

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PROGRAM

- QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER -

The Official Newsletter of the CSP Alumni Board



CSP Alumni group photo

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CSP PROGRAM UPDATES

The 2021 CSP fellowship officially begins July 6th for 120 fellows from 67 countries with the Pre-Fellowship Orientation July 6 to 12. From July 12 through August 29, CSP fellows will take part in Community Leadership Institute (CLI) coursework. Concurrently, CSP fellows will be matched with a U.S. practicum organization, meet with their host collaborator, and create a practicum work plan during this time. Fellows will be arranged in small Peer Organized Discussion (POD) groups to further connect with others in their cohort, engage in cross-cultural learning, and provide peer feedback on CLI coursework. Fellows will also create affinity groups on the CLI to network and connect with others who have similar interests, backgrounds, or learning objectives. Fellows will continue building relationships with their alumni mentor(s) during this phase.

2021 CSP ALUMNI BOARD ELECTION

The 2021 CSP Alumni Board Election self-nomination form is live **until Sunday, July 4th!** Interested CSP alumni can nominate themselves through the [Alumni Board Self-Nomination Form](#) which asks alumni to identify the position they are interested in serving and to provide a short "election biography" that will be shared during the live election.

The Alumni Board positions open for election for a two-year term are as follows:

1. Africa Representative
2. South Central Asia Representative
3. Western Hemisphere Representative
4. Environmental Issues Representative
5. Transparency & Accountability Representative
6. Vice-President (a three-year term commitment as vice president, president, and immediate past president)

The Alumni Board Election will then take place online from July 5th to 18th. Further details, such as the link to the election form, will be sent via email and posted on the CSP Alumni Facebook page. For those interested in learning more about the Alumni Board election, in particular those who are interested in running for a Board position, we encourage you to read Alumni Board Handbook (sent to you via email), which details the Alumni Board positions, commitments, committees, and election process.

ALUMNI REUNION WEEK

We would like to say THANK YOU to all who made the 2021 CSP Alumni Reunion Week so successful! In total, we had 219 alumni (35% of the CSP alumni community!) participate from 73 different countries around the world. The CSP team and Alumni Board were delighted to see meetups across cohort years and thematic areas and witness community building in action. We look forward to making Alumni Reunion Week an annual event!

SOLUTIONS SUMMIT

CSP held the third annual and first-ever virtual Solutions Summit from July 17-21. During the Summit, 38 alumni and U.S. partners convened virtually to connect, learn, and share with other experts and practitioners committed to solving pressing women and gender issues. The Summit featured a diverse menu of sessions including networking activities, a moderated panel discussion on women and gender issues around the world, and participant-led expert workshops on specific strategies, tools, and approaches. Participants also engaged in a “Hackathon,” an activity in which participants collaborated in small groups to identify potential solutions to real, pre-selected challenges. The CSP team will share Hackathon Action Plans with the CSP alumni community in the coming weeks.

MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The CSP team and Alumni Board would like to thank the alumni who signed up to participate in the 2021 Alumni Mentorship Program! Alumni mentors play an integral role in fellows' experiences by guiding their program success, leadership development, and professional growth. Alumni who volunteered to serve as mentors will be paired as co-mentors to guide a group of diverse fellows throughout their CSP experience. This includes planning monthly check-ins, providing feedback on their fellows' CLI course work, helping them navigate challenges in the virtual program, guiding them through collaborating with a U.S. host organization, and providing mentorship and support during the Community Action Project implementation period. Although the official sign-up deadline has passed, the CSP team is still seeking motivated alumni mentors and is accepting applications. To learn more about the Alumni Mentorship Program and/or to sign-up to serve as an alumni mentor, please review the [alumni mentor sign-up form](#).

PAST PRESIDENT LIVIA ANINOȘANU "MY GRATITUDE WALK"



*Photo of
Livia Aninoșanu*

One of my favorite moments of the program happens right at the very end; it is the gratitude walk, where you have the chance to flavor a very bittersweet ending with honey-like thoughts. This is when all memories of being together come back exactly when you are creating new ones and it is a wonderful journey of intimacy and affirmation.

