



Terre des hommes

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Developing a Child Protection Safety Net in Albania

BEHOLD OUR SUCCESS STORIES



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Forward

Terre des hommes – Child Relief, is a Swiss foundation based in Lausanne which has been active in Albania since 1993. In October 2009, Terre des hommes (Tdh) began implementing the “Developing a Child Protection Safety Net in Albania” CPSN project. A consolidation of Tdh’s former TACT project (Transnational Action against Child Trafficking) project, CPSN has worked to achieve a child protection safety net able to protect children against trafficking and other forms of abuse, violence, exploitation or neglect.

Based on Tdh definition, a child protection system is **a coherent set of actions and actors, in which the child is the starting point and which aims to guarantee the rights and well being of the child by constructing synergies within and between protective environments**. For Tdh in Albania achieving a functioning statutory child protection system implies working with local and central level institutions and actors which have a role in protection and can help ensure the promotion and protection of child rights and their well-being, no matter what the circumstances.

The CPSN project has focused its efforts to achieve the establishment and functioning of local Child Protection Units (CPUs) in over 12 municipalities and communes¹ of Albania; the inclusion of schools in the child protection safety net at the local level, particularly focusing on strengthening the coordination between school actors to improve identification and responses to child protection concerns; the mobilization and empowerment of marginalized communities, especially Roma and Egyptian, in 8 communities to contribute in ensuring a safer environment for the most vulnerable children and support a sustainable livelihood for their members; and the empowerment of child care institutions to implement and monitor the standards of child care in their environment. CPSN has also offered families sustainable livelihood alternatives to child exploitation by supporting the income generating activities program implemented by the local non-for-profit CAAP (Common Action Against Poverty).

Given that this project is ending in December 2012, we thought to celebrate it through the stories of some of our beneficiaries, who happily shared with us the impact that CPSN project had on their lives. We hope you will enjoy reading and will be inspired to action by stories like that of Marjon, a former child victim of trafficking, who thanks to the help of many organizations including Tdh, has turned his life around and is now raising his own family, or the story of a mother, who inspired by the work of her Community Counseling Group, finally put an END to domestic violence in her family. Of course CPSN project activities and the results witnessed in these stories would have not been possible without the generous contribution and support of our donors. We would like to sincerely thank the Austrian Development Cooperation, UNICEF, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Medicor Foundation, OAK Foundation and the Swiss Development Cooperation, but also the OSCE Presence in Albania, Open Society Foundation for Albania- SOROS, USAID-World Learning, Raiffeisen Bank, World Vision Albania and Save the Children Albania and the many other supporters who made these results possible.

Our partners in Albania have played the key and vital role in helping CPSN project prosper to protect Albanian children from trafficking and all forms of abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect. Tdh is honoured and grateful to its partners for their constructive collaboration, particularly the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and its various departments, the State Agency for Child Protection, the State Social Services, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education and Sciences and its Regional Directorates of Education in Tirana, Durres, Fier, Korca and Elbasan; the Municipalities of Tirana, Elbasan, Durrës, Fier, Vlora, Saranda, Gjirokastra, Pogradec, Korça, Kavaja and Peqin and the commune of Dermenas (through the creation of and support to Child Protection Units), the residential institutions in Tirana, Durres, Vlora and Saranda; the BKTF Coalition, ARSIS, FBSH, CAAP, the Center for Integrated Legal Practices and Services, Amarodrom, Romani Baxt, and other Roma CBOs like Romano Seizi, and many more.

At last, the staff and volunteers of Terre des hommes Albania have been invaluable to CPSN with their dedication, professionalism and enthusiasm towards ensuring child protection in Albania and the passion with which they have supported beneficiaries.

Thank you to all and let’s continue our mission together for the best interests of children, *From Terre des hommes, Mission in Albania*

¹ Originally planned to support 9 Municipalities : Durres, Elbasan, Fier, Gjirokastra, Korca, Pogradec, Saranda, Tirana, Vlora, the project extended its support to Dermenas commune, Kavaja, and Peqin.

Objective 1: *Municipal Child Protection Units (CPUs) are established and functional in 9 municipalities of Albania, and succeed in analyzing the situation of vulnerable children, on case per case basis and acting according to the child's need for his/her best interest*

Child Protection Units protect children and bring hope to families

October 2006, marks the date when Tdh in collaboration with many partners helped establish the first Child Protection Unit (CPU) in the region of Elbasan. 6 years later, and a new law adopted in 2010, 52 more Units are functional in municipalities and communes throughout Albania.

Institutionalized in November 2010, with the passing of the Law no 10347 on Protection of the Rights of the Child in the Albanian Parliament, the Child Protection Unit functions as an office at the local level in charge of child protection and promotion of child rights. Its Worker works to identify abused, neglected, exploited and trafficked children and children at risk. The CPUs are mandated to provide protection through case management, offering direct services and coordinating actions in the highest interest of the child.

