

Connections

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Partner News



MOUs Formalize New Partnerships in Georgia

Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), signed on May 24, 2004 in Tbilisi, Georgia, ratified the two new community-based primary care partnerships between the Guria Regional Healthcare Administration Department and World Services of La Crosse and between the Shida Kartli Regional Labor, Health, and Social Affairs Administrations and the Milwaukee International Health Training Center (IHTC). Both US partners are located in the state of Wisconsin.

In addition to representative from each of the institutions participating in the healthcare partnerships, the MOUs were signed by the Georgian Minister of Labor, Health, and Social Affairs Lado Chipashvili; USAID Office Director, Health & Social Development for Georgia and Azerbaijan Khalid Khan; and AIHA Executive Director James Smith.



Participating in the MOU signing are Sandra McCormick, president and chief executive officer, World Service of La Crosse; John Petersen, president, Milwaukee IHTC; Khan; Smith; and Chipashvili. (Photo: Zaza Varsimashvili)

"The new primary care oriented partnerships in Georgia were established in support of USAID's efforts to improve primary healthcare delivery in the country through community-based projects," says Smith, who also notes that by signing the MOUs partners agreed to develop productive and lasting cooperative relationships; expressed a mutual commitment to work as diligently as possible to accomplish project goals; and promised to contribute resources necessary to ensure the success of this collaboration.

As reported in last month's issue of Connections (see ["New Caucasus Partnerships to Focus on Primary Care Delivery, Professional Training for Clinicians"](#)), the partnerships are expected to implement model community-based primary care service delivery systems in the western region of Guria and the central region of Shida Kartli; program implementation for the Shida Kartli region will be focused in Gori.



Minister Chipashvili answers reporters questions about the new partnerships and their goals after the MOU signing ceremony. (Photo: Zaza Varsimashvili)

The model will promote the development of high-quality services in one or more sites, help meet community healthcare needs, and improve access to treatment and care. Emphasis will be on disease prevention and health promotion for adults and children. Plans include the training of medical personnel in preventive services, clinical care, and management, and increasing capacity in the areas of diagnostic and treatment services. The partners have also pledged to develop more effective referral systems, promote evidence-based practice, and encourage health education among local

populations.

According to the Chipashvili, "The activities of AIHA's partnerships will help increase the scope of healthcare services, as well as the quality of and access to primary care available for our citizens. This is in keeping with the country's current healthcare delivery system reform efforts."

AIHA Launches A New Program To Strength Tuberculosis Control In Moldova



Since implementing the National Tuberculosis (TB) Program in 2001, the government of Moldova has made significant progress in expanding the directly observed treatment-short course (DOTS) for TB. Substantial gaps in the diagnosis, treatment, and management of TB services remain, however, and late last year AIHA was awarded a \$4-million grant from USAID to support the government in preventing and treating the epidemic.

In November 2003, AIHA opened a regional office in Chisinau, and local program staff began planning the four components of AIHA's activities: renovating laboratories and training technicians; developing software and conducting training to organize a national system for surveillance of TB cases; increasing the primary healthcare providers' capacity to manage TB; and implementing a public awareness campaign to provide education about the symptoms and treatment of TB.

Project Director Viorel Soltan is leading a team comprised of Project Administrator Ina Lisnic; Laboratory and Surveillance Specialist Valeriu Crudu; Senior Health Communication Specialist Irina Zatusovski; Procurement and Logistics Specialist Slava Rodideal; and Administrative and Financial Assistant Tatiana Dumbrava. The Moldovan Ministries of Health, Justice, and Internal Affairs, as well as the National TB Control Program, the TB Institute, and the State University of Medicine and Pharmacy are participating extensively in the project. The AIHA project team will also collaborate with strategic partners from the State Center of Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases of Latvia (SCTLD) and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS).



Participants gather in Chisinau for the assessment workshop. (Photo: Tatiana Dumbrava)

Although the project was just established in December 2003, some major activities are already underway:

- Representatives from AIHA, UAMS, and SCTLD, along with members of other governmental, non-governmental, and international organizations, met for an assessment workshop in Moldova, February 9-13. Participants visited laboratories, primary care clinics, surveillance units, and schools to assess the current state of TB control in Moldova and to plan the course of the project. TB healthcare stakeholders, including a speaker who attended on behalf of the Ministry of Health, discussed control of the bacillus. During the workshop, AIHA disseminated press kits and held a press conference for local journalists.