Here I am, doing my own gratitude walk, for the many gifts CSP had offered me. I was a fellow in 2014 and I honestly felt like I was travelling as far as I would ever be able to go; and probably that is true. It is an immense privilege to be able to feel like you truly belong to a group of people from all over the world, with fascinating minds, stories and experiences, coming from so many lineages; it makes you feel we are all magically rooted together.

After 2014, like many of you, former fellows, I was a recruiter for new fellows, I was a mentor, I was giving webinars to colleagues, I ran for the CSP Alumni Board in 2016 and became a Board member for the first time; I ran again in 2018 and from that spring to this summer I was the Board President. During this whole process I had the opportunity to learn from people that were so generous and nothing short of exceptional: I did my best to keep up with everything that they had to offer and at the end of this experience I take so much with me!

I want to thank every single person who was a Board member in the past 5 years and I also want to encourage you, Alumni, to self-nominate for the new Board. You will be working under very strong, energizing and kind leadership and you are so needed here! You will be joining a team of welcoming, focused, creative and very, very fun people, who are barely waiting to benefit from your skills and your point of view and your dedication.

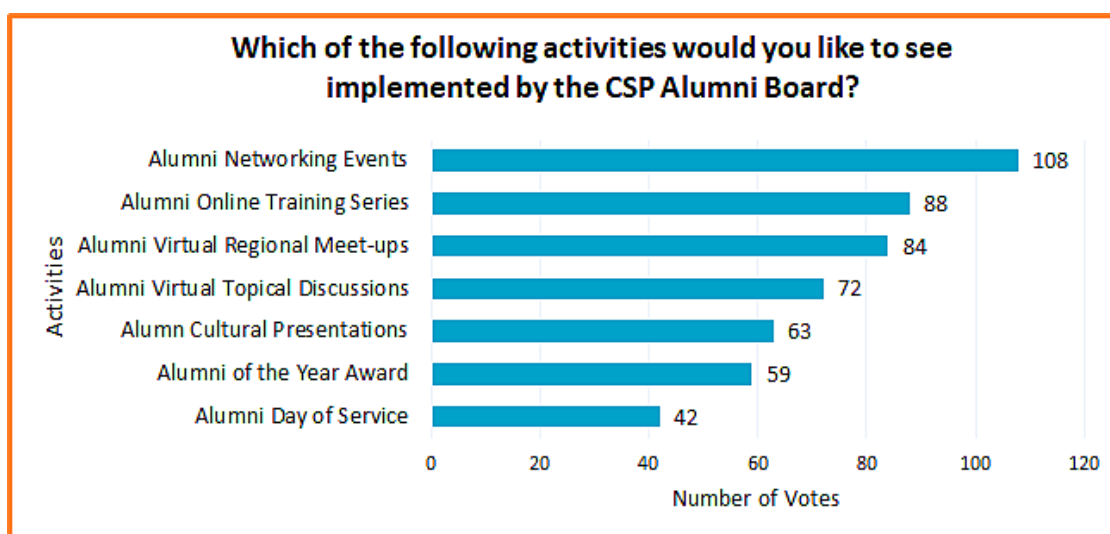
As I pass the torch to Sa'eed, your Alumni Board President, I feel confident in the many opportunities this new Board will offer us, the larger Alumni community. Supported by a very committed, empathetic and present IREX team, I am sure this will provide you with an environment for personal growth and for offering your own treasures to others!

Myself, I will stay connected with the program, as always, and I am also always here for all of you! Thank you for this part of the journey spent together; and we will continue together! See you soon!

