

*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

Albania Manager: Marash Rakaj

Executive Dir: Kristina Milaj

Board of Directors:

Mary Alice Seville
Nancy Leeper
Mona Jones-Romansic

**Watch Facebook for
information about
our upcoming
fundraiser. Food,
wine and Albanian
dancing!**

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AAI Competition Art winner



Tamara dancers

From the President

Recently, my wife Terri, AAI secretary (and accountant) said that she didn't know what we could put in our annual newsletter, because our programs haven't changed much over the past few years. After giving it some thought, I concluded that rather than being a negative, this is very much a positive for the villages in which we operate. Villages that we've provided materials to for 20 years. The kindergarten teachers in Vrith, Bogë, Dedaj, Tamarë, Bratosh and Selcë can count upon us every year to provide them with supplies. The librarians in "our" schools can depend upon us for funds to purchase new library books. Graduating high school seniors can depend upon our university scholarship program. We pay for internet connections, bookshelves, printers. A common complaint I've heard many times is that foreign donors come to a village, do a one-off project and then disappear. We are there every year. We are consistent. They can depend upon our help.

Our spreadsheets indicate that our budget surplus has declined for the past several years, and we can no longer ignore this. We will need to replicate last year's donations in order to continue funding our current programs. Please consider us in your annual donations. Because we have no overhead or paid staff, all of your donations go directly to our programs. I pay all of my own expenses when I travel to Albania. We are financially lean.

Our schools can depend upon us because of our donors, our faithful donors. And we thank you. We never thought that we'd still be operating 20 years after our inception. It's only because of you. Shumë faleminderit! (thank you very much!)

MEET OUR NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Kristina Milaj, from the village of Vrith, has been on our board since 2014. We are creating a new position for her to reflect the increasing responsibility she is taking within our organization. Kristina now travels to Albania once a year, and while there, she meets with various school directors and teachers in the village schools and relays information and requests back to the board. She, along with our Albania Manager, Marash Rakaj, provide invaluable services to help us further the education opportunities for the Malësia e Madhe region of northwestern Albania. Kristina has lived in Oregon for fifteen years. She earned her Bachelor's (2014) and Master's (2016) degrees from Oregon State University and currently works for Jacobs as a Structural Engineer. In Kristina's words, "In every interaction, I am reminded of the enthusiasm of our students for knowledge and success, the economic difficulties of their families, and the lack of resources and opportunities to further their education. I hope AAI, with your support, will continue to be the "bridge" that makes possible the continuation and enhancement of many of these children's educational journey, as it did for me many years ago."

NEW KINDERGARTEN IN BRATOSH

New territory but the same story. Bratosh is an isolated village in the formally known Kastrat Municipality, on the west side of the mountains from Shkrel, which for the past 30 years has not had a kindergarten. In 2023 local authorities decided to make a change for the better, opening a new kindergarten and hiring a very energetic and passionate young teacher, Stelina Vulaj, who is a proud AAI alumna and supporter of AAI's mission. Stelina's eagerness to build a welcoming and memorable learning experience for the 11 kindergarten children who have started their educational journey in her hands is obvious. AAI decided to take Bratosh school under its wing by providing kindergarten school supplies, extracurricular library books, maps, and internet access. Stelina, like all the teachers we have helped in Malësia e Madhe, is full of ideas and tries to make every penny we send go further. She is a great advocate for her students and we are the only non-profit she can turn to right now to help fill her classroom with educational development tools and activities.



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