

My name is Jeremy, a former student and teacher of the KIDS FIRST Swimming program. Currently I am a Peace Corps Volunteer serving in Azerbaijan, a small, primarily Muslim country wedged between Russia and Iran. It is an oil-rich country struggling to reengage with the world after about 70 years of Soviet rule. I primarily teach English at a local school which houses people displaced persons from a war from the early 90s; now that it is summer, I have been working at a local Sports center.

Because I am a Volunteer and cannot accept money for my activities, I work as an assistant swim teacher. When I first came to help teach the swim lessons, there were about 40 children splashing and thrashing in the pool at the same time! I couldn't believe my eyes and my lifeguard instinct was in overtime. I luckily convinced the local swim teacher to split the children into groups where I would take half. Now I teach about 25 kids a week in separate groups, trying to recreate a KIDS FIRST atmosphere as humanly possible. I have been teaching the kids from the beginning, starting with blowing bubbles, streamline (we call it arrow form!), and kicking. Teaching kicking has been hard due to lack of kickboards, but we manage. Now we are working on arms and breathing, and I find myself using all the same drills I learned as your student. Already, the improvement is apparent and the kids feel great about their new skills. For them, this is extremely important because many are displaced due to the war from surrounding regions, with little money and little opportunity. Swimming is more than just fun; it is a principal means of increasing their confidence and physical fitness.

I just wanted to take this time to write you an email of a success story of KIDS FIRST halfway around the world. The children are benefiting hugely from my lessons, and it goes to show that your techniques work regardless of culture, religion or race. Sag olun! (Azeri for thank you!)