












Children and adults with disabilities and their families are fully, equally and meaningfully participating in all World Vision programes

World Vision
Georgia

Section 1
Empowering Parents

We believe that parent empowerment is one of the key elements of disability advocacy. Once provided with emotional and informational support, parents fight for the rights of their children in every area: education, healthcare, independent living, employment, recreation, etc. This is why we have decided to specifically target parents and involve them in different intiatives in all four regions covered by World Vision Georgia. The following are several examples of our work.

All activities included in this section were implemented in frames of the project "Caucasus Sub-Regional Social Inclusion of Children with Disabilities", funded by World Vision Australia.

Five Days of Freedom

I believe it is impossible to work on a specific aspect of human rights without keeping the big picture in mind; it is impossible to work on disability issues while being prejudiced against other groups; and it is impossible to work only on one issue, in isolation.

For this reason, the best thing about the parent-children summer school that took place in Bakuriani, was not the fact that parents received training, but instead that participants opened up slowly, day after day. I knew the battle had been won, when reserved, quiet moms started exercising at the hotel gym at night, after they put their kids to sleep.

In the beginning, they were not sure what to do with this new-found freedom. Some tried to avoid attending the trainings, but we told them that it was mandatory; otherwise, they could not stay. Some were extremely shy. Timidly, they let us know about their kids' needs. We tried to help each of them to the best of our ability.

Parents soon became familiar with the schedule and to the fact that their reasonable requests were satisfied. They started bonding with each other and forming friendships. Many times we would hear laughter from thehotel rooms – some women naturally took the roles of hosts, while others assembled regularly in their temporary living quarters. They brought coffee and shared jokes.

Each day started with sharing. A consultant engaged with participants and set the tone for the day. Afterwards, trainees talked with other guest speakers from experienced Parent Club and individuals who had reached success despite limitations that Georgian society places on individuals with mental or physical challenges; they watched documentary films; participants listened to others' struggles and success stories.

The parents also went through an "independent living crash course": they met with a psychologist, a speech therapist, a physical therapist as well as an occupational therapist. The training was as practical as possible. Each specialist presented and discussed their work, talked about independent life skills, behaviour management and means of communication. However, after their short presentations, the specialists answered questions and most importantly demonstrated everything in practice.

The occupational therapist sat down with the participants during lunch and showed them how to let their kids eat independently, with minimal parent input; she demonstrated effective ways of picking up children, without hurting their spines. She monitored the processes of hygiene and self-care.

The physical therapist worked with children, while parents sat nearby and learned massage techniques. Afterwards, they practiced under supervision.

All of the staff members continuously practiced behavior management interventions with the children. Every time there was a problematic situation (for instance, if kids were reluctant to take turns or hit each other), the psychologists intervened and implemented strategies discussed during the presentations. Sometimes, the situations required immediate intervention – in this case parents received individual consultations.

Many participants were genuinely concerned in the beginning, but after several interventions (including holding a child during a tantrum and time out), they started trusting us and let us work as we saw fit. The behavior management intervention proved to be successful – by the end of five days one kid stopped hitting others and others stopped crying to get attention. As the parents witnessed this transformation, they too learned, not because some trainer told them to do so, but because they wanted to become part of the process.

Not everything at the school was easy. One day a husband visited and wanted take his wife and child away. After unresponsive reasoning, we offered to let him to stay for the night. That way he could personally see how his wife and children were spending their time. Family conflict was avoided and he likely reported situation back to his community. All was safe at the school. All was good.

Challenges and solutions such problems as these call for specific training. Hands-on learning and personal connections are impossible unless parents leave their homes and experience a different kind of setting for a longer period of time. Trainings, even very good ones, mean several hours of sitting in a room, listening to "experts" and in a good case, participating in exercises. However, trainees are often only partly attending training as they are also worrying about planning their evenings, about transportation, chores, and everyday problems. Consequently, they take home only portion of the information.

Summer school, however, is different. Learning takes place all the time. An evening stroll with children can turn into positive reinforcement lesson. Every lunch is a practical lesson. Every evening is an informal group therapy. Parents don't learn information here. They experience it.