ALUMNI SURVEY RESULTS

The Engagement Committee of the CSP Alumni Board designed and administered a survey to obtain insights from the CSP alumni community on how alumni can be better supported and engaged by the CSP Alumni Board in their efforts to continue to drive positive change. The voluntary participation in the survey was open to all CSP cohorts for two weeks in spring 2021. Alumni participation remained encouraging with responses received from 25% of the alumni body!

Among the key findings, which are detailed further below, was the alumni community's preference regarding activities they would like to see implemented by the Alumni Board. The three most popular activity ideas were Alumni Networking Events, Alumni Online Training Series, and Alumni Virtual Regional Meet-ups.



Additional key survey findings included:

1. Promoting learning and development activities for the alumni. When asked to provide suggestions for promoting learning and development activities for alumni, many respondents expressed interest in having more opportunities to share knowledge and information and promote their community work and projects, such as publishing alumni "success stories" and sharing "best practices". Respondents also showed an interest in launching joint projects, producing vlogs, work plans, and lessons with the CSP alumni community.

"I believe that working on a joint project worldwide where all of us will need to make a small effort in cooperation with the other alumni will be a great way to connect."

2. Coordinating more networking activities. Increasing the number of networking opportunities was also a major interest of respondents. Respondents argued that organizing annual virtual and/or in-person global meetings, such as the alumni reunion week, would help maintain relations within cohorts and help build bridges between alumni from different cohort years, thematic areas, and geographic regions. In addition, respondents suggested leveraging new communication methods, such as video blogs, podcasts, and social networks pages as a way of exchanging ideas and experiences with the global alumni community. One recurrent idea involved creating a podcast series with alumni from around the world to discuss their experiences and the projects they are working on.

"[It] would be great to invite all CSP leaders by thematic areas and use this platform for sharing the experiences from different aspects."

"I wish I had more time to connect with all my CSP friends. Especially during the pandemic, when I've been working from home for several nonprofits, taking care of my little daughter, writing articles on global challenges, conducting MIL workshops, supporting the community, and finishing the research on international volunteering."

3. Supporting fundraising and resource development for alumni projects. Many respondents discussed their struggle to find resources to back their projects and requested support from CSP in this regard. Several respondents suggested that the Board hold sessions (virtual and in-person) on such topics to help alumni understand where and how to seek support for projects. Respondents identified organizing activities, such as local funding events managed by alumni from the same region or thematic area, as one approach to tackling this topic.

"Alumni board should seek to expand opportunities to the alumni community. Networking, funding, and learning opportunities. The Board could create an online hub where they harness and share such opportunities with the alumni community."

4. Email messages and the Alumni Newsletter are effective highlighting Alumni Board activities. Respondents identified email and the Alumni Newsletter as an accessible way to connect and keep updated on Alumni Board events and updates.

"Sending emails and links to events [help] keep me connected with CSP alumni."

5. Using more social media would raise alumni engagement. Respondents identified Facebook, WhatsApp, and other similar platforms as fast and accessible venues for alumni to connect with the Board.

"Recently in Myanmar, internet access [has become] unavailable, especially Facebook and sometimes Google mail, because of the political crisis. It would be better for me to connect with CSP alumni [through] WhatsApp, Telegram, and Outlook mail."

6. Supportive quotes for the Board:

"You are doing a great job keeping us active and involved already."

"I loved the online courses we had – Adapting to Virtual Leadership and Leadership in Crisis. Thank you for these courses!"

"I would like to thank and congratulate the Board for their appointments and work so far."

"They have been doing a great job. I think It would be interesting that they could connect new fellows with some alumni so they can know a little bit about (CSP) experiences."

"Keep rocking, CSP team."

Grant out to the Google foundation to support women. Research-based, interviewing leaders about their leadership experience, geared for people in the workforce – connected with peer mentor, blind professional in the field. Interest in policy, education, digital inclusion consulting practice.

