

CARITAS

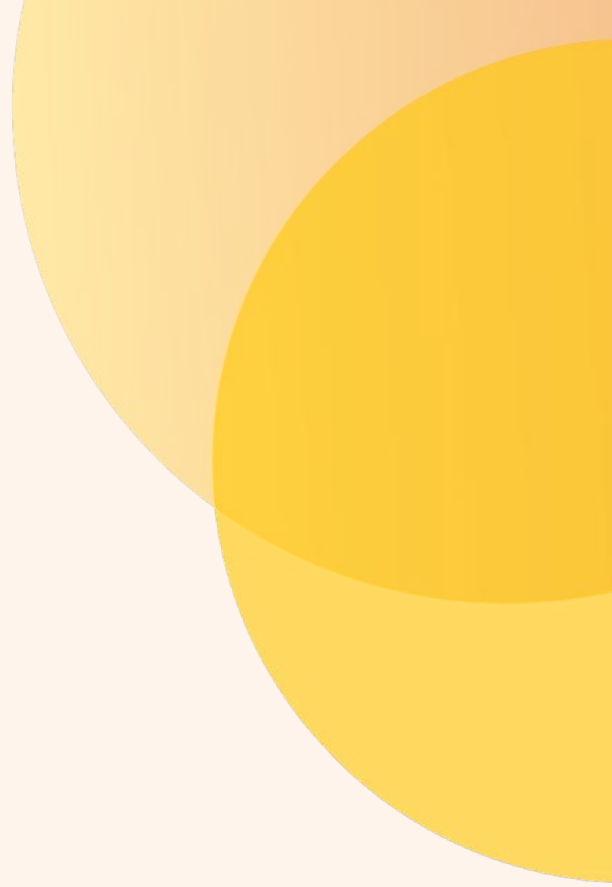
aregak
FOUNDATION



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

2024 was a year of growth, resilience, and transformation at Caritas Aregak Foundation. Through our programs, we continued to empower children and young adults with disabilities, helping them build independence, confidence, and brighter futures.

This report is a celebration of the lives we've touched, the milestones we've achieved, and the faithful support of our donors, partners, and community. Every therapy session, every job placement, every

adapted home, and every joyful moment in our centers was made possible because of you.

As we reflect on this year's progress, we invite you to celebrate these achievements with us and look ahead to another year of breaking barriers, fostering inclusion, and creating opportunities—together.

Sincerely,

Tigranuhi Akopyan

Director, Caritas Aregak Foundation

*Where
Potential
Blossoms*

**MISSION &
VISION**

Margarita, speech therapist

MISSION

Creating an inclusive and nurturing environment where individuals with diverse needs can flourish.

Everything we've learned over the years has shaped who we are today—the challenges, the successes, and the moments of quiet perseverance. As we look ahead, our 2025-2029 strategy builds on these lessons, helping us grow in ways that stay true to our values while expanding our reach.

With a deep commitment to inclusion, dignity, and opportunity, we're taking the next steps—strengthening our programs, creating new possibilities, and ensuring that every child and young adult with disabilities has the support they need to thrive.

VISION

A society where everyone has an equal opportunity to live a full & independent life.

The vision emphasizes the center's aspiration to build a world where all individuals, regardless of their abilities, can access opportunities that allow them to live autonomously, participate fully in their communities, and achieve their personal goals. Our vision underscores the importance of removing barriers and promoting inclusivity in all areas of life.

HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a purple sweater, is smiling and looking down at a young girl in a pink shirt. The girl is reaching up towards a tree with bright yellow autumn leaves. A boy in a blue and black plaid shirt is also looking up at the tree. The scene is outdoors in a park-like setting with sunlight filtering through the leaves.

Marieta, group leader



At Caritas Aregak Foundation, we go beyond providing care—we create pathways for independence, empowerment, and meaningful participation. Through our five key initiatives—Emili Aregak Center, Aregak Bakery & Café, Green Aregak, Aregak Chalet, and our grant-funded special projects—we support children and young adults with disabilities not only through direct services but also by helping them gain the skills, confidence, and opportunities to shape their own futures.

Our work extends beyond individuals, fostering inclusion at the community, regional, and national levels. Whether through therapy and rehabilitation, social enterprises, or advocacy initiatives, we are committed to building a society where every person has the tools to thrive and every community embraces diversity as a strength.

HISTORY

Nestled in Gyumri, Armenia's cultural capital, the Emili Aregak Center stands as a beacon of hope for children and young adults with disabilities. Gyumri, a city shaped by resilience and having a legacy of caring for orphans fleeing from the Armenian genocide, has endured immense challenges, including the devastating 1988 Spitak earthquake. This natural disaster left thousands displaced and reshaped the region's economy, deepening social and economic hardships for vulnerable families. In the early 2000s, a group of occupational therapists recognized the urgent challenges faced by

children with disabilities—social isolation, stigma, and a severe lack of therapy options. Many children remained confined to their homes, unable to access the support and socialization they needed.

Determined to make a change, the Aregak Center was founded in 2008, beginning with just a handful of staff and ten children. As demand grew, so did the need for a barrier-free, fully accessible space. Thanks to the generosity of donors—many from Austria—the Emili Aregak Center opened its doors in 2015, providing specialized therapies, inclusive spaces, and a community where every child



2008

**Aregak Center
Opens**



2015

**Emili Aregak
Center Founded**



2017

**Accessible
Paths Laid**

GYUMRI

The 1988 earthquake had a catastrophic effect on Gyumri.

belongs. Today, the center serves over 200 children and young adults, continuing its mission to provide care, inclusion, and empowerment in a city that understands the power of perseverance. Since establishing the Emili Aregak Center, the Caritas Aregak Foundation has expanded its work to ensure that children who come to our center are heard, seen, and welcomed beyond our walls. One such initiative is Aregak Bakery and Café, Armenia's first cafe to train and employ people with disabilities intentionally, becoming a model of inclusivity in the workplace. In 2022, we opened our doors to visitors of Gyumri and launched Aregak Chalet, our beautiful guesthouse, which also

helps sustain our programs. Right behind our center, we launched an inclusive and sustainable agricultural initiative called Green Aregak which provides hands-on training in green agriculture for people with disabilities, vulnerable youth, and parents of children with special needs.



2018

Aregak Bakery & Cafe Opens



2022

Aregak Chalet Launches



2024

Green Aregak Launches

EMILI AREGAK CENTER



Group leader Armenuhi, Saghatel

At the heart of Caritas Aregak Foundation, the Emili Aregak Center is more than a therapy center—it's a place where children and young adults with disabilities receive personalized support tailored to their unique needs. Every beneficiary follows an Individual Development Plan (IDP), outlining goals that align with their abilities.

Success at Emili Aregak is not measured by a universal standard, but by individual development plans (IDPs) that reflect each beneficiary's specific goals and abilities. For some, success means learning to walk or communicate. For others, especially those with severe disabilities, it means maintaining their emotional well-being, preventing physical decline, and staying engaged with their surroundings.

