

Friends of Mongolia

Newsletter

Apr-Jun 2023

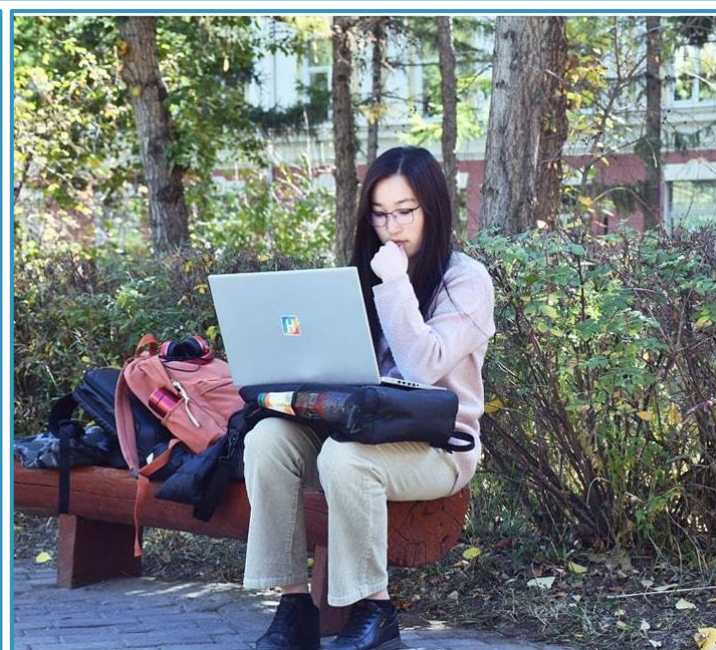


Table of Contents



- FOM Mission and Update
- Peace Corps Update
- Partner Update
- April
- May
- June
- 21/21 Initiative
- Upcoming Opportunities



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.

Apr-June 23 Update

The FOM Executive Committee (ExCom) had an eventful and rewarding spring quarter. We are excited to share our progress with the FOM community. If you are eager to discuss any of topics in this newsletter, or want to discuss new ideas, please feel free to contact us.

Education: The education pillar of FOM is expanding drastically. For the coming year, we introduced two new scholarship programs to complement the Matthew Girvin Scholarship. Mongolia 21|21 is a new program partnering with American Rotary Clubs in order to sponsor a student's tuition cost in Mongolia. FOM is managing the expectations and communication structure between the Rotarians and their student. The Leadership Scholarship program is designed to provide support to students from Ulaanbaatar and is open to the community for anyone wishing to donate/sponsor a student. We are always looking for more sponsors.

Community Development: We recently selected this year's recipient for the small grants program and are in the process of developing a constructive and healthy relationship between the implementers and FOM ExCom. We also presented this program to Peace Corps Mongolia and their partners, and we are excited to offer support to Peace Corps Volunteers in the coming months when they design project proposals. Our next grant season will open in the fall. We expect this pillar to expand this coming year.

Community Outreach: Community Outreach initiatives were heavier on the administrative components this quarter, laying the foundation for a new process to be implemented in the coming year. FOM spent this quarter developing a new community outreach strategy to engage Americans, through Rotary, universities, and grassroots-level connections for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. We've also onboarded a new Board Member, and two new Event Coordinators, in an effort to begin hosting regular and informal events in both the US and Mongolia.



Peace Corps Experiences

Sarah Posluszny

In partnership with Lingors, an English learning development organization, I was given an unexpected opportunity to record an audiobook in Mongolia. I've been collaborating with Lingors for the past few months. I volunteered as a moderator for their Teacher's Toastmasters, as a quiz master for their English quiz nights, and now as their voice to a new children's book Boloroo's Big Question.

Written by Michael Lacey Freeman, a prominent Lingors author, the story follows a young Mongolian girl, Boloroo, living in Italy with her family. Boloroo has always been inquisitive about the world around her. However, the story follows her asking one big question over and over again, "How can we be happy ALL of the time?" Throughout her journey to answer this big question, Boloroo is able to reconnect with her Mongolian heritage and learn a beautiful life lesson.

