

## Case Study - Mira Dzhakshylykova (AUCA)

### From Heart to Heart

#### *Documenting Work on Your Project*

In rural areas of Kyrgyzstan, people with disabilities are vulnerable and face high rates of unemployment. Unemployment impacts health, well-being, and independence. As a result, most of the people with limited mobility feel unnecessary, useless, and abandoned by society, even though they have talents and skills of their own. People often lack the knowledge and resources, to support themselves financially and government pensions are very small.

Since my childhood, I have personally known 5 people from my hometown who faced challenges with disabilities. During my freshman year, with the American University of Central Asia's (AUCA) Student Initiative Development Program's (SIDP) help, I implemented my project with a solution to this problem. I had been developing this idea for a few years and was excited to implement it with the help of my school.

The goal of the project is to help people with disabilities from my hometown to learn new skills and overcome their challenges. The project is called "From Heart to Heart" and it promotes the interests and rights of disabled people by creating employment opportunities. The project provides art training, job training, and a community for people with special needs in Cholpon-Ata town. Using these skills, people with disabilities can and earn some money for their needs. Through this project, they will also learn how to promote their goods at the market. Also, we are addressing this problem through mass media, social networks, and exhibitions. Our participants are so excited about this project and have big plans for further development.

The project is seeking new collaborations to expand the market for goods and develop more training in an effort to create a sustainable, long-term program. The main goals of this project are to develop job skills to overcome poverty or improve the financial situations of local people with disabilities, improve self-confidence, and strengthen community and family connections. It will help participants expand and develop skills such as communication, build support networks, and increase self-sufficiency.

#### *Team Recruitment*

As a primary resource for the project, I have a team which includes:

- 1) Trainers: felting artisan, business professionals, and marketing professionals
- 2) Me, as project coordinator and public relations coordinator for the web page/social network (FB, Instagram).
- 3) Three volunteers who help me organize the program.

The main donors were AUCA's SIDP and the Bard Center for Civic Engagement microgrant. This project also builds a partnership with the Local House hall, the FLEX program, local NGOs, and TV stations. The local NGO "Umai Ene Jarygy" provided us with a working space and store for selling our products, organizing trainings, and finding sign-language interpreters for our participants with hearing problems. Issyk-Kul TV is also one of the main partners because through mass media this project was recognized all over the region and drew in more participants.

In the beginning, there were 12 participants from Cholpon-Ata town, and six of them I had known and recruited personally. The other six participants I recruited through the contact list that was provided by the city's Social Development department.

The project started in January 2018, and the participants were just taught the skills and were selling their first batch of products. That March, this project was presented at the "Get Engaged" conference and later on at the "Enactus National Competition." Also, this project participated in the "Global Youth Service Day," where we organized an exhibition.

#### *Advertisement*

Besides these events, this project was highlighted on television 4 times to show the working progress. Our current outcomes include:

1) After we showed a local NGO the importance of our project, they gave us products to sell and we now have to locations in town where our participants are making sales;

2) During the summer we participated in 2 big exhibitions (one of it is an international exhibition "Oimo") that took place in different parts of the Issyk-Kul region and involved participants from all over the world. One was an international exhibition called Oimo, and the other was the 3rd Annual World Nomad Games.

3) We are making new products and selling them in our store and in a tent next to the beach. The other organizers and I have also personally noticed that as participants build community, they've been building their communication skills as well.

### *Growth and Sustainability*

We already organized 12 felting and 4 financial literacy trainings. To be sustainable, "From Heart to Heart" must identify more financial and community sponsors and expand the volunteer network. As we grow, we must establish a reliable market to sell goods. This project may also inspire other rural areas to continue this kind of work and potentially result in the expansion and increase the sustainability of "From Heart to Heart."

Our future plans include branding our project, which I am working on now. This project is already more or less sustainable and can work without me because we've worked to make sure it has a name for itself as well as good partners. With the help of the Bard network, we also hope to continue spreading the word about our project. I also believe that the expansion of this project will be fruitful work for our participants, but I am happy to continue helping out the project and intend to continue working with it.

Miscellaneous information:

**Are you using new channels to expand your project (the internet, in person, your surrounding community, the Bard network, etc)?** Yes, I do use social media and in-person meetings to expand my project.

**What are the signs of success in your project (how do you know it's doing what it's supposed to)?** The sign of success for my project is when our participants are happy with what they are doing through their community and when their income is more than just their pension thanks to the sales we've taught them to make.

**What are the challenges of your project?** One of the main challenges during implementation of the project was finding a good trainer for teaching felting in a professional way.

**Were there once challenges you've found solutions to?** Yes, I did research among professionals in this field, and with recommendations found the right person to teach felting.

**How do you collect feedback about your project?** I ask for feedback directly from our participants, and I also received feedback during the Get Engaged conference after my presentation.

**Do you feel that your project is valuable to your community?** Yes, during implementation, I realized how it is important for participants and the community itself.

**If you went back in time to when you started working on the project, what would you change or say to your younger self?** I would tell myself not to be scared of any challenges, just face them and believe in your project's success!