Through expert care, IDPs, and a strong support network, the center ensures that every child and young adult is treated with dignity and has opportunities to reach their potential.



EVERY STEP FORWARD MATTERS



2024 *in* NUMBERS

172 children (0-18 years old) received **long-term** services, of which

29%

showed **visible progress** recognized not only by specialists and parents but also by their wider environment.

51%

experienced **positive changes** in daily skills, communication, or mobility

20%

of children with **severe disabilities** made measured progress, such as improved **social engagement**, emotional stability, or the prevention of physical decline.

Haykaz, physiotherapist and Katrin

54

children received **short-term** services of which



36%

successfully **transitioned to school** or no longer required therapy

Diagnosis	# of Children
Cerebral Palsy	57
Psychomotor Developmental Disorder	52
Autism	18
Intellectual Development Disorder	16
Global Development Disorder	10
Down Syndrome	7
Genetic Disorders	7
ADHD	2
Central Nervous System Disorder	1
Hearing Disability	1

22

young adults (18+) continue to receive services, including therapy and social programs, helping them maintain and enhance their quality of life.



Grisha, barista at Aregak Bakery & Café

STORIES IMPACT^{of}



"All the positive changes that have happened in Larisa's life and our own have been thanks to Aregak, and we are confident that there will be many more."

LARISA

Walking Toward Independence

Born in 2016 with severe physical and developmental challenges, Larisa's journey at the Emili Aregak Center began with uncertainty. Her mother was hesitant to enroll her in school, fearing she wouldn't fit in or be able to keep up with her peers. But hope and persistence changed everything. Through consistent therapy, parental guidance, and an individualized education plan, Larisa not only

started school but began to thrive. Her physical therapy sessions helped her develop muscle strength and coordination. Initially unable to move independently, she progressed from sitting upright to taking her first assisted steps with a walker.

By early 2024, her progress became even more remarkable—Larisa could stand unassisted, take

8-10 independent steps, and even attempt riding a bicycle. Meanwhile, speech therapy improved her oral motor function, reducing excessive salivation and making communication easier.

Beyond her personal growth, Larisa's story is also one of transformation within her family. Her mother, once fearful of sending her to school, became her biggest advocate, working closely with teachers and specialists to support her development. Today, Larisa's world is expanding, and she is proving that with the right support, possibilities are limitless.

Larisa's mother cannot speak about Emili Aregak without emotion and tears: "We cannot imagine our life without Emili Aregak now. My husband and I have thought a lot about what we would do if Aregak didn't exist. Our life seems to have been divided into two phases—before Aregak and after Aregak. All the positive changes that have happened in Larisa's life and our own have been thanks to Aregak, and we are confident that there will be many more. Through Emili Aregak's knowledgeable specialists, we feel confident and secure in every way. We express our deep gratitude to Emili Aregak, the specialists

"We know there are caring people who are always by our side, who understand us and are ready to support us within their capabilities."

working with us, as well as the sponsors whose efforts bring a ray of light and hope into Larisa's life and the lives of many children like her. May what you do for us return to you twofold. God protect you all."



DAVID & YULIANA

The Power of Family and Community

David, 22, and Yuliana, 18, have faced lifelong challenges due to complex disabilities, including a rare genetic condition that affects their cognitive and physical development. They cannot speak and require full-time care, yet their family has remained steadfast in ensuring they have every opportunity to learn, grow, and engage with the world.

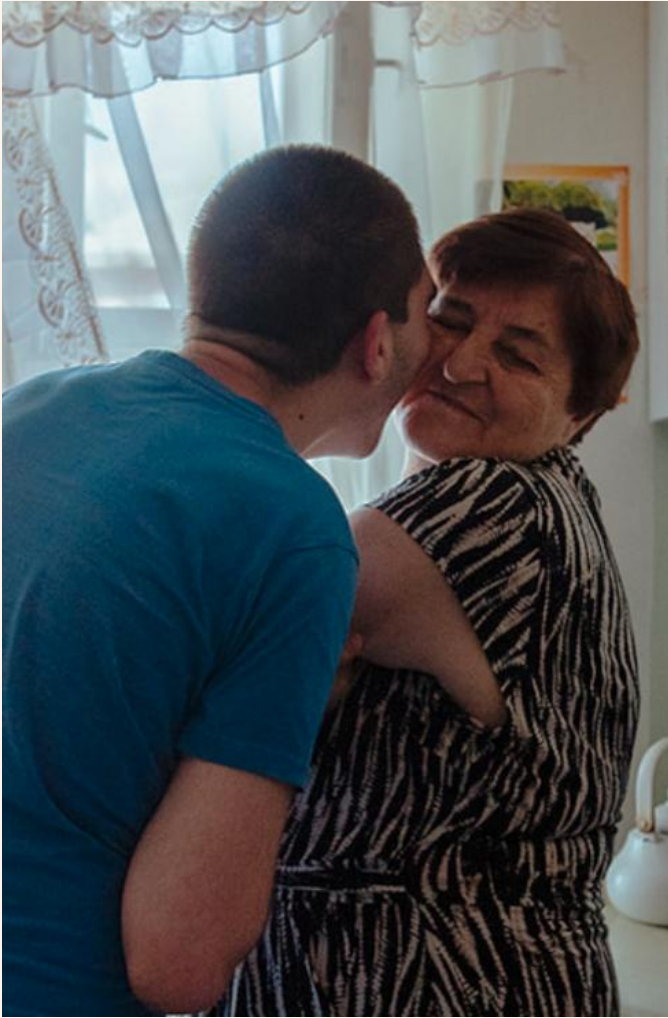
Since 2014, the Emili Aregak Center has been their second home, providing specialized therapy, group activities, and structured care that allow them to develop skills, build social connections, and improve their quality of life.



For David, progress has meant learning self-care skills and gaining independence in daily routines. When he first joined the center, he relied entirely on others for basic tasks. Over time, he learned to feed himself, move independently, and engage in group activities. One of his biggest milestones has been learning to ride a bicycle, a skill that not only strengthens his motor coordination but also brings him immense joy.

For Yuliana, who relies on a wheelchair and has low immunity, the center has provided a safe and inclusive space where she can





But the impact extends beyond David and Yuliana—it has transformed their entire family's life. With the support of the center, their parents are able to work, knowing their children are in a nurturing and structured environment. Their mother, in turn, has become a mentor to other parents navigating similar challenges, sharing her experiences and offering guidance.

As David and Yuliana's mother says:

"Emili Aregak is a warm and loving place where my children feel completely free and happy. The fact that a smile appears on their faces when they hear the name Aregak speaks to the professionalism of its specialists and that they are on the right path."

participate in group physiotherapy, socialize with her peers, and enjoy music—one of her favorite activities.



