



# Helping Vulnerable Youth in Kazakhstan

## Challenge

Much of Turkistan's population in Kazakhstan consists of young people, many of whom have left their hometowns to study at the city's two universities and five colleges. Youth in Turkistan are particularly vulnerable to radical religious movements which are active in the area. Recent recruiting drives have urged youth to separate themselves from parents who aren't religious enough. Turkistan has little to offer youth in terms of productive and constructive ways to spend their time, and adults are openly concerned about both the recent upsurge in the drug trade and the intensification of extremist activity among youth.



Photo: ACDI/VOCA Staff

A young girl models her traditional costume at one of Turkistan's newly refurbished youth centers.

## Initiative

USAID helped Turkistan communities identify and resolve localized sources of conflict. Two separate municipalities of Turkistan decided that the best way to confront their conflict was to re-invigorate the youth centers that had been neglected since the country's independence.

In one municipality, USAID renovated the heating system for a sports-based youth center, and the community pitched in with in-kind and cash contributions from the government and private citizens. In another municipality, USAID helped procure sewing machines, and sound and dancing equipment so that children could learn both traditional and modern music and dancing.

Members of the community helped to refurbish and repaint the building, make costumes for performances, and offer courses in chess, dancing, music, and other extracurricular activities. The building and the rehearsal room were finished in time for the children's end of school festivities.

## Results

By creating a positive environment for more than 1,400 youth in Turkistan, USAID offers a creative and healthy alternative to destructive behavior, and is helping keep the city's social fabric intact. The rehabilitation of the city's youth centers, including previously abandoned buildings lacking programs to occupy youth in any meaningful way, has provided a healthy outlet for city and suburban youth, who continue to sign up to join teams and take courses.

***"So many have signed up that we can hardly keep them all busy."***

***-Sara Tanatarova, Community Investment Council (CIC) Chairperson***

