

## RESOURCE SHEET 1

**ROBIN SOLOMON TALKS ABOUT HER LIFE IN KAZAKHSTAN\***

I live in Kokshetau, Kazakhstan, a city in the north of the country, near the Russian border. I write letters home to Texas describing my work in this town of about 130,000 people, where I work as an English teacher and jack-of-all-trades. The educational system of Kazakhstan has a lot to be proud of, but I work with English teachers on improving the quality and breadth of instruction. In my own classroom and through teacher-training seminars, I show people how to teach English, health, leadership, and more, trying to give young people tools to improve their lives and the future of their country. Besides teaching, I lead a girl's club, work with the English library in the city, volunteer in an orphanage, and organize summer camps, among many other things. One of my most important jobs is being "the American," who is a constant source of information and support for people in Kokshetau who have ideas to improve their community.

And what do I write home about this country? Kazakhstan is a fascinating place of contrasts and bitter history. The country and its people lost a great deal when the Soviet Union ended in 1991, and since then, they have struggled to build a prosperous nation from the meager remains of the great Russian empire. Russians and Kazakhs live peacefully side by side with numerous other ethnicities, speaking many different languages and practicing different religions, such as Orthodox Christianity and Islam. Together, everyone battles the harsh, cold winters, and this gives people a solidarity and toughness with which they live their daily lives. History has been hard on this country, where nomads were forced to live in cities, exiles were sent to suffer, and farmers were challenged to grow wheat on land that won't support agriculture. This country teaches me on a daily basis, sometimes far more than I think I teach people here.

\* Excerpted from Solomon's biography, posted in the archive of the CyberVolunteer website at [www.peacecorps.gov/wvs/cybervol](http://www.peacecorps.gov/wvs/cybervol).