



SUCCESS STORY

Scholar Advocates for Kosovars with Ostomies

Leadership training brings greater impact to civic causes



Arta Uka, far left, and other recipients of the Advancing Leaders Fellowship Award

Photo by: USAID - World Learning

“I’ve already met with the minister of health and he has been very supportive”—Arta Uka, head of the Kosovo Ostomy Association.

March, 2017—As head of the Kosovo Ostomy Association, Arta Uka works to help Kosovars who have ostomies—artificial openings in an organ of the body created during a surgical operation. She is currently working on a project to inform citizens about the condition with leaflets and brochures in Albanian and Serbian. She also plans to organize doctor lectures on how to best live with an ostomy.

Uka’s participation in a USAID leadership program helped get her where she is today.

In 2015, Uka finished a semester’s worth of credits at the University of California Berkley, earning a professional certificate in Management and Leadership under USAID’s

Transformational Leadership Program—Scholarships and Partnerships. The program is implemented by World Learning and co-funded by the Government of Kosovo.

“My experience at Berkley was absolutely incredible,” says Uka. “Both academically and socially. The way of life there is very inspirational. If it hadn’t been for my experience with the Transformational Leadership Program and my time at Berkley, I wouldn’t have been able to apply for Advancing Leaders Fellows.”

In 2016, Uka became one of World Learning’s seven Advancing Leaders Fellows worldwide. The fellowship, which is open to all alumni of World Learning programs, provides training in social innovation and project management and leadership as well as providing grants and mentor networks to selected high-achieving fellows who have social innovation projects in their home countries. In the initial stage, Uka was one of around 50 people who were selected for the two-month online portion of the fellowship with online lectures and webinars on project management and leadership.

“Every week we had to submit homework, and this was all done to prepare us for writing a social innovation project proposal to help our community,” says Uka. “Because we would peer-review each other’s homework assignments, I learned a great deal from my competition and classmates. My classmates’ projects focused on providing shelter, nutrition and help with abuse.”

At the end of those two months, the “survivors” who completed all assignments were qualified to apply for the Washington, D.C. portion of the Advancing Leaders Fellowship. Uka was accepted into the fellowship and her project proposal was to further her work to help Kosovars with ostomies.

“The initial idea started from my mother,” she explains. “My mother had colon cancer and we had to go through a lot of researching to help us manage.”

Following her mother’s diagnosis, Uka started learning about the illness and founded the association. Her subsequent participation in the scholarship and fellowship programs has strengthened her ability to advocate for the association’s cause.

“The goal is to have all Advancing Leaders Fellows complete their projects by April. My personal target is to have a website, conduct two focus groups, and start producing the information brochures by that time,” says Uka. “I’ve already met with the minister of health and he has been very supportive.” One hundred beneficiaries are expected to benefit from Uka’s project by April.

Uka has already received help and donations from London (which donated bags in the past), Luxemburg and the United States for her association. All her work has been purely voluntary.

USAID’s five-year Transformational Leadership Program—Scholarships and Partnerships began in 2014 and strives to develop a cadre of leaders that will drive change in priority economic, political and social areas in Kosovo.