

SUCCESS STORY

Country-wide Access to Social Services

Targeting the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities



A groundbreaking seminar supported community social workers in their professional development to better serve vulnerable groups.



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Tangible policy changes bringing Armenia's vulnerable groups closer to the social and economic mainstream became realistic procedures in a three-day meeting in Yerevan. 100 participants, led by Ministry of Labor and Social Issues (MLSI) and USAID/SPSS experts, discussed how to implement specific provisions of the 2007 RA Government decrees: "Procedures of Provision of Rehabilitation Aid," "Care and Procedure of Provision of Services to Elderly and Disabled Citizens," "Order of Provision of Prosthetic-Orthopedic Devices, Rehabilitation Technical and other Assistive Devices." These decrees make social services more accessible and more individualized.

Discussions among the social workers revealed the challenges and unclarified issues related to individualized planning and decentralized service. These challenges have slowed implementation since the April 2007 adoption of the decrees MLSI turned to USAID/SPSS for assistance to facilitate and advise on best ways to get more motion into its decision to reach out to more elderly and disabled Armenians.

The two most important achievements of the meeting were that, social workers from many communities shared their experience and vision on how to best use this opportunity on the local level. A Tavush marz representative spoke about the importance of using an individualized and integrated approach to all cases. He brought the example of providing wheel chair to a young man with a disability living in the countryside. Without thinking about other services, the wheelchair will not be enough to break his isolation, and will become a part of the furniture. It is not enough to help encourage social inclusion and vocational rehabilitation of the young man. But teaming social aid employment services to organize some vocational training and job placement assistance will make a real difference.

Social workers from throughout Armenia discussed the new opportunities to combine services creatively to mainstream their local beneficiaries. The creative use of more services than just assistive devices is encouraged by all participants, and is a major break from old-style social services.



First of a series of seminars targeting social workers promotes more individualized and community-based social services.

Jemma Bagdasaryan, Head of Disabled and Elderly Issues Department of MLSI, drew attention to the standardization of the individualized planning procedure, which tracks the history of all aid received by the beneficiaries and allows social workers to monitor the complete service process.

Astghik Minasyan, Head of Social Assistance Department at MLSI, explained that the proper use, registration and validation of the forms reduces corruption and abuses, and makes the process more transparent. Karmen Petrosyan, Head of Disabled Division of MLSI reminded social workers that provision of devices is social worker's professional obligation and not a personal act of good will. The new procedure simplifies the process and removes bureaucratic barriers to receiving timely assistance.

Amy Ramm, Chief of Party of USAID/SPSS, stressed that the meeting promoted more individualized and community-based social services in line with internationally accepted best practices. She applauded the interest and professionalism of participant social workers as they shared their experience in making the challenges of decentralization into an opportunity to do better social work. She mentioned that these seminars are the first of a series of seminars for social workers planned for the coming year.

Further training needs were assessed. At the same time the meeting allowed social workers to identify their goals for a further outreach campaign to promote increased use of the individualized aid provision system.