



bringing
aecpSight
to armenian eyes

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Armenian EyeCare Project
Bringing Sight to Armenian Eyes

A Message From Our Founder

Dear AECP supporters
and friends:

With the recent developments of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, it has undoubtedly been a trying time for nearly everyone around the world. As always, the health and safety of our community comes first and the Armenian EyeCare Project is taking the appropriate measures to protect the well-being of our beneficiaries, staff and friends.

In an abundance of caution, we have, for the time being, suspended operation of our Mobile Eye Hospital and Regional Eye Clinics in Armenia as well as reduced staff presence in our administrative offices both in Armenia and the U.S. These precautions, in conjunction with global social distancing and “safer at home” efforts, are in the interest of everyone’s safety and to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19 as best we can.

Still, we do continue to have expenses in Armenia and need



the financial support of our donors and friends now more than ever. Though we do understand that times are tough for many right now, if you are in the position to give, it would make an extraordinary impact in helping our organization – which provides essential eye care services and aids in

eliminating preventable blindness in Armenia – to work through these challenging times.

We will continue to monitor any and all developments with COVID-19 and put the highest priority in protecting our community. Our thoughts are with everyone in Armenia, the U.S.

and the greater globe. Please do all that is in your power to stay safe and healthy during this time.

Sincerely,

Roger V. Ohanesian, MD
Founder and President
Armenian EyeCare Project

AECP's First Next Generation Fellow Completes Training in U.S.



Though concerns over COVID-19 now have much of the world rightfully practicing heavy precautions, the Armenian EyeCare Project (AECP) was fortunate enough to be able to bring our organization's first Next Generation Fellow to the U.S. for advanced medical education and training before threats of the virus escalated.



Last December, Dr. Vahan Papoyan, the first ophthalmologist from the AECP's Next Generation Fellowship Program, traveled to the U.S. from Armenia to participate in his medical fellowship at Wills Eye Hospital in Philadelphia. Over the course of three months, Dr. Papoyan studied his specialty of glaucoma and was able to train alongside some of the best eye care specialists in his field. Now Dr. Papoyan has returned to Armenia with the advanced education and training to treat his patients with the highest level of care.

"As a physician, you try to do everything you can to offer

the best possible care to your patients," Dr. Papoyan said. "So when you have the opportunity to go to the most advanced country and one of the finest medical institutions to learn cutting-edge techniques in glaucoma and eye care, it's an incredible feeling. It has been the best experience of my life."

The AECP launched our first Fellowship Program in 1996 and over the next decade brought several ophthalmologists to America for specialty training in retina, glaucoma, cornea, low vision, pediatric ophthalmology and more.

Following their fellowships, these physicians later returned to Armenia to establish and head Subspecialty Clinics in Yerevan in their fields of expertise, training hundreds of other medical personnel in Armenia on the most advanced techniques in

eye care along the way. This includes the AECP's NextGen Fellows, who have all observed and learned under the direction of our organization's past Fellows for several years before their opportunity to continue their training with U.S. fellowships of their own.

Now these next generation physicians will travel to the U.S. for three-to-six-month fellowships where they receive advanced education and training at some of the best U.S. ophthalmic institutions in their respective specialties.

For Dr. Papoyan, this exchange of knowledge from a range of physicians – including first-generation AECP Fellow Dr. Lilit Voskanyan in Armenia to now several glaucoma specialists in the U.S. – has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience.



"Different doctors have different techniques so it's interesting to observe them all, see what works for you and what you can adopt for yourself," Dr. Papoyan said. "Learning these techniques is so important because I can then utilize them in Armenia to treat my own patients and help my country."

Dr. Papoyan also considers the fact that he was able to witness surgeries from some of the most renowned ophthalmologists in the U.S. an unbelievable advantage. "Having the unique access to see these surgeries is exciting because you know how revered these doctors are in their field," he says. "To be able to see their work is incredible."

