



# ALLIANCE NEWS

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## In Our Next Issue . . .

Meet our Mongolian and Afghan partner organizations!



The Mongolian Liberal Women's Brain Pool ("LEOS") is one of Mongolia's oldest women's rights organizations and one of the Alliance's first partner organizations.

## The Alliance Celebrates A Successful Year!

The Alliance for International Women's Rights is about to finish its first full calendar year of operation - and what a year it's been!

During the course of 2006, the Alliance launched its long distant volunteer program — the Armchair Volunteer Program — and grew from working in one country to operating in four countries: Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Afghanistan. Our volunteer base has also grown to over 40 volunteers — and it continues to grow all the time. So, thanks entirely to all our volunteers and supporters, it's been a wonderfully successful year. Thank you!!

There's much to tell about the activities of both the In-Country and Armchair Volunteer Programs during 2006. In this edition of Alliance News, we share just a few of the highlights with you.

## Alliance Selected As Finalist for International E-Philanthropy Award!

In August, the Alliance was selected as a finalist for the International ePhilanthropy Award. The International ePhilanthropy Award is an annual award sponsored by the ePhilanthropy Foundation, which is a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C. The Foundation helps large and small nonprofit organizations learn to utilize the best internet practices and services to aid in their philanthropic endeavors. The goal of the International ePhilanthropy Awards is to recognize and support best practices and the pursuit of excellence in the many facets of using internet in philanthropy. The Alliance was selected as a finalist for the category "Best Community Building/Volunteerism and/or Activism Campaign." The Alliance had good company amongst the finalists in this category, which included the American Cancer Society, Save the Children, Seattle Works and VolunteerXChange. Although the Alliance did not win the award (the award went to VolunteerXChange), it was a true honor for the Alliance to be selected as a finalist during our first full year of our operation.

## Alliance Volunteers Are Changing the World From Their Armchairs

The Alliance was very proud to announce the official launch of its new **Armchair Volunteer Program** early in 2006. For those of you who aren't familiar with our Armchair Volunteer Program, let me give you a brief introduction.

The program was named the "Armchair" Volunteer Program because these volunteers do not travel, but volunteer to help women's rights organizations via e-mail and the internet from their own homes.



A reliable internet connection, e-mail, some available time and the willingness to share your skills are the main ingredients to being an Armchair Volunteer.

The Alliance's Central Asian women's rights partner organizations often need assistance with projects that can be accomplished completely through e-mail contact with a volunteer professional. The projects can vary in length and complexity; some projects might take half an hour while others require several hours or even days of work. Projects can also vary in subject matter. Some examples of projects that Armchair Volunteers help with include communications projects (including editing and revising documents that have been translated into English, such as grant proposals, articles, educational material, letters, and reports); research projects (including compiling examples of laws from other countries that relate to women's rights issues); technology projects (including providing advice and assistance with website maintenance and computer and software issues) and general capacity building projects (including assisting with the preparation of grant proposals and researching potential funding sources).

Although we have been active for only a little under a year, the Armchair Program has grown from a mere handful of volunteers in early 2006 to over 40 Armchair Volunteers today, working on numerous projects with nine partner women's rights organizations in four countries — Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Afghanistan.

### **Armchair ESL Project – Virtual English Classes Using Skype**

As part of the Armchair Volunteer Program, the Alliance has recently started the Armchair ESL Project — a project to teach English classes long distance to women's rights advocates in Mongolia. The goal of the Armchair ESL Project is to improve the English of Mongolian women's rights advocates so that they can communicate better with foreign NGOs, women's rights workers and donors. The Alliance recruited professional ESL/EFL (English as a second language, or English as a foreign language) teachers from all over the world to volunteer an hour a week to teach two half-hour sessions of conversation classes. The classes are conducted using Skype, a free internet/computer communication system that allows the students and teachers to talk for free using their computers. Skype also lets the students and teachers "chat" while they talk — meaning they can type instant messages to each other while they talk to help facilitate the English lesson.



Iris, an experienced ESL/EFL teacher from Vancouver, Canada, is one of our first Armchair ESL teachers.

We are still in the initial pilot phase of the Armchair ESL Project with ten students and ten teachers. However, the project is really off to a great start — thanks to the amazing generosity, patience and good humor of the volunteer ESL teachers, and thanks to Tsatsral, the Alliance's wonderfully helpful and patient coordinator in Mongolia. We are still ironing out a few technology issues, but both the teachers and students have been reporting that they really enjoy the classes and the experience of getting to know a new friend on the other side of the world. If the pilot project continues to work well, we'll double the number of students and teachers in Mongolia. In early 2007, we also hope to launch an Afghan Armchair ESL Project to teach English to the staff members of our Afghan partner (the Afghan Women's Network) in Kabul, Afghanistan and Peshawar, Pakistan.

The Alliance would like to express its tremendous gratitude to the Armchair ESL teachers. They have really paved the way for making the Armchair ESL Project a success.

## **Alliance In-Country Volunteers Experience Mongolia Up Close**

In addition to its Armchair Volunteer Program, the Alliance also runs a small In-Country Volunteer Program. The purpose of the In-Country program is to act as a conduit between professionals who are seeking meaningful, short-term



Scarlett Chidgey helps cook traditional Mongolian food while visiting Mongolian colleagues in the countryside.

volunteer projects within the field of women's rights, and our partner organizations in Mongolia who need volunteer assistance in many different fields. We work with both the volunteer and the Mongolian organization to identify available volunteer projects that match the volunteers' background and interests. This summer, three volunteers worked with two of our Mongolian partner organizations, the Liberal Women's Brain Pool ("LEOS") and Women Leaders Foundation ("WLF").