For this reason, the school was not only about disability awareness: parents got the chance to spend some time alone, talk to each other, work with the specialists and share experiences, while being confident that someone trustworthy is taking care of their kids. These moms (and one dad) who divide their lives between tending to their children's needs, working in the countryside, cooking, cleaning, battling life's challenges, finally had several hours for their own personal growth.

On the very last evening, we had a good-bye party, with World Vision cake and colourful hats. As we looked around, we noticed that several parents changed into fancy clothes. They were laughing and dancing and having a good time. Their children were also dancing and playing with them. Some moms learned how to smile during these five days. They could finally relax. They could finally spend time with each other and their children, without fretting and worrying.

The next morning, they packed and exchanged phone numbers. While we, as World Vision, promised to meet once a month in a newly-formed parent club as there is much left to learn[1].

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[1] **Blog post written by Lika Barabadze ,** Senior Disability Expert in "Caucasus Sub-Regional Social Inclusion of Children with Disabilities".

"Today I realized that my life is not hopeless, I saw the movie "How to break the wall" and I felt the pain that reminded me of my own, from now on I have a hope that everything is possible for my children."

Maka (Participant of World Vision's School for parents)

"After having Nika, I was very depressed, I had hard time taking care of him... But later I realized that crying was not helping the situation, and I said I would do everything to see Nika walking and I achieved that goal…Children face more challenges if parents decide to isolate from society and don't fight for the better future, because children need attention and support. .. Now I feel relieved, I saw that I'm not the only one who has a child with different problems, and I believe that society should accept them the way they are… "

Shorena (Participant of World Vision's School for parents)

"I should never lose hope that someday everything will be better. This belief can even make miracles happen for us and for people around us. I will always remember these days as a warm memories of my life, I gained new friends, shared their pain, and somehow I became stronger and started to see life from the different perspective."

Khatuna (Participant of World Vision's School for parents)

"I'm very happy to be involved in this project and so is my daughter. She used to have communication problems, but she is more open now."

Marina (Participant of World Vision's School for parents)

"I am feeling very positive today, because I see changes in Tornike [her son], now he has different relations with the children; he no longer experiences the emotional difficulties. In the past, he used to cover up his ears every time he saw children to avoid the loud noise. I think I should be stronger, because strong people can win in life."

Diana (Participant of World Vision's School for parents)

"I like being here. I like the positive and friendly atmosphere around me."

Tamuna (Participant of World Vision's School for parents)

"I am happy because my children are not alone here. Different psychologists and specialists are spending time with them while we are in the training. Every day after the training, they tell us how good our children are. It makes me happy and confident."

Natia (Participant of World Vision's School for parents)

"I learned so much and had so much fun! Thank you!"

Marina (Participant of World Vision's School for Parents)

"I didn't expect what I saw here. I learned a lot. I changed the way of thinking and I believe that Mari's life will change for better too."

Lia (Participant of World Vision's School for parents)

Section 2

Engaging Youth with Disabilities in Non-Formal Education

We believe that the “now generation” is the one that will push society forward; young persons will become leaders and will sculpt the attitudes of their communities. Hence, World Vision Georgia has been dedicated to making notion of inclusion available for every member of the youth club in every target community. This has been done through various means: awareness raising trainings, inclusive summer camps and field trips and inclusive university summer courses.

All activities included in this section were implemented in frames of the project “Caucasus Sub-Regional Social Inclusion of Children with Disabilities”, funded by World Vision Australia.

Summer Camp and Courses

Section 3

Sharing Expertise

Our work principally deals with mainstreaming World Vision Georgia activities; however, we also consult other governmental and non-governmental institutions on how to make their programs more inclusive. Thus, World Vision Georgia has partnered with several organizations in frames of a livelihood project to support the inclusion of beneficiaries with disabilities into activities planned for internally displaced persons and their host communities. Our work included supporting project administration and staff, training stakeholders (such as Ministry of Internally Displaces Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia and Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia and local municipalities), encouraging beneficiaries to personally attend business training and apply for a business grant and monitoring the process.

