



SUCCESS STORY

Responding to the Needs of the Disabled

Day Center provides services and care to disabled people to bring them out of isolation



Photo: USAID

Children's drawings, showing empathy for the disabled, decorate the day center's walls.

“Our most important achievement is that using alternative methods of support we facilitated the integration of disabled people from different ethnic groups in society.”

—Shenai Bekir, regional coordinator of the Union of the Disabled in Kardzhali.

The energetic commitment of Shenai Bekir, a regional coordinator of the Union of Disabled in Bulgaria, breathed new life into an information and advisory center for disabled people in the southern town of Kardzhali. The center, aptly named “From Us, For Us,” inhabits a modest office space provided for free by the city of Kardzhali. A renovation transformed the center’s dreary appearance and now it is cheerfully decorated with colorful children’s drawings.

Disabled people of different ethnic origins from Kardzhali and neighboring villages have a cozy place to meet and socialize. Social consultants and volunteers extend a friendly helping hand. More than 50 percent of the funding for the one-year project was provided by Partners Bulgaria Foundation (PBF), implementer of the USAID Inter-ethnic Interaction program, which works in Bulgaria’s most ethnically diverse regions.

Four consultants of Roma, Turkish and Bulgarian ethnicity assist visitors with filling out applications and forms for social and health services and provide free legal advice on a bi-weekly basis. They also offer trainings on career development such as how to write a CV, how to find a job, and presentation skills. Special interest groups were formed to address specific problems shared by some disabled people, like disabled mothers. Volunteers from grades 9-11 of a Kardzhali school organized a course on computer literacy for the disabled at the club. Approximately 900 of the region’s 1,000 disabled people have sought the club’s services at least once during the past year, says Bekir.

The Center’s efforts to find employment for disabled people have reaped success. Wheelchair-bound Dimitar Petkov works as the project accountant. The consultants assisted a young woman missing fingers on both hands to find a job in a second-hand shop, and helped a 25-year old disabled musician start work at the Turkish community center in Kardzhali.

The Day Center and the Union of the Disabled-Kardzhali also engage in advocacy activities. As the result of a joint project with the Kardzhali Municipality, 42 street crossings in downtown Kardzhali were reconstructed to be wheelchair-accessible.