



ALUMNI

# News letter



ARMENIAN  
VOLUNTEER  
CORPS

## IN THIS ISSUE

### *Dear Alumni,*

We are so glad to be sending you the Birthright Armenia/Depi Hayk (BR/DH) and Armenian Volunteer Corps (AVC) Alumni newsletter, full of interesting news and information about your fellow alums and BR/DH and AVC. From our upcoming 20th anniversary celebration to our Vanadzor expansion, much is happening here in Armenia.

These are very challenging times for our country and this is when we all need to focus on the critical issues we have. The landscape has changed so much over the past few years, and that includes Artsakh. As paradoxical as it may seem, this is when we need to be more involved and not give up. We need all of you to stay focused and engaged in every way possible. We are here to answer your questions and help you in the process. Let us stay active. Let us be even more committed.

— *Birthright Armenia/Depi Hayk,  
Armenian Volunteer Corps*

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## PODCAST featuring EDELE HOVNANIAN

Remeet Edele Hovnanian, founder of Birthright Armenia and President of the H. Hovnanian Family Foundation, whose exemplary commitment to Armenia is evidenced by the work of the Foundation-supported NGOs that in addition to BR/DH and AVC include HIKE Armenia, Repat Armenia, and The Armenia Project. In this very timely interview, Edele talks about the motivations and vision behind her work with Armenia. Listen to the podcast [here](#).



## BIRTHRIGHT 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION: JULY 6-15, 2024!

We are marching forward and proudly announce our upcoming Birthright Armenia/Depi Hayk 20th Anniversary. Our motto is "**Armenia: Reconnect, Recommit, Engage**". The July 6-15, 2024 events will feature purpose-driven gatherings, celebrations of partnerships, community service projects, cultural events and dinners, excursions, visits to alumni initiatives, talks and networking events. Keep your calendars open for July and join us to reflect on our journey, foster connections, and recommit to the future.

Over the last 20+ years, our worldwide alumni community has had outstanding achievements amongst its membership. Below we share some alumni highlights, and invite you to send us your stories to share in future newsletters.



**GARINE PALANDJIAN**

*BR, 2005*

### Making a Difference in Education

After earning her PhD in Educational Policy & Evaluation at Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College (Arizona State University) in Spring 2022, Garine Palandjian was recently appointed as the new Head of School at [St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School](#) in Boston. Her background in education and extensive experience in both the United States and Armenia make her a true inspiration to others to channel their professional experience for direct impact in our communities.



**NARINE POLADIAN**

*BR, 2018*

### Breaking Barriers and Stone

We are delighted to share the incredible journey of Narine Poladian, a Lebanese-Armenian who is helping to preserve Armenian culture by making ornately carved traditional khachkars. Narine is the first woman to take up this craft professionally. Furthermore, she extends an invitation to anyone interested in exploring the world of Khachkar culture. You can get in touch with her to inquire about purchasing your very own Khachkar creation set. Explore her work [here](#).



## SOFYA MNJOYAN

BR, 2009

### Bringing Healthcare Access to Borders

In a bold, groundbreaking initiative, Sofya Mnjoyan has established the first [Deghatar pharmacy](#) in the village of Verin Karmir Aghbyur in the Tavush region of Armenia. This project aims to address the healthcare needs of border villages without pharmacies and is a testament to Sofya’s dedication to the Armenian people. She plans to expand to a mobile pharmacy in order to serve the various villages of Tavush and give access to much needed medication in the region.



## GREGORY BANDIKIAN

BR, 2006

### A Journey in Berry Farming

Living in Armenia with his family from 2011 to 2016, Gregory found himself at a crossroads, prompted by the passing of his father. His career in Armenia had reached its peak, but the next step was clear: entrepreneurship. Now, he is overseeing a kiwi berry pilot project, with plans to expand to 2 hectares of land in the Margahovit community of the Lori Region by year-end. Greg’s plans include involving residents of the community to increase crop production, and exporting the fruit to the Emirates. Watch out for the [Lori’s Berries](#) brand!



