



**SOCIETY FOR ORPHANED ARMENIAN RELIEF (SOAR)**

150 N. Radnor Chester Road, F200, Radnor, PA 19087

Office: 610.213.3452 Fax: 610.229.5168

Email: [gyacoubian@soar-us.org](mailto:gyacoubian@soar-us.org) Web: [www.soar-us.org](http://www.soar-us.org)

**2016 Report to The Carol Fananjian Foundation**



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## Creation and Management

George S. Yacoubian, Jr. and his wife Erica began their adoption process in 2005. Throughout that spring and summer, they went through home study and various levels of domestic governmental approval required for an international adoption. While in Armenia that summer, they saw Liliana for the first time. George and Erica submitted their dossier to the Armenian government that fall, received preliminary approval in December 2005, and obtained final approval in March 2006. Liliana arrived in the United States on April 23, 2006.

The Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR) was established in the fall of 2005 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that today provides humanitarian relief to orphaned Armenian children and orphaned Armenian adults with disabilities in Armenia, Artsakh, Istanbul, Javakh, Lebanon, and Syria. In early 2006, an experienced Board of Directors was assembled, a network of Partners in Armenia was recruited to assist with distributions, and the website was launched. In 2009, a National Board of Trustees was created to review annually SOAR's fiscal operations and distributions.

Represented by more than 100 Chapters and 5 Junior groups worldwide, SOAR supports 38 institutions throughout the world. Some volunteers are parents of adopted Armenian children; others simply recognize the significance of SOAR's work and want to help perpetuate its mission. The common bond among them all is the recognition that orphaned children and adults with disabilities represent the most vulnerable population of Armenian society.



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# Quality Control

SOAR has a strict quality control protocol to assure that all donations reach the intended recipients. This protocol has five essential elements.

1. SOAR rarely makes cash distributions directly to the orphanages. Rather, goods and services that can be procured in Armenia are purchased by in-country staff and distributed directly to the institutions.
2. SOAR implements chain-of-custody procedures for any distributed goods or services, providing assurance that these items have been received by the orphanages in the exact quantity intended. These procedures have three sub-steps:
  - a. In-country staff sign for the shipments and/or attest to the type and quantity of goods or services procured in Armenia. This invoice includes an exact description of the type and quantity of goods and services.
  - b. The recipient institution's director signs this same invoice, indicating that the exact type and quantity of goods and services received is the quantity indicated.
  - c. Both invoices are mailed to SOAR's Executive Board Chairman.
3. SOAR Partners, in-country Chapter members, and other volunteers make random inspections of the institutions. Discrepancies are to be reported immediately to SOAR's Executive Board Chairman.
4. When possible, goods donated or services provided by SOAR are engraved and/or stamped with a corporate seal. Capital projects are acknowledged with a dedication plaque.
5. A zero-tolerance policy for fraud, theft, and/or deception is imposed. Any malfeasance would result in the termination of assistance.



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## Institutions We Support

SOAR supports 26 institutions in Armenia, two Armenian orphanages in Artsakh, two facilities in Istanbul, an orphan summer camp in Javakh, four Armenian orphanages in Lebanon, and three Armenian orphanages in Syria:

**Armenian Evangelical Boarding School** is in Ainjar, Lebanon, and is home to approximately 75 healthy social orphans.

**Birds' Nest Orphanage** is in Byblos, Lebanon, and has been home to thousands of Armenian children in the Middle East region for more than 80 years. There are currently 37 children housed at Birds' Nest, ranging in age from 6 months to 17 years old.

**Boarding School #1** is a state orphanage in Stepanagert, Artsakh, housing approximately 35 children (both healthy and with special needs) between the ages of 4 and 16.

**Boarding School #2** is a state orphanage in Kashatagh, Artsakh, housing approximately 17 children between the ages of 6 and 17.

**Bzommar Orphanage** is operated by the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, a religious order of nuns established in 1847. Throughout the year, the Sisters carry out catechetical, cultural, and social work with both natural and social orphans. Approximately 25 girls are housed at Bzommar.