PATHWAYS *to* EMPLOYMENT



Hovo, waiter at Aregak Bakery & Café

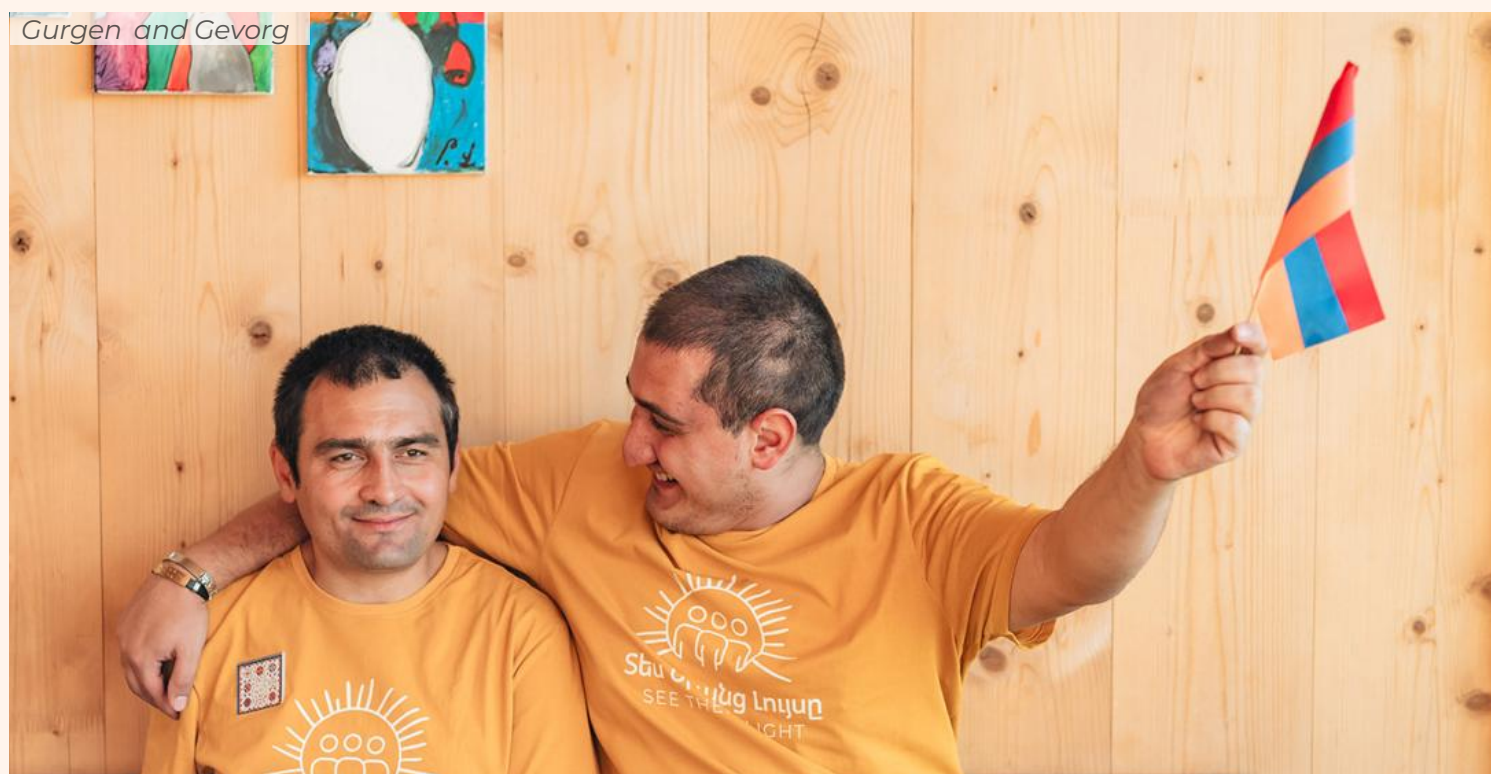
At Caritas Aregak Foundation, we believe that every person has the right to meaningful work and independence. Yet, for many people with disabilities, barriers to employment remain high—from a lack of accessible workplaces to deeply ingrained social stigmas.

That's why we are committed not only to providing skills training and career support but also to advocating for inclusive workplaces at the community, regional, and national levels. We are committed to working with employers across Gyumri and Armenia to create inclusive job opportunities. Together we are changing perceptions, breaking down barriers, and proving that an inclusive workforce is a stronger workforce.

Through Nine Steps to the Labour Market, Aregak Bakery & Café, and Green Aregak, we are proving that employment is not just a possibility for young people with disabilities—it's a right. By equipping them with skills, advocating for inclusive workplaces, and providing real job opportunities, we are paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable workforce.

Because when people with disabilities are given the chance to thrive, our entire community becomes stronger.

Gurgen and Gevorg



9 STEPS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

Paving the Way for Success

Since its launch in 2018, the Nine Steps to the Labour Market program has helped over 50 young people with disabilities gain the skills, confidence, and experience needed to enter the workforce. Designed as a comprehensive pathway to employment, the program provides:

- **Psychosocial Assistance:** Weekly individual and group therapy sessions to support participants in overcoming personal and emotional barriers to employment.
- **Art Therapy Meetings:** Creative workshops that enhance self-expression, personal growth, and emotional well-being.
- **Vocational Orientation Workshops:** Career exploration and vocational training to help participants discover their strengths and develop relevant job skills.
- **Excursions & Employer Visits:** Study tours to cultural sites and workplaces, offering exposure to different job environments and networking opportunities.

By integrating skill-building, mentorship, and direct employer engagement, the program fosters self-worth, social inclusion, and long-term career success for its participants.



Marine, youth training coordinator

SVETLANA

From Job Seeker to Business Owner



“I love my work and am committed to growing my business every day. All of this was made possible by the program, which helped me believe in myself.”

Today, Svetlana is a successful businesswoman and the proud owner of COMPSERVICE. But her journey to success wasn't easy.

After graduating from university, Svetlana struggled to find work. That's when the local employment center in Gyumri recommended the Nine Steps to the Labour Market program. What started as a simple opportunity turned into a life-changing experience.

“The program was incredibly impactful. Not only did I gain valuable knowledge, but I also made lasting friendships and built connections that continue to support me today,” Svetlana shares. Her first job came through the program—a position as an assistant bartender at Aregak Café. This role helped her develop professional skills, gain confidence, and improve her communication

abilities. After seven months of hard work, she was ready for more.

With the tools she gained through the program—including resume writing, job search techniques, and psychological resilience training—Svetlana took the next step in her career. In just a few years, she launched COMPSERVICE, offering services ranging from printing and design to business card creation and air ticket booking. Today, Svetlana serves as an inspiration to many. At Aregak, we are proud to have been the “little sun” that helped her potential blossom.



AREGAK BAKERY & CAFÉ



Waiter Hovo, Manager Diana, Cashier Anush

As Armenia's first cafe to intentionally train and employ people with disabilities, Aregak Bakery & Café strives to model inclusivity in the workplace, where people with and without special needs work together in a supportive environment. Since its founding in 2018, the bakery has provided training, employment, and career pathways for more than 15 young people with disabilities and seven mothers of children with disabilities.

