i>project proposal. The exact timing and locations of the training dates, therefore, had to be either rescheduled or canceled due to her desires. Second, the actual purchasing of project materials turned out to be more of a labor (and point of contention) than I had anticipated. I had spoken with my director and co-workers about the transportation and purchasing of materials; however, when the actual materials appeared my director was upset by the timing of their arrival and by the amount of space the materials took up in the office.</i></p> <p><i>My reaction to these unexpected negative events was to handle them with patience and diplomacy. At the point of implementing the project, I had worked with my director for nearly a year. I was aware that she does not take confrontation lightly (especially from her staff), so I tried to appease her complaints through rational dialogue. In addition, my regional manager played an invaluable role in voicing my concerns to my director and helping us find common ground.</i></p> <p><i>The unexpected positive events that resulted from this project are as follows:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>1. The high quality of the training sessions conducted by the youth trainers</i></li> <li><i>2. The willingness for the same group of youth trainers to conduct four separate training sessions during two separate weekend days</i></li> <li><i>3. The high number of school teachers and pupils who attended the trainings, and their positive reaction to the trainings</i></li> </ol>
<p>6.</p>	<p><a href="#">What are the next steps for the community group?</a></p>	<p><i>The next steps for the community group, namely the Youth Center and the youth trainers, is to keep in close contact with those teachers and school pupils who attended the various training sessions. As many of the youth who attended the training sessions are now active members of the Kostanai Youth Parliament, than the youth leaders should provide them with similar leadership responsibilities and opportunities. In addition, the youth trainers and Youth Center staff should consider duplicating and/or modifying the training and conducting more training sessions for schools that did not attend one of the four training events.</i></p>
<p>7.</p>	<p><a href="#">Will there be recurring costs needed to sustain the benefits/gains of this project? How does the community plan to cover those costs?</a></p>	<p><i>In general, the project is closed and there are no recurring costs the hosting organization must attain. If the project were to be continued in the future, however, then the Youth Center staff would need to seek the support of schools who had teachers and pupils who attended the trainings.</i></p>
<p>8.</p>	<p><a href="#">From what you learned from this project, what recommendations would you have for others interested in implementing a similar project?</a></p>	<p><i>In general, I feel like a project similar to this one is worth pursuing. Training sessions for youth, designed and implemented by youth, can provide a valuable experience to both those receiving and engaging in the trainings.</i></p> <p><i>My advice for carrying out a similar project is as follows:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>1. Work very closely with your director and a translator, if needed (I think that some problems I occurred during this project were simply due to language barrier).</i></li> <li><i>2. Keep it simple. The original project proposal included 12 training sessions conducted outside of the host city over a period over four months. The project would probably have reached the grant proposal's goal better had the trainings been limited to no more than two each outside of the host city (4 total).</i></li> <li><i>3. Work with youth that you strongly feel with be able to carry out</i></li> </ol>

		<p>the project. For trainings within the host city, thankfully all of the youth trainers were willing and able to attend; for trainings outside of the host city, the main student organizers were not able to attend and thus the number of training sessions was limited.</p> <p>4. Keep close documentation describing the training sessions, even if these descriptions are not in English.</p> <p>5. Communicate frequently with your manager or Peace Corps staff throughout the entire time of the grant proposal and project implementation period.</p>
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**PROJECT COST BREAKDOWN (IN \$USD):**

<u>PLEASE, list all funds in US dollars only!!!</u>	<u>SPA Grant</u>	<u>Community Contribution</u>		<u>Other Agency Contribution</u>		<u>Other Agency Name</u>
		<u>Cash</u>	<u>In-kind</u>	<u>Cash</u>	<u>In-kind</u>	
<u>Labor</u>	XXX	<u>Cash:</u>	XXX			<u>Put the other agency's name in each row next to where it is providing a contribution</u>
<u>Equipment</u>		<u>funds</u>				
<u>Materials/Supplies</u>		<u>given</u>				
<u>Land/Venue Rental</u>		<u>to</u>				
<u>Travel/Per Diem</u>		<u>buy</u>				
<u>Materials transport</u>		<u>goods,</u>				
<u>Other</u>		<u>services</u>				
<u>Total</u>		<u>etc.</u>				

