

BE THE HEROINE OF YOUR LIFE, NOT THE VICTIM

Text by Aghavni Harutyunyan

When business trainings for women were organised in Alaverdi, an industrial city in Northern *Armenia*, Irina Israyelyan was among 20 participants attending the event with her business idea for camping, which is unusual for Armenia. “I was born in Alaverdi and have lived there since. It was hard to imagine that in my fifties I would come up with a new business idea, attend trainings, and get financial support for realising a new project”, says Irina Israyelyan.

A musician by profession, who had been employed for more than 22 years, Irina Israyelyan was not pursuing any new initiatives until her life suddenly changed. “I lost my son when he was serving in the army and the time stopped. My grief was not compatible with music, so I decided to stay at home”, recalls Irina the hardest period of her life when her daughter and two grandchildren became the only reason to live. “Although I was not able to

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overcome my feelings, I had to carry on since being unemployed was not an option and would have led my family to serious consequences. We were on the verge of losing our minds, so I had to take control of the situation as I am the mother”.

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A *woman's strength* isn't just about how much she can handle before she suffers. It's also how much she must handle after she has suffered. Irina started a small business, a pastry shop that earned enough income for the daily bread. It was not enough as her family needed something different to recover psychologically. Exactly at that time, the trainings in Alaverdi were

announced. “My friends advised me to participate, and that has become a successful starting point. It was new, creative and engaging”.

Business trainings were conducted in April in 2014 by the Armenian Young Womens’ Association within the *EU funded “Social and Economic Empowerment of Women in Armenia” project*.

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The training events applied Competency Based Economies through Formation of Entrepreneurs (CEFE) methodology that provides necessary knowledge, information and develops entrepreneurial skills despite the educational background, experience and knowledge base of the participants. Entrepreneurial training was combined with consultations and financial assistance. Out of 20 participants, eight business plans were developed and submitted for the financial support. Irina presented her idea of camping and received

465.000 AMD (approximately 1000 USD) of *financial support*.

She says it was exactly the type of business her family has been looking for. “We all got involved, the whole family. I was advised with all peculiarities of the camping organisation: what type of tents are the best, what are the most suited materials for the sleeping

bags alongside with many other specifics, including how to make solid constructions etc. We started preparations for the launch of our camping business, an idea that for the wider public is not only new, but sometimes even a bit strange”.

People in Armenia are used to hotels and restaurants when they think of going for a holiday or taking a break. Very small group of mostly young people prefer to go camping. However, Irina believes that things will change especially in the *region of Alaverdi* and its surroundings, located in Debed Canyon that is rich with historical monuments and natural beauty.

Combining *camping* and the cultural heritage and involving women in all regions of Armenia would provide a great support to the population, although professional training and more financial support is necessary to go further than dreaming. “This is where my experience was useful and during the trainings we gained knowledge and skills on how to organise

a business and start all financial calculations. The most important part of the training was building confidence in yourself, in your own skills and increasing your self-belief”.

The financial support that Irina received through funding has been spent on purchasing tents, sleeping bags and other tent construction materials to be ready for the launch of the camping project this year. “I am confident that part of my success is because this region is blessed by milder climate, pleasant summers and warm winters, wonderful green springs and very colourful autumns”, says Irina with a hope that nature and satisfied campers will bring her more satisfaction as well.



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ARMENIA - GENDER



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