

New Initiative to Mobilize Americans to Volunteer in the Muslim World

Launch of the America's Unofficial Ambassadors Program Fills a Major Void

Washington, D.C. – March 2, 2011 – Creative Learning today is announcing the launch of the America's Unofficial Ambassadors (AUA) program, the first initiative specifically designed to increase the number of Americans who volunteer in education, health, community needs, and civil society in the Muslim World. The goal of the AUA program is to build peace at a grassroots level in America and throughout the Muslim World by increasing the number of substantive, cross-cultural partnerships that support higher standards of living, greater economic opportunities, and increased freedoms. By December 2012, the AUA program aims to encourage 1000 Americans to commit to at least a week of service in the Muslim World.

Project Director Benjamin Orbach explained that the AUA initiative's launch comes at a historic time. "Since World War II, our government has primarily looked at our relations with the rest of the world through the prism of government-to-government diplomacy and assistance. As we see popular-led change in Egypt, Tunisia, and other spots throughout the Middle East, it becomes clear how important America's people-to-people relationships are and have to be in the future. Volunteering and supporting the rights and aspirations of our counterparts in the Muslim World is a way for Americans to participate in creating a better future based upon the interests we share with the rest of the world."

From building houses in Indonesia, to teaching English in the Palestinian Territories, to supporting local organizations to raise awareness on public health issues in Senegal, there are a diverse range of opportunities for American volunteers to support citizens and leaders who seek to make a difference in their lives and their communities. Through the process of volunteering and supporting these initiatives, there is a chance for Americans to build peace and to get beyond harmful stereotypes.

Roughly 63 million people volunteered in America between September 2009 and September 2010, but less than two percent of that number volunteered overseas. A much smaller fraction of Americans volunteered in Muslim-majority countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. "One of the reasons why so few Americans volunteer in the Muslim World is that on a comparative basis, we don't have the same number of deep familial and personal relations to those parts of the world as we do to Europe and the Americas," said Creative Learning President Bill Krivant. He continued, "There is much less awareness of or access to the credible and impactful volunteer opportunities that are out there, and unfortunately, there is a greater exposure to some of the exaggerated stereotypes."

Finding the Best Opportunity to Volunteer in the "Muslim World"

To overcome this "access" issue, Creative Learning has compiled and published the first ever directory of volunteer placements that exclusively focuses on organizations that send or host

American volunteers for short-term service opportunities in Muslim-majority countries. The AUA Directory of Recommended Organizations is now available and free to the public at <http://www.unofficialambassadors.com>.

In producing the AUA Directory, Creative Learning researched more than 1000 organizations and conducted interviews with program staff and alumni to compile profiles of leading organizations that send or host American volunteers in a Muslim-majority country for service of a week to a year. Each organization profiled in the AUA Directory has the capacity to offer safe and meaningful service opportunities. They allow volunteers to choose their country placement, and they use people-to-people partnerships in their programs, which range from building schools in Mali, to restoring historic buildings in Albania, to training local organizations in Bangladesh to use “new media.” All of the volunteer opportunities profiled in the AUA Directory are open to the public, are non-proselytizing, and are apolitical in nature. Each AUA Directory profile includes program-specific information on past volunteers’ experience, the skills a volunteer will need to succeed, and the specifics of how to apply.

A dynamic resource, the AUA Directory is an ideal starting point for interested volunteers to find the volunteer opportunity that is right for them. As the lone resource that focuses specifically on Muslim-majority countries, the AUA Directory can be an important tool in building better relations between America and the Muslim World. Orbach said, “There are terrific organizations out there doing meaningful work that changes lives, but people don’t know about them or about and how they can volunteer. With the AUA Directory, we have created the premiere resource for Americans to identify short-term volunteer opportunities that build people-to-people partnerships in Muslim-majority countries.” Kruvant added, “We can all participate in national service. Volunteering on a short-term basis is an excellent way for each of us to play a role in building peace at a grassroots level.”

About Creative Learning

Creative Learning is a Washington DC-based 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization that enhances the capacity of local organizations around the world to improve the lives of people in their communities. Through the creation of people-to-people partnerships, Creative Learning is especially dedicated to protecting human rights, supporting economic and social development, and building peace. Consistent with the program’s theme that American citizens should do more to make a difference, AUA is a citizen-funded initiative that does not seek government funding. For information about sponsorship opportunities, please contact Tracy Key at Tracykeyevents@aol.com.

###