



NEWSLETTER

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Global Connections and Exchange Program for Tajikistan

Global Connections and Exchange Program for Tajikistan has established 24 Internet Learning Centers (ILCs) in secondary schools across Tajikistan. The program's main goal is to increase global dialogue and educational opportunities by installing modern computer equipment with Internet access in schools, and developing training and learning projects for teachers and students.

Tajikistan Global Connections and Exchange Program activities include:

- * Teacher training on using computers and the Internet in classroom teaching;
- * U.S. school partnerships on civic education projects, teacher and student exchanges;
- * Public access and programs for community members and disadvantaged groups;
- * Development of sustainable practices for schools and communities.

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Isfara ILC and future 2006-2007 FLEX students with the U.S. Exchange Teachers

Who Will Spend 2006 - 2007 in the USA?

For some GCE Tajikistan students, April was a month of great expectations. Students who applied for the Future Leaders and Exchange (FLEX) scholarship program were expecting to hear the results of the final stage of this opportunity at the end of April. The FLEX Program is sponsored by the U.S. State Department of States, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, which also funds and supports the GCE program.

At last, the long-awaited moment came and the finalists were informed of the exciting news: they would spend the next academic year studying and living in the U.S.! Many of our most active GCE students from project groups and clubs are now the future Tajikistan FLEX students of 2006 – 2007:

- from Isfara ILC – Zafar Atlasov, Firuza Bahodirova, Rukhshona Mirsoartikova, and Sherali Yunusov
- from Kanibadam ILC – Shakhnoza Ibragimova
- from Kulob ILC – Shifo Sharifzoda
- from Sarband ILC – Manon Yusupov

These students thank the Global Connections and Exchange Program which gives the opportunity to enlarge one's world view, develop leadership skills, and learn and improve English language skills – all which help open up new windows of opportunities to youth in Tajikistan.

We congratulate our winners and wish them great success in their coming year of studying and living abroad in the U.S.!

U.S. Exchange Teachers in Tajikistan!



U.S. Exchange Teachers are welcomed by traditional bread and salt

Finally, the long-awaited day came: the day when the Teacher Exchange participants – Andy Dean from College Preparatory School in Oakland, California; Alvin Moses from Robert E. Lee High School in Magnolia, Texas; and George Thornton from Oroville High School in Oroville, Washington – arrived in Tajikistan!

Before coming to Tajikistan the teachers already had some knowledge about our country. But they learned much more during the 16 days spent in Tajikistan, as there is no better way to understand a country and its people than to visit it and see everything with your own eyes.

In the course of their trip the teachers visited many of our ILCs, mainly their partner schools with whom they usually exchange partnership presentations every month. In general, the teachers' trip was divided into three stages:

1. first, teachers went to the ILCs near Dushanbe – School No. 10 of Dushanbe and the ILC of Gissar
2. then, teachers visited ILCs of the Khatlon region in the south: Nurek, Kulyab, Chorbogh, and Sarband
3. the closing tour was to ILCs of the Sughd region in the north: Isfara, Istaravshan, and Khujand.

Each of the centers gave the American guests a warm and hospitable welcome, including meeting the teachers with bread and salt, and of course music and dancing. Not only ILC students but members of the entire school ranging from primary school students to teachers and the school director were involved in this bright event. Students introduced the guests to national traditions and customs. For example, students of School No. 10 in Dushanbe and students from Chorbogh ILC performed a Tajik wedding skit with traditions characteristic of the region. In Istaravshan students decided to show "gavhorabandon" which is the celebration of the first time a newborn baby is put into the "gavhori", or national cradle. In Kulob, girls made a fashion show of the national cloth "chakan" – a female dress with colorful rounded embroidery. Students prepared welcoming speeches, presentations and poems about their city and country not only in native languages but also in English.

The teachers also prepared themselves for meeting with students and teachers. Each of them conducted interesting presentations about their schools and students, and about their cities and families. Moreover, teachers conducted trainings both for students and teachers. Andy Dean conducted many meaningful activities which Tajik students and teachers participated in with great pleasure. Not only were the activities fun, they taught them to overcome challenges by means of having good communication within a team and the importance of being a good listener. Alvin Moses presented a new game that is popular in the U.S. and Europe among people of all ages - a Letterboxing game which students joined with great enthusiasm. Thus, the very first letterbox in Tajikistan was created in the Chorbogh ILC of School No. 40, which is another historical event in the life of our students.



