

The Lowedown

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Sharing Christ with J-Lo, Jim Carrey & Kristi Yamaguchi--Well, Sort Of

One of our objectives as a ministry is to have a world influence. This summer we saw 2 of our staff lead a team to Shymkent, Kazakhstan. The goal of the team, which included 3 UC Davis students was to lay a foundation for a long-term self-sustaining ministry. The following is the report from our staff:

"Hi, my name is Jennifer," the young Kazakh woman introduced herself. "Jennifer Lopez. And this is my friend Kristi--Kristi Yamaguchi."

At first, we chuckled, thinking these young women were just star-struck college students you might find on any campus in the United States. But we soon realized that they really did think of themselves as J-Lo and Kristi, to the point of changing their appearances and insisting we not use their real names when talking with them! And they weren't alone.

"Don't you think Tolgot is a lot like Jim Carrey?" Iden asked one evening when he and his friend dropped by. "He watches Jim Carrey movies all day to practice his English. Don't you think he is Jim Carrey?"

In a city where everyone seems to be unemployed, learning fluent English can be a Kazakh's ticket to a high-paying job as a translator. One first-year college student who did some translating for us at the train station grinned with enthusiasm as her childhood dream--translating for an American

--came true.

Surprised? Most people would assume that all Muslim countries are hostile towards Americans. We found the opposite to be true--our otherwise ordinary team had celebrity status everywhere we went. For most Kazakhs, faith seems to be more an ethnic identity than a spiritual worldview. In fact, we found few Kazakhs who could even name the 5 pillars of

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Islam, much less any who actually practiced them.

That leaves for a very surprising spiritual climate--the worldview held by most university students in Shymkent has been imported straight from the postmodern, relativistic campuses of America (thanks, no doubt, to Hollywood).

"God is Allah, Jesus is Mohammed, the Bible is the Koran," we would hear students say time and again. "It doesn't matter what you believe, it's all the same."

Our challenge then was to help these university students—who will become the next generation of leaders in central Asia - discover that Christianity and Islam are very

different and that choosing to place one's faith in Christ does not change a person's ethnic, cultural or national identity.

After six weeks of intense, cross-cultural ministry, we had put together a database of over 160 students from 4 universities who are interested in spiritual conversations about Christianity and saw 6 Kazakhs make decisions to begin a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ!

"This [the 2002 Shymkent Summer Project] was the most successful summer project we've ever had in this part of the world," said "Greg," who directs our ministry affairs in central Asian countries.

Although our team has just returned to the United States, a 1-year STINT team has just arrived in Shymkent to follow-up on the groundwork we have laid. This team includes two UC Davis graduates, Tricia and Rachel.

Much prayer and hard work still must be done, but we have taken significant steps on the way to building a self-sustaining campus ministry in Shymkent Kazakhstan--the gateway to Central Asia.

Please pray for the ministry in Shymkent and for the STINT team there. Pray also for our ministry at UC Davis as we reach students for Christ and seek to send them to the world!