

## **The Partnership between Zurich YMCA and Spitak YMCA**

As a part of the worldwide movement of the YMCA's, Swiss YMCA (Young Men Christian Association) is having good international contacts to different partnering organisations, of which one is the Armenian National Union of YMCA's ([www.ymca.am](http://www.ymca.am)). This contact consist out of financial and ideological support, as out of Local-to-local-partnerships. Zurich YMCA decided in 2000 to establish one of these partnerships with the YMCA of Spitak in Northern Armenia. The YMCA of Spitak is one of six local Groups in Armenia (Yerevan, 2x Gjumry, Spitak, Vandazor, Vardenis) and is focused on child- and youth-programs. The programs and Project are the following: English and computer trainings, puppet theater, Tensing (Youth-Choir), English-Club (Conversation Classes), Child Care, and "Jungschar" (Scouting-program), with a total of 250 participants.

Spitak Town suffered hardly in the 1988 earthquake, as it was the closest town to the epicentre. The wounds of this disaster aren't healed until now. The economical situation very critical and most of the inhabitants are unemployed. There are no perspectives. Especially children and the young are affected, as there are just very few playgrounds or infrastructure for different activities. The YMCA of Spitak is serving the whole community, bringing a new hope to the coming generations.

Zurich YMCA is supporting the YMCA of Spitak with different projects as youth exchange, trainingcamps in and studyvisits to Armenia, and with different Armenian events in Switzerland. The biggest project should be finished within the next two years: The House of Hope! A new building should be replace the old hut, in which the YMCA of Spitak runs his programs with a huge lack of space. The "House of Hope", located in the centre of the town, should become a Child- and Youthcentre, which will give the coming generations new perspectives and a new Hope. Please help us to realize this project. With your support we will be able to build the House of Hope!

Please contact us for further informations:

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**Interview with Adrian Künsch-Wälchli,  
leader of the Partnership YMCA Zurich – Spitak**

*Where do you get the idea for having a partnership with a YMCA in Armenia?*

The main reason is perhaps the deep connection between Armenia and Switzerland. In 19th century yet, swiss organisations supported the Armenian people, starting with orphanages. A partnership with our «Christian brothers in Middle-East», as Armenians are called, is in the Christian tradition of YMCA Zurich.

Beneath the tradition you should not forget the similar characters of Switzerland and Armenia. The landscapes are both dominated of mountains, stones and snow. Armenians are known as reliable and good working people, the same which is said about Swiss people.

These were some of the reasons why Spitak was chosen as a partner in a general assembly of YMCA Zurich in 2001.

*In which subjects does the partnership helps YMCA Spitak?*

I would have to lie if I did not mention the interest fo YMCA Spitak in financial support. This partnership allows Spitak to schedule programs and maintain the work.

But as important as that, is a knowledge-transfer from old YMCAs in Europe to the new YMCAs in Eastern Europe. In these countries YMCA programs are mainly influenced of American ways doing YMCA. We can bring European ideas to Armenia. A good example is Spitak's interest of starting a Jungschar-program as it exists in Switzerland.

*What is the advantage of this partnership for YMCA Zurich?*

Swiss YMCA-groups are not used to look beyond borders. YMCA Zurich has a unique chance to open its horizon. The new YMCA's have a lot more experience in international cooperation of which YMCA Zurich profits.

And a partnership helps YMCA Zurich to identificate itself towards the organisation and towards the public. And it is also a chance to position YMCA in Switzerland as a strong international organisation. The contact to other NGOs gives access to ressources and knowledge.

*In Armenia there are only a few people who speak english fluently, more common are the – for us rather unknown – languages Armenian and Russian. How do you get along with these difficulties?*

We try to manage this with English-speaking multipliers in Armenia. Most of the YMCA-members in Spitak speak some basic English, but a few even study English at Yerevan State University.

Besides this, it is also a chance for Armenians to learn english by being involved in our partnership-projects. Personal exchange with volunteers takes inhibition of foreign languages.

At last we are seeking contact to Armenians in Switzerland who support our correspondence to YMCA Spitak with translation.

*Thank you for the interesting interview.*

## **Report from Spitak YMCA**

«There are no real big changes in our everyday work. We are running all programs in our center: English and computer trainings, puppet theater, tennis, English club, Child Care with about 250 participants.

Last year we participated in the “Refugee Integration Program” and we worked in 2 villages. In our opinion and in opinion of ANU and ICCO (Program funder from Holland) the program was successful and we did a good job. This program will have continuation also this year and we are looking forward to May to start the second phase of the program.

For this year in our plans we have the realization of the Jungschar-Trainingscamp and I have big hope that Christian will help us to start the Jungschar program and be prepared for the camp realization. As I know he has huge scout experience and we are going to use him in this very hard.

Those are things that make ground for the future partnership building. I am an optimistic in this but you know time will show!»

Haik Khachatrian, Executive Director of Spitak YMCA