Andy Dean explaining the importance of communication



Gissar students working together on a challenge activity

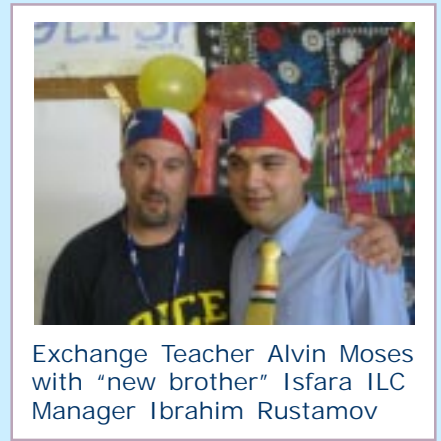
Alvin Moses and George Thornton conducted seminars on integrating IT into the classroom which gave their Tajik colleagues a chance to learn more about Internet resources and how to use them in teaching. Besides these useful trainings, the Exchange Teachers prepared many wonderful and unforgettable surprises for our ILCs.

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One of them was done by Alvin Moses who donated a Classroom Performance System (CPS), with a laptop to his Isfara ILC partner school. The CPS is a new and exciting way for students to get involved and engaged in the classroom while focusing on a particular subject.

Reflective of the new bond formed, Moses also gave a personal gift of his own laptop to his partner, ILC Manager Ibrahim Rustamov! As Moses explained, "It was like a dream come true to come to Tajikistan. So I asked my partner teacher what his dream was. And now, I've made his dream come true." Ibrahim gratefully responded, "It's a great, great event, it's a dream come true. I didn't believe that one day my partner teacher would come to meet me, and spend 2 days with us. So students, be sure to have dreams, because one day it can come true..." This was a very touching moment that left many expressing tears of joy and happiness.

Understanding the great impact more materials could have on the program, George Thornton donated a laptop to RI-SOL Tajikistan! In his generosity and commitment to the program, George expressed his desire to have the laptop be put to use in whichever way would be most beneficial to the program and participants.



Exchange Teacher Alvin Moses with "new brother" Isfara ILC Manager Ibrahim Rustamov



George Thornton presents gifts to Istaravshan partner school

And of course, Tajik students and teachers didn't lose their chance to talk to their guests in English and ask them many questions about their impressions of Tajikistan and its people, the education system of the U.S., American schools and students, life of American people, differences and similarities between American and Tajik cultures and many other questions. Besides live discussions, two online chats were conducted at the beginning and at the end of the teachers' stay in our country. These chats gave a chance for all the 25 ILCs to greet, talk and ask questions to our dear guests.

You can read the teachers' thoughts and impressions on their experience in Tajikistan through their e-journals at <http://www.connect-tajikistan.org/forum/>, which teachers posted on almost daily.

While visiting Tajikistan ILCs, the teachers also went to historical places and sights of our country to better understand its rich culture. These places included the famous Gissar fortress, the mausoleum of Mirsaid Ali Hamadoni in Kulob, beautiful mosques of Khujand and Dushanbe cities and many other interesting sights reflecting the history of Tajikistan.

During home stays with Tajik families with our ILC staff and families of ILC students, the teachers received another experience. These home stays gave them a chance to learn more about the lives of Tajik people, our customs and traditions, to see the differences of southern and northern parts of our country, and observe and try to prepare national meals like "Non" – Tajik bread and "Pilav" – traditional meal.

Unfortunately, the teachers' stay in Tajikistan had to come to a close and thus everybody – Tajikistan students and teachers, RI-SOL Tajikistan staff and especially the U.S. teachers themselves were very sad but also happily gathered together on their last day on May 1st, spent at the School for the Deaf.



Home stay with welcoming Tajik family

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Exchange Teachers, Embassy guests, and teachers and students at the School for the Deaf

Here teachers gave presentations on their Exchange experience and future GCE to an audience of students and teachers from the School for the Deaf and School No. 10, and Embassy guests Mr. Tom Armbruster, Deputy Chief of Mission and Mr. Jon Larsen, Public Affairs Officer.