**WHAT DID SPA FUNDS PURCHASE? (Remember, this is only for what SPA funds purchase!)**

<u>Category</u>	<u>Description</u>
<u>Labor</u>	<u>Examples: construction workers building a classroom, or experts conducting skills training. Also includes any salary or fees paid to skilled labor.</u>
<u>Equipment</u>	<u>Examples include a new pump for a well, computers, books for a resource center, tools for a construction project etc.</u>
<u>Materials and Supplies</u>	<u>One dry-erase board, notebooks, markers, pens, nametags, erasers, folders, white printer paper, colored printer paper, printer cartridges, glue, scotch tape</u>
<u>Land/Venue Rental</u>	<u>Examples of this could include: venue rental for a training or a event</u>
<u>Travel/Per Diem</u>	<u>All costs associated with travel, including food, lodging, or transportation. Also includes any fees/stipends for trainers/speakers.</u>
<u>TRANSPORTATION OF MATERIALS</u>	<u>The transportation of materials, supplies or equipment to the community. Note that SPA funds will not pay for transport from the US</u>
<u>Other (be specific)</u>	<u>Use this category for any item that does not fit into the ones above</u>

**Appendix B: Professional Development Seminar Entry Survey**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Entry Survey**

**Professional Development Seminar**

1. Why did you decide to participate in this seminar?
2. How did you hear about this seminar?
  - a) advertisement
  - b) teacher
  - c) friend
  - d) other
3. What is your interest in English?
  - a) personal
  - b) professional
  - c) other \_\_\_\_\_
4. Have you ever written a resume?
5. Were you ever required to send a resume written in English?
6. Are you currently looking for work?
7. What are your personal and professional goals?
8. What do you think “professional etiquette” is?
9. Have you ever given a presentation in public? If yes, then do you consider yourself a good public speaker?
10. Have you ever participated in a job interview?
11. Name three qualities of a leader
  - a)
  - b)
  - c)
12. What do you want to gain or learn from this seminar?



**Appendix C: Professional Development Seminar Exit Survey**

**Professional Development Seminar      Exit Survey**

<b>Please select one box for each session:</b>	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Bad
Introduction					
Resumes & Cover Letters					
Leadership & Public Speaking					
Researching Employment					
Professional Etiquette					
Mastering the Interview					
Mock Interviews					
Interview and Resume Feedback					

**Please rate and provide your comments for your trainer 5= Excellent 1= Bad**

Presenter	5	4	3	2	1	Please provide any feedback and constructive criticism:
Tanya						
Daniel						
Abby						
Jack						

1. In which session do you feel you learned the most? Why?
  
2. Will the “Professional Development Seminar” book be useful for you after the seminar? Why?
  
3. Which session did you enjoy the most? Why?
  
4. How did this seminar meet/not meet your expectations?
  
5. How do you feel this seminar could be better organized? Do you have recommendations for the schedule, coffee breaks, or materials?
  
6. What other topics would you have liked to see presented in workshops?
  
7. Would you recommend this seminar to your friends?       Yes       No
8. Do you have any other comments or suggestions for improvement? (feel free to use the back of this sheet)

## Appendix D: Country Studies Course Syllabus

“Know yourself”  
- Socrates, 400 B.C.

**Course philosophy:** The knowledge you will gain from this class will depend on how much effort you put into it. Simply put: the more you give, the more you will receive.

“Country Studies” is the academic study of the world we all live in. “Country Studies” is the study of the places, events, and people that shape our world. Past, present, and future. Although the population of the world is over 6 billion (a number almost impossible to imagine) your thoughts, opinions, and actions do matter. This is *your* world to explore.

Throughout this course you are strongly encouraged to use the “Socratic method.” What is the “Socratic method?” The “Socratic method” is a form of learning developed by the Greek philosopher, Socrates, over 2400 years ago. This method consists of asking questions and talking with others in order to learn more. Socrates believed that by using this method, people could learn the truth about the world. Socrates also believed that if a person wants to understand others, he must first know about himself or herself. Therefore, “Country Studies” is not just the study of *other* people and places, but also the study of *your* own country, culture, and ideas.

### **Class rules:**

- 1). Participate in lectures and activities
- 2). Be prepared
- 3). Listen to others
- 4). Ask questions
- 5). Respect the opinions of others
- 6.) Turn your cell phone off
- 7). Speak English (don’t worry about making mistakes, everyone makes mistakes)

**Themes:** “Country Studies” is not limited to one place, one time, one event, or one person: it is the study of many places, many times, many events, many people, and many ideas.

This class will include lectures, presentations, and most importantly – discussion. It is very important that you read the newspaper and watch the news so you can talk about current events.

Here are some themes that we will talk about:

- |              |                               |                       |
|--------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| + History    | + Culture                     | + Society             |
| + Philosophy | + International organizations | + Comparing countries |
| + Geography  | + Communication               | + Current events      |

**Final thoughts:** The student who decides to study the world we live in is like an explorer. As every successful explorer learns: “it is not the destination that matters most, but the journey.” Good luck on your journey!

