

Friends of Mongolia

Newsletter

Jan-Mar 2024



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FOM Mission

Friends of Mongolia (FOM) is organized and operated exclusively for charitable, educational, and developmental purposes. Our mission is to develop partnerships with the people of Mongolia in furtherance of cultural exchange and human development. In fulfillment of this mission, our membership and fundraising supports the core programs, listed below, that contribute to the future of Mongolia.



Announcements!

Education:

-The three scholarship programs (Matthew Girvin, Mongolia 21|21, and Leadership) are generating momentum and attracting more support. We are excited to prepare for the new scholarship season and invite more provinces to apply.

-Our relationships with the local Mongolian universities are steadily improving as they become aware of our support for Mongolian students. We hope to continue this trajectory and potentially sign MOUs with different universities regarding information/knowledge sharing.

Community Development:

-Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) have submitted multiple projects for consideration for financial support. Our grants committee is evaluating and selecting projects to receive funding. We hope to support multiple projects this summer, designed and led by American and Mongolian counterparts.

-We hope to find more opportunities for FOM members to directly support PCVs and their counterparts' projects. If there is a community, group, or source of support that you are connected with, and want to collaborate with Mongolians/PCVs, please let us know.

Community Outreach:

-FOM, in partnership with the US-Asia Institute, and LemonPress will soon be releasing the inaugural Mongolia Focus newsletter. This new program will strive to introduce the American public to nuanced and refined perspectives on Mongolia, curated from both Mongolian and American contributors.

-FOM, along with USAI is planning on hosting a quarterly seminar/panel discussion exploring the Mongolia-Focus topics as well. We want to build a program that routinely attracts Mongolia-interested citizens across the United States. This will be hosted at the US-Asia Institute in Washington D.C and will be open to the public.

Peace Corps Experiences

Noa Sadeh

It's hard to believe that I am over a year into service! Time is flying by. When I arrived in Mongolia, I already had some classroom teaching experience so I felt confident that the English education portion of my work would feel somewhat natural. However, I never expect youth and community development to be so fulfilling. I'd like to share two success stories:

When I arrived at my school there were no clubs at all. Everyone expressed great interest in having me start clubs but upon further investigation I discovered that there was no knowledge about clubs or how to facilitate non-academic personal development programs. I decided to take on this challenge anyways, even with little support from my counterparts. I led a few life skills workshops and eventually implemented my first club. It was evident that students and teachers had no knowledge about skills such as critical thinking, teamworking, organization, or problem solving. Club meetings often felt like a drag to me as students rarely got up the courage to speak and were reluctant to participate in games whose benefits could not be easily quantified. I pushed through anyway and I am so glad I did! This year, the same club students are working in small teams to facilitate weekly meetings, teaching their peers about all sorts of interesting topics. The club students are now working on a school campaign to recruit more students and promote peer education in our school. Students have organized roleplaying games, art projects, storytelling challenges, vocabulary competitions and so much more!

The second success story comes from Zuunburen soum, in Selenge province where I've had the privilege of working with English teacher Oyumaa on a few youth development projects. Together we organized a summer camp for students who read chapters from the book *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio followed by discussions about disability and resilience. It was wonderful to see the students flex their empathy skills. In November, Oyumaa and I facilitated another English camp. Students worked together to present about their hometown and Mongolian culture. They also practiced stress management with the school psychologist and learned about internet safety from their high school student peer, Munkhtuur. Now I am working with Oyumaa on a debate club. Our students are quickly learning about how to find reliable sources online and are showing great dedication to practicing their critical thinking skills, even if they don't agree with their own team's argument! In our last club meeting, despite some controversy, they even debated about whether Buuz should be taken out of the Mongolian diet!

As my second year begins, I'm excited to work on new youth development projects. I will be working with the Humanities University on a Young Journalists club which will promote Darkhan's culture and industries. We can't wait to see how our youth express themselves and represent Darkhan to the world! I will also work with Oyumaa at Zuunburen on a girl's empowerment program to teach the school dorm girls about feminine hygiene, sexual health, and healthy relationships.



Peace Corps Experiences

Sareena Khanal

Around the end of January, four of us Peace Corps Volunteers went to the first annual Mazaalai Ice & Snow International Festival in Ulaanbaatar.

The festival is part of the government's initiative to increase winter tourism in the country, and also draws attention to a crucial problem—the critical endangerment of Mazaalai.

Mazaalai (Мазаалай), known as the Gobi bear, refers to a sub-species of bear found in the Gobi Desert. Called “The Rarest Bear in the World,” Mazaalai are the only bears that live exclusively in a desert environment, and the latest data indicates there are only 52 in existence in the Mongolian Gobi Desert. Although this number is extremely low, it is nonetheless a victory for researchers and conservationists who have been working diligently to increase the bear's population for the past few decades. Thus, the Gobi bear is unique and important to Mongolia. As such, last year the president decreed Mazaalai as a “Mongolian National Pride Animal.” If anyone is interested in learning more about the Gobi bear and/or conservation initiatives, the Gobi Bear Project is a great resource.

