

ACTIVISTS FOR ARMENIA

Junior Maria Ayvazyan and her cousin
give back to their native country

Ela Patel-Euler Online Opinions Editor

Among the lush valleys and ancient mountains of Armenia, junior Maria Ayvazyan saw beyond the breathtaking scenery. She saw families on the streets without food, water or a place to go.

Alongside her cousin Eduard Yeremyan, Ayvazyan co-founded Youth for Armenia, a charity organization dedicated to supporting devastated Armenian families through fundraising and fulfilling their basic needs.

"I began Youth For Armenia last September with my cousin who lives there," Ayvazyan said. "We began by noticing the extreme level of conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh when Azerbaijan's army blockaded Artsakh, a region in Armenia."

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**- MARIA AYVAZYAN
JUNIOR**

In the wake of a 2023 military attack by Azerbaijan that claimed the lives of thousands of Armenians, Ayvazyan was drawn to take action for her homeland.

"During the attack, there was no food, water or medical resources coming into Armenia, leaving so many families devastated," Ayvazyan said.

Yeremyan, who lives in Armenia, experienced the destruction firsthand.

"I've seen how people are trying to escape for their life and how small kids were left outside without their parents because they were killed by Azerbaijan's army," Yeremyan said. "I've seen how 120,000 people lost

their houses in one night, and from that day, most of them didn't know where to live."

Youth For Armenia is dedicated to involving Armenian youth in the improvement and restoration of Armenia.

"We aim to mobilize and engage youth from Armenia in a broad spectrum of social, educational, cultural and community development initiatives," Ayvazyan said.

Ayvazyan and Yeremyan fundraise to help families obtain various crucial resources.

"In a short time we were able to collect \$35,000 and provide eight families with houses and 30 children living in borderline villages with free education," Yeremyan said.

Together, the cousins developed a scalable business plan focused on collaborating with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) who share a similar mindset.

"Our main goal is to outreach to other organizations based in and related to Armenia and partner with as many as we can," Ayvazyan said.

In addition to using their funds to help families gain access to food, first aid materials and housing, a percentage of Youth for Armenia's funds are dedicated to supporting the non-profits they partner with.

"We use a percentage of our funds to help other charities or NGOs who operate in Armenia and share our cause," Ayvazyan said.

Ayvazyan is driven in her hopes to link the United States and Armenia in their efforts to improve the lives of Armenian families.

"Connecting the United States and Armenia would be a key collaboration, linking American and Armenian



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youth to help each other ease the effects of the 2023 military attack," Ayvazyan said.

Ayvazyan's kindness and compassion has been inspirational to others who know about her mission.

"Youth for Armenia inspires other McLean students to not only work hard in school but outside of school as well," junior Assia Lazizi said.

Through Youth for Armenia, Ayvazyan has gained invaluable knowledge about beginning an NGO.

"Don't underestimate how difficult the early stages of beginning [an NGO] are," Ayvazyan said. "But most importantly, do something you are passionate about because that's the only thing that can drive you forward."

Funds for Families – Junior Maria Ayvazyan and her cousin Eduard Yeremyan take a look at the money they have earned through fundraising. With these funds, they acquire resources for war-torn Armenian families.