## MARISOL KHADEYAN

BR, 2013

### Kimk Food Lab

Marisol Khadeyan, from Córdoba, Argentina, began her journey with volunteer work in Gyumri, Shushi, and Yerevan during her time with Birthright Armenia. Her experience in Armenia left a profound impact on her, leading her to make the decision to settle in Armenia in 2015. With five years of experience in the wine industry, Marisol gained valuable insights into production, gastronomy, and tourism. Driven by this passion, she joined forces with her friend, and now partner, Misak. Together, they created Kimk Food Lab and specialize in making empanadas, with Zvartnots Airport as their primary client. Follow Marisol: [Kimk Food Lab](#).



## RAFFI WARTANIAN

BR, 2007

### Creative Composing

[Raffi Wartanian](#) is a writer and musician who teaches writing at UCLA, and currently serves as the inaugural Poet Laureate in Glendale, California. A multi-instrumentalist, composer, and singer-songwriter, Raffi has performed internationally and released two albums of original music. He also currently serves on the board of the International Armenian Literary Alliance. Recently, his innovative compositions were used in the theatrical production of William Saroyan’s “The Time of Your Life” staged at UCLA.



## GARNI BARONI

BR, 2012

### Hovk Farms: Blending Tradition, Comfort, and Adventure in Armenia

[Hovk Farms](#) is a traditional small-scale Armenian farm that has undergone a transformation. The old farmhouse on the property was converted into a modern home, equipped with the amenities required for a relaxing getaway. Alongside the home, a campground has been established to cater to hikers and outdoor adventure enthusiasts. Through collaboration with the local community, development of services and recreational activities are ongoing, in order to boost the village’s tourism sector.



## LAURA TASHJIAN

BR, 2006

### Women Empowerment

With birth rates in Armenia below the threshold necessary for stable population growth, alumna Laura Tashjian has been working tirelessly to research maternal health conditions, challenges, and areas for improvement in Armenia. She is among the founding executive board members of the [Michel Odent Mother \(MOM\) Center](#) in Armenia, advocating for holistic, safe, and informed birth and postpartum experiences. Laura is a [certified birth doula](#), lactation counselor and prenatal yoga teacher with specialized training in nutrition, trauma and early childhood education.

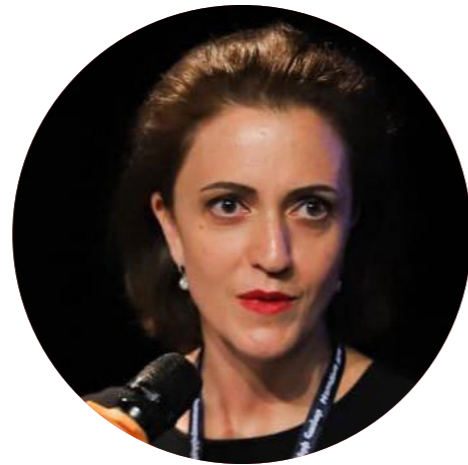


## TSOLEEN SARIAN

AVC, 2021

### The Right Place at the Right Time

Always active in advocacy, particularly “Hye Tahd” work in the US, the summer of 2022, Tsoleen Sarian yearned to be involved completely in Armenian civic life. In 2023, she purchased a home in Yerevan complete with a local mortgage. “It felt so fulfilling to own a piece of my homeland. It helped me be more secure in my desire to remain and to have a stronger sense of permanence here.” Tsoleen later joined the Batsum movement which raised awareness in front of the UN, Red Cross, and embassies. She makes it a point to visit all corners of Armenia. “Two years ago I took a one way flight to participate in a strong, independent Armenia and I’m certain I’m in the right place at the right time to do so”.



## ARINA ZOHRABIAN

AVC, 2002

### A Life-Changing Decision

In the fall of 2021, Arina Zohrabian returned “home” to AVC after volunteering with the organization in 2002. Having lived in Armenia ever since her date of arrival on Children’s Day in 2001, Arina’s decision was a life-changing experience. Since joining AVC as its Executive Director, Arina and the AVC team have expanded the program to surpass 100 volunteers in a single year, and continue to prioritize the Professional and Senior Volunteers who have the skillset to make a difference.

