



by Lilit Asatryan

# Quilting and Social Cohesion in Armenia

**The Mission of the Armenian Young Women’s Association’s (AYWA) is to lead social change and to achieve equality of opportunity and reward for all Armenian women, as an integral element in creating a just and productive society for all.**

AYWA envisions a sound community without marginalized people, which is gender just, culturally plural, socially and economically equitable and politically participatory, peaceful, democratic, secular, and ecologically sane.

Based on human values of compassion, caring, nurturing and sharing, where women, men and children enjoy the basic rights to live in dignity and security and attain fuller growth and development with autonomy, where the communities and people are the master of their productive resources, living environment, and where social justice, equality, freedom, truth and love reign forever.

The involvement of young women in public life through leadership development, democracy education, and social inclusion is the daily agenda for AYWA. During the past years AYWA has implemented many social projects in Armenia at regional and national levels. These projects are aimed at the development of personal skills for young women in the regions who then use them in social settings and to earn for themselves.

One of the bright examples of these implemented projects is the “To mend life with needle and thread” project supported by the Canadian International Development Agency and Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO). In the Quilting project two quilting studios were opened. The first studio opened in Yerevan in 2009 following a training programme for eight women. The second studio opened in Akhtala, Lori Region. The trainings were provided by CESO volunteer advisers Donna Denham and Joan Gillespie.

## ► Why Quilting?

Quilting is an art, a type of sewing which has a unique method. Quilting is very common in the US, Canada and some European countries. It is also called “patchwork”. If you are a quilter you will know you have to use small and various kinds of pattern pieces in your quilt. How colourful your handcraft is, how extraordinary it is, determines if you have managed to create a masterpiece. The quilting products being made include home accessories: place mats, table runners, bread basket liners, cushions, wall hangings; ornaments, stuffed animals, tote bags and purses, passport folders and cell phone holders.

The project beneficiaries are young women aged between 19-35 years old. The overwhelming majority of the project beneficiaries, before project launch, saw their role in community life as housewives and mothers only. They lost their jobs due to the financial crisis and survived awaiting their husband’s money transfers from abroad where they are working from season to season. Now these women are working independently. They become “Quilting Bees” while working together on a common big product. They work as bees. They all are full of motivation, enthusiasm and new ideas. And they are proud of the work they do. Gayane, a 21 year old project beneficiary said: “Firstly, I have not believed in this initiative and had a lot of doubts, but



now I realize that I have got a new profession, employment, friends and a network, as well as I am earning money, which is quite important for me and my family. I would like to express my thanks to Armenian Young Women’s Association for this project implementation which is very important for Armenian women and for our region, in particular.”

**What were these young women doing before they became involved in this project?**

They were unemployed. There was no opportunity for them to work because of lack of workplaces (especially in the region); also they didn’t have enough qualifications. Besides this, the global economic crisis has created some new problems for people. Lusine 27 year old project beneficiary says: “Owing to this project I am sure that I am participating in the social life of our community. I am realizing the role of women in the society; I have awareness of women rights and opportunities. I hope that this project will cover all Armenia, it is indeed very useful and a good initiative”.

Now the Quilting project helps these young women not only to work, to realize their wonderful ideas but also helps them to be socially active and to take part in public life, be a real part of society, participate in decision-making processes realizing their rights and responsibilities in society.

Not only quilting skills but also civic education is provided to these women in both the training course, as well as within the framework of their main quilting activity.

In the near future AYWA will establish another quilting centre in the Vayots Dzor (Southern) region of the Republic of Armenia. This will support the widening of the Quilting project – a project which really has a positive result on making young women socially inclusive.

**► Puppets**

Another way for AYWA to include young women and men in social life is the Puppet Theatre project. Since 2005 the Youth Puppet Theatre established by AYWA has performed many times, in different places from the capital Yerevan to small



towns, villages, and hard-to-reach communities. Initially, the Puppet Theatre was performed by professional actors; however during the years, members of AYWA got relevant qualifications and they are now the key figures in the performances.

Youth Puppet Theatre actively participated in the “All Different – All Equal” European Youth Campaign, too. More specifically, the Youth Puppet Theatre has taken world famous tales and changed them to reflect European values: Children’s rights, Women’s Rights, Human Rights, Participation. Thus, watching the performance the audience (young people and children) enjoy the show and at the same time get new knowledge on the specific subject and “take their own place” in the tale.

Through the Youth Puppet Theatre a lot of young people and children (by the way, the performances for young people and children are separate) have become more socialized into the society. Youth Puppet Theatre on wheels makes the life of young people and children more enjoyable and at the same time uses the opportunity to make them responsible citizens who are aware of their rights and possible ways of participation.

The project also promotes socially inclusive conditions for those young actors who work in the Youth Puppet Theatre; earning for themselves and making a number of young people’s lives happier.

For more details about the project visit AYWA website: [www.aywa.am](http://www.aywa.am), or contact Ms Lilit Asatryan – the President of Armenian Young Women’s Association: [lilit.asatryan@aywa.am](mailto:lilit.asatryan@aywa.am) ■

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