This year, Aregak continued to expand its impact:

- With support from the Via Fund, Armenia's first social enterprise investment fund, **we expanded our patio space** and hired three more employees
- We **strengthened vocational training** for employees to enhance their skills and career prospects
- With support from influencers in the disability community, we **grew our customer and social media follower base**
- We **promoted inclusion** through community engagement, showing local businesses that hiring people with disabilities is not just possible—it's beneficial




Sofia, actress



Seyran, waiter

First and foremost, Aregak Bakery & Café is a business. It just happens to have a social mission that informs all it does! We are not an initiative that people support out of pity; customers come for our warm service and delicious treats. Don't take our word for it – check out our reviews!



 **Stay21393912626**
4 contributions 👍 0 ...

●●●●●

A must-visit place!
Aug 2023 • Friends

Everything is super delicious and the service is great. It's so much better than a lot of bakeries in the center of Yerevan.


The idea behind the place is also phenomenal, they recruit people specifically from the special needs sector and this is the place that proves that all you need to do is create an equal opportunity and the people will thrive.

Although the place is based on such a great idea, you visit again and again simply because those are one of the best pastries you've tried!

[Read less](#) ^

●●●●● Value ●●●●● Service

●●●●● Food

 **MouradShah**
Yerevan • 2 contributions 👍 1 ...

●●●●●

Yumm!
Apr 2021 • None

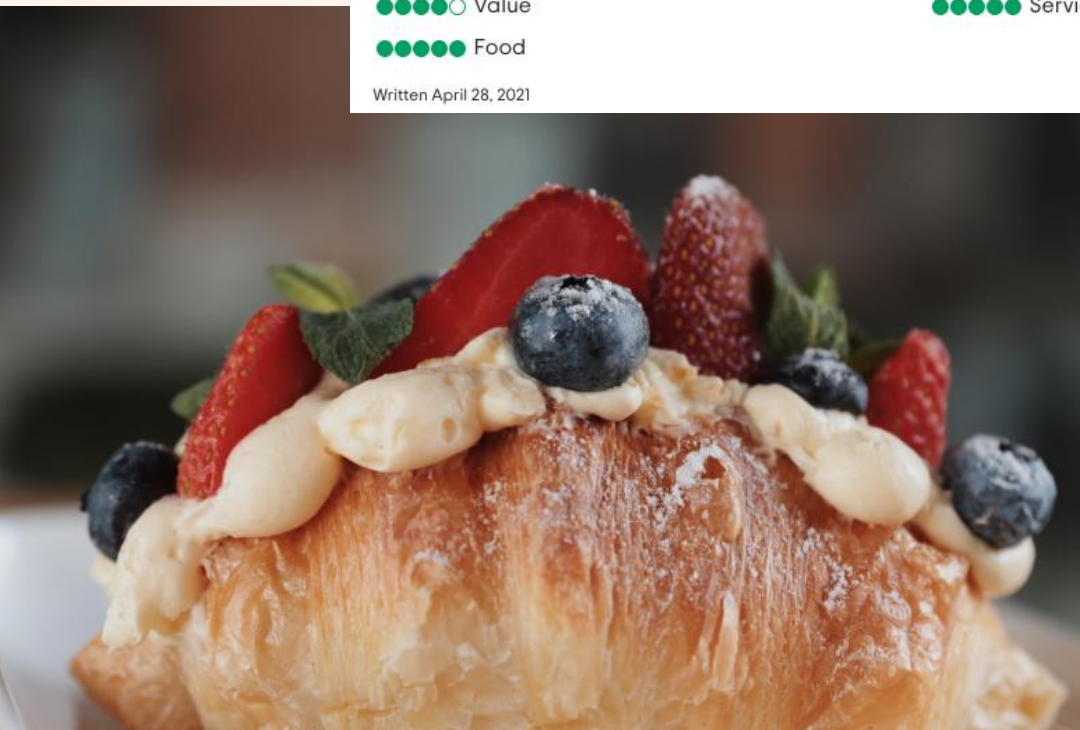
Went inside by curiosity, bought two loafs of "sev hatz" and an apple turnover to test. I and 3 friends tasted the village bread on the way out and we devoured it rated it as the best bread we've ever tasted; the next day we tasted the day old bread reheated in the oven with butter, and it still maintained our rating. Can't wait to go back to Gyumri for more!

[Read less](#) ^

●●●●○ Value ●●●●● Service

●●●●● Food

Written April 28, 2021



VIOLETA

Growing Up with Aregak

Violeta's family first learned about Emili Aregak Center through a relative. Around 14 years ago, Violeta began her journey with the center and it has been a transformative experience.

In the beginning, Violeta primarily worked with a psychologist and attended group therapy sessions. As time went on, she expanded her activities to include dance therapy with Olya and gymnastics with volunteer Ani. During her final year at the center, she also received speech therapy services.

As she grew older, Violeta gradually stopped attending Emili Aregak as a participant. But her connection to the center didn't end there—she soon returned as a volunteer, giving back to the community that had supported her for so many years.

In 2021, Violeta's relationship with Emili Aregak evolved further when she began interning at Aregak Bakery & Café for six months, which eventually led to employment there.



Her family has witnessed remarkable changes in Violeta throughout this journey. As her sister Aida explains: "She was very shy and reserved, she didn't like meeting new people but now that's so easy for her. Plus she earns her own money and has learned how to control her finances."



Hambo, campus dog

AREGAK CHALET

Green Aregak graduates

In 2022, we decided to open up our beautiful space to visitors and launched Aregak Chalet—a place where hospitality supports a greater cause. More than just a guesthouse, the chalet is a social enterprise that helps fund our programs, creating opportunities for young people with disabilities while promoting inclusive and sustainable tourism in Gyumri.

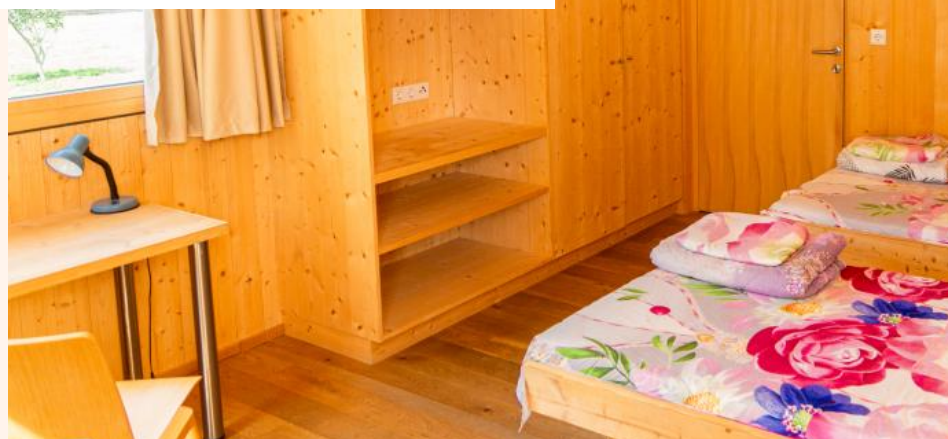
Since then, Aregak Chalet has welcomed guests from near and


far, offering a warm and peaceful retreat while directly supporting our mission. In 2024, we continued to grow—hosting more visitors, strengthening financial sustainability, and raising awareness about inclusion through every stay.