## ADVANCED DEGREES

We want to offer our warmest congratulations to our alumni who have achieved their PhD and MD degrees. Your dedication and hard work have brought you this well-deserved success, and we couldn't be prouder of your accomplishments!

**Varak Ketsamanian (BR, '14)**  
Princeton University  
PhD in Near Eastern Studies  
2021

**Erik Aznauryan (BR, '16)**  
ETH Zurich  
PhD in Bioengineering  
2021

**Linda Balabanian (BR, '21)**  
McGill University  
PhD researcher, Molecular and Cell Biology, Biophysics  
2021

**Tavis Apramian (BR, '11)**  
The University of Western Ontario  
Medicine (MD)/Education Research (PhD)  
2020

**Shushan Sargsian (AVC, '12)**  
New York University/Sackler Institute  
PhD in Microbiology  
2020

**Arda Kotikian (BR, '15)**  
Harvard University  
PhD in Material Science Engineering  
2020

**Carineh Ghafafian (BR, '17)**  
Technical University of Berlin  
PhD in Polymer Engineer/ Material Science Engineering  
2020

**Leena Adamian (BR, '14)**  
Creighton School of Medicine  
MD  
2016

## CONGRATULATIONS

### FUTURE VOLUNTEERS



September 24, 2023

**Arek Harout Seferian**  
NATALIE HAJINELIAN  
(BR, '18)



September 8, 2023

**Levon Markosian**  
KARINE VANN (BR, '13)



March 13, 2023

**Kapriel Raffi Terjimanian**  
ARMEN TERJIMANIAN  
(BR, '15)



June 22, 2023

**Aren Harutyunyan**  
VICTORIA DAVYDOVA  
(BR, '12)



February 8, 2023

**Amaras Hakhverdyan**  
NIERI AVANESSIAN  
HAKHVERDYAN (BR, '11)



August 13, 2023

**Amari Lucene Paige**  
TALENE GHAZARIAN  
(BR, '09)

## PATHWAY PROGRAM *in YEREVAN and GYUMRI (and SOON VANADZOR)*

In order to serve BR and AVC alumni who wish to move to Armenia for employment-based stays, we have residential options in Yerevan and Gyumri to aid alumni in the transition process. Since the Pathway to Armenia program inception, we have housed 110 alumni in Yerevan and 10 alumni in Gyumri. Vanadzor will join early next year, as we have purchased a building to serve

as our permanent headquarters in Vanadzor, with a section dedicated to the Pathway to Armenia residence. All alumni interested in employment opportunities in Armenia are eligible for the Pathway program – let us know, and we'll walk you through the quick and easy application process.

## HOVNANIAN FOUNDATION FELLOWSHIPS

Earlier this year the Hovnanian Foundation launched its Fellowship program to support Armenians invited to be a participant in artistic, athletic, scientific, academic and entrepreneurial events to showcase their skill sets, talents and represent the country of Armenia. Alumni are welcome to apply for these Fellowship grants – keep in mind that the fellowships are not just to attend prestigious global events, rather they are to offset the costs of being an active participant or presenter during such events. Visit here to learn more and see the types of Fellowships that have been awarded to date.

## LOOKING *for* WORK OPPORTUNITIES *in* ARMENIA?

Many alumni look for work opportunities as an important element to facilitate moving to Armenia for long-term living. We are here to help you.

### Here are resources to start your search:

**1** Write to the Next Step (alumni) team about your interests and send us your resume. We will also connect you to [Repat Armenia](#) and their employment headhunting agency. We can be reached at [alumni@birthrightarmenia.am](mailto:alumni@birthrightarmenia.am).