### **Scarlett**

One of the volunteers was Scarlett Chidgey. Scarlett is a website developer from California. Scarlett had decided to take six months off from work to travel and see the world. As part of her adventure, Scarlett decided that she wanted to volunteer in Mongolia. After contacting the Alliance, Scarlett was matched with LEOS, where she spent over two months helping LEOS with a website project, assisted with computer maintenance and edited documents that had been translated into English. Scarlett describes her time in Mongolia as follows:

"Before I arrived in Mongolia, I didn't really know what to expect — it is a country like no other I had visited before. At first, life in Ulaanbaatar was a bit daunting and overwhelming, but it didn't take me long before I made several friends and learned how to navigate around the city. I began to enjoy figuring out how to deal with the challenges that naturally arise in a place where you barely know the language and certain cultural aspects are very different from your own. Volunteering for LEOS was one of the best things I've ever done — the women I worked with are fantastic and the work they do is astounding. During my 9 1/2 weeks in Mongolia, I learned that patience is imperative and things rarely turn out as planned. But, I finally realized that is what makes life exciting!"

### **Alexandria**

Alexandria Wise, a business consultant who specialized in the US federal government sector, lived in Washington, D.C. before volunteering in Mongolia for several months this summer and fall. Alexandria was partnered with WLF in Ulaanbaatar, and assisted in developing a project to encourage and support women running for local and national parliamentary seats. WLF was involved in drafting the original legislation that mandated 30% of the national parliamentary (*Ikh Khural*) seats must be held by women. Alexandria has decided to stay on in Mongolia to volunteer with the GER Initiative (CHF International) and is continuing to support the WLF.

### **Laura**

Laura Erion is a recent alumna of the University of Pittsburgh with a BA in Political Science, Anthropology and Women's Studies. Laura now works for a non-profit in Pittsburgh. In addition to participating in academic studies in Mongolia, Laura spent several weeks volunteering with WLF. In describing her experience in Mongolia, Laura says:

"The time I spent in Mongolia provided me the opportunity to simultaneously study my academic disciplines and experience an exceptional culture. While completing research about women in politics, I interned with the Women Leader's Foundation who provided me with vital connections and helped me navigate the political scene. My time spent in Mongolia was truly priceless. I extend my deepest thanks to the Alliance for making such an opportunity possible."

## **Featured Armchair Volunteers**

The Alliance has over 40 Armchair volunteers who have provided invaluable support and assistance to the Alliance's partner organizations, as well as to the



Alexandria and Scarlett enjoy Mongolian food while visiting Mongolian friends.

### Would You Like to Volunteer?

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, please visit our website [www.AIWR.org](http://www.AIWR.org) and complete a short, simple application found under "Apply."



Diane Zahler

### Contact Us

152 Tier Street  
Suite C212  
Bronx, New York 10464

<http://www.AIWR.org>  
[AIWR@AIWR.org](mailto:AIWR@AIWR.org)

Alliance itself. Each of these volunteers deserves recognition and our undying gratitude. Because the Alliance is run entirely by volunteers, we would literally be nothing without them.

In each of its newsletters, the Alliance will be featuring different volunteers. In this edition, we would like to introduce you to Pamela Duncan and Diane Zahler.

### Pamela Duncan

Pam Duncan is a former Air Force Judge Advocate who currently lives with her husband, Jim, in Lexington, Kentucky. For several years she has focused her attention on writing both novel-length fiction and creative nonfiction. Her essays have appeared in the Lexington Herald-Leader and have been picked up by several web magazines and various Kentucky newspapers. Her fiction includes a completed novel, *Blackberry Winter*, and a novel-in-progress, *No Bears Are Out Tonight*. She is active in various Central Kentucky literary groups, is a member of the ACLU and the American Constitution Society, and is an enthusiastic member of PEO, a women's philanthropic organization that helps to educate women throughout the World.

Pam became an Armchair Volunteer in the spring, when she took on the project of editing and revising a grant proposal for one of our Mongolian partner organizations. Pam has also used her writing skills to research and write materials for the Alliance's website, including background information on Afghanistan and Turkey. Recently, Pam agreed to help out on a rush project for one of our Mongolian partners. The Mongolian organization had finished a summer-long study on trafficking in women and children in Mongolia and needed to submit a report to the donor who had funded the study. Because the study was large and complicated, the translated version of the report was not finished until very shortly before it needed to be submitted to the donor. Putting aside her other obligations, Pam jumped in and, along with a team of Armchair Volunteers, edited several chapters of the report within a very short time — allowing the Mongolian organization to submit a far more professional version of the report to its donor. Currently, Pam is assisting in researching materials for a domestic violence website for Afghanistan. Thank you, Pam!!

### Diane Zahler

One of the Alliance's first Armchair Volunteers was (and is) Diane Zahler. Diane is a professional writer and editor with over 25 years of experience. Among her published works are *Test Your Cultural Literacy* and *The Twenty-first Century Guide to Improving Your Writing* as well as textbook materials for kindergarten through high school students.

Diane's first project with the Alliance last winter involved helping to edit a report on Kazakh crisis centers — centers that help address the severe problem of violence against women in Kazakhstan. The report was prepared by the Feminist League, a Kazakh women's rights organization, and had been translated into very rough English. The Feminist League wanted to share the report with international organizations and donors, but the translated text was very difficult to understand. With Diane's help, the rough translation was cleaned up and turned into a more professional and presentable report that the Feminist League was proud to share with international NGOs. Recently, Diane worked alongside Pam and a team of Armchair Volunteers to assist the Mongolian organization in editing their report on trafficking in women and children. Despite the tight deadline, Diane tirelessly edited several chapters, in addition to creating editing guidelines for the team of Armchair Volunteers to ensure that the report was edited in a consistent manner. Thank you, Diane!!