"[CPU] is the center in the municipality...that helps children who are poor, children who do not have parents, children who are in need and live in bad conditions, children who do not attend schools and disabled children," defines the CPU one child. Another adds: "It's the person who protects children better than others."

"The process of handling identified cases of children in need or at risk of abuse, and providing assistance to them and their families while ensuring the 'best interests of the child', is called case management" explains Ms. Nadire Kreka, CPU Worker of Elbasan. A multi-disciplinary approach to case management is practiced. This means working with various actors at the local level to identify cases of children in need, to assess the situation and develop a comprehensive Individual Child Protection Plan, implement the plan and monitor the situation until risk levels have been reduced and the situation is deemed safe for the child. "Some members of the group of actors with which we collaborate include the police and courts, health care service providers, school actors, social service and economic aid sectors within the municipality, family members, Roma and Egyptian communities and its members, and partner non-for-profit organizations," informs Ms. Kreka.

Supported by Tdh and partners like UNICEF, Save the Children, World Vision, Partners for Children and ALBAID, with regular capacity building activities, coaching and mentoring and systemic advocacy work, the Child Protection Units have been able to service thousands of children in need in Albania. Out of these, *"more than 900 cases of children have been serviced by the 10 Units Tdh has helped establish until now,"* informs Tdh's Project Manager, Ms. Enkelejda Lopari. In 2011 alone, these CPUs have supporter 293 new cases of children at risk or victims of abuse and have assisted 162 families with direct support, including food packages, school materials, clothes, rent, medicine etc. They have also conducted 1,435 family visits to complete assessments or follow up on cases.

But the work of the CPUs goes beyond supporting cases. CPUs also play a wider community development role. They initiate and help lead awareness raising activities, summer camps and psycho-social events. They coordinate round tables and multi-stakeholder meetings to inform about its services and work, as well as to seek support and collaboration. They draft joint action plans to ensure timely and efficient interventions and lead advocacy campaigns in an effort to promote child rights and to bring the attention of local governments to child protection issues and concerns. Over 160 preventative, awareness raising and recreational activities have been organized by CPU workers since the beginning of CPSN project, all marking Children's Rights days like June 1st, June 12th, November 20th etc. Summer camps have provided safe environments, learning and fun for the over 1100 participating children, each year. More importantly they have provided HOPE to vulnerable children and families. As one child from Elbasan best explains: *"The CPU lady helps my mom. She calms her down. My mom feels happy and is full of hope when leaves for home. She has helped us with food and medicine for my sister who has been sick."*²

² 'Listen and Involve Us More – A participatory Assessment with Children on the Child Protection Units Services' – Mario project, July 2011

Childhood Lost, Childhood Regained!

Marjon* is grateful for the opportunity to provide his children with a happy and healthy childhood! The childhood he never had!

Marjon was only 6 years old when he was first trafficked to Greece for forced begging by his mother. The second child of the Leka family, a family of 14 members living under extreme poverty in one small room in the outskirts of Elbasan, Marjon's experience in Greece was traumatic. He endured a multitude of difficulties and hardship while forced to beg by his tutor for long hours under extreme conditions. Often left hungry and thirsty, he was beaten or obligated to sleep outside in the cold when he did not earn enough money. Money which he saw little of! Upon his return from Greece, in 1999, Marjon was identified as a child in need of protection and services by 'Help for Children' Foundation (NPF), a non for profit organization established with the support of Terre des hommes in 1998. He was immediately included in NPF's CEFA program, a program offering educational and social support and pre-professional and professional training to children and youth from poor and socially disadvantaged families, which allowed him to attend public school until grade eight and receive professional training as a bicycle mechanic. Despite this accomplishment, Marjon was unable to find a job.

As the years past, at the age of 17, Marjon got married and became a father. He struggled to provide for his family's basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter etc., by collecting and selling scrap iron metal and tin-cans and occasionally working as a gardener for one of Elbasan's hotels. However the income generated was not enough and he often faced financial difficulties and at times of crisis. Today, the future looks brighter for Marjon and his family. Tdh in collaboration with donors and various partners is currently implementing an action plan which will help Marjon create a safe, healthy and loving environment for his child and teenage wife. He is thankful for the opportunity.