All activities included in this section were implemented in frames of the project "Livelihood Initiatives to Foster Employability and Entrepreneurship of IDPs, and host populations in Georgia – LIFE Georgia" Funded by EU, Leading Implementing Partner: ACF- Action Against Hunger.

Climbing Steep Life

I am ascending stairs to get to Khatuna's apartment. A cat with a pretty necklace lies on one of the steps. The staircase has no handrails, so I try to avoid stepping on the cat and at the same time, refrain from falling two stories down. I see a wheelchair in the room. I've noticed a second one in the yard.

Khatuna is anxious at first. She tells me that originally she was a teacher and for a while she lived in Russia until her husband passed away. She returned back to Zugdidi afterwards.

Khatuna learned massage therapy because her son, Mirian needed one: "The doctors told me that he will live for 12 years. Every day I thought: he is going to die now, he is going to die now, but Mirian is 16 years old now. The doctors claim that it's my good care, massage and healthy food that helped him survive".

A practitioner visited Mirian in the beginning, though Khatuna soon learned how to massage her son: "I looked up massage techniques online…my mother is a famous massage therapist, she taught me too. She is a very strict teacher. Very strict.

Soon I attended a massage therapy course at the vocational college. I decided to acquire this profession – for my son, for others and for my own health".

Presently, Khatuna offers different services: "I specialize in a rehabilitation massage. I do sports massage. I also help people loose weight using a massage technique with honey. I do not perform other massages, as I feel responsible for my clients' well-being and practice only what I know well".

Khatuna has two children. The youngest, Mirian, is always home, since no school in Zugdidi can provide education catered to his unique needs (Mirian has multiple disabilities – physical, visual and intellectual). Her eldest, Tamta, is a high school senior. Tamta plans to attend foreign language studies in order to work in the tourism department.

Since Khatuna has to constantly take care of her son, she had hard time scheduling the appointments: „I had to wait for my daughter to come back from school to leave the house. Sometimes I had to work early in the morning and rush back home".

Khatuna attended a series of business trainings, presented her business idea and was funded in frames of the livelihood project. As a result she purchased a massage table. This event has radically changed her working schedule. Now clients come to her home. She is able to see 5 clients daily and provide them with a two-week rehabilitation course.

"They come here and I have a lot of clients. It is easier to work with this new table, my joints don't hurt anymore. Also, the new table allows me to approach clients from all sides. This is important: the quality of massage depends on how I distribute my weight".

I ask her whether it was hard to find clients in the beginning and how she managed to build up clientele base. Khatuna explains that she likes to exercise and her friends, inspired by her personal example, approached her for weight correction massage and exercise. After a while, she received more clients and expended her practice to include rehabilitation work.

Khatuna answers my question why she loves her job: "I exercise with my clients to stay fit. I can work at home. Finally, I am glad that my clients are satisfied. Some of them have been coming for 3-4 years".

As we continue with the interview, I hear noise outside: "mom, the garden!" Khatuna runs down the stairs and chases away several cows that snuck into the patch of corn. She returns with Tamta and Tamta's friend. Khatuna's everyday life interrupts our talk and I imagine, how hard it must be for a single mother to have a career of her choice, grow corn and take care of the family at the same time.

Khatuna also attempted to salvage her low-rent apartment. She plastered wallpaper: "I did all of this. The building used to be a kindergarten for 20 years, then a camp for the internally displaced people". I notice a second kitty in the house, she sits in the middle of the room and snobbishly glances at me. Khatuna explains that the first floor of the building is used as a hazelnut storage and they keep these two furry anti-mouse agents to patrol the apartment.

Khatuna chose this place because she grew up in the area and her mother and friends live in the neighborhood. They help her get by. However, she is ready to move to a better home: "I want to find another apartment, on a first floor. I have to lift up my boy from the first wheelchair, carry him down the stairs and place him into the second wheelchair. That's difficult. I also think assessable apartment will be more comfortable for my clients".

I notice that Khatuna treats Tamta as her peer, who will soon join her mother as a financial provider. Presently Khatuna receives a social welfare, but she hopes that with two employed family members she can manage to take care of the costs: "soon I won't need a welfare. I won't have to depend on the government aid".