Viorel Soltan, a lecturer at the Moldovan School of Public Health, is project director for the AIHA program. (Photo: Valeriu Crudu)

- A draft Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) Survey and a TB communication strategy were developed in collaboration with Moldovan stakeholders and experts from UAMS. Through the results of the questionnaire, key players can determine what the public already knows about TB, establish a baseline upon which to gauge the success of the public awareness campaign, as well as review current TB services available in-country. The public awareness campaign will be based on the findings from the survey.
- A training plan that includes modules on adult teaching methodologies and the DOTS strategy was developed for Moldovan nurses and TB specialists. In July, AIHA will train two

to three family physicians, two to three TB specialists, and two to three nurses, who will then be responsible for training colleagues throughout the country. The goal of this component of the project is to strengthen the capacity of healthcare providers to assess, treat, and monitor TB patients and to develop community-based capacity to address the TB epidemic.

- Beginning in September, AIHA's project team will renovate and equip the National Reference Laboratory in Chisinau and three regional reference laboratories. The four newly renovated laboratories are expected to improve diagnosis, monitoring, and quality control of TB cases. Laboratory staff members—who will act as trainers for other lab technicians—will receive their training at SCLTD that same month. One anticipated result of improving the laboratories is a greater capability to diagnose multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB, a strain of the bacillus often caused by patients not finishing a full course of treatment (noncompliance).

—by Victoria Merkel AIHA publications assistant



Baku Workshop Offers New Approaches for Addressing the Health Problems of Refugees and the Local Population

A three-day workshop held on Clinical Epidemiology and the Essentials of Evidence-based Medicine was conducted in Baku under the auspices of the AIHA Baku/Richmond partnership on March 30-April 1, 2004. Designed to improve the clinical data collection system in Baku's Binagadi District—the area of Azerbaijan's capital with the largest concentration of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)—and strengthen its epidemiology services, the workshop gathered some 12 healthcare professionals, including epidemiology surveillance specialists from Binagadi, staff of the Information and Statistics Department at the Azerbaijan Ministry of Health, key members of the Baku/Portland partnership, and information coordinators from AIHA's three graduating partnerships to develop a comprehensive understanding of clinical epidemiology.

The training was hosted by two US specialists from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Tilahun Adera, chairman of Preventive Medicine and Community Health in the School of Medicine, and Robert Johnson, associate professor in the Department of Biostatistics, introduced basic epidemiological concepts and principles, including data sources research and analysis of outbreaks and their causes. The workshop also included a comprehensive discussion of evidence-based medicine (EBM).



Robert Johnson provides an overview of research design and data analysis. (Photo: Anver Kuchkaryev)

During training sessions, participants were able to review specific examples of how EBM is put into practice in primary healthcare settings, as well as learned how to identify, evaluate, and utilize scientific evidence to improve patient care at medical institutions. In addition, the VCU specialists provided an overview of international classifications systems—such as ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases 10th edition) and ICPC-2 (International Classification of Primary Care)—used by healthcare institutions. In 2003, WHO endorsed ICPC-2 for the recording of primary care data and the system is in the process of being registered as one of WHO's Family of Classifications.

According to Jeyhoun Mamedov, AIHA country coordinator for Azerbaijan, the introduction of these classification systems will enable healthcare providers to move toward internationally recognized standards for classifying primary care data and to switch to ICD-10 codes for diagnoses. He also stressed the importance of using public domain software—such as EpiInfo—which was provided by the American partners to help their Azeri counterparts to collect, analyze, and graph epidemiology data in the Binagadi district. "With this software on hand, specialists will be able to analyze clinical data much faster and more thoroughly," says Mamedov.

In relation to this, outpatient Polyclinic #39, which is affiliated with Baku City Joint Hospital #6, was selected as the first partnership site to have a computerized data analysis system in the Binagadi district. "When implemented, the electronic data base will allow healthcare providers to evaluate the health status of the local population and will enable medical specialists and authorities to concentrate their efforts on addressing the specific needs of the refugees and local population, which will save on both human and material resources," explains Mamedov.



Can the Media Improve a Population's Health? Ukrainian Journalists Address this Question at Kiev Seminar

One of the main functions of a journalist is to inform the public about world and local events. An equally vital role they play is to educate readers and viewers about topics that are important and relevant to an individual's life. Because the media reaches thousands—even millions—of people, journalists can help shape public opinion on a given topic. This, in turn, may lead to specific changes in society, for better or for worse. Frequent coverage of a topic on television or in the press can

define it as a matter of urgency in the minds of the audience. Likewise, what does not get covered in the media may be ignored by millions, for whom it might as well not exist or have happened.

