

Learning to Take Responsibility for Health

By Joanne Neuber

From Novosibirsk, Russia to Minsk, Belarus to Mykolayiv, Ukraine, citizens are beginning to take charge of their own health through non-governmental programs designed to promote sustainable solutions to community health concerns. These programs, and ones in 14 other Russian Federation cities, are supported by World Learning, a Washington, DC-based organization that promotes sustainable grassroots initiatives that enable participants worldwide to develop the knowledge and skills to address a wide range of social problems.

World Learning's PVO (private voluntary organization)/NIS Health Project received \$6 million in funding from USAID to support projects in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The program promotes sustainable development and capacity building of NIS non-governmental organizations (NGOs) through partnerships with American NGOs. Although World Learning funding from USAID was scheduled to end in March, many of these NGOs have the foundation to continue their programs, said Margot Mininni, deputy director of the PVO/NIS Project.

"Organization strengthening is what we're all about," Mininni said. "Our NGOs are learning how to network and promote their health activities with the surrounding community."

PVO/NIS in the Russian Federation include:

- An Alcoholics Anonymous program in Dubna (see article, above).
- Improved access for the disabled through the Novosibirsk Center for Independent Living and ADRIANE women's health group in Novosibirsk and the Wheeled Mobility Center at San Francisco State University in California. The groups have worked together to establish a community health clinic for the disabled and distribute educational materials on disabilities. Last November, members of the groups hosted a three-day demonstration in Novosibirsk to educate the public on the difficulties faced by disabled citizens, succeeding in creating handicapped access to the city metro station, on public sidewalks and other public facilities. The group also lobbied the Russian Parliament to draft national legislation to ensure that public places will be accessible to people with disabilities.
- The Magee Womancare International/Woman and Family Educational Center-Russia established 24 women's health centers across the Russian Federation. The centers provide childbirth and women's health education classes for 50,000 women annually. The project builds on the model of the Moscow-Pittsburgh AIHA partnership.
- AIDS Infoshare Russia developed a Russian Federation-wide program to distribute information on HIV and AIDS. Through its Web site and print publications, AIDS Infoshare produces health promotion information about the transmission of HIV and safety precautions. Most recently, the group distributed 15,000 AIDS education posters based on an illustration from a popular Russian book, *Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov.
- Nursing associations in Chita and Ekaterinburg have trained nurses in leadership skills, application of nursing standards, association development and community outreach. Part of the program includes a model outreach program on maternal and child health.