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**Cardinal Aghajanian Orphanage** is in Ainjar, Lebanon. The orphanage is home to approximately 24 male social orphans.

**Children's Home of Gyumri** is a state orphanage in Gyumri housing approximately 100 children with special needs, ages 6 years and younger.

**Dzorak Care Center**, located in Yerevan, served as an orphanage for 400 children during the 1940s. In 1959, it became a boarding school/sanitarium for children from underprivileged families. Today, Dzorak serves as an orphanage and nursing home for approximately 120 adults with severe physical and psychological disabilities who have outgrown the traditional orphanage.

**Gavar Orphanage** is a state orphanage in Gavar housing approximately 115 children between the ages of 3 and 18.

**Gyumri Social Childcare Center** is a day center in Gyumri. Since July 2006, approximately 230 children from around the province have been served at the Center.

**Hrant Dink School** is a day center in Istanbul that offers support to approximately 150 Armenian children between the hours of 8AM and 7PM.

**The Holy Cross Armenian Church of Javakh Summer Day Camp** in Akhakalak, Georgia, serves 250 social orphans living at or below poverty level in the nearby villages. The camp was created to provide the children with a safe, clean, fun, and spiritual environment during the summer.

**Kalfayan Orphanage** was founded by Srpuhi Kalfayan (1822-1889), an Armenian nun, as an orphanage for girls in Istanbul. In 1865, she mobilized financial support for the victims of epidemic cholera and, in 1866, opened an orphanage for 17 girls who lost their families in this epidemic disaster. Both the Order of Kalfayan and the orphanage exist today due to support of the Patriarchate and charitable Armenians around the world.



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**Kharberd Orphanage** is a state orphanage in Kharberd housing approximately 280 children with special needs between the ages of 6 and 18.

**Mari Izmirlyan Orphanage** is a state orphanage in Yerevan housing approximately 100 children with special needs between the ages of 6 and 18.

**Mer Doon** offers a home in Etchmiadzin for Armenian children who have outgrown their orphanage. Mer Doon offer education and a loving and compassionate family environment, thus easing the transition from orphanage life to mainstream society.

**Mer Hoos** houses approximately 16 teenage girls in the Arapkir district of Yerevan. The girls receive language and job skills training, computer instruction, college preparation and education, religious foundational teaching, life skills training, psychological support, and hope, confidence, and love.

**Nork Orphanage** is a state orphanage in Yerevan housing approximately 80 children (both healthy and with special needs) ages 6 years and under.

**Nubarashen** is a state boarding school in Yerevan housing approximately 83 children with special needs, ages 7 to 18.

**Orphanage of Fridtjof Nansen** is a state orphanage in Gyumri housing approximately 83 children between the ages of 4 and 18.

**Orran**, "haven" in Armenian, was established in downtown Yerevan in April 2000. The center started with 16 children, but within 6 months, had grown to embrace more than 26 at-risk elderly and 40 socially vulnerable children, some of whom were orphans. In 2009, another center was opened in Vanadzor.

**Our Lady of Armenia Annie Bezikian Youth Center** is a private transitional facility in Kanaker housing girls between the ages of 16 and 22 who have outgrown the traditional orphanage and who are transitioning to independent living. The Center is operated by the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, a religious order of nuns established in 1847.



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**Our Lady of Armenia Center** is a private orphanage in Gyumri housing approximately 45 girls between the ages of 6 and 18. The Center is operated by the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, a religious order of nuns established in 1847.

**Our Lady of Armenia Center Summer Camp** hosts approximately 800 children ages 8 to 15 throughout the summer, in four 16-day sessions. The Camp provides nutritious food, physical rest, recreational activities, and religious-educational experiences both to orphan and otherwise needy children throughout Armenia.

**Our Lady of Armenia Educational Center** in Tashir, Armenia, is operated by the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and provides meals and after-school activities to approximately 30 orphaned and otherwise needy children.

**Our Lady of Armenia Educational Center Summer Camp** in Tashir hosts approximately 50 children ages 7-15 for four weeks throughout the summer. The Camp provides nutritious food, physical rest, recreational activities, educational opportunities, and religious experiences to children from the Tashir community.