Generally, despite the fact that Khatuna is very busy, she doesn't seem to be exhausted. I believe that she loves her profession.

"I work all day and keep myself occupied, hence I have no time to sit at home, isolated, alone with my son. I make money, I am physically active and I have no time for brooding. This job has saved my life".

Khatuna talks about her future plans:

"I'd like to officially open a massage room in several years. My work is seasonal now- most of my clients want to loose weight for the summer. I will also need a certificate to work with children. They provide a three-month training and a certificate in Tbilisi (the capital city) only and that's why I postponed my future education until Tamta graduates. Sometimes I consider moving to Tbilisi, but for some reason, she wants to stay here", Khatuna looks at her daughter. "Tamta, why don't you want to move to Tbilisi? On the other hand, I know how hard it will be for me to live without friends. Friends and my job helped me so much. I wouldn't be able to work in school now".

After discussing future plans, I take pictures of Khatuna and Mirian. I say good-bye and take the steep stairs down, the stairs that Khatuna encounters daily, while carrying her 16-year-old son. The cat is still lying down on the middle of the staircase, pretty with her necklace, purring at the sun.

Business Home Schooling

Beso has been carving wood for 10 years. He learned this trade from his father, also a self-taught carpenter. His father helps and teaches Beso to this day.

"Does he point out your mistakes?" I ask jokingly. "I never make mistakes" answers Beso and I realize that working on wood is more than a job for him.

In scope of the LIFE project, Beso bought several tools to work in a small room in his house. However, when I visit him for the interview, he shows me a little wood shop.

"Wood products are in demand, so after working for three months, this is what I built. I am planning to hire several workers too". As we speak, Beso's wife brings us his handmade items: chairs, cornices, and crosses.

Beso purchases the material, prepares it for cutting and produces objects that he either sells directly to the costumer or gives to a store.

Beso's success is a result of many people's work. For example, his wife found about the business training programs through a local NGO. She attended the trainings, since Beso is a wheelchair user and could not access the training space that was located on the second floor. However, finally "I asked the trainer to come see Beso, in case I misunderstood the material". Business trainer agreed and visited Beso seven times for special "home schooling".

"Who wrote your business plan?"

"I did. It was my idea and I wrote the plan".

Beso claims that it was hard for him in the beginning, since he knew nothing about the business management and many concepts were foreign to him. Nonetheless, the business trainer "translated" the concepts for him and provided the carpenter with recommendations. Beso's idea was selected and financed.

After this case, World Vision Georgia provided additional funds for acquiring a training space that is accessible for beneficiaries in wheelchairs.

Section 4

Capacitating Schools

As a response to the community demands for better qualified school teachers, World Vision Georgia contacted McLain's Association for Children to develop and implement a training and supervision program that would help teachers acquire new information and then receive feedback on how they utilize this knowledge. Schools also received materials for the resource room after the training was completed. They shared new experiences with other regional schools during the conferences.

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School Trainings and Conferences on Inclusive Education

Section 5

Awareness and Advocacy Initiatives

Participation in annual global disability events is already shaping as a World Vision Georgia tradition; our goal is to spark advocacy initiatives around the country by involving as many people as possible in global campaigns, among them Wings for Life marathon that sponsors spinal injury research; Light It Up Blue campaign held on International Autism Day; and Lots of Socks campaign held on Down Syndrome Day and of course International Day of People with Disability, December 3. As a result of combined work between World Vision Georgia, government agencies, DPOs and NGOs, Georgian society became familiar with these events and with each year they gain increased popularity and media coverage. This is especially true of Lots of Socks and Light It Up Blue campaigns that were endorsed by influential people, including the President and the First Lady of Georgia.

The social inclusion model implies that people with disabilities represent their community and voice common concerns. Unfortunately, only few DPO's in Georgia have sufficient experience to support people with disabilities. Regional DPOs are on the beginning stage of their work – they wish to learn more about advocacy, grant application and acquisition, project writing, and get more skills to move away from the charity approach.