## **Appendix E: Home Reading Course Syllabus**

**POLONIUS:** “What do you read, my lord?”

**HAMLET:** “Words, words, words.”

- William Shakespeare: *Hamlet, Act 2 Scene 2*

### **Class philosophy:**

The goal for this class is that you will develop your mind and gain personal pleasure from reading different books. Also, this class will give you practice in speaking, reading, and thinking in English. The knowledge you will gain from this class will depend on how much effort you put into it. Simply put: the more you give, the more you will receive.

### **Class overview:**

Throughout the “Home Reading” class, we will read a classic work of Non-Fiction (fantasy).

The teacher will decide what book or books the class will read. However, if you have an idea about a book or story that you would like to read, please tell your idea to the teacher and your idea may be used.

Our book and other reading materials will be copied to a writeable CD. One student from the class will be responsible for getting this material from the teacher. You can then copy the book from the CD. Also, please bring a notebook and pen to class every day. Take notes, please!

### **Class rules:**

- 1) Participate in lectures and activities**
- 2) Be prepared**
- 3) Listen to others**
- 4) Ask questions**
- 5) Respect the opinions of others**
- 6) Turn your cell phones off**
- 7) Speak English (don't worry about making mistakes, everyone makes mistakes)**

### **Assignments:**

The class will include in-class discussions and activities, writing assignments, and lectures relating to the topic. Grades for the class will be decided based on your attendance, participation, and home tasks.

Read at home and be ready to talk about the readings during class.

Students will work alone and in groups. For this class, you will be an active learner: you will be asked to give presentations, discuss your ideas, and to lead activities.

Good luck and happy reading.

## Appendix F: Professional Development Seminar Schedule

# Professional Development Seminar

Time	Agenda	Topics
<b>Monday, 23 October</b>		
18.45	Check-in	
19.00	Session 1	Introduction, Icebreaker, Entrance Survey, Job Posting
20.00	Coffe Break	15 minutes
20.15	Session 2	Resume Writing and Cover Letters
<b>Tuesday, 24 October</b>		
19.00	Session 3	Leadership and Public Speaking
20.00	Coffee Break	15 minutes
20.15	Session 4	Team-building Exercises
<b>Wednesday, 25 October</b>		
19.00	Session 5	Professional Etiquette
20.00	Coffee Break	15 minutes
20.15	Session 6	Interview Skills
<b>Thursday, 26 October</b>		
19.00	Sessions 7 and 8	Practice Job Interviews
<b>Friday, 27 October</b>		
19.00	Session 9	Interview and Resume Feedback
20.00	Coffee Break	15 minutes
20.15	Session 10	Course Summary, Exit Survey, Presentation of Certificates

**Наш адрес:**

г. Костанай,  
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Молодежная социальная служба  
**Телефон: 501-457, 50-49-80**


**BDFK**
*Business Development Foundation Kostanay*

- Public Foundation -

**Appendix G: Framework for Analyzing Nonprofit Organizations: Creation, Growth, and Expansion**

Below is a chart comparing the *Youth Center* and the *Association of Children and Youth* based mainly on my personal observations of each organization’s internal operations and not necessarily from the perspective of the director or staff.

The vertical column displays what I perceive as the Vision, Capacity, Resources, and Linkages of each organization.

The horizontal column is dedicated to Development, Sustainability, and Expansion.

The organizations are compared separately within each column: the *Youth Center* abbreviated as (YC) and the *Association of Children and Youth* as (ACY).

	Development	Sustainability	Expansion
Vision	<p><b>Develop a vision.</b> (YC): strong, well-defined mission statement printed in program brochures, advertisements, and in organization’s youth newspaper.</p> <p>(ACY): strong, well-defined mission statement printed in program brochures, advertisements, and informational pamphlets.</p> <p><b>Develop leadership at board and executive level.</b> (YC): leadership mainly restricted to director with some main responsibilities passed down to staff; some outside assistance from city</p>	<p><b>Examine and refine vision.</b> (YC): vision has been refined in terms of programs/projects that have been added and/or removed over time.</p> <p>(ACY): overall mission of the organization has changed little over time; yet, sub-organizations within the NGO have created specialized mission statements.</p> <p><b>Develop systems for Board evaluation and rotation.</b> (YC): no board currently exists.</p> <p>(ACY): no board</p>	<p><b>Evaluate and revise the vision/mission statement to express the goal of expansion.</b> (YC): no expressed plan to expand that I am aware of.</p> <p>(ACY): no expressed plan to expand that I am aware of.</p> <p><b>Strengthen entrepreneurial quality of the Board and Executive</b> (YC): N/A (ACY): N/A</p>