Through donor fundraising for the program, AECP was able to bring Dr. Papoyan to the U.S. as our first NextGen Fellow. We plan to bring our remaining five NextGen Fellows to the U.S. for their specialty fellowships

once the COVID-19 pandemic has stabilized.

"I am extremely happy for this opportunity but I also feel a great responsibility to make those who have put so much confidence and investment in me proud," Dr. Papoyan says. "I would like to thank everyone involved in this Next Generation Fellowship Program from AECP Founder Dr. Roger Ohanesian to Armenia's Chief Ophthalmologist Dr. Alex Malayan to AECP Fellow Dr. Lilit Voskanyan, who has been my mentor in Armenia. And of course, to all the donors of this program who have made my training possible. I would quite literally not have been able to come to the U.S. and learn all that I have learned if it were not for you."

To learn more about the AECP's Next Generation Fellowship Program, visit www.eyecareproject.com/next-generation-fellowship-program

Baby Eric's Story

Eric's parents were overjoyed when they learned they were expecting twins. But their joy came to a crashing halt when their babies were born premature and one passed away shortly after birth.

The other twin, Eric, survived but he still had many health problems of his own. This included a diagnosis of retinopathy of prematurity or ROP – a crippling eye disease found in premature infants that leads to blindness if left untreated.

As days went by, Eric's eye disease progressed and doctors noticed he was losing sight in both of his eyes. Eric's parents did not know what to do. In the past, surgeries to treat ROP were not available in Armenia. Babies like Eric would either go blind or have to travel to Russia for care, a daunting thought considering how fragile premature infants are.



With USAID's help, the AECP opened its Center of Excellence in 2012 inside the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) in Yerevan where premature infants are cared for. The proximity of our eye center to the NICU was an innovative idea that even advanced medical institutions in the U.S. have not yet adopted.

"No children's hospital in the U.S. has what Armenia has," Dr. Thomas Lee, Director of The Vision Center at Chil-

"After the surgery, I was finally able to breathe," Eric's father, Armen, said. "I can see the difference!"

"Now he pays attention to his toys, follows my movement and recognizes me," Karine added.

Eric's parents are ecstatic that their baby boy, who once had a very real possibility of going blind, has been given the gift of sight.

"Now when I hold my child, I know he will have a fulfilling life," Karine says.

Eric is just one success story. Since our Center of Excellence opened in Armenia, the AECP has screened roughly 20,000 premature infants and provided sight-saving treatment to over 500 babies. We continue to do this invaluable work through our donors' generosity and support.

To watch Eric's touching story, visit www.eyecareproject.com/video/eric-story

"Now when I hold my child, I know he will have a fulfilling life."

"I refused to believe this was it and I had hopes for another solution," Eric's mother, Karine, said.

Luckily Eric's parents were introduced to the Armenian EyeCare Project and our Center of Excellence for the Prevention of Childhood Blindness, which screens and treats babies with ROP and other eye diseases affecting children.

dren's Hospital L.A. says.

At the AECP's Center of Excellence, Dr. Tadevos Hovhannisyan, a local ophthalmologist who specializes in retinal surgeries, operated on both of Eric's eyes – a procedure that took six long hours.

Fortunately the surgery was a success and little Eric was able to regain his sight!

Seven-Year-Old Holds Fundraiser for AECP



Big hearts come in small packages! Last year, seven-year-old Ziva Bodenschatz received a school assignment: find a way to improve her community and write an official letter to a local agency. She decided that she would like to help people – especially children – see.

When discovering that her town of Irvine, California already had a number of resources for children's eye care, Ziva decided that she would write her official letter to her family's housing development of University Hills. She would ask to use its community center free of charge to host a fundraiser to raise money for international eye care.

The school assignment was to end there, but Ziva's parents encouraged Ziva to see her vision through and actually host a local event to help sponsor a community in need halfway across the world.

Once Ziva received the good news that she would be able to use the University Hills Community Center at no cost to host her event, she began researching international eye care nonprofits and found the Armenian EyeCare Project.

