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FIRST PERSON

Making a Positive Change in People's Lives

Through USAID-supported drop-in center, an outreach worker turned his life around and wants to help others do the same



Photo: JSI

A drop-in center outreach worker, standing above, conducts a workshop with drop-in center clients.

“This program helped me turn my life around. I want to give others the same opportunity.”

—Farid Badahshan

“My life changed for the better after coming to the Ashgabat drop-in center in June 2009,” says Farid Badahshan, an outreach worker at the drop-in center who previously abused drugs. At one point, Farid’s circumstances were so dire that he was considering suicide. Yet when Farid read about the drop-in center in a local newspaper, he decided to visit. During his first visit, Farid was welcomed by staff and provided with psychological support. After subsequent visits, he started to believe in himself and began attending activities at the center on a regular basis. Eventually, Farid became more self-assured and offered to volunteer at the drop-in center. “I turned my life around for the better and I would like to help others do the same,” said Farid, who is one of 10 people who make up the center’s first group of outreach workers.

In 2009, USAID’s Capacity Project opened the first drop-in center in Turkmenistan. Now, there are three, including two youth centers, designed to respond to the growing HIV epidemic in Central Asia. Today, the centers provide HIV prevention services and much more to people, especially at-risk youth. The drop-in centers are supported by USAID and Chevron Nebitgaz, B.V, under a project called the Youth Centers Program. The drop-in center is located in Ashgabat and the youth centers are in Mary and Ashgabat to provide youth and people who abuse drugs with psycho-social support, counseling services, HIV-prevention education, and referrals for medical services.

The drop-in center and youth centers provide daily services to hundreds of youth and drug abusers in a client-friendly atmosphere. Farid and others like him are now able to cope with the negative effects brought on by drug use and practice healthier lifestyles. The Government of Turkmenistan, pleased with the centers’ efforts to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS among youth and drug abusers in the country, plans to expand the program to all regions of the country.