On May 17 in Kiev, AIHA sponsored a seminar titled "Topics of Interest in Medicine." The event provided 20 Ukrainian representatives from television, radio, and the written press an opportunity to discuss how to better educate the Ukrainian public about matters related to health. Specialists from the independent media network Internews-Ukraine conducted the seminar.



Journalists discuss possible ways to inform readers about the advantages of family medicine. (Photo: Vira Illiash)

Participants worked to answer a number of questions aimed at helping them orient health coverage to the needs of their audience. An even higher priority discussed was how to attract readers and viewers who as a rule do not pay any attention to their own health—such as the overwhelming majority of adolescents and other members of at-risk groups.

During the workshop, Stepan Mayilo, director of the Internal Medicine Department at the Family Medicine Training Center opened in the Darnitsky District of Kiev under AIHA's Kiev/Philadelphia partnership, gave a presentation on the work of AIHA programs in Ukraine. In particular, he discussed projects that address mother and child health, family medicine, and socially dangerous diseases like HIV/AIDS and TB. By having a local medical expert address the journalists, attendees were given the opportunity to not only learn about these areas in depth, but to meet someone who is a potential useful contact for future reporting.



Ukrainian television and radio journalists participate in a working session on ways to attract the attention of at-risk individuals to HIV/AIDS- and TB-related stories. (Photo: Vira Illiash)

Agreeing that the Ukrainian media provides too little educational information on health and prevention, seminar participants developed approaches for presenting this kind of material in a manner that could capture the attention of active and passive segments of the population alike. They looked at how to expound these topics for their target audiences as comprehensively as possible, in informative and attractive ways.

Pavel Moiseyev, a lawyer from Internews-Ukraine, also worked closely with the journalists to clarify the ethical and legal aspects of reporting on topics in medicine.

In the words of Yekaterina Konovalova-Smirnova, a host on the popular *Music Radio*, taking part in this seminar was a chance to learn many new things about family medicine as well as to get a sense of the real situation regarding such topical issues as HIV and TB.

At the end of the seminar, the journalists received information packets describing AIHA's programs and exchanged contact information, expressing hope that they would be able to meet again in the future.

Regional News

World Blood Donor Day

The World Health Organization has declared June 14 [World Blood Donor Day](#). Events planned for the day serve the dual purpose of offering recognition for people throughout the world who donate blood and encouraging others to give blood regularly. Festivities marking the start of celebrations related to World Blood Donor Day will commence in Johannesburg with a campaign called "Blood, A Gift for Life," says *UN Wire*.

South Africa was selected as the place to kick off the global celebration because, according to WHO, the country observes a high rate of voluntary blood donation with relatively low incidence of HIV among donors.

A report released by *UN Wire* says that healthcare facilities in most countries lack a sufficient supply of blood and many experience cases when donor blood is infected—two factors that can have a negative impact on a population's health. Additionally, blood shortages severely impact women suffering from complications related to pregnancy, children with extreme malnutrition or malaria-induced anemia, and trauma victims, while the transfusion of infected blood can result in fatal consequences.

World Blood Donor Day is supported by countries throughout Africa, Asia, and Central and Eastern Europe, including Kosovo, Latvia, and Russia. Organizations joining WHO in supporting the day's events are the [International Society of Blood Transfusion](#), the [International Federation of Blood Donor Organizations](#), and the [International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#).

European Commission Allocates More Funds to Improve Disaster Preparedness in Central Asia

The European Commission has allocated more than \$3 million to finance a second Disaster Preparedness Action Plan for Central Asia that will help governments and citizens in the region better respond to the numerous earthquakes, landslides, floods, and other natural disasters that plague the region, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' *Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN)*. The project will be implemented by the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO).

Over the course of the past decade, natural disasters have affected lives of 5.5 million people and killed some 2,500 of local citizens. It is expected that this new funding will allow national Red Crescent Societies, local authorities, and non-governmental organizations to improve their current system of disaster preparedness through public awareness campaigns, the appropriate training of local populations,

development of well coordinated management plans.