Upon researching our organization, Ziva decided she would like to raise money to adopt a village in Armenia through our Adopt-a-Village Program, which offers eye screenings and treatment if needed at no cost to an entire community in need in Armenia. To raise funds for this effort, Ziva, with the help of her parents, would organize a wine tasting fundraiser at the UHills Community Center.

"I would like my community to adopt a village in Armenia so children and their families can have glasses and eye care if they need it."

"I would like my community to adopt a village in Armenia so the children and their families can have glasses and eye care if they need it," Ziva said. "Then we can make new friends in Armenia and in our neighborhood."

On September 28, 2019, a sunny afternoon in southern California, about 50 of Ziva's closest family and friends got together for Ziva's fundraiser at the University Hills Community Center in Irvine. AECP Founder and President Dr. Roger Ohanesian, along with other local AECP staff, were also happy to attend!

Ziva's father, John, a wine enthusiast, led the group of enthusiastic attendees through a handful of expertly selected wines for tasting, including a wine from Armenia! Each wine was paired with some light bites, ranging from chocolate to nuts and even cheese boreg!

By the end of the event, over \$3,500 was raised for the AECP and our Adopt-a-Village Program, allowing Ziva to adopt two villages in need in Armenia, including visits to the village's schools for screening and treatment!

Once the threat of COVID-19 has stabilized and our Mobile Eye Hospital is back in operation, the AECP will be visiting the two villages with the

greatest need for care. There, residents will have the opportunity to get their eyes checked aboard our mobile clinic and receive treatment including new prescription eyeglasses and even surgery – all at no cost.

Thanks to Ziva's and her parents' incredible initiative and their greater community's thoughtful support, thousands of residents in rural regions of Armenia who would otherwise not have access to eye care will be able to receive the quality care they need and deserve.

With kindness and determination, Ziva's local community in southern California is helping another community in great need across the world and we are incredibly grateful.

To learn more about the AECP's Adopt-a-Village Program, visit www.eyecareproject.com/donations/adopt-a-village



Since 2003, our Mobile Eye Hospital has been traveling throughout Armenia to offer sight-saving eye care services, including surgery, to the many residents living in remote regions in Armenia. These beneficiaries, who are often on the country's poverty list and do not have the means to pay for care or travel far to receive it, have had their lives changed through our fully functioning surgical suite on wheels, which brings quality eye care to them!

Largely considered the hallmark of the Armenian EyeCare Project, our Mobile Eye Hospital – equipped with an up-to-date operating room and two exam rooms – delivers eye care to tens of thousands of Armenians every year who otherwise wouldn't have access to this care.

Gregory Makaryan, 65, from the small town of Chambarak in the Gegharkunik province of Armenia, is one of these beneficiaries. Cataract blinded his left eye about two years ago, leaving only his right eye with sight. Although it was difficult to work with poor vision, Gregory continued his job as a watchman on the shore of Lake Sevan.

"I am used to earning my living," Gregory said. "I cannot stop working now."

Gregory knew he needed cataract surgery but could not afford its cost. When he learned about the AECP and our Mobile Eye Hospital, he was in disbelief that he could receive this surgery that he needed so badly at no cost.

"No one has ever done anything free of charge for me," Gregory said. "It is amazing that such an organization exists!"

