Enhancing the Education Environment and Empowering Orphans in Hisor
Tajikistan
The College of Idaho
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Context: Tajikistan is a landlocked country located in Central Asia. With a population of almost 10 million people and a surface area of over 55,000 square miles, it is dwarfed in size and political power by neighbors such as China to the east and heavily influenced by the Russian Federation. As a former Soviet Union territory, the country still suffers from the oppressive effects of communism. While the promise of democracy was made during independence in 1991, the current political situation does not reflect this. With extensive corruption and widespread human rights violations, the citizens suffer, especially those that live outside the capital, Dushanbe. Among citizens, children are the most neglected cohort. Issues such as preference for male over female children, overcrowded schooling and boarding institutions, and limited access to good health care, hinder the proper development of minors. To make matters worse the most often overlooked children are the orphaned and disabled. Although the country has laws that protect the rights of these children, the situation on the ground does not reflect this. Most are put into shabby institutions with limited resources and inadequate education. For instance, the only “education” some disabled children receive are basic skills such as going to a store to buy groceries, learning how to pay bills, and so on. Therefore only a few individuals can grow to become productive members of society, with the majority left to be supported by an inefficient government and undertrained caretakers.

The project we propose is aimed to empower and improve the learning environment of blind children at the Boarding School for the Blind orphanage located in Hisor. There are 283 children in the orphanage from ages 5 to 18. This aim will be achieved by providing 1,000 braille papers, 10 braille boards, and 100 slates. The braille slates are used for writing on the Braille papers that are important for supporting the children’s education. In addition, it is important to teach the teacher how to use the braille boards, so they can continue assisting the students. These efforts will improve students’ linguistic learning skills in both Tajik and English. In order to create a conducive learning environment, we intend to provide an air-conditioning unit to cool the communal area during the summer and warm it up during the winter. Our definition of peace is having responsible and literate members of society and global citizens, which is what our project intends to accomplish by better equipping children to develop into such members.

Project Overview: The orphanage is for children with disabilities ages 5 to 18. This project's main goal is to provide a peaceful and comfortable environment for the children to grow in. We decided to tackle the heating and cooling system, which is essential for the winter and summer seasons in Tajikistan. To achieve this goal, we decided to install an air conditioner that will work as a heating system for winter and a cooling system for the summer. The communal area is the main room in the building where the children gather and where the air-conditioner will be installed. Installing air conditioning will create a comfortable environment for the children. In comparison to other air conditioners, the selected air conditioner is environmentally friendly and requires less energy but does twice as much.

Because the orphanage is specifically for blind children, they have unique needs and treatment. Therefore, braille paper is thick enough to poke holes and the pen that comes with it is used to poke the hole. Since English is the universal language and knowing it has an advantage for future employment, we wanted to teach the children English. Therefore, we decided to use the braille boards that have the English alphabet.

As evidenced by our plan to install an environmentally friendly air-conditioner, sustainability is another important component of our program. Workshops on the climate crisis will be held to emphasize the importance of sustainability. The workshops will explain why we chose the environmentally friendly air conditioning unit and a basic introduction to how the Earth is affected. Auditory and touch will be used to instruct the children on sustainability. For instance, to make the workshops interactive, we will bring in a
A variety of materials such as plastic and cotton for the children to touch and interact with. This will stimulate their senses and help them understand what materials are eco-friendly.

**TIMELINE:** This project will take three weeks in June 2023

- **Week One:** Meet with teachers and volunteers at the orphanage and begin orientation for the educational aspect of the next three weeks. This will all be done at the orphanage to allow us to familiarize ourselves with the environment. Start working on the air conditioning system in the communal area.

- **Week Two:** The first week of workshops will be held. We aim to do this by distributing braille paper, slates, and boards. In addition, basic English workshops will be held where the children will have an interactive experience learning the English language. We will use the braille boards that were purchased for this teaching experience. We also aim to teach the teachers so that they can continue using them after the project. Teaching them English promotes more access to education which will help them in the future.

- **Week Three:** we will begin courses on environmental sustainability and climate crises. Since this is a topic that is not taught to many Tajik children, we will do this through practical games, and songs, to entertain them as well as make them fully aware of the gravity of this topic. By this week, the air-conditioner will be installed. The most environmentally friendly conditioning unit has been selected to tie it in with the workshops. Since there are many students in the orphanage, we will divide them into groups based on their ages.

**Partnerships:** Mr. Abubacer Ibragimov is the principal of the Boarding school for blind Children in Hisor and has agreed to partner with us on this project (phone number +992937071982). Moreover, with the help of the teachers at the school, we would be able to run the braille teaching workshops using braille resources such as the scratch paper and boards.

**Impact & Sustainability:** Blind children in Tajikistan do not have the same advantages and face discrimination daily, the project will aim at providing similar access to proper tools to study and learn. The different braille tools stimulate a myriad of senses that are designed to instruct blind people, which provides an interactive learning method. This is an opportunity for the children to learn better which will positively impact their futures by augmenting their self-confidence. Having the teachers interact in the workshops will help them learn more about peace and sustainability. The knowledge will then be passed on to future children. Moreover, the environmental education they receive will empower them to become conscious of the decisions they make that can impact the environment, which begins their development as climate-conscious global citizens.

**Personal Statements**

Jahona- This project will allow me to give back to my community and make an impact on the lives of hundreds of children in Tajikistan, who are in most need but so often forgotten due to discrimination and unequal distribution of resources.

Karina- I am looking forward to implementing this project because it will allow me to not only work within my community but also to challenge myself.

Kelvin- My career aspirations lie in public health, specifically health promotion and community advocacy. Hence, I believe that working with the children of Hisor will give me the opportunity to step into this exciting field.