What started as a way to share our space has become a meaningful initiative, where each guest's visit helps build a more inclusive future.

“The place is truly peaceful and relaxing with beautiful views. The cabin is built very well and is highly insulated with a workstation with an award-winning view. Above all, this place supports the amazing and noble cause of supporting children with disabilities at Emili Aregak Center. I would've loved to extend my stay for one more day, but the place was already booked, unfortunately. I will most definitely book this place again!”

- Nasser





Launched in 2024, Green Aregak is an innovative project that introduces young people with disabilities to green agriculture—not only as a career path but as a way to drive environmental change.

GREEN AREGAK

What started as an effort to revitalize a neglected plot of land has now become a thriving agricultural training center. Over the past seven years, we've transformed what was once a construction dump into a vibrant green space with:

- **Berry bushes and more than 70 fruit trees** *[thank you – Birthright Armenia, Twinz Eyewear and many individual donors]*
- **Accessible pathways** and a small training greenhouse *[thank you – Embassy of the Czech Republic in Armenia, Hovnanian Foundation]*
- **A 900 sq. meter passive solar greenhouse** with an accompanying green agricultural training center, built in 2024, to expand training opportunities *[thank you – Austrian Development Agency, Caritas Austria]*
- **An accessible playground**, a long-awaited dream that was finally realized this year— providing a safe, inclusive space for children of all abilities *[Stirling Foundation, LDS Charities]*



Green Aregak graduates

In 2024, 15 young people and parents of children with disabilities participated in **theoretical and practical courses in green agriculture**, preparing them for sustainable employment. The program includes hands-on learning at Aregak's greenhouse and study visits to other agricultural sites across Armenia.



Berry Festival: Cultivating Skills and Community

During the annual Berry Festival in Haykavan village, young people from the Green Aregak program proudly showcased their freshly grown produce, pressed juices, and handmade goods. Visitors had the chance to purchase apricots, red currants, juices, and other products, giving participants a real-world entrepreneurial experience.



GRANTS & SPECIAL INITIATIVES

Grigor, volunteer Susik, Katrin

Our work extends beyond the walls of our center. Whenever we have the opportunity, we design and implement projects that foster inclusion, address urgent challenges, and create lasting impact. Whether by ensuring access to essential services, advocating for inclusive education, or supporting displaced families and veterans, we strive to respond to the needs of our community in meaningful ways. Here are some of our key initiatives from 2024.

Barrier Free Safety

48,000 €

Jul 2023 - Oct 2024

Funded by the German Federal Foreign Office in partnership with Dialogue for Understanding, this project supported families displaced by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, with a focus on those with disabled members. Through home visits and needs assessments, we have been able to identify and address urgent challenges faced by families living in temporary shelters and rental housing.

Key interventions included:

- **Providing essential humanitarian assistance**, such as bedding, hygiene kits, and winter clothing.

- **Offering psychological support** through group sessions and self-support groups for veterans and disabled women to help them cope with trauma and stress.
- Ensuring disabled children from displaced families receive **professional therapy services**, offering them the care and stability they need.

This initiative ensured that some of the most vulnerable members of our community are not left behind.

This project was instrumental in offering help to our fellow Artakhtsi families during the September 2023 mass exodus. The program allowed us to help our beneficiaries, especially the children to have overcome stress and communication difficulties, make friends, and enjoy attending the center. This is confirmed by both the center's specialists and the parents.

Among these stories, the case of siblings Margarita and Gurgun Hakobyan deserves special attention.

Margarita is 16 years old, diagnosed with moderate intellectual disability, and receives professional services from a psychologist and art therapist at the center. When

first admitted, she was very shy, sad, with a detached gaze, unwilling to do anything, and uncommunicative.

After about a year of working with a psychologist, the changes in Margarita are evident, as confirmed by both her parents and other specialists at the center. She has now become more sociable, independent, has improved self-esteem, and freely expresses her opinions.

Recently, she has even started coming to and leaving the center on her own. By her own wish, she enrolled in the culinary department of a vocational school, enjoys learning, and has made friends.

Gurgen is 13 years old and has epilepsy. He attends pottery and felt-making group classes, as well as individual sessions with a psychologist. He initially lacked motivation and desire to perform any activity, was unable to follow instructions, showed negativism, and reluctantly attended the center, not wanting to participate in the classes.

As a result of the work done, Gurgen has shown reduced negativism, now follows instructions, and completes his tasks. He can accomplish short-term goals and shows initiative in performing certain activities. Work with them at the center continues, and they will soon be included in group sessions.



Social worker Piruza, displaced women from Artsakh

Inclusive Green Training Center

63,345 €

Feb - Oct 2024

With funding from the Japanese Embassy in Armenia, we enhanced our Green Aregak project and finished the construction of the training center adjacent to the greenhouse. It is now renovated and furnished with the necessary equipment to train and employ people with disabilities in green agricultural practices and prepare them to enter the labor market.

By integrating environmental sustainability with vocational training, we are creating long-term employment pathways while promoting eco-friendly practices.



InclusEDU Pathways: Empowering Staff for Student Success

\$15,000

Oct 2024 - Feb 2025

Education should be accessible to all, yet vocational colleges in the Shirak region often lack the training and resources needed to accommodate students with disabilities. This project was designed to bridge that gap by equipping educators with the tools, knowledge, and strategies needed to foster an inclusive learning environment.

The initiative engaged vocational colleges across Shirak, training teachers and administrators from each participating college. Through preparation, training sessions, and assessments, the project not only helped schools become more inclusive but also raised awareness among people with disabilities and their families about the opportunities available to them.

Manushak and Kirby, actor

A photograph of a man and a young girl laughing together. The man, on the right, has a wide, joyful expression with his mouth open in a laugh. The girl, on the left, is also laughing and looking towards the man. She has her hair in a ponytail with a white lace bow. The man is wearing a black t-shirt. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an outdoor setting with other people. A large yellow circular graphic is overlaid on the bottom left, containing the text 'HEART-WARMING MOMENTS'.

HEART- WARMING MOMENTS

Beyond our programs and initiatives, some of the most unforgettable moments at Caritas Aregak Foundation happen in the connections we build, the kindness we receive, and the joy we share. This year, we saw firsthand how small acts of generosity can change lives, how inclusion can take many forms, and how a sense of community can transform even the most difficult realities.