**Saint Theresa's Little Flower Orphanage (Azizie and Meydan)** is the House of Providence. After the 1915 Genocide, the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception stood responsible for the displaced and served as comforting and caring "mothers" for the lonely Armenian orphans. In 1936, "The Providence Orphanage" (Nakhaknamootian Doon) was founded in the Syrian region of Azizie and was a haven for 300 orphaned children. Before March 2011, the orphanage housed up to 35 girls who lived in an environment of peace and who attended regular school. Because of the war and the unrest in Aleppo, many of the Armenian orphans could no longer stay at The Providence Orphanage. Some live in Meydan, a very poor Armenian section in Aleppo, and attend Zvartnotz School, while other orphans live in Azizie and attend Zanabek, the other Armenian school run by the Armenian Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.





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**Shengavit Kindergarten** is the only one of its kind in Armenia. The students, who stay overnight Monday through Friday, are children whose families live in extreme poverty or which have histories of abuse, domestic violence or alcohol or drug addiction. Although some of the children return home on the weekends, approximately 150 stay at the school full-time.

**S.O. Khach Orphanage** in Syria has been a family for more than 90 years. Before March 2012, the children lived in the Telil area of Syria. In March 2012, the children moved to a beautiful new facility in the Sis Hamaliren region. Unfortunately, due to civil unrest, the children moved to the Aram Manoogian Community Center in September 2012. The children are cared for by a couple who live with them full-time. There are currently 14 boys and girls living in S.O. Khach Orphanage, ranging in age from 8 to 19 years old.

**SOS Children's Villages' Armenian Charity Foundation (Idjevan and Kotayk)** is a child-centered organization whose core mission is to provide care and development for children without parental care and children in difficult life circumstances. The organization was founded in 1989 in response to the devastating earthquake of December 1988. In 1990, SOS Children's Village in Kotayk opened its doors for children who had lost their parents in the earthquake. It was the first SOS Children's Village in any former Soviet republic. SOS Children's Village in Idjevan was founded in 2009. Presently, SOS Children's Villages in Armenia operate a wide range of child care and family strengthening community and educational activities.

**Terchoonian Home** is a private orphanage in Gyumri housing approximately 75 intellectually gifted children between the ages of 3 and 12.

**Vanadzor Orphanage** is a private orphanage in Vanadzor housing approximately 90 children 18 years of age and under.

**Vardashen** is a state boarding school in Yerevan housing approximately 82 children who "exhibit socially dangerous behavior" between the ages of 6 and 18.



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**The Voice of the Armenian Church Summer Day Camp**, operating under the auspices of the Eastern Prelacy and its Executive Council, is held in the summer retreat of Tsaghgadzor and hosts 50 orphaned boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 16. The Camp, held in July for eight days, exposes the children to comfort, love, compassion, and care, while simultaneously instilling in them the love of Christ and the history of the Armenian Church.

**Warm Hearth**, located outside of Yerevan in 3<sup>rd</sup> Village, is a private group home housing 13 adults with disabilities and mental illnesses who have outgrown the state-funded orphanages. It provides each resident with an alternative to psychiatric institutions and offers holistic care in a family-like setting.

**Zadik Orphanage** is a state orphanage in Yerevan housing approximately 138 children between the ages of 6 and 18. After the age of 18, the children move to either Rainbow House or a farming village in Arzni.



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# Reunification

Child reunification refers to the process of returning children in temporary out-of-home care to their families of origin. Reunification is not a one-time event, but a process involving the healthy integration of the child into their original family with a goal of permanency. Often when families require temporary out-of-home care of their children, families are left powerless in their choices of what is best for their child. Families that are given the chance to stay in contact with their children can learn about child rearing with the proper encouragement and support.

Every child deserves to be raised by biological family, when possible and when in the child's best interest. With that goal in mind, SOAR created the Child Reunification and Family Training (CRAFT) Program in February 2015. The Program has four components:

1. Construction of "family suites" at full residential facilities so families can visit their children. To date, family suites have been renovated at Kharberd and Mari Izmirlyan Orphanages. Construction of a third suite (photos below) is close to completion at Dzorak Care Center.