As *IRIN* reports, most of the projects will be concentrated in Tajikistan, the nation where the greatest number of natural disasters in the region occurred last year. In 2003, a large number of settlements in the southern and northern districts of Tajikistan were ravaged by some 120 floods, avalanches, and landslides, as well as 12 earthquakes. These natural disasters significantly drained the country's resources and further aggravated economic and social conditions among the local population, 83 percent of whom live under the poverty line while 17 percent are indigent. In addition to Tajikistan, ECHO's disaster preparedness plan will cover Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, two other countries in the region that are prone to natural catastrophes.

According to Cecile Pichon, who heads ECHO's projects in Central Asia, the European Commission decided to expand its Disaster Preparedness Programme (DIPECHO) for Central Asia because of the very high social and human impact of natural disasters. In view of this, Pichon emphasizes that "The DIPECHO project has a direct impact on the life of the communities and we hope we can continue having such funding for the region because we feel it is very important to prevent and to help before—rather than respond after—a disaster has happened."

Workshops, Conferences, Opportunities and Grants

The European Society of Cardiology Invites Applications for Clinical Training Fellowships

This fellowship helps medical professionals under the age of 35 acquire clinical experience in high quality cardiology practices with the ultimate goal of enabling them to contribute to improving academic standards in their home countries when they return. In keeping with this objective, preference will be given to applicants from nations where modern clinical cardiology is not yet strong, provided there is enough evidence that the applicant can contribute to the improvement of clinical cardiology in his or her home country upon completion of the fellowship. For more information, please go to:

[www.escardio.org/initiatives/membership/fellowship/Rules for the ESC training Fellowship.htm](http://www.escardio.org/initiatives/membership/fellowship/Rules%20for%20the%20ESC%20training%20Fellowship.htm)

2nd International Conference on Cancer on the Internet

The European School of Oncology will hold its 2nd International Conference on Cancer on the Internet September 13-14, 2004 at Rockefeller University in New York City. The conference aims to update participants about emerging information technologies and their potential impact across the spectrum of cancer from prevention to end-of-life care, to discuss key challenges in harnessing the power of the Internet in the fight against cancer, and to identify opportunities for collaborative projects on the use of the Internet to optimize the fight against cancer worldwide. For more information, please visit:

www.cancerworld.org/eso/programme_2003/CancerOnTheInternet/default.asp?ActiveMenu=2

Call for Information on Discoveries in The Area of Behavioral and Social Science

The Decade of Behavior Initiative is seeking input from behavioral and social scientists to identify significant breakthroughs, discoveries, or applications in the behavioral and social science fields. The objective of this project is to increase awareness among both the public and policymakers about the importance of behavioral and social science research in addressing societal concerns and issues and to compose a publishable list of the top 10 breakthroughs in the behavioral and social sciences. For additional information, see:

www.apsanet.org/PS/announcements/behavior.cfm

2005-2006 Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellowship

The purpose of this fellowship is to give outstanding mid-career health professionals in academic and community-based settings an opportunity to learn more about the legislative process through direct participation. Fellows actively contribute to the formulation of national health policies and accelerate their careers as leaders in health policy. The program is funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and conducted by the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences. For more information, go to: www.apsanet.org/about/cfp/

International Cancer Vaccine Symposium

The Royal Society of Medicine and the Hasumi International Research Foundation will hold a symposium on clinical and laboratory advances in cancer vaccines and immunotherapies. The event will take place in London on November 12-14, 2004. For more information, please visit: www.rsm.ac.uk/academ/810-hasumi.htm

Features

Moving Beyond Traditional Structures: Russian CLDP Graduates Use Community Mobilization Techniques to Bring Health to Their Cities

"A healthcare system alone is not able to improve a person's health because health is the result of much more than just medical care." This sentiment, expressed by Yulia Abrosimova, coordinator of the Russian Healthy Cities Network at the Scientific and Research Institute of Public Health and Healthcare Management, is the underlying philosophy behind the Healthy Communities concept, a programmatic approach endorsed by AIHA as the foundation for its Community Leadership Development Program (CLDP), sponsored by the Open World Leadership Center at the United States Library of Congress. Recognizing that health as a broad concept is a fundamental element of civil society and that today's youth will become tomorrow's leaders, the 2003 CLDP program agenda and exchanges focused on broadening the vision of what creates and sustains a "healthy community" for adolescents and young adults, particularly those at-risk.