From new partnerships and creative events to special opportunities for children and families, these moments remind us why we do what we do. Here are some of the highlights that made 2024 extra special.

Rod's Heroes: Changing Lives, One Family at a Time

od's Heroes is an incredible organization with a mission to support families around the world who care for children with special needs. Their goals are powerful: changing the stereotypes surrounding disability, finding forever families for orphaned children with disabilities, and providing vital resources to families in need. In 2023, through a shared

network of connections, the Rod's Heroes team traveled to Armenia and visited our Emili Aregak Center. They were deeply inspired by our work, and soon after, they proposed a partnership. We were thrilled about the idea!

In October 2024, we joined forces to host a special event celebrating children of all abilities. We invited not only our families but also the children from the Gyumri Children's Home, an orphanage for children with special needs. Sadly, many of these children were abandoned by their parents due to the challenges of raising a child with a disability.

This heartbreaking reality affects many children with disabilities in Armenia. In fact, there are three state orphanages in the country—one in Gyumri and two in Yerevan—dedicated to children in this situation. It's a reality that underscores the vital importance of our foundation, where we offer unwavering support to families who need it most and work to empower young people to reach their potential. Caring for children with disabilities is a 24/7 job, and we're here to ensure no family has to face it alone.



Varduhi and the moms' choir

The event itself was a day of fun and connection! **We hosted a vibrant harvest festival complete with apple picking, strudel-making, juggling, live music, a talent show, and so much more.**

Local media outlets came to cover the event, and the talent show highlighted the incredible potential of children with disabilities, showing that they are far more capable than society often gives them credit for.

One of the most meaningful parts of the event was a service project where volunteers **painted the walls of the orphanage**, giving each floor a different contrasting color to aid children with visual impairments.

In addition to the celebrations, Rod's Heroes also held an important advocacy portion of the event in Yerevan, where we invited leaders from other NGOs. This gathering was a powerful opportunity to raise awareness about Rod's Heroes' mission and

encourage future collaborations. The advocacy session helped inform local organizations about Rod's Heroes' work, fostering connections and promoting partnerships to further support families and children with disabilities in Armenia.

But the excitement didn't stop there—perhaps the most thrilling moment came when the film crew of the **TV show Making Good traveled all the way from America to film an episode of their TV show at Aregak!** The show focuses on nonprofit organizations making a global impact. Thanks to encouragement from Rod's Heroes, Making Good decided to highlight our work as the central focus of one episode. They captured beautiful moments at Aregak Bakery, Emili Aregak, and the orphanage. They also interviewed families, staff, and others involved with our foundation. The episode is set to air in May 2025, and we can't wait to share our story with the world!

Captivating Concerts

In 2023, the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan launched a partnership with Emili Aregak to **host annual cultural events that highlight American music and traditions.**

This collaboration continues to grow, and for the second year in a row, the Embassy selected Aregak as the venue for their Gyumri performance! This time, the spotlight was on Sihasin, a Native American brother-sister duo whose captivating performance featured a blend of folk songs, along with vibrant dance presentations. The children in attendance were enthralled, especially by the traditional hoop dance.

Later in the summer, we had the honor of hosting Marc Toureille during his first visit to Armenia. Marc, an Armenian-American hip-hop artist and therapist, is known for his work supporting children with special needs at the Floortime Center near Washington, D.C. During his visit, he led a Floortime therapy workshop for our staff, sharing his expertise and passion for therapeutic methods. But the **kids enjoyed his hip-hop performance most of all.** Marc rapped his new song, "Honoring the HYE," a tribute to Armenian culture, and the kids fell in love with the genre. We are so grateful for Marc's continued support, as he donates a portion of the proceeds from his music sales to benefit our therapeutic programs!



Group music therapy performance

Bathroom Renovations

There are a lot of challenges when it comes to raising a child with special needs in Gyumri. One of the most basic is toileting. Bathrooms in Gyumri – especially in old houses – have bathtubs, narrow doors and mold problems. For children with mobility difficulties, this can be hugely complicated and a big stressor for families. This is one of the reasons that we are so glad to provide accessible bathrooms and bathing services for children who need it most at Emili Aregak.

Another way we've been helping recently is through bathroom renovations. We have renovated bathrooms for ten families with our amazing donors' support!



Trip of a Lifetime

Two years ago, some of our staff members had a vision: to give the parents of children with special needs a well-deserved getaway to recharge and reconnect. Thanks to the incredible support of Tufenkian Heritage Hotels, this dream has become a reality!

Mr. Tufenkian, moved by our mission, generously offered pro-bono stays across his stunning resorts in Armenia. We simply have to cover costs of transportation and caregivers (usually \$100-\$150 per weekend).

Since 2023, we've already sent nearly 20 couples on respite weekends. One of the most touching stories is that of Narine and Vahan. They have two children with severe genetic disabilities, and

after years of caregiving, they had never had a vacation just the two of them, or even stayed in a hotel.

Narine and Vahan returned home recharged and better able to care for Davit and Yuliana, which is a 24/7 job. The short break meant the world to them.

"For years, our bodies have been weary, longing for rest. We never imagined receiving such a wonderful gift—one that would allow us to forget our worries, surrender to the soothing sounds of the Debed River, and finally relax."



Rubik's Cubes for All

In July 2024, Emili Aregak proudly hosted Armenia's first inclusive Rubik's Cube competition, a groundbreaking event held with the support and blessing of Mayis Jraghatspanyan, the energetic official representative of the World Cube Association in Armenia.

The competition saw over 50 participants, including neurodiverse teens and individuals with other disabilities who competed in specially adapted categories to ensure everyone could take part. The event was a huge success, drawing participants from all over Armenia, including Yerevan, and putting Emili Aregak on the map as a hub for inclusive activities. This exciting event was made possible by a \$1,000 grant from the Awesome Foundation. We won the June 2024 pitch competition for the best "awesome idea."



Summer Camp

Alongside the group Faith & Light, we worked to ensure that children with special needs in Gyumri – many from Emili Aregak – had the opportunity to experience summer camp at Armenia's beautiful Lake Sevan. Due to limited opportunities and funding, these children had previously missed out on a chance to relax in an inclusive, supportive environment. This year, they had a memorable summer vacation, filled with fun activities and care from dedicated staff. We appreciate all donations that made this experience possible.



Katrin, mom Luiza

STAFF



Our work is powered by the dedication, compassion, and unwavering commitment of our team. Many of our staff members have been with us since the very beginning, shaping Caritas Aregak into the inclusive and nurturing space it is today. They are more than just specialists—they are mentors, caregivers, and advocates, walking alongside each child and family on their journey toward growth and independence.

Every success story at Aregak is, in many ways, a reflection of the people behind the scenes—those who give their time, expertise, and heart to ensure that every child is seen, heard, and supported. Their dedication is not just professional—it is deeply personal.

