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# SUCCESS STORY

## Town Creates Hub for Disabled People

### Multi-ethnic center provides social, health and career services



Photo: USAID/Bulgaria/Jennifer Croft

Shenai Bekir stands in front of the club she revitalized that provides services and information to the disabled residents of Kardzhali.

***“Our most important achievement is that using alternative methods of support, we facilitated the integration of disabled people from different ethnic groups in society,” said Shenai Bekir, regional coordinator of the Union of the Disabled in Kardzhali.***

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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, named “From Us, For Us,” inhabits a modest office space the town offered for free. A renovation transformed the center’s dreary appearance into one cheerfully decorated with colorful children’s drawings. Disabled people of various ethnic origins from Kardzhali and neighboring villages have a cozy place to meet and socialize, and where social consultants and volunteers can extend a friendly helping hand.

A local NGO implementing a USAID-funded interethnic interaction program that operates in Bulgaria’s most ethnically diverse regions provided a majority of the project’s funding. Four consultants of Roma, Turkish and Bulgarian ethnicities assist visitors with filling out applications for social and health services, provide free legal advice on a bi-weekly basis and offer trainings on career development. Special interest groups are formed to address specific problems shared by specific populations, such as disabled mothers. In addition, volunteers from grades 9-11 of a Kardzhali school have organized a course on computer literacy for the disabled at the club.

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

Approximately 900 of the region’s estimated 1,000 disabled people have sought the club’s services at least once during the past year, said Shenai.