	<p>government.</p> <p>(ACY): leadership divided between main director and director's assistant; some outside assistance from city government; linkages with directors of other youth NGOs in region and country.</p> <p><b>Develop a Strategic Plan.</b></p> <p>(YC): strategic plan exists, developed within the organization and approved by city government.</p> <p>(ACY): strategic plan exists, developed within the organization and approved by city government.</p>	<p>currently exists.</p> <p><b>Plan for Chief Executive succession.</b></p> <p>(YC): N/A</p> <p>(ACY): unsure if formal plan exists, yet director's assistant frequently operates in director's absence.</p>	<p><b>Undertake long-range strategic and financial planning.</b></p> <p>(YC): long-range strategic and financial planning usually extends no further than one or two years into the future.</p> <p>(ACY): long-range strategic and financial planning usually goes no further than one or two years into the future.</p>
<p>Capacity</p>	<p><b>Create the core organizational structure.</b></p> <p>(YC): core organizational structure consists of director, accountant, and one or two program managers (part-time university students).</p>	<p><b>Standardize systems for increased control</b></p> <p>(YC): system of increased control is passed from director to staff; not standardized.</p> <p>(ACY): no standardized system for increased control</p>	<p><b>Revise methodology to reflect specialization</b></p> <p>(YC): unsure</p> <p>(ACY): unsure</p>

(ACY): core organizational structure consists of head director, assistant director, one or two accounts depending on time of year, two or more program managers (part-time university students).

**Recruit, train and evaluate staff.**

(YC): core staff recruited from universities, trained mainly by director or self-taught. Local volunteers recruited from schools and universities mainly by means of seminars.

(ACY): core staff recruited from universities, trained by director. Local volunteers recruited from schools and universities mainly through seminars, trainings, or public events.

**Set up systems to assure accountability**

(YC): unsure if formal accountability structure exists.

(ACY): unsure if formal accountability

**Refine methodology**

(YC): unsure

(ACY): unsure

**Develop and maintain personnel**

(YC): frequent staff turnover (new staff every 3 to 6 months)

(ACY): staff well-maintained; yet most staff members generally seek higher paying work after graduation

**Re-form or revise organizational structure.**

(YC): unsure

(ACY): unsure

**Strengthen capacity for financial analysis and management.**

(YC): unsure

(ACY): unsure

	<p>structure exists.  <b>Adapt the methodology during implementation.</b>                  (YC): unsure                   (ACY): unsure</p>		
<p>Resources</p>	<p><b>Project the Financial Requirements</b>                  (YC): Yes; director and accountant work very closely together; some financial struggle                   (ACY): Yes; director, accountant, and staff project long-term and short-term financial requirements although the organization struggles financially</p> <p><b>Project Other Resource Requirements</b>                  (YC): unsure; projected sources come from local government, grants, community sponsors, private business                   (ACY): unsure; projected sources come from local government, grants, community sponsors</p>	<p><b>Improve cost recovery.</b>                  (YC): minimal costs recovered by charging participation fees and selling youth newspaper                   (ACY): minimal costs recovered by charging fees for services, selling tickets to events; moderate costs recovered by charging participation fees for summer camp</p> <p><b>Improve repayment rates and cash flow.</b>                  (YC): unsure                   (ACY): unsure</p> <p><b>Review financial viability projections</b>                  (YC): unsure                   (ACY): unsure</p>	<p><b>Mobilize financial resources for expansion.</b>                  (YC): unsure                   (ACY): unsure</p>



		<p><b>Expand donor base for non-credit activities.</b>          (YC): expanding donor base through private business and community donors</p> <p>(ACY): expanding donor base through community donors and other NGOs</p>	
<p>Linkages</p>	<p><b>Acquire Resources:</b>          (YC): strong linkages with schools and universities, community groups, parents, private businesses, foreign youth NGOs</p> <p>(ACY): strong linkages with schools and universities, community groups, private businesses, orphanages, multiple linkages with youth NGOs and volunteer organizations throughout the region; links with foreign youth development programs</p>	<p><b>Establish a niche</b>          (YC): noticeable niche within the city</p> <p>(ACY): noticeable niche within the city</p> <p><b>Join associations for learning and policy impact.</b>          (YC): partnership with foreign youth NGOs; works with city government on issues of policy.</p> <p>(ACY): partners with other organizations; attend trainings sponsored by other organizations; senior staff occasionally attends trainings in different cities and countries; works with city government on issues of policy.</p>	<p><b>Establish and implement a policy formation strategy.</b></p> <p>(YC): unsure</p> <p>(ACY): unsure</p>

**Environmental review to ascertain possibilities of partnerships supportive of mission. [Systems review.]**

(YC): partners with like-minded community groups; expands projects to include participation from other cities

(ACY): frequently seeks out information and personal acquaintance with NGOs and volunteer organizations, schools and universities, businesses; expands projects to include participation from other cities

*General Trends and Observations*

Overall, based on the above chart, some very similar comparisons can be made between the organizational operations of the Youth Center and the Association of Children and Youth.