Marjon has been included in Tdh's income generating activities program which has enabled him to create a small business activity selling second-hand clothing in remote areas of Elbasan. A six month rent budget has also been secured for him, thanks to the support of Tdh donors, which will allow the family to save a portion of their current earnings for the future. The Child Protection Unit of Elbasan and its worker will secure legal support for the family in order to legitimize Marjon's marriage at the State Civil Office. The CPU Worker will assure the registration of Marjon's child in his family tree which will provide automatic access to services such as public kindergarten. Furthermore, the Paul Ritzau Foundation is providing health services to the family, while the Missionaries of Charity (known as Sisters of Mother Teresa) have secured a monthly food and clothing parcel for the family. Tjeter Vizion, a local Elbasan NGO, has enrolled Marjon's wife in a professional training course and through the collaboration with the Women's Association of Elbasan, family planning advice will be provided to the young parents on a monthly basis. The success and progress of Marjon and his family will be continuously assured and monitored through family visits by the Child Protection Worker of Elbasan and ongoing assistance by Tdh, various partners and donors.

**The names in the story has been changed to protect identity*

Objective 2. *Child protection is strengthened in the education system in 5 regions, and the education system is more effectively incorporated into local child protection safety nets*

Improving schools in Albania: Upgrading the school psychologists

School psychologists help children and youth succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. They collaborate with educators, parents, and other professionals to create healthy and supportive learning environments for all students that strengthen connections between home and school. School psychology services additionally play an important role in guaranteeing child rights and protection. After decades of inexistent services, Albania is catching up in this area. Thanks in particular to the efforts of child relief organizations like Terre des hommes and their initiatives and collaborations with Albanian government structures and various local partners.

Since 2006, Tdh has been actively working in Albania in collaboration with various national and local partners to develop a child protection safety network within the school system. Project activities have focused on building the capacities and knowledge of those involved in child protection in the schools: psychologists, teachers and school directors, among others, so that they may ensure child protection needs. Over 180 school psychologists and 480 school directors countrywide have benefited from the numerous training sessions delivered on various child protection issues, like case identification and management procedures, effective collaboration in multiple contexts, positive discipline and communication with children, conducting psychological evaluations, etc. They have attended technical round tables on specific needs, exchange visits and experience sharing meetings, individual and group consultations and supervision sessions with national and international experts, various workshops and seminars on running psycho-social intervention programs with children, teachers, parents and the community, etc. Roles and responsibilities of school actors have also been better clarified, the position of school psychologists has been institutionalized in the law, and child protection tools for schools have been developed to facilitate the work of these actors.

The school psychologist have appreciated the knowledge and skills acquired throughout the years, as well as experience sharing with other colleagues. Some testimonies include:

"I have been recently appointed in the position and do not have much work experience. This training gave me a broader picture of my role and responsibility in the school to promote and protect children's rights within the school!"

"It is never too late to learn new things in order to improve our work and to achieve good results. This experience sharing session made me see my role as a school psychologist from whole new perspective."

"I realize now that I have to think more from a child's perspective and take into consideration children's view when designing and implementing my school educational programmes and plans."

"Today, I learned better ways to reduce the aggressive behaviour of students, using more effective approaches too!"

"I found this training to be particularly useful as it gave me new tools for assisting children who struggle with issues of low self-esteem and academic performance. I also feel clearer about my role in mobilizing appropriate support from teachers and parents to help children feel better and do better in school."

School psychologists improve schools in Albania by increasing parental involvement

Simply put, throughout these years schools actors have been empowered to prevent and intervene with a mission to making schools better and safer for children. For school psychologists of Fier region in particular, the focal point was to increase parental involvement in children's academic life. *"It has been a real challenge for the Regional Education Directorates and school boards to involve parents in school life. And both parties were to blame for this,"* informs Merita Meçe, Tdh M&E Specialist and School and Community Project Coordinator. *"School staffs did not invite or consider parents' views when designing educational plans and programs for children, and parents expected the school system to provide and care for all educational and protection needs of children, without any or minimal involvement from their side. The concept of school-parents partnership was little understood and the sporadically established parents' councils were inefficient, with little involvement and accountability from parents' side. Communication between school actors and parents also lacked, often making programmes like "Parents Committees" a failure!"*

The later, although a programme institutionalized in the Albanian law since 1995, was seldom functioning a few years back. In an effort to restore this programme in over 20 elementary and secondary schools of Fier region and to help address existent challenges Tdh, its regional staff and project partners supported school psychologists and staffs, both logistically and financially, to undertake a series of activities. Initially, discussion sessions were organized with all school actors in an effort to identify challenges faced and to develop strategies to tackle them. Then parents were invited in 'Open House Night' events at their children's respective schools to learn more about the school environment, its challenges and needs for support, to meet teachers and school board staffs like school psychologists and to get to know them better. 'Parents Night' events were better structured to also include focus group discussions on matters such as child protection, implications of violence and abuse on children's academic performance, positive reinforcement to achieve good academic results, etc. Lastly, a series of awareness raising campaigns informed parents of the importance and benefits of being involved in their children's school life and encouraged their active participation in programmes like the Parents Committee Programme and other school events.

