

*Our Mission:  
Supporting improved  
educational opportunities for  
the children and youth of the  
isolated Malësia e Madhe  
region of Northern Albania*

President: Steve Cook, PhD

Secretary: Terri Cook

Board of Directors:

Karen Berg

Mary Alice Seville

Nancy Leeper

Kristina Milaj

Mona Jones-Romansic

Albania Manager:

Marash Rakaj



Drita Volaj



Jolanda Mitaj

## KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

Meet our new kindergarten teachers from Kelmend. AAI has expanded its reach and we are now supporting two more kindergartens in the Malësia e Madhe district. Drita Volaj has taught for 27 years. She was born in Broje, Kelmend in Malesi ë Madhe in 1996. She received her degree at Shkodra Higher Pedagogical Institute in education and currently teaches kindergarten in “Nike Mernacaj” Tamare General School.

Jolanda Mitaj is currently teaching at the 9-year school in Selce and was also born in the same village. She received her high school degree from “Nike Mernacaj” in Tamare and has taught at the Selce school since September 2020. She is married and lives in the village.

AAI will be giving supplies to these two schools. We wish you a very productive and happy school year!

## UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIP APPLICANTS – 2021-2022

We welcome seven new university students this year. Congratulations and good luck to all our students!

Joland Pepushaj – First year, Bachelor, Law

Marin Malotaj – First year, Bachelor, Civil Engineering

Jurida Shaqiri – First year, Bachelor, Nursing/Physiotherapy

Kristjan Pllumaj – First year, Bachelor, Computing

Ernest Ghelaj – First year, Bachelor, Math Education

Edona Velaj – First year, Bachelor, Nursing

Mikloana Ulaj – First year, Bachelor, Business Administration

Mikel Rakaj – Second year, Bachelor, Business Administration

Ledi Marinaj – Second year, Bachelor, English

Xhesika Bakaj – Third year, Bachelor, Finance/Accounting

Ermela Celaj – Third year, Bachelor, Finance/Accounting

Denisa Pepaj – Third year, Bachelor, Math Education

Stela Vulaj – Third year, Bachelor, Math Education

Sentuela Vulaj – Masters, Bio-Chemistry

Juljana Kuqaj – Masters, Finance/Accounting

Gentjan Sterkaj – Masters, Business Administration

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

I've not been to Albania for three years and I miss all of my friends and contacts there. I plan to go this year. However, AAI continues on. In 2021, we came to a decision point. The student populations in "our" schools in Shkrel have declined steadily since I first traveled there in 1992. Our sole mission is improving education in Malsia e Madhe, northern Albania. Do they still need us? Have we still got a part to play? After discussing this with Albanian Representative Marash Rakaj and the AAI Board of Directors, we decided that, yes, we do still fill a niche in northern Albanian education, and the best way forward is to increase our geographical area of operation.

There is another rural, even more isolated school district "over the hill," north of Shkrel. Kelmend School District, mostly in the Cemi Valley has elementary (1-9) schools, in Vukel, Selce, and Vermosh and a twelve-year school in Tamara. There are kindergartens in Tamare and Selce. I contacted the Kelmend School Director about having AAI provide university scholarships, books for their libraries, and kindergarten support. She was most welcoming. I know the Cemi Valley well, having first ridden my bicycle there in 2005, and am excited to have a reason to go there more often, visiting the schools and teachers. It is a beautiful area.

In other news, we have more university students receiving scholarships than ever before, mostly at the University of Shkoder, but two at Tirana University and one at a private business school. We wish them well. As always, our programs only go forward because of our generous donors. I am pleased that we have begun receiving donations from former students and expat Albanians living in the US, indicating a belief in what we do. And of course, a big thanks to our core donors in the US, we continue to make your donations reach programs "on the ground" as AAI has very little overhead.



English classes in Boge (left) and Vrithe (right)



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