Nikolay Kuznetsov, coordinator for Open World in the Samara Oblasts, speaks about Open World's program perspectives during the CLDP follow-up meeting in the region; Galina Gusarova, minister of health of the Samara Oblast (far left) was part of the same panel discussion. (Photo: Marina Ayvazian)

In November and December 2003, some 57 healthcare professionals and community leaders representing schools, substance abuse programs, law enforcement, the media, and social services from 12 rural communities in three Russian oblasts—Sakhalin, Samara, and Tomsk—had the opportunity to learn more about the Healthy Communities approach to civic mobilization, as well as how some US communities are addressing issues related to at-risk adolescents. The program began with an orientation in Moscow, where principals of community mobilization and strategic planning—such as bringing citizens together to identify problems, set priorities, and develop an action plan—were discussed. Then, during a 7-day exchange hosted by citizens and families in selected US communities in Minnesota, Iowa, and Texas, participants were given the chance to observe first-hand how the community planning process

works and how effective healthcare and social services programs targeting the lifestyles of young people interact with one another. During the exchanges, participants visited school-based programs that promote healthy lifestyle choices, substance abuse prevention and risk reduction programs, athletic events sponsored by schools and communities, and church and employment programs, all of which are working to provide comprehensive, accessible services to citizens—especially to adolescents who often lack both accurate information and the emotional support they need to make healthy lifestyle choices.

The program concluded with two days in Washington, DC, where participants met with health policymakers at the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services and Congressional leaders, as well as developed action plans to address healthy lifestyles and the health-related needs of young people in their home communities. The projects identified by each community and the action plans they created were the result of what participants had seen on their trip, as well as the application of the Healthy Community mobilization approach to which they had been exposed.

"The Healthy Communities method encourages the identifying and solving of local problems by involving different stakeholders at the community level," explains Abrosimova, who served as a trainer for CLDP follow-up meetings held this spring in Russia. Underscoring that empowering a wide variety of people and organizations plays a vital role in improving a community's health outcomes and well being, Abrosimova says that a community's health is directly dependent on its social, economic, and environmental conditions.

"This means that in order to improve health in our communities, we need to combine the efforts of government agencies, nonprofit and private organizations, and the public in the problem solving process. Only the coordinated and organized response of many community members can bring improvement," she explains.



Ivan Prudnikov, deputy head of the Molchanovo Regional Administration, talks to CLDP participants about the importance of intersectoral collaboration in addressing community needs. (Photo: Marina Ayvazian)

The progress of the projects first identified in Washington and initiated by the Russian leaders when they returned to their home communities was discussed at the follow-up meetings convened by AIHA in each participating oblast in February, March, and April 2004. At these highly interactive forums, 2003 CLDP graduates were not only

able to share their achievements and experiences about implementing their projects, but also—building upon each others' experiences—reinforce the community mobilization skills and strategies they learned during the study tour. The meetings were also attended by 2002 CLDP alumni and US host partners whose expertise and experience added to the knowledge shared. In addition, CLDP graduates had the chance to meet representatives of the Russian Open World Network, who presented their Web site, which was created to encourage collaboration between the program participants and to promote the Network's civic society initiatives.

Tomsk Communities Take First Steps on Road Where Health is Ultimate Destination

The first CLDP meeting, held in Tomsk, on February 18-19, brought together 19 community leaders from four rural areas in the Tomsk oblast: Bakchar, Molchanovo, Parabel, and Shegarka. Through action reports, presentations, group discussions, and interactive activities, the event reinforced the idea that a team approach with intersectoral collaboration is an effective way to improve community health.

Bakchar Strives to Improve Quality of Life in High-risk Groups

Reporting on their first steps to implement a program to support young, high-risk families, Irina Guseva, a specialist on youth issues at the Bakchar Region Administration, said that her group chose to work in this area because of an increasing number of unwed mothers and low-income families in Bakchar, as well as high unemployment rates among youth. These factors are linked to substance abuse and violence among young people, explained Guseva, and these individuals often do not contribute to their own health, nor to that of their children who observe and mimic the habits of their parents.



Vitaliy Grakhov, head physician at Tomsk Inter-University Hospital and a 2002 CLDP graduate, shares his experiences related to promoting healthy lifestyle choices among youth with participants from Bakhchar.

(Photo: Marina Ayvazian)

According to Guseva, a healthy community is achieved when every resident has the opportunity to experience a high quality of life. To address the problem of low-income and high-risk families, the Bakchar team created a working group consisting of social workers, educators, healthcare providers, and a lawyer. "We developed a database of at-risk families and implemented a social aid program that includes employment assistance as well as lodging for families whose living conditions are not acceptable," said Guseva adding that the Backchar Administration also allocated additional funds to pay the kindergarten fee for children from low-income or unemployed families.