"Since, outcomes of these initiatives have been truly great. Parents are definitely more aware and concerned about their children's academic and social progress. They are able to recognize and seek information about any potential difficulties that their children may be experiencing in school. They are also better informed of our roles and responsibilities and understand that without their support and collaboration, schools cannot succeed!" explained Silvana Koshtica, a School Psychologist in Fier.

In line with these efforts, the Albanian government has also taken great steps towards building a solid social and institutional basis that will help address issues and guarantee child rights and protection within the school system. Some examples include: the endorsement by the Ministry of Education and Sciences (MoES) of the Child Protection – Manual for the schools and Training Handbook on Child Protection in 2009, a set of tools developed by Tdh and the Ministry of Education in collaboration with other local partners serving as a guideline and self-study toolkit to help improve the skills and competencies of professionals working with children in schools; the institutionalization of these tools in 6 public and private university curricula; the development of a national training module on "Child protection in the school" targeting school teachers, directors, psychologists and their supervisors; and the adoption of the new law on pre-university education system, Nr. 692012, as of July 18, 2012.

Community Counseling Groups: A community-based prevention mechanism helping to ensure protection of children in Albania

Since 2001, in the framework of its “Transnational Action against Child Trafficking (TACT)” and “Developing a Child Protection Safety Net (CPSN)” projects, aiming to tackle issues of child trafficking and child protection, in partnership with Roma organizations Tdh has been supporting the development of Community Counseling Groups (CCGs) in 8 vulnerable communities of Albania, mainly Roma and Egyptian³. Made up of 4 to 8 volunteers each from mix ages and gender, mobilized and empowered to address child rights issues, Community Counseling Groups offer child protection advice and counselling to vulnerable families and help identify and refer cases of children in need or at risk. While also serving as a bridge between vulnerable communities and various public and non-public structures, employing dynamic and timely models of interventions, Community Counseling Groups have played a significant role in ensuring safe environments for the children of their communities. They have linked families facing economic hardship and social problems with local institutions providing services and non-profit organizations running programs such as conditional micro-loans for income generation activities and poverty alleviation. Furthermore, Community Counseling Groups have supported local Child Protection Unit Workers in planning and running of summer camp programs, socio-cultural and awareness raising activities. Familiar with the various severe socio-economic problems faced by the vulnerable communities where they operate, the CCGs have also been able to advocate to local government representatives for the need for better measures of care, protection and education of vulnerable children living in their communities.

“We strongly believe that the most valuable resource a community has, are its own people. And with the right support, community members can play a vital role in the development of their community’s self-sufficiency and self-reliance. Most importantly, they can also greatly contribute to ensure a safe environment for their children,” says Ms. Sendrine Constant, Delegate of Tdh’s Mission in Albania.

So, in order to equip these Groups with the necessary knowledge and skills to better perform their roles and to develop their contribution, Tdh has provided and coordinated several trainings, in collaboration with other local partners and with the support of project donors. Focusing on areas such as the rights, conditions and procedures for vulnerable families to benefit from social protection and unemployment schemes, social security and health programs, child rights and responsibilities, identifying and acting on domestic violence, the importance of registering a child, the value of education for children, etc. Positively, aside from helping build capacities, these trainings have also served as excellent knowledge sharing mechanisms. Recognizing the benefits to be gained from sharing the information presented, CCGs have been quick to spread it across their communities. This has turned them into reference points or “go-to-persons” for both community members and other actors working with Roma and Egyptian Communities in Albania.

“Becoming a member of the Community Counseling Group was the best thing I did. This experience has given me an opportunity to serve my community and to help protect our children,” declares with a strong sense of pride Ganimete Kalemi, a CCG member of the Novosela village, in the region of Vlora. *“As a CCG I truly feel that I am supporting my community members to have a better life!”* The development of these groups has been beneficial not only for the communities serviced but also for the CCG members themselves. *“I have learned so much being a CCG! Especially on issues I was not aware of before. I have developed great personal skills as well. I am a much better listener now. I have more patience and tolerance and can better communicate what I know with others,”* answers Mr. Latif Kazanxhiu, serving since 2007 as a CCG in Baltëz village in the region of Fier. Mrs. Mexhidije Ademi, CCG member in Elbasan, adds: *“As a Romani woman, I have to say I have suffered a lot. My husband was very controlling. I wasn’t allowed to speak my mind or express my opinions or ideas. At times, I felt like I was born to only cook, clean, raise my kids and serve my husband and his family. But now! Now things have changed. I have gained so much knowledge and confidence by being a CCG member. I have learned to speak my mind!”*

³ Tirana-Kinostudio (in collaboration with local NGO/CBO partners), Durres (Nish-tulla and Shkozë), in rural areas of Fier (Baltëz, Levan, Driza), and Vlora (Novosela), Elbasan, (and Pogradec in 2011)

"He only beats me because he loves me!"