World Vision Georgia has supported 10 regional DPOs by implementing Citizen Voice and Action methodlogy , with the help of teams comprised of advocacy experts and leading DPO.

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DPO Empowerment

Awarness Raising Campaigns

Section 6

Community Stories

World Vision Footprints

World Vision Georgia is committed to identifying and responding to the needs of the most vulnerable. We would like to share several stories of children that are struggling for equal participation in their community, despite the daily challenges that they encounter.

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funded by World Vision Australia.

Living in Silence, when Those around You Are Deaf to Your Dreams

When we asked 17-year-old Pikria how it feels to live in her community, she answers: "difficult""; she uses her hands, instead of her lips to communicate that truth. Life has been difficult from the beginning and it has only gotten worse as she has grown.

She was just 3 years old when she was diagnosed with deafness, after a neighbor noticed that she did not respond to her name. It was a shock for her family. Her Mother, Maguli, still tears up as she tells us her story. Even after 15 years, she can not imagine how to communicate with Pikria or what her future entails."Pikriawas a very anxious as a child because she could not explain what she needed and was always crying," remembers Maguli.

At the age of 6, Pikria enrolled in the school in her village, like the rest of the children. , This is not one of her favorite memories, unlike many of the other children.

"I did not like school," explains Pikria. "Nobody could understand me and I could not understand anything," she says.

It was clear for the family that Pikria could not stay in that school- it was a painful experience for her. six-year-oldPikria could not communicate with her family members. She could not explain her feelings. All she could do was cry, which she did frequently.

Pikria's mother decided to take her to Tbilisi, the capital city, so she could study in boarding school for the deaf. "It was a difficult decision, as we do not have any family in Tbilisi and to let a six-year-old child live and stay in foreign environment was not easy," remembers her mother. "But, we understood that it was the only solution. Pikria had to study and learn how to communicate," she adds.

The first year was very difficult for Pikria. She was far from her family and still did not know sign language. "Until I studied sign language and started communicating, expressing my feelings, I felt very bad," she remembers. Right now, school is the only place where she has friends. She spends most of her time there and she feels happy.

It is still difficult for her to come to the village. Most of the time, she stays only a few days: "I see that being with her peers, with friends who understand her fully makes her feel good," says her mother.

Perhaps, one of the only times when Pikria has been able to hear, understand and communicate with her peers was at World Vision's three-day camp. Pikria went with her interpreter. She was fully involved in all the activities and trainings. "It was a very good experience and very interesting time for me," says Pikria.

Pikria has often longed to be integrated with youth outside her boarding school. However,in many cases, it has just been a dream for her. The three days at the camp gave her this chance. It was a time when she could speak to her peers, through a interpreter. She could make herself understood and also understand them as well—a rare opportunity.

The reason why Pikria often does not feel comfortable at home is that her parents do not know how to use sign language well.

“I did not have time to study her language,” claims Pikria’s father, as he explains that he can only describe simple things to her.

Although Pikria’a mother understands sign language better, she still has problems explaining things properly. Pikria’s two sisters and one brother, a twenty and a twelve- year old are able to use the sign language, but most of the time they are gone, so Pikria stays home alone. Although she loves her family, her eyes light up when she talks about boarding school, which she calls “home”.

Communication in a hearing world is frustrating for Pikira. Although she has learned a new language speak, her family, her community and those who know her remain deaf to her voice, unable to hear her needs or her dreams.

Unlike many high school students who wait with great anticipation for the end of their education, Pikria is fearful of the future. This is her last year in the boarding school. She will have to return to her community as her family does not have the ability to pay for ongoing education and living costs in the capital.

From Sunday School to Real School

Nana is a 41-year-old mother from the Bagdati Municipality. She has 3 children; the younger, Mate, is a six-year-old boy, diagnosed with cerebral palsy. He rarely goes to Kindergarten. Parents refrained from sending their child to school since they believed that he won't be able to learn.he They also thought that he would have hard time socializing. With such views and attitudes, Nana visited the first meeting in February 20, 2016, held in the frame of the Sunday School for parents and caregivers of children with disabilities. During the sessions, trainers gave recommendations on: how to work with children with disabilities and/or special needs, how to talk to them in an appropriate manner, how to teach and support children's development through play, how to see their strengths and needs, how to support their friendship with peers and simply how to be a better parents, then we are today.