VENERA

Reciprocal Growth

As I reflect on the pivotal moments that have shaped my professional and personal growth, I often find myself looking back to a time when I was still a young girl, brimming with curiosity but lacking experience. I boldly took on the challenge of helping a boy with a complex swallowing disorder—he had no words and no way of positioning himself for eating. I offered my support, spending over an hour feeding him and talking with him, using smiles to signal “yes” or “no” in our silent exchange. It was then that I realized how deep the human connection could go, even without spoken language. That day marked the beginning of a journey that would span years, eventually turning me into the primary caregiver for many children with complex and multiple disorders. The responsibility for Hrayr, a boy whose life was deeply intertwined with mine, became a defining experience. Despite my youth, my emotional struggles, and my lack

of formal training, **Hrayr's trust in me helped shape my identity as a future mother, a specialist, and as a citizen of Armenia.** Now, as I mourn his passing nearly a year ago, I reflect on how Hrayr, in his 26 years, transformed not only my life but also the lives of so many others. Through his spirit, he built bridges—between me and my education, between my family and the world, and between us all and the light that we often fail to see. I carry the lesson he taught me: Every child is a sun, let's just give him or her the space to shine.



David's story is another chapter in this ongoing journey of self-discovery and learning. When I first began working with him, I had no clear idea of how to help him. David has an undifferentiated hereditary disorder, which left him without speech and with severe developmental challenges. I was unsure where to start, feeling as if I

was standing at the edge of an uncharted territory. A few months into my work, a specialist visited our center. I presented David's case and sought guidance, but even the expert was unsure of how to proceed, suggesting we start with something as simple as tearing up a piece of paper together. This advice, though small, ignited a fire in me to keep searching for ways to help. Two years later, I met the same specialist again, and when I showed him how far David had come—how we had developed communication through small, consistent steps—I was met with admiration and praise. **This moment became a turning point, propelling me toward constant self-education and the pursuit of new approaches in my work.**

Today, I am pursuing a master's degree at the Pedagogical University, always seeking ways to improve and adapt. David, once unable to communicate his needs, now signals when he wants to use the bathroom, rides a bike, and even goes up and down stairs with ease. This progress has rippled through his family, fostering trust and deepening our shared commitment to his growth. It is a joy to witness these changes and to know that, together, we continue to shape David's world one small victory at a time.

MEDIA



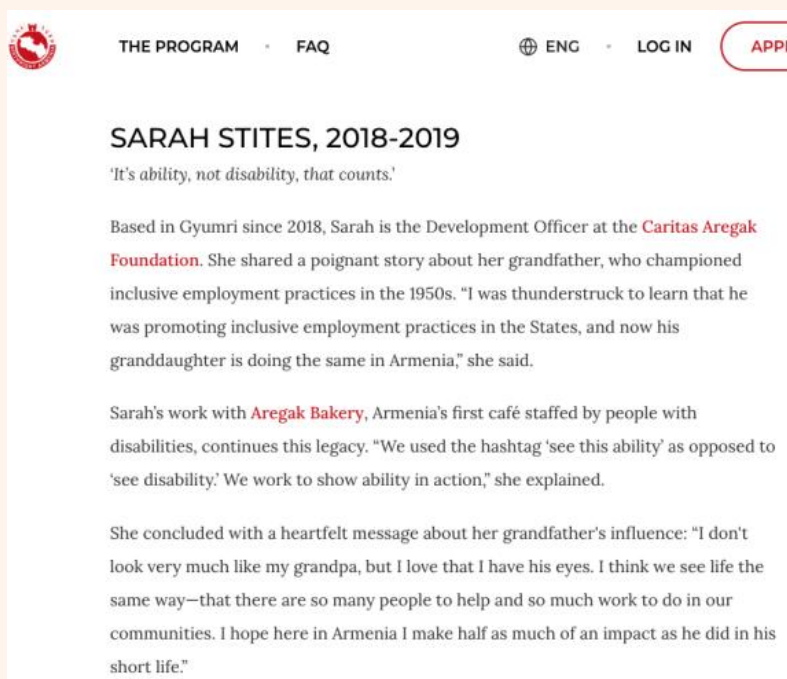
Throughout 2024, our work and mission reached wider audiences through media coverage, storytelling, and advocacy efforts. From news features to social media highlights, we shared the impact

of inclusion, empowerment, and community-driven change. Each story helped raise awareness, celebrate our beneficiaries, and inspire more people to support a society where everyone belongs.

Aregak Bakery & Cafe: Breaking Barriers, Building Opportunities



Showcased by
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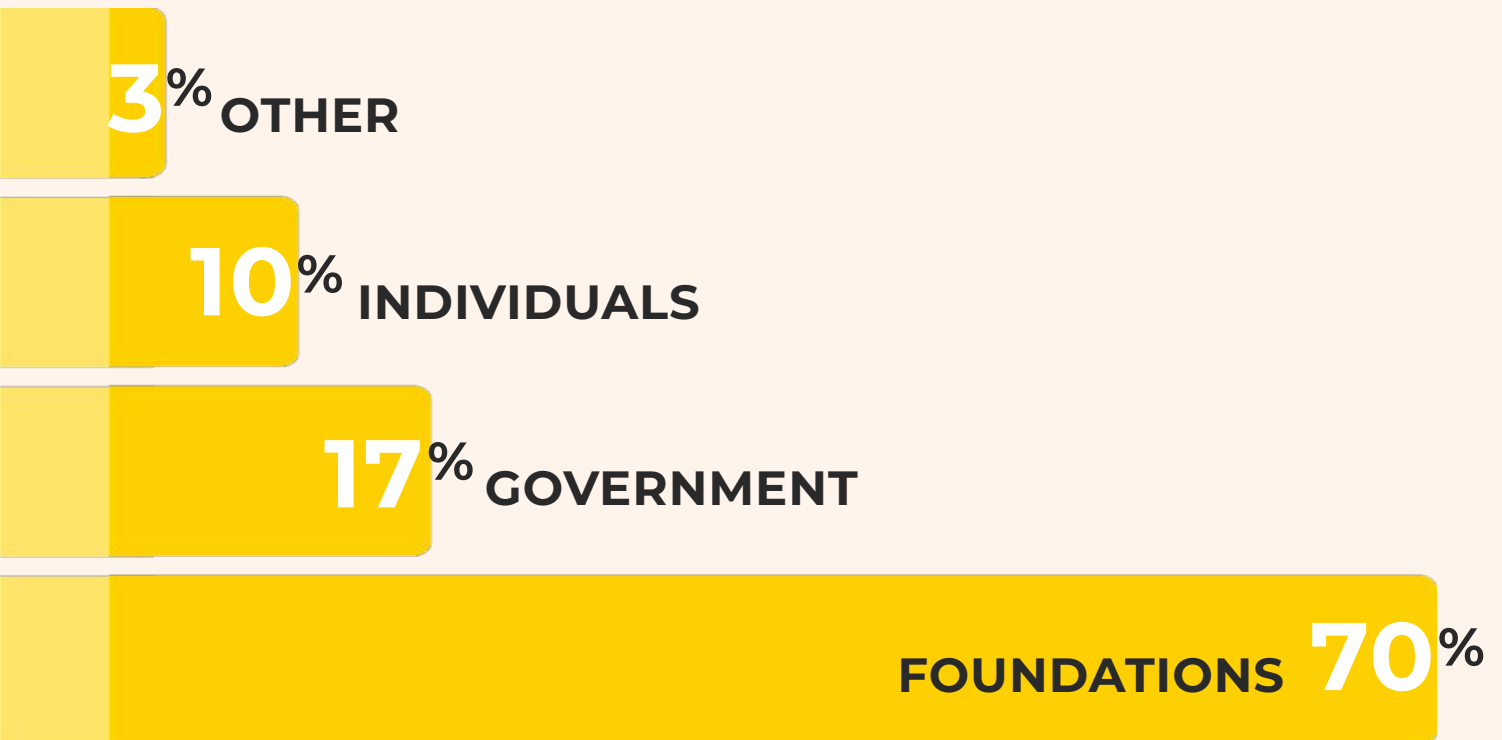