CCGs Raise Awareness on Domestic Violence to Save Lives

Many years, enduring brutal violence from her ex-husband had to go by before one woman from the Nish-tulla Roma community in Durrës region could finally say STOP to domestic violence! *"For years and years I tolerated, in front of my children's eyes too, the punches and kicks, slaps and humiliating insults...and I used to think to myself 'He only beats me because he loves me!'"* explains the woman who wishes to remain anonymous. She is just one of the many women victims of domestic violence in Albania, a country facing persistent gender inequalities and violence.

Given the numerous cases of domestic violence in this Roma community and considering the negative implications all forms of domestic violence have on children and their development, both as victims or as witnesses of this violence, the Community Counselling Group ran an awareness raising campaign, with the support of Tdh and in collaboration with representatives from the municipal office of Gender Equality and Domestic Violence, and the Sector of Domestic Violence within the Police Directorate of Durres.

The issue is not discussed openly, the campaign set out to bring domestic violence out from behind the closed doors of this community. It aimed to inform the members about the phenomenon, the rights of victims and penalties for offenders foreseen in the Albanian law. Leaflets were produced and distributed, posters were put up and focus group discussions were held regularly. Representatives of the existent structures where cases could be reported were invited to speak of the help and services available in the region. At last, as some of the members of this community had testified to the CCG of having used violence as a method to discipline children, the campaign also focused on the importance of protecting children from domestic violence and actions to be taken.

The overall outcomes were positive. One community member explained it best: *"we often tried to hide this devastating crime as we didn't want our neighbours and community to think badly about our families. But this was so wrong! From the CCGs we learned that ignorance, indifference and denial only create barriers for victims seeking help. We learned that if we don't protect our children from it, the cycle will only repeat itself and they too, will become abusive when they grow up. We know now that instead of justifying domestic violence within our community, we have to fight it!"*

But outmost, the end results of this work can be witnessed by the story of our anonymous testimony. She divorced her husband and is now living alone with her children. Luckily her husband didn't turn on her for leaving him. Although life is difficult as she now has to make it on her own with limited means, she is thankful that her and her children don't have to live with violence and in fear anymore. *"They [referring to members of the Community Counselling Group] help save lives and give hope. They surely did it for me!"* she told us.

(This beneficiary preferred to remain anonymous because she didn't want everyone to know that she had 'failed' her marriage and had left her husband.)

Conditional Micro Loans: Helping alleviate poverty and secure education for children



Common Action Against Poverty (CAAP), a local non for profit NGO, in partnership with Tdh and in collaboration with a local financing agency, New Opportunity Albania (NOA), has been directly supporting families in need by providing conditional micro loans for income generating activities (IGA), since 2008. The conditional micro loans program aims to help families lift themselves out of poverty and provide adequate material care to their children. Through this program, loans are made available to families who wish to increase their income by operating a small private business. The amount of the micro loan varies and can only reach a maximum of 100'000ALL (approx.740 Euro). On one determined condition, Tdh through CAAP subsidizes half of the full amount of the micro loan, while the remaining amount is to be paid by the family in small installments, on a monthly basis, to the financing agency. The condition applied is that the increased budget of the family from the income generating activity benefit children and ensures

their schooling.

“Helping parents gain economic stability means they can survive without begging and because we help families ensure an income which alleviates pressures, they are more incline to care for the future and education their children” explains Ms. Iva Sinani, project coordinator of CAAP. *“Encouraging recipients to develop more sustainable means of income instead of relying on activities such as begging, child begging or child labor also remains a central focus of this program,”* she adds.

Beneficiaries of this program can be families living in poverty and who cannot provide for the care, upbringing and education of their children, families with children who wish to increase their income by operating a small private business, and families who are able to regularly pay the monthly installments of the micro loan. Furthermore, given that in Albania Roma and Egyptian communities represent some of the most vulnerable and poor communities, the conditional micro loans for income generation (IGA) has been highly promoted on a regular basis by the Community Counseling Groups. To date over 120 families have benefited from the program.

The findings are telling. People who need the loan the most take advantage of it, and it has proven to be a program that does not create long-term dependence. These families have been able to pay their dues on time regularly, usually using the loan to run activities like bike repair shops, second hand clothing, beauty product stands, doing metalwork, handicrafts, running barber shops and beauty parlors, and for small businesses in recycling etc.