With an international ice sculpture competition, a twenty-two meter ice slide, beautiful carvings of Mazaalai, warm food and drink, billboards with information and fun facts promoting Mazaalai and educating us, ice skating, and a concert stage, it was worth it to brave the cold and be a part of what I am sure will be a wonderful tradition!



Peace Corps Experiences

Richard “Web” Whiting

These past few months here in Tsetserleg, I have met a truly huge number of very sweet dogs. No, seriously; I’m not sure what it is about Arkhangai, but the Bankhar dogs here are strangely kind, and (while maintaining respect for their personal space) I’ve really enjoyed just how sweet and majestic they really can be. I even got to attend a dog show at Arkhangai’s new ice festival this past January.

That said, more substantively:

- I’ve continued assisting with TEFL education at Arkhangai’s School #2, where students continue to make strong progress in their development of English education. The Aimag-wide Olympiad was held, and some of our incredible students will have the opportunity to compete (or have already competed) in Ulaanbaatar in the coming days.
- Tsagaan Sar! My very first Tsagaan Sar was a blast, and I was deeply honored by the graciousness of my friends and co-workers for allowing me to join their homes on this lovely holiday. I won games of shagai, lost games of shagai, played quite a bit of chess, rode on horseback, got to meet the families of so many lovely people I have come to really enjoy being around here, and I ate truly tremendous amounts of buuz (probably close to 100 in one day). I was also able to join fellow PCV Claire Bodger and some of her wonderful co-workers at School #1, where I learned more about Mongolian animal husbandry and made a valuable connection that culminated in a tour and meeting at Arkhangai’s teacher college. Just another point that even these very fun moments can build towards fruitful collaboration.
- A lot of clubs I help facilitate really got underway or found their stride this month. In particular, I helped start a weekly community IELTS club meeting at a local space here in Tsetserleg. While theoretically targeting English test prep, I’m proud to say it’s also been host to more relaxed conversations, too.
- The spring break approaches, and with it: the upcoming aimag spelling bee, testing, and the end of the school year. I very much look forward to what Mongolia will bring next!



Small Grants Recipients



FOM is thrilled to be supporting the efforts of 5 Peace Corps Volunteers and their colleagues with financial support for this season. There were many competitive applications, making the selection process very difficult for our committee. We are grateful that many PCVs felt comfortable approaching us for support and we hope to expand our impact in the future. The projects and their PCV leaders are listed below in no particular order:

-Richard Whiting, Arkhangai School #2 in Tsetserleg, Arkhangai. This grant would help create a summer camp aimed at Life Skills Club members at a local school within the community that would be facilitated in part by teacher sponsors as well as upperclassmen camp counselors. The Life Skills Club is co-facilitated and assisted by the PCV, but is primarily a community endeavor originally created by school teachers themselves. The Life Skills camp itself was originally implemented by a teacher sponsor (with assistance) and was brought up and instigated by the teacher sponsor and school itself. This camp would develop the life skills of Life Skills Club members, the life skills education ability of upperclassmen, and build a foundation for Life Skills education at the club and surrounding community to grow in subsequent school years

-Barbara E. Schwarz, Arkhangai School #3 in Erdenebulgan Soum, Arkhangai. Every school in Mongolia lacks schoolroom facilities which can restrict students' learning experiences. The school community identified an underused room as the permanent home of the school museum. The grant funds will cover the materials and supplies needed to remodel the space and transform it into a venue that will serve the community as an educational gathering point where history, achievements, and creativity can be shared. Following the 50th Anniversary celebrations in September, the museum will display students' and community members' semester projects and artwork. The exhibit schedule will be implemented in the annual school events calendar to allow all school grades to display their expositions.

-Noa Sadeh, Darkhan Soum, Darkhan-Uul. Noa is partnering with the director of Darkhan's Chamber of Commerce and the Humanity Development Center to offer an English "Young Journalists" club for high school aged students who already possess strong English-speaking skills. Darkhan currently has no written news source and very little opportunity for youth to learn essential information gathering practices, writing, and communication skills. Many children in Darkhan use YouTube and social media to teach themselves English but they do not have real-life applications that are relevant to their lives in Mongolia. By offering the Young Journalists club, we aim to empower our local youth to explore their community, Mongolian culture, and the value of local news sources and to use their skills and knowledge to promote Darkhan stories and industries both locally and globally.