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FINANCES

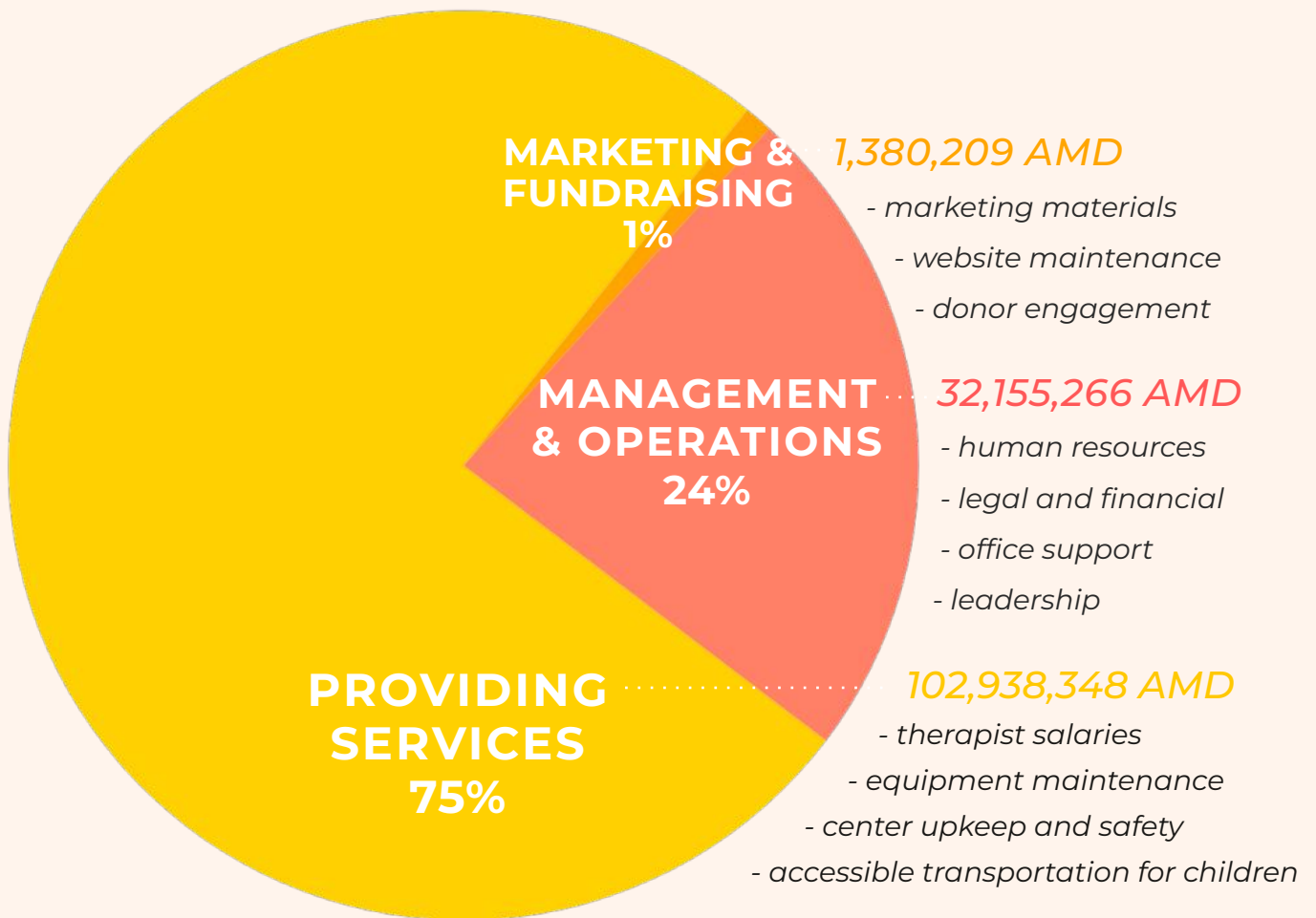
Every contribution to Caritas Aregak Foundation is used with care and purpose. In this section, we share a transparent look at the funds we received in 2024 and how they were allocated—from therapy services and staff salaries to accessibility improvements, social enterprises, and special projects. Behind every number is a story of impact, and we thank you for making this work possible.

WHERE WE GET OUR SUPPORT





HOW WE USE THE SUPPORT



None of what we do would be possible without the generosity and trust of our donors. Every therapy session, every job opportunity, and every moment of joy at Caritas Aregak is fueled by your support. Whether through grants, individual contributions, or in-kind donations, our donors help turn vision into reality—creating meaningful change in the lives of children, young adults, and families. Thank you for believing in us and in a future where inclusion is a reality for all.



DONORS



"Everything about Aregak makes me smile!"

NATHALIE

The Beauty of Giving Back

There's a jar and a little note on Nathalie Stiegler's desk at her personal styling studio in downtown Vienna. It says "Emils Kleine Sonne," or "Emili Aregak" in German. Being half Austrian and half Armenian, Nathalie had a "full-circle" experience when she discovered our foundation through the friend of a friend (our former volunteer Franz). As many of you know, Aregak was founded as a collaborative project between Armenian Caritas and Caritas Vorarlberg in 2008. "Everything about Aregak makes me smile," Nathalie shares. "It starts from the name, which means 'little sun' in Armenian." Nathalie first visited us in summer 2024. "I get emotional

when I talk about it," she says. "The staff welcomed me so warmly. And thanks to their love, children with special needs get the chance at a better, more integrated life."

But even before her visit, Nathalie jumped into action. She actively involved her clients! They contribute generously to her donation jar, a nod to their faith in Nathalie and appreciation for her big heart (and five-star rated services). Those donations add up and Nathalie is able to send a considerable sum toward our therapy programs!

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