I immediately connected to her as a character. Just like her, I've always been invested in learning new things and asking big questions that affect all of humanity. Questions such as "How can we help others?" and "What can we do to foster a better understanding of different world perspectives?" are continuously at the forefront of my mind while serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Mongolia. Similar to Boloroo's big question, my questions don't have easy answers. However, as I continue to serve with my school counterparts and dedicated organizations like Lingors, I hope to uncover more and more through new experiences.

Big thanks to Lingors for this amazing opportunity! Lingors creativity and dedication to English learning is truly inspiring. Thank you to White Arch Studios, a highly renowned recording studio based in Mongolia. White Arch Studios' professionalism and easygoing attitude made me feel much more relaxed while in the booth. Lastly, thank you to Sumiya who works at Lingors, she supported me throughout this process and coached my pronunciation of Mongolian names.

If possible, please check out Lingors' amazing work at <https://lingors.com/> There, you can buy the children's book Boloroo's Big Question. All proceeds will go to further support Mongolian students and teachers' English learning development. The audiobook of Boloroo's Big Question will be released soon!



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Peace Corps Experiences

Sareena Khanal- The Best Way to Run

To run or not to run? That was the question I pondered when hearing of the upcoming 2023 Ulaanbaatar International Marathon. This year would mark the first time the marathon would be held after a three-year COVID gap. In the past, Peace Corps Volunteers and staff have run various events together, showcasing their resiliency and community pride.

Although I regularly exercise, running is not my preferred form of cardio, which is why I was a bit hesitant to sign-up without proper training. But, I also knew I would regret missing out on this opportunity. And so, I joined the eight PCVs that had already signed up for the 10k, along with our one staff member who signed up for the 5k.

On race day, the energy in Sukhbaatar Square was electric! The roads were blocked off, various tents advertising sporting clubs and fitness-related opportunities were all around, a large piece of turf was in the middle that people were already chatting and relaxing on, and, as I would come to find out, at least 24,500 people were there as marathon participants from over thirty countries. The race itself was incredibly exhilarating and fun. From the thousands of spectators all over the course, to being able to enjoy (for once!) the traffic free streets of Ulaanbaatar, you could sense the feelings of pride, excitement, and joy.

However, the most impactful part of the event was meeting and connecting with various people from all over the world who came to take part in and celebrate fitness, community, and physical interactions, made all the more meaningful after being unable to do so for the past three years. Despite the fact that my legs were extremely sore for the next three days (proper training next time for sure!), participating in the marathon with my Peace Corps community is a memory I will cherish from my time in Mongolia.



Peace Corps Experiences

Christopher Wizda

Did you know that trees serve a multifaceted role beyond carbon capture, including mitigating the adverse effects of climate change such as flood prevention, pollution reduction, and cooling urban areas while enriching surrounding soil with essential nutrients? Each year, the American Chamber of Commerce in Mongolia (AmCham Mongolia) hosts a Service Day to give back to the community and support larger Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. On May 13th of this year, AmCham Mongolia organized a tree planting event at the National Garden Park (Үндэсний цэцэрлэгт хүрээлэн), providing an exceptional opportunity for participants to positively impact the environment and society by combating climate change, air and soil pollution, and aligning with Mongolia's worldwide pledge to plant one billion trees by 2030.

A few months prior to the event, a fellow volunteer and I established communication with AmCham, and upon learning of this upcoming opportunity, I organized a team of Peace Corps Volunteers to join and participate. The team included Christopher Wizda, Alex Erdman, Jeff Coomber, Sarah Posluszny, Eric Pluciennik, Chris Thomason, and Daniel Lang who eagerly took part in the event. The program commenced with an introduction of sponsors and a host, followed by a demonstration of proper tree-planting techniques. Subsequently, we planted approximately 200 drought-resistant trees in the designated area of the park. The event was fulfilling and we believe that our contribution not only benefited the community, but also aligned with the broader Peace Corps mission of promoting global peace and friendship by working with communities to address their most pressing needs.



Reflections from a Partner

Derrick and Joanna Martin

We are Derrick and Joanna Martin, and together with our three daughters, we live in Baruun Urt, Sukhbaatar Province. This is in the East Gobi region of southeast Mongolia, about eight hours from the capital city of Ulaanbaatar.