-Christine Tran and Bailey Nelson, Zuunburen Soum, Selenge. The community is seeking to host a camp for students to continue learning about various types of life skills, English language, and how to work with Americans. Prior to the camp, the students and teachers of the community will identify the needs of the community and plan sessions with regards to those specific needs. During the camp, the older students (peer mentors) will practice previously learned life skills such as effective communication, teamwork, and problem solving, by co-facilitating English and life skill sessions for younger students. In turn, when these younger students get older, some of them will become peer mentors and help future younger students. With the funding, the community hopes to continue this peer mentorship program into the future. A group of peer mentor students were trained in 2022, but since then several students have graduated or will soon graduate. As such, new students will have to be trained and with the funding, the community will be able to do so while also supporting younger students in improving their English skills and life skills.

-Paul Reese, Ulaanbaatar. The proposal for the Young Urban Farmer project outlines an innovative angle to urban agriculture education and green space development, for the youth of Ulaanbaatar. The project seeks to engage 30 students from local schools and the ger district community, introducing essential skills in sustainable farming practices, greenhouse management, and value-added agricultural products through a series of more than 15 workshops, hands-on activities, and field trips. The objectives of this grant include educational enrichment and skill development, with a goal of least 80% of participants that can independently manage small-scale urban farming projects, and foster innovation and community impact by equipping youth with the knowledge to transform urban spaces into productive agricultural sites. To build the capacity of community members, the project will leverage the expertise of local experts and incorporate urban farming concepts into school curricula. Funding is essential for securing resources, materials, and expertise required to establish the gardens and conduct educational programs.

Dzud Relief Fundraiser



As many of you know, FOM partnered with People In Need (PIN) in order to provide relief for hundreds of herder families struggling with the extreme winter. There are numerous articles online that can provide you with reports (we'll list them below), but at least 5 million livestock have perished. As you can imagine, this devastating loss of life is not spread evenly across the country and across families. Some families have lost everything and will need to start over and/or re-locate.

While FOM does not have the same financial capacity as governments or major International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), we are proud to contribute to this worthy cause. Our community surpassed our stated objective of \$5,000 USD by raising:

\$7,251.87

We cannot thank you enough for your kindness, generosity, and support. Additionally, we are grateful for your trust in us and PIN to ensure this money gets to the families who need it most. As our community continues to grow, we are hopeful that we will be able to participate more extensively in initiatives such as this. It is reassuring to know that the American public is becoming more aware of the tragedies and natural disasters affecting populations beyond the US border.

Articles- As always, FOM is non-political, and we do not necessarily support any news agency over others.

[-CNN](#)

[-NYT](#)

[-Al Jazeera](#)

[-WHO](#)