**2** Check out websites that list professional opportunities: [www.professionals.am](http://www.professionals.am) | [www.careercenter.am](http://www.careercenter.am) | [www.staff.am](http://www.staff.am)

**3** **Remember** – you don't have to be in Armenia to start your job search! Let us know how we can be of assistance.

## CAREER SPOTLIGHT

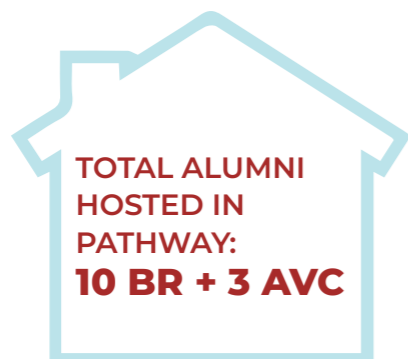
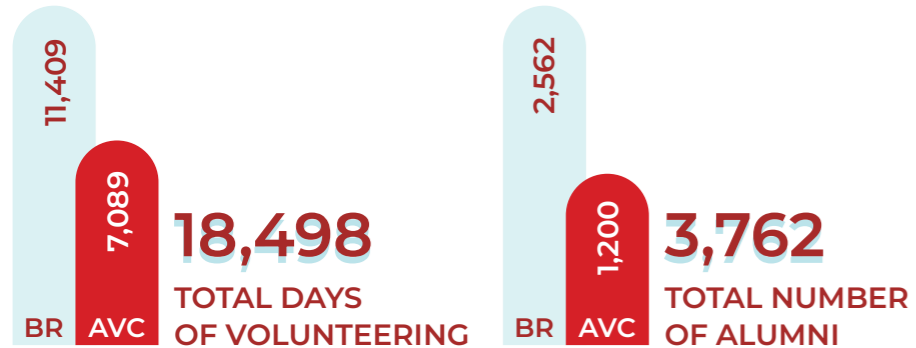


Meet the designer of this newsletter! Marni Kaldjian (BR, '23) had volunteered in Yerevan earlier this year when she was hired by her volunteer site, Proper Studios. Originally from Wisconsin, USA, Marni has a Masters Degree in Graphic and Web Design, and came to Armenia to gain international design experience. Six months of volunteering turned into a permanent managerial position, and we're proud to be able to feature her work here. You can view more on Instagram: @mkaldji.

# 2023 BY THE NUMBERS

As we near the end of 2023, we at BR and AVC realize just how much work there is to be done. Having witnessed a tragic time in Armenia's history, we remain proud of the work of our volunteers and alumni in all sectors. We have had a year full of work, expanding the scope of our activities within Armenia by engaging more volunteers – Armenian, non-Armenian, junior, experienced, and retired professionals. We invite you to join us in making even more possible in 2024!

TOTAL VOLUNTEERS IN 2023 = 335



**100**  
NEW PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS IN 2023

**100+**  
ALUMNI INITIATED PROJECTS OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS



**180**  
VOLUNTEERS AND ALUMNI LEARNING ARMENIAN

# GET INVOLVED

## BE A PART OF OUR NEWSLETTER: SHARE, CONNECT, SUPPORT

Our newsletter is a collection of **your** stories; a space where we come together, share, and support one another. Your active involvement is what makes our community special. **Share Your Stories, Updates, and Accomplishments** using our user-friendly [Google Form](#). Don't forget to share links to your achievements.

### OTHER WAYS TO GET INVOLVED:

**Connect with us** on various social media platforms including LinkedIn, the FB Alumni Community, and the WhatsApp group.

**Stay tuned** to learn more about our micro-grants, which we anticipate announcing in Spring 2024 to continue your impact for Armenia.

**Host an Event** at your church or in your community if you loved your BR or AVC experience. Our Next Step and Communications team will walk you through the process and join you.

**Visit Armenia** and our office. If you plan on visiting Yerevan, Vanadzor, or Gyumri, don't forget to schedule a visit to our offices. Email us to let us know you'll be visiting and we'll make sure to get you on our email list so that you can take advantage of the amazing opportunities – language classes, excursions, forums, and more.

**Recommend an Applicant** to continue expanding the impact for Armenia. If you have a sibling, parent, friend (Armenian or non-Armenian) who you think can help the country, urge them to consider volunteering with us. Send us their email address and we will do the rest.

### ***Closing remarks***

To wrap up, [here's](#) a musical treat for jazz enthusiasts. Alum Galina Shcherbakova (BR '22) collaborates with one of Armenia's top musicians, Mikayel Voskanyan, presenting a fresh take on the timeless "Ari Im Sokhag" song. Enjoy this harmonious blend of jazz and Armenian soul. Stay tuned for more in our next newsletter.