Strengths within each organization include: strong mission which staff is dedicated to; linkages with various educational, private, and non-profit entities; basic capacity to operate as an organization; visible niche within the community; partnerships with other organizations/groups/people; some projects generate revenue; and directors seek continued education and training.

Weaknesses within each organization include: decision-making heavily dependent upon director; lack of Board and transference of leadership/skills; little focus paid on long-term planning and expansion; lack of accountability; no formal training program for office staff.

From my viewpoint, both NGOs are well-developed as organizations; while there are certainly areas in need of improvement, in the “Development” category they exist as functional organizations. However, at present and in the next few years, the major challenges facing each organization remain in the sphere of “Sustainability” and “Expansion.” These challenges will not be overcome quickly or easily. In my opinion, the best methods to improve current operations while preparing for the future would be as follows: 1) for each organization to form governing (or advisory) boards, such membership bodies could be a needed source of managerial/leadership support while simultaneously helping the organizations develop ideas/sources for funding and drawing wider attention within the community; and 2) for the executive director and staff to establish a formal training program for new or potential staff members.

## Appendix H: Current Resume

# Daniel A. Wienecke

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P.O. Box 20  
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**E-mail:** [dwienecke@hotmail.com](mailto:dwienecke@hotmail.com)

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### Professional Experience

**VOLUNTEER, UNITED STATES PEACE CORPS** March 2005 – Present  
KOSTANAI, KAZAKHSTAN

- Teaching international studies and literature courses at Kostanai Social and Technical University
- Instructing “Art and Games” at a home for children with developmental disabilities
- Leading an English-language discussion club at the NGO “Association of Children and Youth”
- Designed and implemented five professional development seminars providing over 60 students and young professionals with training in leadership, public speaking, team-building, and interviewing
- Awarded a \$1500 grant proposal to the Peace Corps SPA program for youth leadership training
- Performed most business in Russian, rated Intermediate-High by Peace Corps language assessment

**PROGRAM ASSISTANT, MCLEAN COUNTY COMMUNITY COMPACT** January – December 2004  
BLOOMINGTON, IL

- Organized a Teens in Prevention (TIPS) leadership conference for 100 students from 10 central Illinois high schools in conjunction with my graduate studies in community development
- Implemented a "Job Fair" for a small rural high school in Central Illinois attended by over 25 representatives of business, education, and military

**FACULTY ADVISOR, CONGRESSIONAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP COUNCIL** June 2004, January 2005  
WASHINGTON DC

- Directly responsible for supervising, mentoring, and educating groups of 20 high-achieving secondary school students from the U.S. and overseas attending the Global Young Leadership and Presidential Youth Leadership Conferences in Washington, DC and New York, NY
- Assisted logistics for entry into public and private institutions for groups of 300 to 600 students

**TRANSITIONS LEADER, OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS** August 2002 - May 2003  
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY, FORT COLLINS, CO

- Guided student orientations and cross-cultural excursions for international students and scholars

### **Education**

**ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY STEVENSON CENTER, NORMAL, IL** January 2004 – Present  
Master of Science in Political Science expected June 2007 GPA: 3.82 (Dean's List)

Concentration: Applied Community Development

Articles Published:

- *Community-Driven Development in Central Asia: A World Bank Initiative* (Critique: A worldwide journal of politics, Spring 2005)
- *Building Bridges to Educational Success: The McLean County School Completion Research Project Report* (Illinois State University, 2004). With support from the United Way of McLean County

**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY, FORT COLLINS, CO** May 2003  
Bachelor of Arts majoring in History and Political Science GPA: 3.67 (Phi Beta Kappa)

Concentration: Russian, Eastern and Central European Studies

**UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS, PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC** February – May 2002

### **Additional International Experience**

**ULSAN, REPUBLIC OF KOREA:** Private English Tutor October – December 2003

**SUMY, UKRAINE:** English Language Teacher/Groundskeeper June – July 2002