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SUCCESS STORY

Nurses Reach Out to Sex Workers

USAID is working to change risky behaviors



Photo: JSI

Drop-in center outreach worker educates sex workers on HIV prevention.

“As result of our work, I know many sex workers who have changed their unsafe behaviors.”

—Maral Kurbanova, drop-in center outreach worker

Maral is one of many outreach workers engaged in HIV prevention education for sex workers and drug users in Turkmenistan. Twice a week, she meets up with sex workers to conduct mini-sessions on HIV prevention and invites them to visit the drop-in center. At the center, they can join a monthly discussion group, consult with a psychologist, participate in trainings and get referrals for treatment of sexually transmitted infections. The drop-in center reaches hundreds of sex workers and drug users to educate them on healthy lifestyles and HIV prevention to help them change risky behavior and engage in a positive social life.

Maral is a nurse by education and her calling is to protect people from being sick. Near her home, Maral often saw sex workers standing on the street in groups or alone. From time to time men would approach them, they would negotiate something and then disappear. At the urging of a friend, who is an outreach worker, Maral helped conduct a mini-session for sex workers; she soon realized that she was interested in doing outreach work, too.

“As result of our work, I know many sex workers who have changed their unsafe behaviors. For example, during the last focus group meeting one of my clients said, ‘Before I met Maral, I was ignoring condom use most of the time. But now, even if clients offer me much more money for sex without condom, I refuse them because I understand the risk of unprotected sex.’” Maral continues proudly, “I am contributing to reaching the UN Millennium Development Goal of fighting HIV and am proud of my work.”

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