ALUMNI SUCCESS STORIES

Massa Aboujeib

Art-preneur, Children's Books Writer & Illustrator and

Co-founder of Draw & Smile Program

CSP Alumni Board Member, Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) representative (2020-2022)

Cohort Year: CSP 2016

Thematic Area: Peace & Conflict Resolutions

Country: Syria

Host Organization: Kids For Peace

City & State: Carlsbad, California



*Photo of
Massa Aboujeib*

I am a Syrian art-preneur, children's books writer/illustrator, art university teacher, and humanitarian. I have dedicated most of my professional life to developing various art therapy and social impact projects to support children traumatized by war and deepen the understanding of children's rights, tolerance, and peacebuilding.

During my CSP Fellowship in the U.S., I had the privilege of working with a multi-national team at my host organization Kids for Peace. Through that wonderful experience, I discovered new cultures and learned the importance of communication, collaboration, and being flexible. I was directly involved in many special events, workshops, trainings, and speaking engagements. I completed numerous projects for the organization, such as producing and designing a children's book entitled "Kindness Matters: 50 Ways to Create a Kinder World." I also launched my solo fundraising painting exhibition entitled "Faces of Peace," which contained 35 exquisite art pieces and implemented a "Peace through Art" program for immigrant students at a low-income school in California.

After returning to my home country, I implemented a Community Action Project seeking to provide psychological support through art. My dedication to the children of Syria has resulted in several other initiatives including "Draw & Smile," a healing artistic therapy project that supports refugees and homeless children, those plagued with sickness, as well as children from low-income households. This project, with the support of local NGO's and civil society organizations, supported more than 600 children across several Syrian cities, allowing creative expression through technical, artistic, dramatic, and musical exercises.

Looking to further expand my impact, I have worked with UNICEF to illustrate children's booklets focused on peace and the expression of friendship, love, and cooperation. My work has been widely recognized, not only in the Middle East but also internationally. My most recent accomplishments include being honored at the World Congress in Amsterdam as one of the Ten Outstanding Young Persons of the World in 2017 for the category of contribution to children, world peace, and human rights.



Photo of Massa's children session

In early 2020, I had the opportunity to reconnect and collaborate with my host organization “Kids for Peace” to launch my new children’s book in the U.S., “How to Live in Peace.” The book serves as an interactive guide for both parents and educators in communicating with children. The book helps motivate children to search, analyze, and think outside the box. The book also taps into universal human values, such as tolerance, equality, respect, and co-existence, and will stimulate children’s imagination helping them become lifelong peacebuilders.

The Community Solution Program (CSP) is an invaluable experience. It has shaped my path, both on my personal and professional level, and has helped me develop my identity as a leader.

In addition, serving on the CSP Alumni Board has been an opportunity to give back to a great program and to share the skills and expertise I gained throughout my CSP journey and support CSP alumni and new leaders in community engagement, mentorship, and networking.

I encourage outstanding young leaders from all over the world to participate in the Community Solutions Program. It is a life-changing experience!

If interested to find out more about my work, please use the following links:

<https://youtu.be/WBkUy59QDvM>

<https://youtu.be/ZfSyC2mhJb0>

<https://youtu.be/YgSguN5Pt5Q>



*Photo of
Boba Baluchova*

Dr. Boba Markovic Baluchova

Home Country: Slovakia, Europe

Occupation: CEO, Founder & Enthusiast at DocUnion NGO; Chief-editor & Responsible journalist at 'Media about Development' website; Researcher & Communications Manager at Platform for Development Organizations – Ambrela in Bratislava, Slovakia

CSP Cohort: 2014, Transparency & Accountability

Host organization: Media Literacy Project (MLP) in Albuquerque, New Mexico

Growing up during the Communism regime, I have always been particularly sensitive to propaganda and manipulation in the media and in public spaces. I have also always been passionate about solution journalism, hope-based communication, and responsible media coverage of global challenges. During my university studies and local volunteering, I used to seek out opportunities to collaborate with organizations dealing with human rights and media production. Thanks to the Community Solutions Program (CSP), I was able to realize this dream when I was placed with the Media Literacy Project (MLP) in Albuquerque, New Mexico for my U.S.-based practicum. Even though my host organization doesn't exist anymore due to lack of funding, I continue to follow the vision of MLP: A socially just world where media truly connect and sustain local communities.