After moving to Mongolia in 2016, we initially lived in Ulaanbaatar and studied language and culture for a year and a half. We were amazed at the kindness and generosity of our neighbors, who went above and beyond to help us learn to survive and thrive in the intense climate of this unique country. We learned that the red color in the Mongolian flag stands for the ability of the Mongolian people to thrive in their environment, while the blue represents the endless blue sky, and both are apt descriptions. Mongolians are deeply hospitable, even towards strangers who stammer and stutter and butcher their language, and I hope that wherever our family goes in life, we will reinvest this openness and hospitality into the strangers we meet.

Over the years Derrick has held various positions working to develop ice hockey and coach youth players. Outdoor ice rinks and ball hockey rinks are springing up all over Mongolia, and interest in the sport is growing. There is opportunity to invest in many young people through this sport. Joanna partners with the English teachers in our city to improve the level of English education provided to students and encourage travel abroad. We are Christians and we love Jesus, so it has been a privilege to join in the activities of the local Christian church and invest in the community and the lives of our friends and neighbors. We desire to see families, filled with hope, contributing to thriving, healthy communities.

The greatest highlight of our years in Mongolia has been the opportunity to live in another culture and learn from the cultural values displayed here. For example, Mongolian culture tends towards collectivism, indirect communication and polychronic time management, which is very different from our western cultural norms. These differences have accentuated our need for self awareness, cultural intelligence and learning from others. We are so grateful for the privilege of living here.

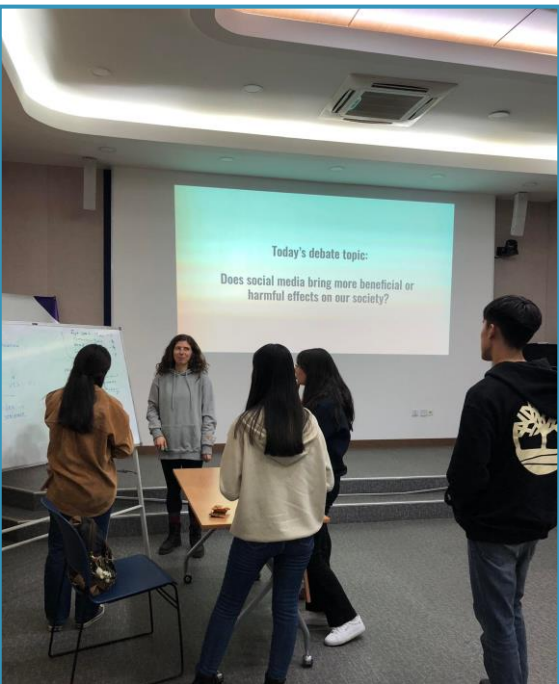
Thank you for your interest in Mongolia!



April



April was an exciting month where FOM participated in or organized three events in Mongolia and the US, as well as selected our grant recipient for the coming season! Administratively heavy, but rewarding to spend time together in-person.



On April 22nd, our Fulbrighter, colleauge, met with FOM scholarship recipients to teach about Debate Club. Multiple recipients told us it was the highlight of their semester. Thanks Audrey!



Meanwhile, that same day, Ariel Wyckoff and prospective ExCom officers joined with local Mongolians in DC to celebrate Asian American & Pacific Islander month at Inova Health Systems. It was a great opportunity to share Mongolia's story with a wider audience!



On April 15th, our Grants Program Manager and Event Coordinator participated in a conference hosted by Peace Corps Mongolia at Terej National Park. They introduced FOM to local staff and volunteers and explained our Community Development program.



May

While FOM did not attend or host a multitude of events in May, it was one of our busiest months. We drafted and announced all of our scholarship programs, old and new. We decided to announce these programs earlier in the year so more time was available for dissemination to the students in the provinces.

We also finally received all of our official documentation that we have been successfully re-registered as an NGO in Mongolia (this process started in December and was only supposed to take 30 days). This was critical for our ability to operate successfully in Mongolia.

May was crucial for us in laying the foundation and groundwork for partnering with Rotary Clubs and Rotary International. One of our officers attended the Rotary International convention and advocated for Mongolia 21|21 at all levels of Rotary. It was received well by many clubs, leading to a multitude of virtual presentations throughout the month.