The program developed by the Backchar team also includes a media campaign aimed at changing the negative attitude of local people toward their unemployed or at-risk neighbors. "Using the media, we are working to raise the community's awareness about the needs of these families and jointly help them to overcome the difficulties associated with their lifestyles, as well as to dispel the stigma surrounding them, which contributes to their social isolation," Guseva explained.

Successful Collaboration Across Communities Brings Public Health Center to Molchanovo

The collaboration of many local sectors, as well as the leveraging of their resources, has made it possible for CLDP graduates from Molchanovo to develop a project to promote increased community participation in a program that teaches healthy lifestyle choices. The Community Board, appointed by the regional authorities to manage this task, includes leaders from many social sectors, including education, culture, healthcare, sports, a youth policy agency, and the militia.

According to Ivan Prudnikov, deputy head of the Regional Administration, "Cooperation among the different agencies was instrumental for addressing social and health issues at the local level." As an example of how this approach works, he explained that healthcare providers from the Molchanovo Regional Hospital work in concert with local schools to educate children about healthy choices, while organizations and individuals from the sports and cultural sectors help to organize health fairs and sports activities that involve all community members in health programs. In addition, he stressed the role of the militia in building a social support network to fight against drug and substance abuse.

The establishment of the Molchanovo Public Health Center (PHC) was cited by the group as one of their major achievements. According to Prudnikov, the Center, which serves as the coordinating mechanism to promote disease prevention and healthy lifestyle choices is a platform for assuring effective and sustainable program development in the region.



Healthy lifestyle game show winners from Molchanovo prepare prior to the contest.
(Photo: Vira Illiash)

Mikhail Chinyayev, head physician of the Molchanovo Regional Hospital, where the PHC is located, said that the Center's priorities are determined by the health problems prevalent among children and the elderly, such as hypertension, diabetes, bronchial asthma, scoliosis, and caries. He explained that all these health concerns are addressed through educational focus groups—an approach borrowed from the experience of the Svetly Public Health Center, which was opened within AIHA's Tomsk/Bemidji partnership and which now serves as a model site for the Molchanovo PHC. In fact, the replication was given as an example of how collaborative support can generate positive change and how relationships across communities become tools for transferring successful social technologies. (For more information about the PHCs in Svetly and Molchanovo see: ["Tomsk/Bemidji Partners Showcase Excellence in Motivating Population to Lead Healthy Lifestyles and Gain More Followers Among Healthcare Providers"](#))

Shegarka Community Leaders Look for Effective Solutions to Increase Public Involvement

Another example of collaboration between different communities was presented by CLDP graduates from Shegarka, who include representatives from the healthcare, education, media, culture, and sports sectors. The Head of the Tomsk Oblast Center for AIDS Prevention and Treatment, Alexandr Chernov, is among this group. Despite the fact that Shegarka remains relatively untouched by the HIV/AIDS epidemic—which mainly affects the city of Tomsk and town of Strizhevoy—the participation of Chernov enhanced the group's knowledge about the infection and helped them develop a comprehensive substance abuse prevention strategy to be used to help adolescent drug addicts in the region.



The CLDP group from Shegarka discuss their achievements to date. (Photo: Marina Ayvazian)

First Deputy Head of the Shegarka Administration Anatoliy Sychev said that it was due to the efforts of the CLDP graduates that the region-wide Economic and Social Development Program adopted by the Municipal Council in 2004 to improve the quality of life of the local population also included a Healthy Communities component. According to Sychev, the healthy community development plan was widely discussed in the media and during meetings held with local citizens. These discussions revealed reluctance on the part of individuals to adhere to healthier lifestyle choices and, as he explained, "[it was at] this

we realized that we needed to change the attitude of the local population toward their health and that this could only be achieved through well-directed efforts carried out by all of us."

Chernov said that as a result of this conclusion, he suggested an analysis of the healthcare needs of each population group within the community so that their specific concerns could be addressed. "Every information campaign should be aimed at a particular target population; only when it concerns environmental conditions, should the entire community be targeted," he said, also emphasizing the importance of getting feedback from community members.