Raya Torosyan, 60, is another

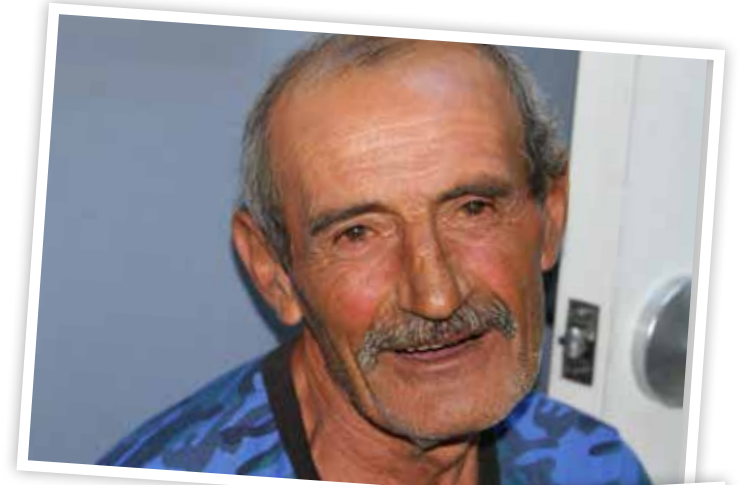
Mobile Eye Hospital Continues to Change Lives

success story. From the small village of Kaghsi in the Kotayk province of Armenia, Raya takes care of her five grandchildren despite living with diabetes and cataracts for years. Recently, she reached a point where not even wearing glasses was helping her vision. But last year Raya was able to receive cataract surgery at no cost on our Mobile Eye Hospital and now she can see.

"It was painless, easy and very effective," Raya says. "Now I can see perfectly well. It is wonderful work that the Armenian EyeCare Project carries out for our people!"

Every patient that the AECP is able to help with restored sight is beyond meaningful and each reaction from our beneficiaries is priceless. Thank you to our donors for making this life-changing work possible!

To learn more about our Mobile Eye Hospital, visit www.eyecareproject.com/video/mobile-eye-hospital



Gregory Makaryan and Raya Torosyan



Over 50,000 Armenians Screened for Diabetic Eye Disease; 15,000+ Screened Using AI Technology

About 270,000 people in Armenia have diabetes. That's almost 10 percent of the country's population. What's more, all diabetics are at risk of contracting diabetic eye disease and going blind if their diabetes is not controlled.

This is why, in 2017, the Armenian EyeCare Project launched an innovative Diabetes Program with the help of the World Diabetes Foundation (WDF) to screen all diabetics in Armenia for eye disease. Our goal: to prevent blindness from diabetes in the country.

We're happy to announce that we have surpassed the milestone of screening more than 50,000 patients throughout Armenia for diabetic retinopathy. Over 15,000 of those screened have undergone exams utilizing the state-of-art EyeArt AI Eye Screening System (Eyenuk, Inc., Los Angeles, USA) – an achievement that could not have been accomplished without



the Ministry of Health of Armenia and with support from the WDF, not only have we screened over 50,000 patients overall, but we have also utilized the cutting-edge EyeArt system to screen over 15,000 patients using artificial intelligence technology. As a result, nearly 10,000 patients have been identified as having diabetic retinopathy

“Diabetic retinopathy is a silent, blinding disease. Most people with diabetes have no symptoms until their vision is irreversibly damaged. While annual ophthalmic screening is recommended for all people with diabetes, less than half get screened yearly, even in the developed world,” AECF Founder and President Dr. Roger Ohanesian says. “This milestone of over 50,000 patients screened – and more than 15,000 patients screened using AI technology – makes Armenia one of the leading countries in the world to have implemented cutting-edge AI technology to truly benefit patients in low-resource settings.”

The Armenian government continues to implement an aggressive strategy to prevent diabetes and improve care for diabetes patients. In support of this, our organization, through its Diabetes Program, will bring

diabetic retinopathy screening and care to 87 clinics across Armenia with help from WDF.

“The use of EyeArt in Armenia offers an intriguing real-world test of this technology in a low-resource setting,” WDF Managing Director Leif Fenger Jensen said. “We applaud the vision exemplified by Dr. Ohanesian and the AECF organization in preserving vision for diabetes patients in Armenia and we hope that medical breakthroughs such as AI medical diagnostics can help more diabetes patients around the world.”