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**Family Suite at Dzorak Care Center**



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2. Day Centers. The Gyumri Social Childcare Center (GSSC) and Community Development and Social Support Center (CDSSC) Sponsorship Programs. Part of our larger Sponsorship Program, the funds are used for *both* child- and family-specific needs that are intended to reduce the prevalence of institutionalization and reinstitutionalization for those children at high risk. In the summer of 2016, SOAR agreed to assist CDSSC with rent so a larger facility could be obtained to facilitate the work with the increasing number of children attending the Center.





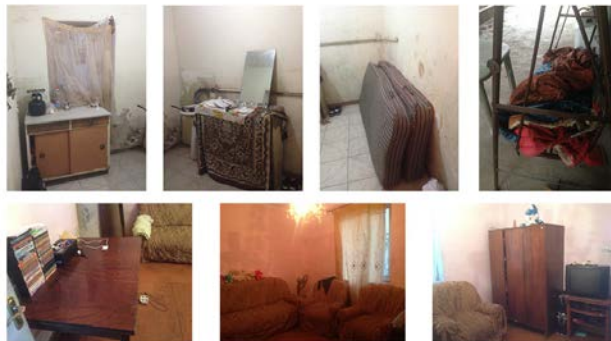
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3. Reunification Days. Reunification Days bring together birth families and their children to spend time together in a neutral, casual venue. Families are educated about their child's needs, progress, challenges, and what resources are available to support the child's return to the family.
4. SCOH (Service to Children in their Own Homes) Sponsorship Program. Funds for children at serious risk for re-institutionalization are used to provide home-based services to children who have previously been institutionalized with the goal of maintaining reunification and preventing reinstitutionalization.





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### *The Carol Fananjian Foundation Grant*

In December 2015, SOAR received a \$6,000 grant from The Carol Fananjian Foundation to host a Reunification Day for the girls of Mer Hooy (MH) and Mer Doon (MD).<sup>1</sup> The Reunification Day was held on August 6, 2016, at the Arthurs Resort in Aghveran, Armenia, with 14 girls at Mer Hooy between the ages of 8 and 17 and 15 girls from MD between the ages of 16 and 22.

The Day was attended by six parents (21%) of the 29 children. The Day was led by Gayana Saribekyan and Narine Abrahamyan, respectively the MH social worker and psychologist; SOAR-Moscow volunteers Sona Stepanyan and Anna Petrosyan; and SOAR

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<sup>1</sup> Mer Hooy and Mer Doon *only* house healthy girls.



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staff Hripsime Muradyan (Executive Director) and Alina Karapetyan.

The parents arrived to the hotel at approximately 9:45AM. Breakfast was served from 10:00-10:45AM, after which the Day's leaders discussed the purpose of

the Day – to bring families together and inform the parents about the needs of the children and the progress each had made since arriving to their respective facilities.

From 11:00AM-12:00PM, the social workers split into teams and assigned the responsibilities to various groups, and from 12:00-1:00PM, the groups provided their materials to the staff for the purposes of the presentation. The primary goal of the morning/early afternoon session was for staff to observe how the parents interacted with their children. For three of the parents, this Reunification Day was the first opportunity to interact with their children in a formal educational setting since institutionalization.

The afternoon sessions mirrored those from 2015. Lunch was served from 1:00-1:40PM. Following lunch, volunteers provided information to the parents about successful parenting, behavioral models, and patience in child-rearing. From 2:00-4:30PM, there





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was role playing with the families and family discussions. From 4:30-6:00PM, the families discussed the short- and long-term strategies the children and parents wanted to pursue toward reunification. The primary goal of the afternoon sessions was to highlight the strengths of the children and to demonstrate that parental reintegration into the children's lives was critical, for both the child's emotional development and to facilitate the goal of reunification. The day concluded at 5:30PM with dinner.