As a successful example of how this mechanism works, Chernov told participants about a long-term campaign conducted by the HIV/AIDS Center in cooperation with the Tomsk Polytechnic Institute to fight infectious disease and promote healthy lifestyle choices among students. According to Chernov, through a variety of different educational events including round-table discussions, conferences, workshops, counseling sessions, and articles published in a student newspaper, the group was able to "increase the responsibility of young people toward their lifestyle choices." As proof, Chernov quoted an article that appeared in the student paper written by a group of freshmen as a passionate appeal to their peers to lead a healthy life. Students in the article said that "Young people should recognize the value of health and quit the harmful habits that ruin their bodies. At the same time, alcohol and tobacco advertising should be strictly prohibited."

"It took us eight years to get these results," said Chernov, encouraging his colleagues to arm themselves with patience and persistence.

Parabel Votes for Sports Promotion as Tool for Improving Health

A major goal of the healthy community movement in the village of Parabel includes healthy lifestyles promotion among the youth through sports activities.



Community leaders from Parabel work with 2002 CLDP graduate Yelena Lobanova (in the middle), youth policy specialist at the Strizhevoy City Administration, on their presentation. (Photo: Marina Ayvazian)

Having learned that public health statistics show that female adolescents involved in sporting activities have improved self esteem and much lower pregnancy rates and that for both genders physical activities decrease experimentation with and the use of drugs and alcohol, as well as decrease the isolation that can lead to other risky behaviors, the Parabel team decided to focus on getting adolescents involved in such programs.

A survey asking "What kind of sports do you like?" conducted in Parabel secondary schools by a multidisciplinary team of CLDP graduates showed that local children favored skiing and hockey. According to Vladimir Denezhko, deputy head of the Parabel Regional

Administration, regional authorities combined their efforts with sports and educational institutions to build two skating rinks to meet the needs of children, as well as convinced the local administration to budget in expenses for construction of a ski lodge for the next year. "We are also planning to attract parents of schoolchildren

to sports activities because a family approach will be more effective in promoting healthy lifestyles among community members," he said.

Stopping Teenage Smoking a Priority in the Samara Oblast

On March 23-24, the second CLDP graduate meeting was held for 24 delegates from the communities of Chapaevsk, Kinel-Cherkassi, Krasny Yar, and Stavropol, all located in the Samara Oblast. As with the previous meeting, each group reported on their achievements to date, shared lessons learned about community mobilization strategies, and discussed plans for the future. A media game show designed to build on the ability of the participants to deliver an effective healthy lifestyle message to their communities was also part of the program.



The team from Chapayevsk prepares for a panel discussion on community involvement. (Photo: Marina Ayvazian)

Each of the Samara Oblast groups spoke about actions taken to identify specific health needs and adolescent health problems in their communities.

To evaluate the extent of tobacco use among teenagers, the group from the city of Chapaevsk conducted an assessment survey in three local schools. As was reported by Irina Kelchina, a teacher at Chapaevsk boarding school #1, the results of the survey were more dire than even the most pessimistic expectations. The survey showed that more than 55 percent of boys and approximately 48 percent of girls smoked regularly, with an additional 20 percent of male and 10 percent of female students admitting to occasional smoking.

In an attempt to make their anti-tobacco message loud and clear, the group from Chapaevsk launched a broad-scale campaign. As a starting point, they convinced the City Administration to provide funding for a two-year program aimed at decreasing the number of smokers among teenagers. The program will focus on training peer educators to promote healthy lifestyle choices, organizing races and health fairs that promote smoking cessation, and writing articles for the three local newspapers to raise the awareness of parents and local authorities about the problem, as well as to educate the public in general, regarding the adverse effects of tobacco.

The CLDP groups from Krasny Yar and Kinel-Cherkassi also shared concerns about the large number of adolescent smokers in their communities. Evgeniy Butinov, director of the Krasny Yar Sport and Fitness Center, said that the problem proved much bigger than they initially thought. In many instances parents would give their children money to buy cigarettes to deter them from stealing cigarettes from individuals or grocery stores. To help fight this, the CLDP graduates from Krasny Yar initiated a one-year project that, apart from running anti-smoking information campaigns, offers a marathon, a mini-football tournament, and other sporting events as means of improving health in the adolescent population.



