

# At 60, Alumna Starts New Life with the Peace Corps

**Barrington Native Goes to Armenia**

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Mary Ann Harty had a whole other life before she starting living the one she has now. Sixty years of a life that had her graduating in 1974 from UNH, where she majored in German and minored in French before going on to earn a master's degree in library science at Simmons College followed a few years later by an MBA from Willamette University.

It was a life that saw her working first as a librarian and then in the field of finance. Where she lived in Oregon for 28 years, raised a child, and then returned to New Hampshire. In 2010, she joined the Peace Corps.

Four years later, Harty is still in Armenia, the site of her first volunteer assignment. "Because I was raised in rural New England in the 50's and 60's, the pastoral way of life, the second-class status of women, and the absence of basic infrastructure were not as difficult an adjustment for me as they often are for young volunteers who were born after the technological revolution. That said, it was challenging to learn a new language at 60 and to live in a post-Soviet society," Harty says.

The Barrington native was sent to Dsegh, a remote village in the Northern Region of Lori Marz where she worked with young women, mentoring and guiding them into taking

on leadership roles. One of the women has since launched a community newspaper. Another led environmental actions.

Harty has extended her service twice. The first time was because the village where she was assigned had never had a volunteer and it had taken more than a year to establish connections in the community.

“I had to convince them that I was not just there as a



**MARY ANN WITH EFRIDA YEGANYAN, DSEGH YOUTH GROUP COORDINATOR.**

tourist, ready to leave on the next bus out of town,” Harty says. “No one in the village spoke English and I had only minimum Armenian language skills. After a year and a half, however, I had some traction and it seemed like a good idea to stay and keep the momentum going.”

In addition to working with the women of Dsegh, Harty helped write a proposal that led to the creation of a playground in the village center that has become a community meeting place for residents. She also co-partnered on several youth exchange projects funded by the European Union's Youth In Action.

Her second extension, in September 2013, had her moving to Gyumri, the country's second largest city, located near the border with Turkey. Here she spends her days teaching English at an orphanage, working alongside Sister Arousiag Sajonian of the Armenian Sisters. Harty also teaches a class — “more or less, in Armenian” — on office practices at the Diramayr Hayastani Vocational School for the school's new secretarial diploma program.

“Being in the Peace Corps has given my after-60 life meaning and purpose. It has taken me to mountain top, once-in-a-lifetime experiences, and dragged me through depths I would never have imagined I could survive, much less transcend. “Through it all the Peace Corps organization and my commitment to service have sustained and supported me. There is no place, no work, I would rather be doing than this,” Harty says.

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