

**Proposal for Natural Sciences Summer Boot Camp for Artsakh Kids in Byurakan, Aragatsotn Marz**

Developed by YSU Center for Continuing Education

Funded by All Armenia Fund

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Yerevan, Armenia

***Rationale***

Provide academic learning in an experiential workshop format for the teenagers aged 13-17, from families forcefully relocated from Artsakh to the Republic of Armenia and currently residing in various Marzes of Armenia, with inclusion of the local kids from the same areas. Based on the project implemented in July 2024, certain revisions have been introduced to the Concept.

***Goal***

Provide learning and socializing opportunity for diverse groups of kids in one place through academic and hands-on in-classroom, and outdoors experience, tours to historical places, soft skills and gamification and sports.

***Objectives:***

1. Increase the interest towards the social sciences among the participants
2. Provide a week of out-of-the routine experience for the participants
3. Provide networking opportunity for the participants, to make new friends and friendships, that will develop beyond the Boot Camp (aka Natural Sciences Summer Workshop-Camp)
4. Provide additional soft skills to the participants via invited experts

***Participants***

Overall, 60 teenagers age 13-16, from various provinces of Artsakh, as well as local communities will come together at the Boot Camp in July 2025. Each week there will be on group of 20 participants, the ration will be 16 participants from the families forcefully relocated from Artsakh, and 4 teenagers from local communities. Selection of the participants will be implemented via direct outreach to the communities that have resettled families from Artsakh, as well as NGO working with the target population, probably there will be a call at mass media (to be decided).

***Geography and Partners***

Each week a group of 20 teenagers will arrive from a Marz.

Last year there were groups from Sevan and adjacent villages, Gegharkunik Marz; Armavir and adjacent villages, Armavir Marz and Aparan and adjacent villages, Aragatsotn Marz.

This year the YSU team will try to expand the geography and reach out to other Marzes. Last year the local municipalities (Sevan and Aparan) have provided transportation for the groups to Yerevan or Byurakan. In Armavir it was the *Armavir Development Center NGO,* that dealt with recruitment of the kids and logistics to-from Byurakan. This year the YSU team will try to use the same approach but different locations, probably.

Last year YSU team partnered with *Jinishian Memorial Foundation* for Sevan group and Aparan Municipality directly for Aparan group. In

**Background**

The YSU Center for Continuing Education has developed and implemented a Natural Science Summer Workshops for 13-17 y.o. teenagers, based in the main facilities of the Yerevan State University. The first pilot workshop was organized in June 2023 and then as a follow up on the feedback from the participants and their parents, the schedule was revised and enriched with more subjects and offered again in summer 2024 and will be offered in 2025, too.

The rationale behind the workshop is to make natural science school subjects interesting and attractive for the school students; to introduce hands-on practice of natural science experiments that are part of the school program, but are not implemented at school; to help the youth with career orientation. Hence, the focus is on hands-on (80/20% ratio of practice/theory) training in physics, chemistry, as well as the entire cycle of biology. Practical tests accompanied with narrative explanation of the subject/experiment.

When the exodus from Artsakh happened in September 2023 and a lot of families, among other venues and facilities, were hosted in YSU Byurakan base, the Center for Continuing Education was involved in assessments of the families and their needs and there came the idea to organize a summer Boot Camp for kids/teens from Artsakh in the same YSU Byurakan base, taking the Natural Science Summer Workshop as a model. The idea was discussed and refined within the YSU and the final Concept was shared with and approved by the Hayastan All Armenian Fund.

Initially, the Boot Cap was planned solely for the kids forcefully relocated from Artsakh. However, the Donor’s requirement was to turn it into 80%/20% participation, with the inclusion of local kids, which turned out to be a much better approach in terms of integration and diversity.

The timing was chosen so that the YSU Byurakan base has availability, in terms of entire facility, as well as operating kitchen. The partners to reach out to the families from Artsakh, as well as the local families were chosen directly, on the networking and fast reaction basis.

Based on the feedback from 2024, this year the YSU team is ready to implement the program, with revised and enriched content, for new participants.

**The Natural Sciences Boot Camp**

As mentioned above, the program is fully hands-on practice. From the school program for grades 7-12, a number of experiments are selected/derived in all the three mentioned above subjects. The experiments are approved by the Ministry of Education. The materials for the experiments have been fully purchased through the Donor’s Grant, including not only the science workshops materials, but also the sports equipment (different types of balls for basketball, volleyball, football, table tennis; yoga mats for the outdoor exercise and drawing classes; ropes for jumping; etc.) that appeared to be the most popular in early mornings and then, throughout the day whenever there was free time.

All the three weeks of the Boot Camp will follow the same main principle: the kids will arrive in Byurakan on Monday morning, approx. 10 AM and leave on Friday evening, towards 6PM.

During the entire three weeks the schedule will mainly be the same: morning physical exercise to wake up, wrap-up of the previous day through an active game, then disciplinary workshops, with breakfast and lunch in-between. The time before and after dinner will be devoted to soft skills, art-therapy, historical site visits, networking and active games. More detailed schedules for each week will be shared with the Donor later in May, 2025.

The general Outline for each group will look like the following:

Non organic/organic chemistry workshop -total of 36 hours

Biology workshop - total of 36 hours

Physics workshop – total of 36 hours

Geography and Geology workshop - total of 6 hours

History/Archeology class and on-site visits – total of 3 days

Fashion design – 2 days

Pottery – 2 days

Paper recycling – 2 days

Professional orientation – 3 days

Visits to Byurakan Observatory and V.Hambardzumyan house museum – 3 days

The same as with the previous Boot Camp, each group will have a half day devoted to the history and archeological on-site visits. The dates and visit sites will be finalized by the expert in June, 2025.

The Chemistry workshops will be full in-classroom, due to its specifics, materials to be used in a lab proxy environment.

The Physics, Biology, Zoology and Ecology will follow the 50/50 approach, with half of the time in-classroom visuals and the rest – outside in the area of the Byurakan facility, observing and experimenting in the natural environment

A lesson learnt from the previous year is that the soft disciplines or art-therapy sessions appeared to be highly popular with the participants, with full engagement of both the kids and the Program staff. Based on that this year the Program plans to have two such workshops for each group.

**Presentations**

To make the time spent in the Camp even more educational and fun, there will be a general task for each visiting group to joyfully present at the end of the week how they had spent the week. The title of the presentation was the same for all three groups: “Expectations, reality and take-away”.

This exercise target several outcomes: to have small presentation groups communicate on a deeper level, make friends and reflect on the Camp; think of things that we, as organizers, might not be aware or did not give much attention, while for them it was important, to receive their indirect feedback regarding the agenda and the teachers, as well as other aspects of the Camp. And do it all creatively, as fun.

**Connection with the parents and the feedback**

The constant connection of the YSU team with the parents is seen important, hence like the first year there will be WhatsApp groups for each group, where the YSU team lead will be sharing the daily reports with the parents on the routine of their kids at the Boot Camp. At the end of each week feedback will be collected from the participants, which will become part of the Report.