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### *Lessons Learned*

The Reunification Day was deemed successful *for those parents who did attend*. For both these parents and their children, the Reunification Day was not only a chance to spend time with each other, but an opportunity to learn about the best ways to develop and re-establish familial relationships. The parents informed the volunteers that they learned about their own strengths and weaknesses and identified what they needed to change among themselves and their environment before reunification could be possible. Most importantly, there was no finger-pointing or blaming. Rather, the parents acknowledged their areas of opportunity and expressed a sincere desire to change.





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Several issues arose which require attention for 2017. First, while the MD and MH girls enjoyed each other socially (at least one girl had spent time at both facilities), the age difference (primarily younger girls at MH with primarily older girls at MD) made the reunification day challenging as only one parent from MD attended. Future reunification efforts should consider separate days for each of the MD and MH girls. Second, parental attendance remains poor, despite a small financial incentive (\$20USD) for attendance. Staff could point to know other reason for non-attendance than ambivalence. While this is not surprising given the social situation the girls are in, the failure to lure the parents to the



Reunification Day represents a major hurdle for the ultimate long-term goal of successful reunification. Third, because SOAR expanded the Day to two facilities in 2016, we were not able to increase the reunification day (for cost reasons) to an overnight or weekend experience. By expanding the current model, there can be more intimate interaction between the parents and children, mediated by a social worker. Fourth, a more child-



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centered approach may be needed to address in a formal and clinical setting issues related to psychoeducation, affective expression, coping, behavioral therapy, and skills-building. Particularly for the older children, developing professional and occupational skills is critical to income generation, often a hurdle to reunification in Armenia. Fifth, future efforts should consider multisystemic therapy (MST) for children under the age of 18 who display serious antisocial behaviors. At least two of the MH girls may benefit from MST. Finally, Motivational Interviewing (MI) would be incredibly valuable for both the children *and* parents. MI is an approach used to work with those who might not present as prepared to change their behavior. The children and families in Armenia often lack motivation to change their emotional, social, and occupational deficiencies.





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## Budget

The total grant from The Carol Fananjian Foundation was \$6,000. In total, was \$6,662.90 was spent, with SOAR's operation account covering the balance. The breakdown of expenses follows below.

<b>Expense</b>	<b>Total</b>	
Hotel (and food)	\$3,350.00	
Shopping for children	\$1,677.90	
Transportation to/from MH/MD	\$1,345.00	
Games at the hotel	\$150.00	
Incentives	\$140.00	
	<b>\$6,662.90</b>	
		<b>\$6,000.00 Grant</b>
		<b>\$662.90 Deficit</b>



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## Conclusion

The Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR) was established in the fall of 2005 to provide humanitarian relief to orphaned Armenian children. SOAR's long-term goal is to provide orphaned Armenian children throughout the world with the resources fundamental to their physical, emotional, and intellectual development. Over time, we aim to provide underprivileged youth with the tools necessary to become accomplished, educated, and self-supporting Armenian adults.

A \$6,000 grant from The Carol Fananjian Foundation was used to support a Reunification Day with the girls from Mer Hoos and Mer Doon Orphanages. The Day emphasized communication and parenting skills for the younger girls and career aspirations for the older girls. While the Day was deemed a success for those families who attended, major challenges remain.

Consensus among SOAR staff is that the next Reunification efforts should focus on children and families assisted through our SCOH Program. Unlike the girls presently institutionalized at MH and MD, the SCOH children, previously institutionalized, were recently reunified and need attention to prevent reinstitutionalization. Future funds will be



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used to facilitate educational and occupational training for the children and addressing parental issues that had previously created a hostile and dysfunctional household.

SOAR is extremely grateful to the Foundation for its support of our work, and we hope that additional funding will be available to facilitate our SCOH efforts in 2017. The desire to improve the lives of orphaned Armenian children is the bonding element among our supporters, and our CRAFT Program offers the goal of reunifying children with their biological families and stabilizing those familial situations post-reunification. If you have any questions about SOAR, the population we serve, or this report, please contact George S. Yacoubian, Jr., at (610) 213-3452 or [gyacoubian@soar-us.org](mailto:gyacoubian@soar-us.org).