January

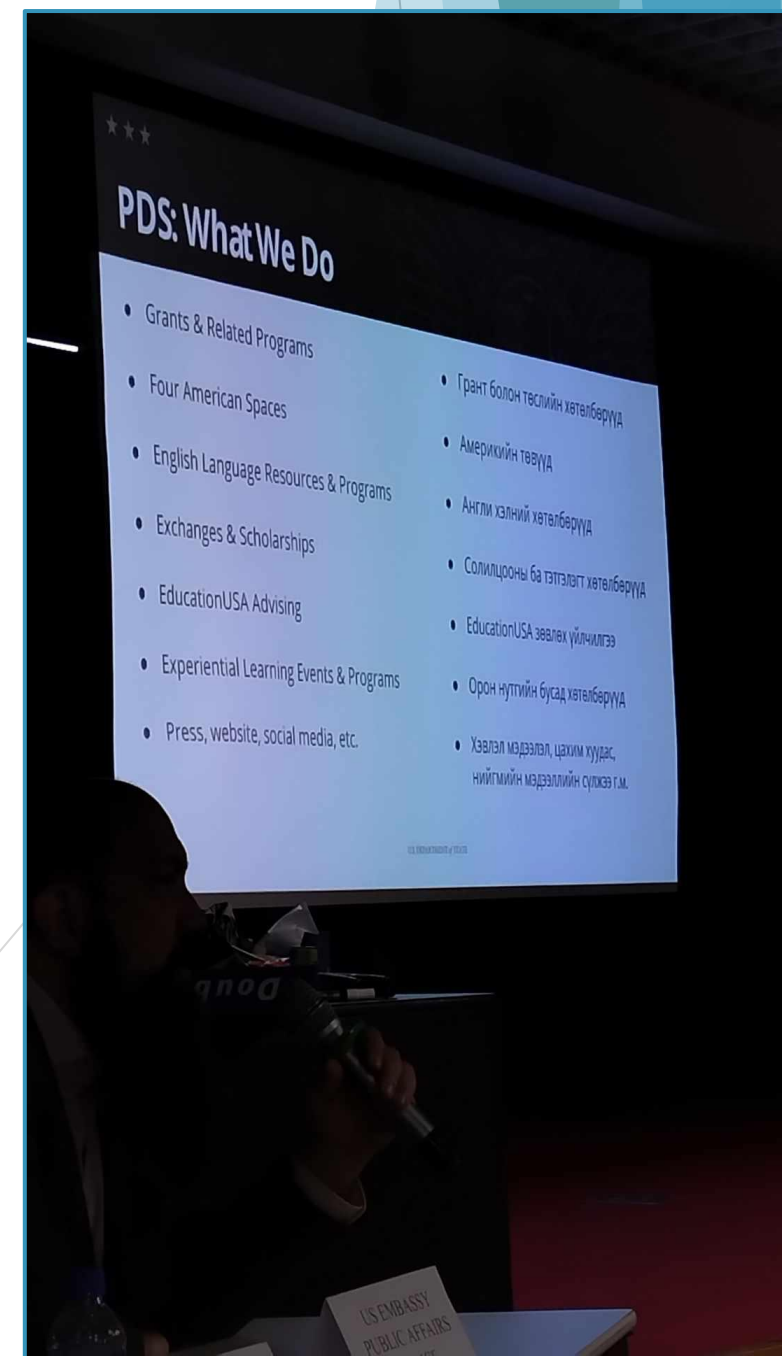


In January, Peace Corps Mongolia invited Friends of Mongolia volunteers to attend their PDS retreat in Terej. This time with the PCVs and staff allowed us to strengthen our network and introduce FOM's small-grants support.

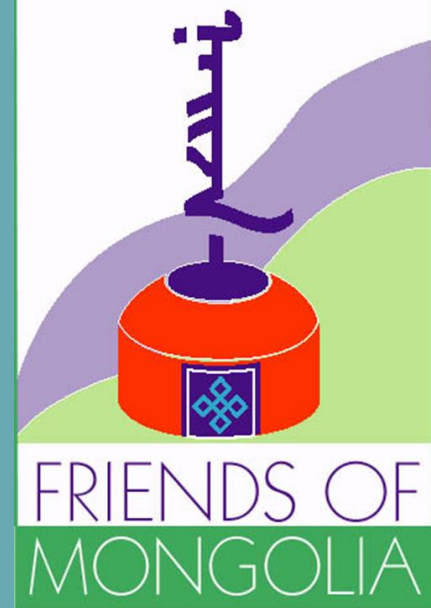
FOM Mongolia Co-Director and Grant Coordinator attended the sessions!



Peace Corps Volunteers learned about project design and had the opportunity to discuss the needs of their host communities with our officers. This was critical for laying the foundation for our upcoming grant season. We are grateful for Peace Corps Mongolia inviting us.



February



February was a very busy month for everyone, as is typical in Mongolia. FOM held its annual Tsagaan Sar celebration in the US. A huge thanks to the American-based planning committee for a warm and heartfelt celebration! As always, we are so grateful for everyone who attended.



American-based planning committee!



Students and officers had a casual dinner and meet up in Ulaanbaatar.

Mongolia 21|21 students, Rotarians, Rotaractors, and Rotary Peace Fellow at Mongolia's Rotary Day.



March



Our Grants Committee hosted interviews with Peace Corps Volunteers who applied for financial support for small projects. We'd like to thank the EARC in Ulaanbaatar for allowing us to conduct our interviews at their facility.



4 FOM students represented FOM at their university's volunteer organization day. They presented about FOM's 3 pillars and received a lot of attention from their peers. Maybe FOM will begin developing service projects with our students.

Upcoming Opportunities

Friends of Mongolia was designed to only be limited by the capacity and resources of its members. We are eager to collaborate with individuals, organizations, and businesses to expand our impact, both in depth and breadth. Feel free to contact us with ideas!



Opportunities to Serve or Connect

-FOM operates solely on donations. We appreciate any amount you can spare. This money goes to our three core programs (nothing to the volunteers). Please share our organization with friends and family, or anyone who has an interest in Mongolia. We want to serve as a centralizing hub for community relations.

-We are looking for potential partners (individuals, cohorts, Rotary Clubs, etc) to help us with the Mongolia 21|21 Program. In the coming years we are hoping to provide full tuition scholarships for a student from each province. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Nick at codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org

-We are interested in supporting formalized and informal/nascent Sister-City relationships, especially in Denver, Fairbanks, Bellingham (Washington), Irving (Texas), and St. Louis. If you are in or around these cities and interested in learning more, please contact Nick at codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org. If you aren't in these cities but still want to participate in events, let us know and we could potentially help you arrange something local.

-We are looking to build a new initiative closely linked to Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Cohorts. We want to establish a relationship with each of the 32 Mongolian cohorts and provide a scholarship per cohort, or have a cohort support a Peace Corps Volunteer's development project. If you are interested in helping us connect with your cohort and design a project/scholarship. Please contact Nick at codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org.