The interesting printed materials alerted Nanato her son's opportunities. She worked with Parents Book, designed especially for parents attending Sunday School. After the sessions, she actively played with Mate. Presently, Nana adopted new attitude -- school is important for her son!

"School is necessary for my son's further development! Furthermore, I want to say to all parents of children with disabilities and special needs – please, give them a chance to develop!" – said Nana.

Mate's case shows that it is essential to work individually with each parent or caregiver, and with the whole family of a child with disability! Integration of each child in the society – is a great achievement and it requires hard work!

Mate's mom will soon get certificate from World Vision Georgia for completion of Parent Sunday School, but the biggest reward is that Mate will go to school together with his friends.

It takes a Village to "Raise" Inclusion

For 59-yearold Nona Mzhavandze, sending her granddaughter Mariam off to preschool means more than picking out her outfits and making a breakfast. It involves hours of meetings with social worker, teachers and inclusive specialist. And it means that her granddaughter will not be isolated from the society and will improve her life skills.

Mariam is three-year-old girl born with diagnosis of spastic paraplegia. She has multiple disabilities: intellectual, physical, and communication needs. Mariam lives in a socially vulnerable family; her grandmother takes care of the child when parents are out for work. The second child in a family, 1.5-year-old Mariam's sister also has a disability. Social support and disability pension is not enough to provide medical support for the children.

Doctors advised Mariam's family to get child socialized, a hard task to accomplish, since the family had no information that a child with disability could be accepted by kindergarten.

In May 2015, World Vision Georgia recommended that Baghdati kindergarten union would hire an inclusive preschool education and development specialist, a person responsible for children with disabilities outreach. The specialist had to work with parents/caregivers to convince them of benefits of inclusive preschool education.

This work gave Mariam a unique opportunity to get enrolled in Rokhi village Kindergarten, where staff was initially capacitated by the newly-hired inclusive preschool education specialist. Mariam was welcomed in a friendly and developmentally appropriate atmosphere for her. The inclusive preschool education and development specialist, together with kindergarten caregiver worked enthusiastically with the child.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

“My girl could not speak, move hand, could not eat or play without help. I could hardly stop crying when I saw her frustrated face, when she looked out of the window and watched other children play. 5 days ago Mariam attempted to eat porridge independently. I took spoon to feed Mariam but she grabbed it from my hand and started helping herself. It was my biggest joy!” Now Mariam can play with toys and cubes together with other children. She communicates with peers, tries to express feelings with sounds, shows emotions, and demonstrates joy with mimics. “I believe that Mariam with the support of inclusive specialists and kindergarten specialists will become joyful, and happy, just like other children”. - Nona, Mariam’s grandma.

Inclusive preschool education was advocated and commenced to be developed in two regions of Georgia. Two inclusive preschool education specialists are funded and capacitated by World Vision Georgia.

They provide consultancy service for municipality kindergartens and are reporting to the Kindergarten Union (municipal structure).

As initially negotiated and agreed with local governments of each municipalities, as far as the initiative proves to be effective municipalities will take over the funding of the inclusive preschool education and development specialists salaries and sustain them as a part of the system. This is the priority issues of an ongoing advocacy by the World Vision Georgia. Even after 2-3 months the initiative proved to be essential, efficient and successful by World Vision Georgia and local government representatives, kindergarten union employees and kindergarten practitioners.

”The parents are quite active and they, generally, are satisfied with an inclusive process at kindergartens, although there are several parents who talk less about their child’s needs and avoid sharing information. It can be said that they don’t give the exact information and these parents don’t give us a chance to engage and ascertain what needs are necessary for the child’s development and what we can do,. However this is a process-related factor, which gradually changes to full acceptance and higher involvement”, claims the Baghdati inclusive education specialist, Tamuna Kiknavelidze.

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