Teachers prepared interesting presentations talking about their impressions of Tajikistan and its people, the ILCs and its student, and about future GCE plans: joint science projects on physics and biology, translating and combining stories/folk tales into English, Russian, Tajik and even Spanish, joint Club activities as U.S. partner schools will establish their own Photography and Web Designers clubs, international contests, an international recipe book, and many other collaborative activities.

Words cannot express how much we enjoyed having the teachers here on the Exchange and how much GCE participants gained from their visit. Many lessons were learned, many friendships were formed, and we all look forward to the strengthening of these lessons and friendships in the future!

Meeting with Psychologists



Tojiddin Valiev explains to Gissar students some causes of conflict

After a three-week online forum with a team of psychologists it was planned to conduct a one-day training for one of the GCE ILCs. On April 6th, the ILC of Gissar city received the trainers-psychologists Firuz Davlatov and Tojiddin Valiev who came to meet students to further address the topic of "conflict".

Students were very excited to meet in person the people who answered their questions and helped them online. At the beginning of the training, the psychologists conducted an introduction game in order to help the students overcome their shyness and have a free discussion. After the game psychologists spoke about conflict stating its causes and origin, and touched upon the following aspects of conflict: ethics of communication, notion of conflicts, causes of conflicts, types of conflict persons, and ways of solving conflicts. Students

gave examples from their every day life, and received answers listening and conceiving new knowledge with widely opened eyes: they discovered the peculiarity of human character, the physiological properties of the human brain, types of human mentality and many other issues. To increase involvement and solidify the knowledge gained, students also participated in skits. The final part of the training was very bright and interesting because students were asking questions not only on conflict but also on different issues which trouble them every day. Students became so enthusiastic about the training that they did not notice how quickly time passed.

This is the first but not the last of communication between students with psychologists. The next forum that started in the middle of April is devoted to the very important problem of alcoholism and drug abuse. This problem has a negative and unhealthy effect on society, and unfortunately, often on young people.

Communication with psychologists plays an important role in the life of teenagers. Given that not every school has its own school psychologist who could help students during difficult times, psychologists' advices and answers is extremely important in helping a teenager understand oneself and its surrounding society.



Psychologists answer students' questions on conflict and other issues

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Work in My Community



Gulyakandoz students help to cut firewood for people suffering from eye diseases

April was an especially exciting month for ILC project group and club students as this month's activity was devoted to Global Youth Service Day (GYSD). Throughout the month, students had the opportunity not only to learn about volunteering, but also to become real volunteers themselves and ready to do what they could to help members of their communities. Though GYSD was appointed for April 21st – 23rd, students decided to carry out several projects during the whole month of April, with the number of students involved in the community service activities sometimes reaching up to 100.

The purpose of the "Work in My Community" activity was to give students a chance to work together to do something positive for their community, especially for disabled persons and orphans. Students assessed school needs and set realistic goals that they met as a class, to be sure that the project they designed would be a project that they could actually carry out for the benefit of their community.

Students developed projects of assisting disabled people in their community in different ways: some students decided to collect money, food, and clothes; others helped to clean rooms or take away trash from yards, white-wash fences, and plant trees. In general, students tried to help as much as they could. For example, students from Chkalovsk ILC made a game with their own hands and presented it to kindergarten children. The children were very happy for the new game that helped them to think logically and learn to work as a team.

"Though most disabled and old people of our community live with their own families and thus they have enough kindness and care, still they were very happy to receive our attention and help" – say

students from Kayrakkum ILC. Those who received help from our students thanked them and said: "The most important is that youth does not forget about their old people, as care is the dearest thing in the world".

Students from Academy of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA consider that volunteering brings a community closer together. It makes communities safer, happier, and more secure.

Volunteering is an empowering tool for young people. By designing and carrying out service projects youth learn that they do have something to add to their community and that they are capable of making improvements in the place they live.

Students believe that this activity helped them to understand the importance of volunteering and work in a community. We look forward to more community service projects from GCE students!



Students from Chkalovsk ILC create games for kindergarten children



Kanibadam ILC students pack donated clothes for children from orphanage

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Muslims in the USA



Mr. Ahmed Younis at the ILC of Islamic University

The Internet Learning Center of the Islamic University in Dushanbe had the pleasure again of hosting an online chat. On April 7th Mr. Ahmed Younis, National Director for the Muslim Public Affairs Councils, paid a visit to the Islamic University and to our ILC. The Muslim Public Affairs Council is a public service agency in the U.S. working for the civil rights of American Muslims, for the integration of Islam into America, and for a positive relationship between American Muslims and their representatives.