The EyeArt System is developed by Eyenuk, Inc. and provides fully automated diabetic retinopathy screening, including imaging, grading, and reporting in a single visit, without the need for eye dilation. Shortly after photographing the retina and while the patient is still in clinic, a report is issued, which is used to determine whether the patient needs to be evaluated by a specialist right away for potential treatment or seen again in 12 months.

Through our innovative Diabetes Program, we hope to show that prevention and early intervention can eliminate most cases of avoidable blindness, specifically diabetic retinopathy in those with diabetes.

To learn more about the AECF's Diabetes Program, visit www.eyecareproject.com/diabetes-program.

Meet Our New Board Members!



Dr. Thomas Lee



Mr. Michael Aghajanian



Ms. Lysa Grigorian



Mrs. Lisa Kalustian

As we look to nearly 30 years of service in Armenia, the Armenian EyeCare Project is pleased to welcome our four newest board members to our Board of Directors who will help facilitate our success for years to come.

Dr. Thomas Lee, Mr. Michael Aghajanian, Ms. Lysa Grigorian and Mrs. Lisa Kalustian all joined the AECF's Board of Directors last fall and each will bring their professional expertise and personal dedication to fulfill the AECF's lifelong mission of eliminating preventable blindness in Armenia and providing access to quality eye care for every child and adult in the country.

The new physician on the Board – Dr. Lee – has been working alongside the AECF for quite some time. Director of the Vision Center at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, Tom started working with the AECF in 2010 and has been integral in helping

develop our organization's pediatrics-oriented programs including our Center of Excellence for the Prevention of Childhood Blindness in Yerevan. The state-of-the-art center is dedicated to advancing eye care for infants and children in Armenia and eliminating blindness caused by childhood eye diseases like retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) and more.

More recently, Tom has also helped the AECF spearhead our large-scale School Screening Program in partnership with Children's Hospital L.A., in which we screen schoolchildren across Armenia for eye disease with the goal of detecting vision issues early on and preventing them in the future.

Michael also has a history with the AECF. An adjunct professor at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in Worcester, Massachusetts, Michael co-founded WPI's Armenia Project Center, which allows

students from WPI to travel to Armenia to complete summer projects where they apply their technical skills to solve real-world social problems. Thanks to Michael's initiative, WPI students have since traveled to Armenia to work alongside the AECF on projects that will enhance our ability to achieve our mission.

Lisa K. and Lysa G. also join the board as longtime supporters of the AECF and our efforts in Armenia. Once serving as VP of Public Affairs for the Western Region of Health Net, Inc., Lisa K. is an accomplished strategist experienced in communications and advocacy, policy development and implementation and public affairs.

Founder of the JHM Foundation, benefactor Lysa G. has made it her life's work to support various charitable organizations through her private foundation, including the AECF.

We welcome these four new board members to our Board of Directors. They join our remaining board members Dr. John Hovanesian, Mr. David Keligian, Dr. Barry Kuppermann, Dr. Richard Hill, Mrs. Meredith Khachigian, Mr. Archie Cholakian, Mr. Jack McHale, Dr. Khodam Rostomian, Mr. Mike Sahakian and AECF Founder and President Dr. Roger Ohanesian.

Our volunteer Board of Directors operates with a traditional nonprofit structure. Board meetings are held regularly to manage the AECF's affairs and the Board works diligently to ensure that the highest percentage of donated funds go directly to our medical programs in Armenia.

To learn more about the AECF's Board of Directors, visit www.eyecareproject.com/about-us/administration/board-of-directors



the help and participation of the WDF and the Ministry of Health of Armenia.

Since our Diabetes Program launched, in cooperation with

and approximately 1,500 of those who had vision-threatening diabetic retinopathy have received sight-saving treatment.



Armenian EyeCare Project

Bringing Sight to Armenian Eyes

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Tax ID No. 47-0850159

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We've Changed Our Address!

That's right, we've changed our mailing address. Please update your records and mail any correspondence and/or contributions to our new address:

Armenian EyeCare Project

100 W. Foothill Boulevard, Suite 203

San Dimas, California 91773



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