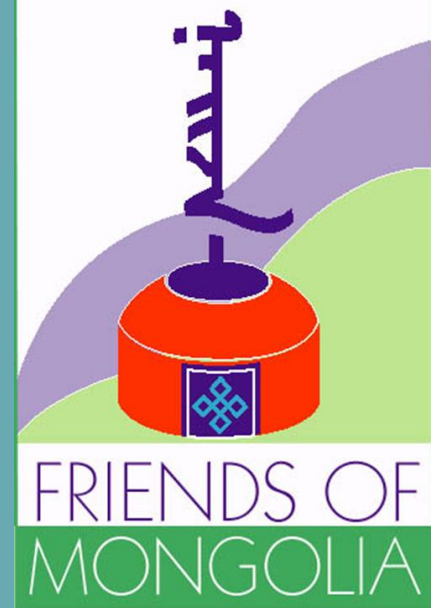
The Allentown West Rotary Club and The Rotary Club of Oakdale, California officially and formally agreed to be FOM's first Rotary Clubs to support the Mongolia 21|21 Initiative. We are honored and thrilled to have their support.



Lastly, one of our Mongolian ExCom officers established relations with the Zorig Foundation and attended their quarterly meeting for local NGOs. This regular meeting allows for local (Mongolian) NGOs to collaborate and identify opportunities for resource sharing and collaboration. We are honored to be invited to this excellent opportunity for building situational awareness.



June



The FOM ExCom had a productive and busy month! One of the FOM Board Members travelled to Mongolia with their students, and the ExCom had the opportunity to meet with them. The meetings held in June were critical to the development of next year's strategy.

FOM and YouthINC met with undergrad students from Mercer University to discuss cultural exchange opportunities.



FOM ExCom and friends met with two Board Members in Mongolia! We're delighted that FOM members are travelling overseas again.



FOM Co-Directors strengthened relations with the Peace Corps staff and engaged with current Trainees about FOM's mission.



FOM ExCom hosted a summer Leadership Retreat in order to discuss and develop the strategy for the next 6 months.



FOM Board Chair traveled to Allentown, PA to attend the Rotary fundraiser for Mongolia 21|21!



Mongolia 21 | 21

Objective: Locate 21 Rotary clubs in the US to partner with FOM in providing a full-tuition scholarship to a student from every province in Mongolia by the 2025-2026 academic year.



Updates

FOM is officially partnering with the Allentown West Rotary Club (AWRC) in Pennsylvania and the Rotary Club of Oakdale in California to lay the foundation for this initiative.

The AWRC selected Khovd Province for this coming year and will be sponsoring a student's tuition fees, cover school supply expenses, and may even assist in the purchasing of a laptop. They hosted an intimate dinner party at the club's President's home and raised the necessary funds. We had our Board Chair and the Mongolian Director of the Tech Education Fund attend the wonderful event.

The Rotary Club of Oakdale formally agreed to sponsor a student from Selenge province because one of the Rotarians is from that province originally. This Rotary club is also organizing a wheelchair initiative in Ulaanbaatar this summer. If you want to get involved in this project, please let us know and we will put you in contact with them.

We are constantly trying to locate more Rotary Clubs in the US that may be interested in this program. Please consider contacting your nearest Rotary Club and approaching them about this initiative; we are more than happy to approach them with you. This program has a lot of untapped potential that could be used to truly improve the quality of life for others, while building a network of collaborators in both the US and Mongolia.

Please feel free to contact codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org for more details about how to get involved.



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.

-In early August, the Rotary Club of Oakdale, California will have a team in Ulaanbaatar, assembling and distributing wheelchairs. If you are in UB at the time and want to get involved... please let us know and we will put you in contact with their project leader!

-If you are in Ulaanbaatar, FOM recently connected with a young couple that handmake bars of soap. Both individuals have cerebral palsy, but they created and run this business, selling their soaps about 10-15 minutes walk from the State Department Store. Please consider supporting their business if you are in/around UB. Contact us for questions, at codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org.

-There has been some interest in hosting an informal Mongolian-language exchange series in the D.C. area. If you are interested in participating in this, please let us know at codirector.usa@friendsofmongolia.org.

-This year we are going to focus heavily on building a resourceful and enthusiastic team and network in the United States. We would be happy to hear from you if you are interested in expanding your role or have ideas you'd like to introduce. Please reach out to us at your convenience.