DIASPORA INITIATIVE HELPS ARMENIA THRIVE

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Interview with Anna Bruno from New York, 22 December 2021

Since the September 2020 war broke out in Artsakh, Armenians across the globe have held a number of initiatives to become re-engaged in various spheres of Armenian life. ***Thrive Armenia Foundation (TAF)*** is one such organization created by New York based Anna Bruno in 2021.

To learn more about Thrive and its founder, Keghart contacted Anna Bruno for an interview:

Keghart: Please tell us about yourself and your background.

Anna Bruno: I was born and raised in Armenia to a family of refugees who fled from The Ottoman Empire to Greece because of the genocide and eventually moved to Soviet Armenia. In 1990 special circumstances brought me to the United States, where I had the opportunity to attend universities in New York and Pennsylvania. Currently, I live in New York. I'm married with three wonderful children.

Keghart: What were the circumstances that led you to found Thrive?

Anna Bruno: Unfortunately, I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2019. It was very unexpected and heartbreaking for me and my family. But as they say, there is something positive in any negative situation. I was able to get through the ordeal of several cancer-related operations, chemotherapy treatments as well as radiation. Because of this, I had to put my business on hold so that I could concentrate on getting healthy again. Toward the end of 2020, I was fully recovered from breast cancer and was looking forward to returning back to the financial planning practice that I had built for over 20 years. Once again, the sad events of the 44-day Artsakh war, and especially the outcome of the war made me realize that our homeland and people needed help. So it made me question myself, how else could I contribute, besides what most of us had already done-such as making donations and sending supplies. I decided that the best way I could be of service to our people would be to offer my 30+ years of experience, education, and professional knowledge of living and working in the US. This is when and how Thrive Armenia Foundation (TAF) was born in February of 2021.

Keghart: What are Thrive's main objectives, the obstacles you face and lessons learned?

Anna Bruno: TAF's main objectives are to connect people of Armenian origin with one another as well as connect them with Armenia. We do this by offering different clubs and programs where Armenians from different parts of the world are able to meet virtually, learn, and socialize. Our second most important objective is to help people by offering specific skills-based programs such as bookkeeping, virtual assistant, computers skills to name a few. As it is in most cases, our biggest challenge is in having not enough human power and financing. Typically we collect nominal tuition fees or donations in order to be able to offer our programs 100% free of charge to the veterans of the 44 day Artsakh war, the displaced people, and the families of fallen soldiers.

Soon we will celebrate our 1st year anniversary. Looking back, there are already some lessons learned that I would like to share. Financial help is a short-term solution to a long-term problem. The real help relies upon helping people to become self-sufficient in taking care of themselves. We can't do it all. We need dedicated team members and partners.

Keghart: What does Thrive do differently compared to other Armenian Diaspora organizations?

Anna Bruno: I think what makes our organization unique first and foremost is our team. Being born and raised in Armenia and spending most of my adult life outside of Armenia gives me a dual understanding of both cultures and the mentality of the people. Also, our team members have very diverse geographical as well as professional backgrounds ranging from students to attorneys, professors, business owners, financial planners to name a few. We are "on the ground" every day. Our executive team is involved in all aspects of the operation and strategic planning of our projects. We work proficiently, with a high level of transparency.

Keghart: How can interested individuals reach you and what are some of the ways that they can get involved?

Anna Bruno: We are always looking for new team members and volunteers. We welcome you to visit us on our website at ***Thrive Armenia Foundation*** . There you can become familiar with our projects, sign up to become a member, volunteer, or teach. You can also make a donation to any of our projects or help support individual families or children that need our help.

Keghart: Thank you Ms. Bruno. We wish you personally and the organization all the best, Merry Christmas and a happy new year, **Շնորհաւոր Նոր Տարի և Սբ. Ծնունդ.**

Thrive Armenia Foundation

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It is high time to galvanize Armenians in Armenia and Armenians in Diaspora communities including half Armenians and those who have different faiths. Armenians around the world, their umbilical cord is attached to Mother Armenia. After WW2 Mother Armenia asked her children to come home from diaspora to repopulate and they did. They responded with migrations, recently from Syria and Lebanon. Their ongoing financial contribution, no matter how small, is an indication of their love to Mother Armenia. WW3 will be much more devastating; once again the global map will change for many years to come. Fortunately we are all over the world; survivors will become the seedlings to repopulate our homeland if and only if our present government stops the quarrelling, blaming each other about the battle of Karabagh. We were fighting against Azerbaijan, Turkey, Arab mercenaries, very sophisticated drones made and operated by Israeli army. Note that this was the first time Israeli armed forces were fighting on behalf of another nation. Our loss was certain. I hope we learned a lesson in diplomacy VS war. Now is the time for our intellectuals, diplomats, politicians to think ahead, how to save Armenians in Armenia and Diaspora and our small country that we have.