First, Mr. Younis met with students of the Islamic University and talked to them about various issues surrounding Islam and practicing Islam in the U.S. Then, students of all ILCs joined a one-hour online chat with Mr. Younis to ask him their questions.

Questions asked by students and teachers were various. For example, some students were interested in the attitude of American citizens towards Muslims after September 11th. Mr. Younis answered that Muslims try interpret Islam in the right way so that others do not mix acts of terrorism with the Muslim religion. Students also asked how the attitude of Americans changed towards Muslims after Mr. Younis published his book *American Muslims: Voir Dire [Speak the Truth]*. "I hope that Americans' attitudes have changed. I think that Muslims will change the attitude of other people themselves once they take an active role in the society".

Through the chat students also learned that in the U.S. there are approximately 6 – 8 million Muslims; and that there are several translated versions of the Quran into English. Mr. Younis believes that there is no terrorism in Islam as there is no terrorism in Christianity. There are some groups which interpret the Quran for their own political purposes.

At the end of the chat Mr. Younis gave students his email address so that students and teachers could send more questions. We thank Mr. Ahmed Younis for the time spent with our students and the informative answers to the students' many questions.

ILC Becomes an International Center

For about two months, the Internet Learning Center of Chkalovsk have been hosting schoolchildren from Batken and Ovchi-Kalacha, boundary regions of Kyrgyzstan. Every Tuesday students from the neighboring country visit our ILC in order to learn basic computer and Internet skills. To help Kyrgyz students to achieve this goal, project group students from Chkalovsk ILC conduct weekly trainings for them with great pleasure in spite of language difficulties. The language of communication between Kyrgyz and Tajik students is Uzbek, as some of the project group students can speak the language which makes their job easier.



Kyrgyz students learn the first steps of computer technologies with the help of Chkalovsk peers

This is a unique example of how the Internet Learning Centers unite students from other countries, not only online but also in person. We wish good luck for Kyrgyz students and say "Welcome!" to other students from around Central Asia and the whole world!

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Young Leaders Serving their Community



Creating wall newspaper about GYSD and volunteering

This month in celebration of Global Youth Service Day (GYSD) our Youth Leadership Clubs (YLCs) carried out very useful activities with great responsibility and enthusiasm. One of the main goals of the YLCs was to do as much community service as they could and with involvement of other community members. But before the start of GYSD events, young leaders conducted presentations at their ILCs and created very informative wall newspapers telling their community members and students from other schools about GYSD, its history, volunteering and volunteers, and how they can help their community. Students also talked about upcoming activities that YLCs and project groups planned to conduct for GYSD.

Young leaders also participated in the GYSD forum, where they had an opportunity to discuss health problems, disability issues and share their ideas on GYSD events. This way they involved a larger number of volunteers from the community to help them organize and implement community service events.

Many YLCs decided to help protect the environment by cleaning their school yard, and planting trees. The motto of Gulyakandoz ILC was: "By Helping Other People We Are Helping Ourselves". These activities helped build teamwork, which is crucial for future leaders.

Other YLCs visited disabled people and people living in elderly houses. Some students invited orphans and children from poor families to their ILC to show them what an Internet Learning Center is, teach them basic computer skills, and just spend a good time together by playing different interactive games. At the end of the meeting young leaders presented their guests with some gifts which were collected by project group students. Last but not certainly not least, were the activities carried out by YLCs with support from Small Grants provided by the RI-SOL head office. These grants gave financial support to those who were willing to help their community but needed funding to implement their great ideas. Sarband School No. 1, Vakhdat



YLC member teaching young guests of Kayrakkum ILC to draw graphic images



Granny Anya does not feel herself lonely as she has people who take care of her

School No. 139 and Khorog School No. 2 were awarded with these small grants. Sarband and Vakhdat ILCs will purchase school uniforms for orphan children and schoolchildren from poor families, and Khorog youth leaders will help mentally disabled children by providing different kinds of games such as chess, checkers, and tennis-rackets, which will promote their mental development.

We thank all the YLCs and project groups for their hard and useful work during this month, and hope that they will have Service Day not once a year but everyday.

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