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## SUCCESS STORY

# Community Connections

### New Center Provides Resources for Special Needs Children



The new playground at the Medical and Psychological-Pedagogical Assessment Center is improving social skills for special needs children.

**Theme:** Special Education

**From:** Yerevan, Armenia

**Dates of the Program:**  
March 19 – April 9, 2009

**Host Organization:** International Visitors Center of Detroit

**Training Location:** Detroit, Michigan

#### Success

Zhanna Paylozyan, a methodologist, and Sona Harutyunyan, the Director of Social Services at the Medical and Psychological Assessment Center in Yerevan, have recently opened a playground for special needs children at the center. Modeled on examples from the CC exchange to the U.S., the two alumni, with support from the center's Director, created a space to contribute to cognitive development and social integration of special needs children.

#### Overview

In March and April 2008, Paylozyan and Harutyunyan traveled to Detroit, Michigan, to learn about innovations in special education. The trip provided an opportunity for the two women to volunteer at the Wing Lake Development Center, one of several centers in the region that serves severely handicapped youth. CC participants worked in the center's art and play rooms, which inspired them to construct a similar space in Yerevan.

Upon their return to Armenia, Paylozyan and Harutyunyan organized lectures to share with colleagues many of the insights they gained while in the U.S., including the need to develop a children's play center in Yerevan. Much to the alumni's surprise, the Director and staff of the center were enthusiastic about the idea and eager to start work on the project.

Due to the CC alumni's planning, and the teamwork of the center's staff, the new playground was ready at the start of the 2009 academic year. The playground is invaluable for the 72 special needs children studying at the center. It has created an alternative to the traditional learning environment, improves social interaction, and helps educators gain a better understanding of their students' capabilities and problems by observing them in a different setting.

"The most important thing," Paylozyan says of the center's success, "is that we have everybody's support. The results are always so rewarding." Plans are already underway to expand the center.