



PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

AGBU Hye Geen Marks 25th Anniversary with Conference on Parenting in the Digital Age

Ever striving to find ways to improve the lives of Armenian families with programs that address issues facing women and mothers, AGBU Hye Geen chose “Parenting in the Digital Age” as a timely subject for celebrating its 25 years of service. The event took place at AGBU Vatche & Tamar Manoukian Center’s newly opened theater complex on March 23.

The 13th Annual Hye Geen Conference focused on the growing concern about the over-attachment to smartphones by today’s youth, a phenomenon experienced both at home and in schools, which Sona Yacoubian outlined in her opening remarks, along with a concise history of AGBU Hye Geen and its accomplishments over the past quarter century.

Shakeh Yegavian, with over 20 years’ experience at the Glen Robert’s Child Study Center and now in private practice, opened the discussion to a panel of two teenagers and a mother. Yegavian compared her own experience growing up and raising her two daughters in the pre-digital age. She asked the panelists whether today’s youth think they are more or less productive with their smartphones and how their electronic devices have affected their personal relationships. She also posed questions related to how social media has led young people to increasingly compare themselves to others, much to their emotional detriment. She asked the adult panelist what ways parents

could minimize the use of smart technology and whether she herself uses technology for disciplinary purposes.

The second round of discussions began with Dr. Armine Movsisyan, an educator and past principal of AGBU Vatche & Tamar Manoukian High School, who earned her education doctorate from the University of Southern California, was



Sona Yacoubian, Hye Geen Founder. Since 2002, AGBU Hye Geen has established six Pregnant Women’s Centers throughout Armenia, having served more than 5,000 underserved pregnant women and babies

trained in leadership at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and earned her administrator credentials at UC Berkley. She is currently the director of curriculum, instruction, learning, and innovation, as well as the superintendent at

Intellectual Virtues Academy. She asked the audience to express their vision for technology at home and in school; then steered the conversation to addiction to social media, acknowledging a recommendation to prepare youth to use technology responsibly and acknowledging the inevitable impact of new technology in the coming years.

Nora Chitilian-Keleshian joined the discussion in her various capacities in the field of counseling. She has a private practice in Glendale, is an independent contractor at the Glendale Unified School District, works as a school-based counselor at various private Armenian schools, serves on the board of Richard Tufenkian Armenian Preschool, is one of the founders of the Armenian Autism Outreach Project, as well as a co-founder of Camp Zavarian, where she also teaches social skills. She began her talk with a statistic many audience members found shocking—one out of seven teens deal with some form of anxiety.

She emphasized how technology has fueled the rise of anxiety among teens, more specifically social media, and highlighted key factors to keep in mind when parenting in the digital age. For example, if a parent expects their child to not use their phone at the dinner table, then neither should the parent. Another pointer was goal-oriented parenting as a tool to enhance the parent-child relationship.

Following lunch, Dr. Edrick Dorian, a board-certified clinical and police psychologist with the Los Angeles Police Department in private practice in Encino, spoke about cyberbullying, expanding the definition of the word and explaining how, in some extreme cases, cyberbullying can be considered a criminal act. He posited that a digital device can be as powerful as a firearm, with a great level of responsibility on the user and raised the issue of the influence of video games and online videos on youth mentalities, citing the Christchurch mosque shooting in New Zealand. He compared video games with the actual video streamed by the accused perpetrator.

Both sessions included an open Q&A session in which many questions were asked, such as the role of fathers in this issue, the recommended age for the youth to have phones, and the consequences of phone addiction on academic performance. ❧



BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

AGBU Europe’s Goriz Cultivates New Generation of Social and Economic Influencers

As modern societies undergo multiple, simultaneous, and continuous phases of rapid change, the new industries of the future are redefining human capital. Leaders of tomorrow will need an expanded world view and possess such qualities as flexibility, resilience, and courage. They also need to be comfortable with uncertainty and have a high threshold for ambiguity.

Given these new realities, AGBU Europe’s 10-year old flagship program *Goriz* (which means the pit of the apricot fruit—a cultural symbol of Armenia) is facilitating the developmental journey of highly motivated and talented young adults.

The *Goriz* cohort is composed of 30 participants ages 23-35 who set off on a six-month Leadership Development journey involving lectures, experiential workshops, real-life projects, and fun activities for social bonding. The group is exposed to world-class leaders who are engaged with their Armenian identity. What makes this program distinctively different are the group dynamic with peers, meaningful conversation in a safe and trusted environment with fellow

Armenians, hands-on involvement on a project in Armenia through the Together4Armenia talent matching program, world-class speakers, and seminar locations that speak to the Armenian experience. Currently, there are more than 100 alumni from the AGBU global network of peers and young professionals.

The first seminar for the 2019 session was held in Brussels in April. Hosted by the Boghossian Foundation in its magnificent venue, the seminar included two lectures on leadership delivered by Pierre Gurdjian, former McKinsey country director of Belgium and current president of the Free University of Brussels (ULB). The following session featured Armen Ovanessoff, head of the think tank representing Accenture in Davos, G20, and other global platforms.

The two lecturers addressed topics such as alignment of purpose and meaning and the distinctive qualities of leadership in the age of artificial intelligence and corporate social responsibility. *Goriz* participants were organized into pairs or groups for experiential workshops on *positive framing* and *meaning*, including exercises on self-reflection.

Goriz participants and lecturers assemble at the Boghossian Foundation in Brussels for the first seminar of the 2019 session.

One participant described the experience this way: “All practical exercises were extremely helpful to identify patterns and define fields to work on; speakers were very high-level; it was an incredible opportunity to learn from them; great to have the materials with all the exercises so that one can go through them again at home. There was great energy in the room from fellow participants. It was an amazing opportunity to network, be inspired and motivated by others.”

At the conclusion of the sessions, each participant was matched to an ongoing project in service to the Armenian nation, fulfilling the mission of the program to apply the knowledge learned during the seminar to on-the-ground, real world situations. Through the Together4Armenia platform, 17 participants committed to be actively engaged in an AGBU-driven project in Armenia. The rest will use skills they acquired to continue to projects in which they are already involved, such companies as IT is Armenia, ASK Football Academy, Yerevan Marathon, and others.

Ultimately, the *Goriz* Leadership Program will serve as a magnet to attract, identify, select, educate, and help talented leaders of Armenian origin serve a purpose greater than themselves. ❧