During my CSP fellowship, I was able to observe how my MLP colleagues were able to transform people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds into critical media consumers. I had the opportunity to conduct practical workshops on media and information literacy (MIL) and was present during the creation of the 'Siembra la Palabra Digna' Toolkit. This toolkit offered approaches to recognizing (ir)responsible speech, how to "deconstruct media," and how take action in order to treat our communities with respect and dignity. Together with the entire MLP's campaign team, we organized people for media justice in New Mexico and conducted a survey regarding media access. The most interesting part of my fellowship was tabling for MLP at various community events in Albuquerque and deconstructing certain media products with local people who were MLP volunteers, sustainers, and MIL enthusiasts like me.

In the last couple years, I have focused on finishing my second PhD study in the field of international development studies and taking care of my little daughter, Tove Tui. I have also been working for Platform for Development Organizations – Ambrela, which gathers 28 non-governmental organizations in Slovakia with a focus on development cooperation, humanitarian aid, global development education, and sustainable development in low-income countries. As a communications manager, I am responsible for the 'Faces of Migration' campaign which aims to raise awareness about diversity, tolerance, and coexistence of people from different cultures through specific life stories and looking at the migration phenomenon through the prism of the Sustainable development goals (SDGs).

We try to describe life conditions of migrants and refugees and the reasons for forced migration of vulnerable communities to the general public via hope-based stories and responsible media products.

Our videos and articles always receive hundreds of negative comments from haters and trolls on social networks. Such expressions of intolerance only confirm how important it is to bring these topics to people outside the so-called “nonprofit bubble.” We have noticed that many fellow citizens, not only in Slovakia, use the word migrant as an insult. Since 2019, our campaign has been slowly changing the situation for the better. Civil society, the media, and educational institutions should be held accountable and expected to provide unbiased and objective information on the issue of migration. The biggest challenge for me has been to write responsible and fact-based articles on migration and climate change topics. This challenge became more pronounced when the Covid-19 pandemic happened.

In the era of this global pandemic, I have come to realize the importance of my placement with MLP and how resilience and critical thinking is desperately needed in our society. In 2020, technology and social media were used on a massive scale to keep people safe, informed, and connected. At the same time, that same technology has enabled and amplified an “infodemic” - an overabundance of information attempting to disseminate wrong information to undermine the public health response. The role of media and information literacy is to mitigate the harm from misinformation and disinformation.



Photo of Boba conducting field research

Thanks to my close collaboration with MLP, I was able to expand my expertise and contribute additional knowledge from the field of MIL into my teaching and researching portfolio. Thanks to my workshops on global journalism and MIL basics, people from vulnerable groups and minorities can become critical thinkers and responsible media users. They are more aware about MIL themes and able to detect propaganda, censorship, and bias in the news and social media. Thanks to MIL, they will not become followers of conspiracy theories and fans of hoaxes in online spaces.

None of this would have happened without the support from CSP team. I have learned a lot from my MLP colleagues, as well from my CSP co-fellows. I remember how I was amazed by the projects and life-saving activities all those great leaders were doing with their communities. I will never forget the example of artistic social work as the way to offer psycho-social support to kids in Lebanon implemented by my dear friend Samar, or Takhmina's leadership trainings for persons affected by gender-related violence in Tajikistan, or Michelle's educational support program for teenage girls to eradicate crime and violence in Trinidad and Tobago. All those stories kept me thoughtful and taught me not to take anything for granted.

If you'd like to find out more on my work, please go to:

<https://mediaaboutdevelopment.wordpress.com/>

<https://ambrela.org/>



Community Solutions Program logo

**Please don't forget to send us an email at
cspalumniboard@gmail.com
if you have something inspiring to share
with the CSP global community.**

Keep up the good work!