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**USAID ARMENIA, SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS
STRENGTHENING PROJECT**

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SUCCESS STORY

Stimulating Community Partnerships for Social Integration

USAID/SPSS Project supports day-care services in Armenia



Pictures: SPSS photo archive

In Armenia there are already 3000 children identified with hearing disabilities, and approximately 120 new children are born every year with hearing problems.



Laura Bagdasaryan has been taking her 2 year old daughter to the Integration Center for the Hearing Disabled since problems with her daughter’s hearing were identified when she was only 7 months old. “I can’t take her to any kindergarten as they don’t have the appropriate teachers; this is the only alternative where we can develop my child’s speech”, she said.

Three of every 1000 newborn children encounter hearing impairment, and the numbers are increasing, especially in developing countries. In Armenia there are 3000 children identified with hearing disabilities, and approximately 120 new children are born every year with hearing problems. While maternity hospitals in Armenia have advanced diagnostics to identify hearing problems at an early age (and children are normally tested right after birth), there are few places where these children can receive help.

The “Havat” NGO, working with the “Arabkir” Joint Medical Center, is taking action to provide for children with hearing impairments. The Joint Medical Center has registered 800 children with hearing disabilities, and “Havat” is reaching out to this population through the Integration Center for Hearing Disabled; designed as a day-care center, the Integration Center provides services to the hearing disabled to develop artificial speech, teach them sign language, and support their general integration into the society. The establishment of the Center was accompanied by new teaching methodologies, integration strategy and approaches, which are not available anywhere else in Armenia. Children with hearing loss who do not have access to a day-care program like that in “Arabkir” usually end up in costly, isolated residential institutions.

The USAID/Social Protection Systems Strengthening (SPSS) Project is stimulating government partnerships with unique social services that are provided by NGOs to serve special populations. In partnership with the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues (MLSI), it is piloting outsourcing to Havat as part of an emphasis on decentralized social services as an effective alternative to fully state-funded institutional social services. “The SPSS Project is a good partner for us, because it understands our problem and approaches it from the right angle”, “Havat” NGO director Tamara Manukyan said at an interview noting that the MLSI apparently sees community-based services like “Havat” as the wave of the future.



The USAID Social Protection Systems Strengthening Project aims to strengthen Armenia's social protection system's capacity to provide sustainable targeted assistance to more vulnerable populations (including children) who are less capable to meet their own basic needs. SPSS supports USAID Strategic objective of improved social protection by extending valuable assistance in improving institutional and human capacity of the Government of Armenia and NGOs to better design social protection strategies.

SPSS aims to facilitate transition to self-reliance and sustainability, while reducing citizens' dependence on public support to meet their basic needs.