Yevgeniy Butinov speaks about sport projects implemented in Krasny Yar to improve the health of local youth. (Photo: Marina Ayvazian)

The name of the program developed by the community leaders from Kinel-Cherkassi is "Creating Healthy Lifestyles for Teenagers." It takes advantage of the youngsters' fascination with computer games and introduces innovative Biofeedback technology to the school setting. Based on the interactive game format, this technology can pinpoint a broad spectrum of adolescent health problems including asthma, bronchitis, scoliosis, flat-footedness, and stress. A special device connected to certain parts of the human body transmits electrical signals from the muscles to a screen, thereby teaching young patients to associate their muscles with actual levels of tension and allows them to develop the healthier habit of keeping muscles only as tense as necessary, for as long as necessary. According to Yelena Zapolina, deputy head of Kinel-Cherkassi Rayon Hospital, this technology has proven effective in more than 500 regions in Russia and the CLDP graduates have established a coordination team that is now seeking resources to make the technology available to local schoolchildren.



Representatives from Stavropol hold up stills from a health promotion trailer that took first prize at the media game show conducted during the meeting. (Photo: Marina Ayvazian)

Zapolina also indicated that since their return from the United States in December 2003, the CLDP participants have conducted a healthy lifestyle campaign through a series of sporting competitions in which local professional athletes participated. In addition, the group facilitated the establishment of two hot lines designed to communicate public concerns about security and safety to the local law enforcement authority. They also petitioned the regional Environmental Protection Department to address inappropriate garbage collection practices, poor quality drinking water, and other public and environmental health issues.

The Stavropol group was represented by Vasily Sereda, head physician of the Regional Center of Sanitary and Epidemic Control. Explaining that his group is still initiating the first steps of the work plan, he underscored the role of the follow-up

workshop, which according to him, "provides a unique opportunity to learn from the experiences of others and will enable us to develop a more detailed action plan to initiate effective programs."

Sakhalin Oblast Leaders Reinforce Their Community Mobilization Skills and Identify Further Directions

The last in the series of the 2003 CLDP follow-up meetings was conducted on April 26-27 for 14 representatives from the regions of Poronaisk, Tomari, and Nevelsk in the Sakhalin Oblast. The meeting was also attended by representatives from the US State Department's Regional Initiative for the Russian Far East, who briefed participants about their programs on public security and safety.

During discussions, interactive sessions, and presentations, the CLDP graduates had the chance to share their progress and reinforce their skills in multidisciplinary teamwork, strategic planning, and methods of community involvement.

Most of the 2003 CLDP project participants spoke about the administrative challenges associated with the planning of community-wide environmental protection, social welfare, and healthcare initiatives, while Nadezhda Prikhod'ko, deputy head at the Nogliki Regional Administration, a 2002 CLDP graduate, and guest speaker, shared information about the successful health promotion and community mobilization projects she and member of her CLDP team put into place in the Nogliki region.

Talking about health programs initiated in her community, Prikhod'ko stressed the values and influence children derive from their families. "Taking into account that only a healthy family is able to raise a healthy member of society, we decided to support family-oriented projects," she explained. To achieve this goal, the group developed educational programs focused on men's and women's health to train both children and their parents about safe and healthy lifestyle choices. They also established a school for young families, which includes parenting education. As a result, they reported a six-fold decrease in the number of terminated pregnancies over the last year.

Speaking about the community mobilization process, Prikhod'ko told the story of a local youth organization that worked to resist the decision of the Oblast Administration to establish a new local dump. She saw this action of public protest by a group established with the support of CLDP graduates not only a success in environmental protection, but also as an important lesson in how each community member shares responsibility in the building of civil society.

Speaking about the April meeting, Victor Makarov, vice-mayor of the Poronaisk Region, said that "the workshop provided enough evidence that community mobilization fosters stronger relationships between local



During the panel discussion on community involvement strategies, 2002 CLDP graduate Nadezhda Prikhod'ko (second from right) shares methods for increasing the public's attitude toward taking responsibility for their own health. (Photo: Marina Ayvazian)

governments, different social sectors, and community members, as well as increases the participatory decision-making processes, expands the role of marginalized populations such as adolescents and the elderly, and helps maximize the use of local resources for the public good." He said that his participation in the CLDP program gave him the opportunity "to observe the value of raising a community's interest in improving their level of life and the necessary knowledge that enabled [him] to alter administrative approaches to encourage these changes."

Commenting on the results of all three follow-up meetings, facilitator Abrosimova emphasized that each project defines different objectives and activities, but all have the same critical goal of creating a healthier community, which "makes a sizable and valuable contribution to providing platforms for a safe and better future."

—Unless otherwise noted, all stories in this issue were written by AIHA Staff Writer Vira Illiash who is based in Kiev, Ukraine.