“This loan program is great! It opens a door in life for those poor who want to do something to better their lives!” says Moisi Gegollari, a beneficiary from Korça, who applied for the program in 2009 and has since been running his own barber shop. *“The banks in Albania don’t really support the start up of a new business, especially when you have no collateral and are Roma! They don’t trust you! But with this program I got the loan I needed to be able to buy equipment and open a shop in my neighbourhood.”*

Advancing the economic stability of a father and the education of his children

Shefqet Rasho is a conditional micro loan recipient from the village of Levan, in Fier region. He is the sole provider of a poor Roma family of six. He cares for his wife and their four children, with a unique profession he inherited from his grandfather. *"I am one of the few craftsmen of aluminum and cooper metal, left around here,"* he tells us, referring to his region. *"I use the metals to make products such as bins, buckets and water tanks."* But his 'specialty' as he likes to say is *"the barrels and funnels used for making 'rakia'."* He sells these products in the city of Fier, in surrounding areas of his village, also traveling to nearby towns at times.

'Raki' is a traditional alcoholic drink made out of distilled grape juice. It is highly popular in the country and the Balkan region, so demand for these products is quite high. *"Is it good as business? Well, if you have money to buy good quality aluminum and copper, and you have good craftsmanship, then yes! You can make decent money. Of course, in the summer times, with immigrants coming and going too, demands for rakia barrels and funnels are higher, so business is better than in the winter,"* he explains. Shefqet is now teaching the profession to his older son. Almost one year ago business wasn't so well for this family. *"I didn't have enough money to buy good quality metals so the quality of my products also suffered. I couldn't sell what I had made, or make new products. From the village people I had heard of the conditional micro loans program but I was a bit scared. I was poor and I couldn't afford debt either. One day though, the Community Counseling Group was organizing a session on this program and I went to listen. They explained how it worked and who could apply. They were very clear and answered everyone's questions. I asked them if I would qualify, even though my children were already attending school, and they said yes."* After discussing it with his wife, Shefqet, supported by CCG members and Tdh regional staff, applied for the conditional micro loans program. *"With the money, I bought better metals and have been making better products of various sizes and types. I sell them in the markets and at times people even came to my house to buy them,"* he tells us.

Being a recipient of the conditional micro loans program has not only helped advance this family's economic wellbeing but also Shefqet's children's education and his craftsmanship. *"With the income earned I have been able to afford the supplies two of my children need for school and clothing for all of them. I have been also able to afford to send them on some of the organized school trips, which I couldn't do before. This has been great for them. I know it! I understand it from the happiness in their eyes when I say to them 'Yes, you can go!' They are definitely more happy and confident when going to school now,"* he says. By regularly making the products him and only few others know how to make, Shefqet has been able to practice this traditional craft and not lose this valuable set of skills. By teaching his eldest son, he will be able to preserve the craft and hopefully make it a traditional heritage in his family.

"I have and will continue to tell others about this program. It's a good opportunity to increase earnings and improve living. In the near future, with the money saved, I want to buy some new things for the house. To make it better for the kids!"

Objective 4: Four Residential institutions for children have the capabilities to implement and monitor the standards of care for children in their environment

“How I was then and how I am now” - Helping staffs of residential institutions ensure quality services for children

Working with staffs of the public residential institutions of Tirana, Durres, Vlora and Saranda has brought change to the situation of children living within these facilities.

“I am happy to have participated in the various trainings, discussion sessions, workshops and reflection activities. I have gained valuable knowledge which has greatly improved my professional behaviour and has enhanced my abilities to work with children living in institutional care,” says Zamira Brati, a caregiver in Tirana’s ‘Zyber Hallulli’ residential institution. Staffs of the 4 residential institutions which have been engaged in capacity building exercises since April 2011, in the framework of Tdh’s CPSN project, have indeed undergone a transition in the past year, agrees Aida Pambuku, Tdh’s responsible coordinator for the work with residential institutions. *“Looking back and analysing how I was then and how I am now, I can say that I have improved a lot. By listening and engaging in various discussions I have been able to reflect on my individual work practices and improve not only my techniques, but also those of my co-workers. I have learned to be more patient with the children, to listen to them and never single out any child. Now I always think about what’s best for the child, in any situation!”* adds Violeta Gjiçali, caretaker in the Saranda institution who has been working there for almost 10 years.

CPSN project has provided trainings focused on communication with children, positive discipline techniques, conflict management, keeping children safe, working with special needs children and how to consult with children individually or in group settings, organizing psycho-social games and activities based on the methodology Movement, Games and Sports, etc. Workshops organized have sharpened skills and improved knowledge on concepts like physical and emotional abuse, violence at home and within institutions, resilience in children, guaranteeing psycho-social needs of children, managing emotions and stages of development in children, etc. ‘Difficult’ case management support has been provided and case-based discussion sessions organized in a multi-disciplinary group setting have engaged different local actors, psychologists, service providers, state social services representatives and staffs of other residential institutions to help find solutions. They have helped create collaborative and positive relationships amongst these groups. In total 81 staffs have actively participated, including social workers, psychologists, institution healthcare personnel and directors.

