

Human Rights Park

Back in 2011, the Helsinki Citizens 'Assembly Vanadzor human rights NGO, jointly with Kathleen Lestina (US Peace Corps community development volunteer), volunteer for the HCA Vanadzor, initiated building of a Human Rights Park.

Background of Taron IV District

After the earthquake of December, 1988, many people in Vanadzor and Armenia lost their homes.

A number of countries lent a helping hand to the Armenian people and began building apartments, schools, and polyclinics in Taron IV district, an unpopulated area adjacent to Vanadzor. Regrettably, some of the building projects remained uncompleted. Over time, the Taron IV district (with population totaling 7.756) has been overlooked by the local government of Vanadzor. The Taron IV district has a high unemployment rate. The people there are really willing to work but need vocational training, professional guidance and improved skills to become more competitive in the labor market.

Below are the goals of the Human Rights Park Project

- Create a safe outdoor environment for people of all the generations in all the seasons of the year to promote healthy lifestyle and recreational activities;
- Ensure through the Human Rights Park enhanced awareness among the community members of democracy, tolerance, dissent and fundamental values of human right;
- Create a prototype for other similar parks in Armenia as an example of community and civil groups having a voice in designing and using a public space.

What we have done so far

Early in 2011, a community needs assessment revealed that Taron IV district had no outdoor space for the children and grown-ups to spend their leisure time and carry out recreational activities. The parents have no safe place to walk with their children and show them the natural environment.

Also, the population of the Taron IV district found it necessary to have a public park, particularly a Human Rights Park that would bring together people of all ages to take part in the decision making

on their community building and apply the fundamental values of human rights, such as the freedom of assembly and freedom of speech.

To involve the population of the Taron IV district in building of the park, the HCA Vanadzor, Jane Britt Greenwood, American Institute of Architecture Fulbright Scholar at the Yerevan State University of Architecture and Construction and Kathleen Lestina, US Peace Corps Volunteer in Community Business Development had a number of meetings with the *population of the district above and officials of the district municipality*. The community members united and expressed their great willingness to build the park. However, they needed the support of specialized groups with more detailed-oriented and professional skills.

Based on the needs assessment results, the volunteer architects involved in the Project designed the Human Rights Park.

The Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor initiated training sessions on human rights for the district schoolchildren. The schematic design was presented and accepted by the community. We met Sarhat Petrosyan, project architect for Lovers' Park in Yerevan to discuss the design and construction activities of the Human Rights Project.

On May 7, 2011, a tree-planting event was held in the Taron IV district. With the help of the district children, over 40 trees were planted and the park area was cleaned from garbage.

In 2012, the Chairman of the HCA Vanadzor applied to the mayor of Vanadzor to grant to the Organization some territory in the Taron IV district of Vanadzor with the right of free use to build a Human Rights Park there. Based on the Vanadzor Community Council Decree № 31-A of June 29, 2012,¹ the mayor of Vanadzor decreed to grant the area above to the Organization. Also, the Architecture Department of the Municipality helped with measurement activities of the playground in the park.

The draft project was presented to a number of companies and organizations and in 2015, the Paros Foundation² raised funds and initiated the construction works of the playground area of the Park as well as acquisition and installation of merry-go-round and teeter-totters in the playground.

On July 14, 2015, more than 20 US volunteers joined in the construction of the playground and worked the whole day.

We hope that this initiative will stimulate the renovation of the other sectors of the park.

¹ <http://hcav.am/events/%D5%B4%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A4%D5%B8%D6%82-%D5%AB%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%BE%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6%D6%84%D5%B6%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%AB-%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%A3%D5%B8%D6%82-%D5%B0%D5%A1%D6%80%D6%81%D5%A8-%D5%BE%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%A1/>

² <http://www.paros-foundation.org/projects.html#.Va3nYKTtIHw>

What we will do in the future

With further support, we will be able to push forward the complete implementation of the Project. Also, we will be able to ensure the water and electrical infrastructure, acquire trees and flowers, improve walkways, provide lighting and build enclosed areas for various events to be held in all the seasons of the year. We will also hold park decoration contests for the district population to design benches and prepare trash cans.

We will set up a safe and healthy lifestyle outdoor playground for people of all ages and capacities. We will also build an amphitheater for people to attend concerts or various public debates and discussions.