Psycho-social games and activities, part of Tdh’s Movement, Games and Sports Methodology, have also been incorporated in these residential institutions’ Work Plans. In fact, the methodology is seen as *“the only tool available to my staff for meeting Standard Nr. 8 of the Set of Standards for Care in Residential Institutions, requiring the institution to ensure that children are engaged in activities which support their psycho-social wellbeing at all times,”* by the directors of the Saranda and Durrës institutions. *“I am profoundly grateful to Terre des hommes, who has been collaborating and supporting us for over a year now to fulfil some of the needs that my institution has,”* beams Ms. Olta Ganaj, Director of the institution of Vlora, who has also been regularly participating in Tdh activities. In this institution Tdh financially supported the establishment of a ‘parents meeting room’ and the rehabilitation of the ‘game room’. The first serves as a discrete environment where parents or family members can spend time with their children while they receive care in this institution. The later offers an environment where children and staffs can play with one-another and do family-like activities, such as watch TV, read, play games or just talk.

Through voluntarism we can help support a happy and nurturing environment for children in institutional care

Entela, Denisa, Emilja, Elta, Evisa, Martini, Vasilika, Anisa and Blerina are 9 university students who have been regularly volunteering at the residential institution of Vlora since June 2011. Ages 19 to 33 years old, they are all students at the University of Vlora, enrolled in the Psychology or Special Pedagogy Departments.

At the institution they support staffs to complete their daily activities like preparing food and feeding the children, helping younger children bathe or supervising children's outside play time, fieldtrips or walks. They organize psycho-social games and activities with the pre-schoolers and read or play songs for the toddlers. Four of them also conduct one-on-one speech and language treatment sessions with a few of the children who demonstrate having difficulties.

"I started volunteering because I needed the practice to complete my degree, but then after a few weeks I fell in love with the job and I couldn't stop doing it. I absolutely looove what I do here. To me it doesn't matter that I don't get paid. Seeing the smiles on the children's faces when I come in and how they run towards me to hug me, sometimes stumbling onto things, is the best reward ever," says Entela Selami, who is also the oldest of the volunteers. And although married and with two children of her own, she still makes time to come every week, 3 times a week, for 2 hours a day. *"Sometimes I bring my children with me. They like playing with the kids here and have become really close with some of them,"* adds Entela.

This group of volunteers along with the other 40 individuals who currently volunteer at the institutions of Durrës and Saranda have been regularly supported by Tdh, in an effort to provide specialized knowledge on working with this particular group of children and to better their skills. They have been trained to conduct psycho-social games and activities as well as creative activities with children, based on the Movement, Games and Sports Methodology. They have learned of the various forms of abuse and how to identify them in children. Some have also joined in the trainings, reflections sessions, workshops and case management discussion sessions organized for staffs of the residential institutions. In addition, the volunteers of Vlora and Durrës have been trained on the 'development stages of children 0-6 years' and 'how to conduct activities with children aged 0-6 years old', given that these institutions only care for children belonging to age groups 0 to 6 years old.

The extra help is greatly appreciated by staffs. *"They are great support. They are responsible and trustworthy. They take their work seriously and I have never heard them say no when one of us has asked them for help,"* says Olta Ganaj, the directress of the institution of Vlora. Asia, a caretaker with the institution for 7 years now, has learned a few things from these volunteers. Singling out 'good disciplining techniques for children', she says: *"This group of youngsters have taught all of us a lot. They have shared with us some of the information they learn in school and have introduced us to some new work practices. At least speaking for myself, they helped me realize that some of 'disciplining' techniques were a bit outdated!"* Brikena, another caretaker with the institution for about 5 years, is appreciative of their dedication and enthusiasm. *"It's great to see the passion and enthusiasm with which they work. It's inspiring for some of us older workers. They are of great support, not only to us but to the children in particular."*

The volunteer group in the residential institution of Vlora, as well as in the other institutions, were set up by Tdh in an effort to help staff provide the most effective care and support for the children in their environment. *"This has turned out to be a positive experience which could potentially be replicated under a proper framework of training, supervision and child protection policies"* says Aida Pambukur, coordinator for Tdh's work with residential institutions.

Bora, a 5 years old girl living in the institution of Vlora, has her own reasons for appreciating the volunteers. *"Evisa makes my hair pretty. Martini reads me stories. Entela plays with me. I love them all!"* she says.

Working together in the best interests of children



There has been uneven progress in the area of **children's rights in Albania**, which is part of a key priority of the European Commission Opinion of 2010, with policies in place but implementation remaining slow and largely reliant on external assistance. In April 2012 the action plan of the national strategy for child protection 2012-2015 was approved, and implementing measures for the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child were adopted but coordination between central and local governmental structures needs strengthening.¹

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child also urged the Albanian State in 2012 to take all necessary measures to address child rights violations particularly related to discrimination, abuse and neglect, or children deprived of a family environment.

In this context, Terre des hommes Advocacy Strategy implemented in close collaboration with its partners, particularly the BKTF coalition, has focused on lobbying at local, national and international levels, influencing different stages in the decision-making processes through community representation, participation of civil society, pressuring legislation, policies, program practices etc.



Pursuing social policies based on community needs through Social Area Plans

“Children’s issues cannot be addressed in isolation from other local issues. For example, a program that addresses domestic violence against women will quite likely have an impact on children and their well-being and protection. Specific measures to protect children at risk or in need will quite likely require the involvement of a diverse range of actors, such as the family, the school, the court, the local social services department, the local police, etc. It is therefore crucial that local government identifies and takes into consideration the entire complexity of issues faced by different vulnerable groups in order to design and formulate local plans of actions that enable the implementation of social programs and services that are appropriate, complementary and cost-effective,” said Mr. Shefki Lika, Head of the Municipal Social Services in Elbasan during the roundtable meeting on 29 April 2011, between local government representatives from Fier, Elbasan and Vlora, of the respective Municipality and Qark (Regional Administrative Area) levels.

Terre des hommes has supported this initiative of Fier Qark and Fier Municipality to bring together local government officials representing 3 different municipalities and 3 administrative regions to *share and discuss best practices and experiences* in relation to the process of drafting their respective Social Area Plans. Elbasan’s positive experience with the Social Area Plan dates back to 2001 when the idea of establishing Regional Needs Assessment and Planning Committees was first proposed. These committees play an invaluable role in identifying specific needs in the community and serving as forums of consultation amongst different stakeholders for better planning and provision of local and regional social services that target the most vulnerable.

The Social Area Plan enables local government to formulate an all-inclusive strategy for implementing appropriate social policies and pursuing various local projects in areas and communities where these services are needed the most. This is done in coordination with a number of different public and non-public service providers in order to create and establish an integrated system of social policy responses that are suitable to the local context. The process requires the collection of vital data and information through needs assessments conducted at local level; it enables local communes and municipalities to better budget their human and financial resources through a participatory approach, and it allows them to draft and submit concrete project proposals that can be financed with funds raised through donors and/or local taxes with Qark’s coordination. Local non-public organizations working on issues that represent the interests of children, women, people with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian minorities and other vulnerable groups are also an important part of this process in terms of identifying needs and implementing projects in close cooperation with the various local government structures.

“The process of drafting a good Social Area Plan depends on the commitment of the local institutions and the civic responsibilities of all of us to respond to the needs of our community in an inclusive and equitable way so that everyone can benefit from and access quality local services. The needs of the most vulnerable groups, in particular children, can be addressed properly only if all local actors cooperate together and coordinate their actions in an effective fashion,” observed the Head of Regional Social Services at Elbasan Qark, Mr. Blendi Gremi.

The Head of Regional Social Services in Fier, Mr. Astrit Hysi noted that the knowledge exchange meeting was a good opportunity to learn from the experiences of other regions in drafting their **Social Area Plans** in close cooperation with the local municipalities and communes under their territorial jurisdiction. In this context, Hysi expressed that Fier’s commitment to pursue *“social policies that are product of a harmonized and coordinated approach between local actors at commune, municipality and regional levels in order to better serve children and other vulnerable groups in the community in the future.”*

Focusing The Local Elections Spotlight On Children's Issues

“Children’s Voice Is In Your Vote”

This was the slogan of the public awareness campaign launched by the Albanian civil society during April in an attempt to focus the electoral spotlight on children’s issues as Albanians citizens got ready to cast their votes in the local elections of 8 May 2011. Children make up nearly 1/3 of the Albanian population. Although they themselves cannot vote, their interest in Albanian local politics can be represented by the voting adults. Tdh in collaboration with the BKTF coalition (United for the Protection and Care of Children) and support from UNICEF and other partners, prepared and distributed thousands of flyers all over the country to inform citizens about the current situation, as well as policy developments towards the realization of children’s rights in Albania.

The flyer encouraged all voters to actively discuss the remit of local government in establishing child-focused services and in building child-friendly communities. During the electoral campaign, voters were urged to press their local candidates with specific questions on issues of child rights and protection to ensure these issues were part of their election programs. Children in different regions of the country were also able to lead their own advocacy activities with their own peers, parents, community members and local candidates about issues that mattered to them. Their messages were put forward to the running candidates in the form of specific requests and pledges.

A joint press statement was also issued by Tdh and the BKTF Coalition urging voters and candidates alike to make children’s issues a priority. This statement to the press was endorsed by the American Embassy, the British Embassy and the Dutch Embassy in Albania.

Everyone has a role to play in improving the situation. Thanks to their vote, Albanian citizens have now made their choice of local candidates, who will shape the future of all 929,000 children in Albania through the local government policies they will pursue in the four years in office.







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some of our actions
towards the protection
of CHILDREN!**



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