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PROTECTION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

შავლუღული შავსაქმელოების მქონე ბავშვთა დაცვა

CHILDREN OF GEORGIA

Final Report of the

Enhancing specialized foster care system for children with disabilities in Georgia

Project

September 2017 - February 2019

Working Group Facilitation - In the beginning of the Project, in September, 2017 Children of Georgia (CoG) local expert organized working group on supporting foster care system of Georgia. Working group was consisted by the representatives of Ministry of Labor Health and Social Affairs of Georgia (MoLHSA), Social Service Agency (SSA), UNICEF and the NGOs working in relevant field. Initially, the aim of the working group was to develop a draft document on foster carers's recruitment strategy and to develop concepts for different types of foster caring (specilized, recpite). The working group meetings were planned approximately once in a month. During the period of Sept-Dec 2017, group member NGOs presented their experience of recruiting foster parents to working group. World Vision Georgia presented the draft version of needs of assessment of foster parents; Children of Georgia presented USA experience of foster carers' recruitment; Georgian Association of Social Workers presented their recent project report on recruitment foster carers in Kvemo Kartli Region.

On February 9th, 2018, CoG local expert organized another meeting of working group. Representatives of MoLHSA, SSA, UNICEF and the NGOs working in relevant field attended the meeting. The aim of the meeting was to introduce the group with the draft document on foster carers's recruitment strategy and the concepts for different types of foster caring (specilized, emergency, recpite) developed by CoG local expert.

After discussing the presented draft recruitment strategy, group came to the decision that it would be better if the document becomes more general and covers topics of foster care system development, not just the recruitment strategy actions. Group agreed that the strategy of foster care system development should include the following parts:

- Dissemination of information on foster care
- Recruitment of FCs
- FCs training
- FCs Registration
- Possible Barriers of FCs Registration
- FCs supporting services
- Monitoring of Foster care service

Discussing the concepts of the different types of foster care (specialized, emergency, respite), Nutshi Odisharia, the head of social protection department of MoLHSA noted that those types of foster care are regulated by the Foster Care Rule, which was officially adopted in the end of December 2018. Therefore, there is no need to develop separate concepts on specialized, emergency and respite foster care.

In August 2018, draft document was discussed with the working group at MoLHSA. Working group members, including Nutshi Odisharia reviewed the document. Considering all the feedback and comments of the representatives of MoLHSA, the Ministry approved presented document; CoG local expert worked to update the structure of the document to be relevant to the format Ministry required.

The last draft of the document was sent to the group in February 2019 for the feedback and comments. It is planned to organize working meeting of the group to finalize the document in May 2019.

Recruitment of foster carers in selected locations

CoG local expert organized consultation meetings with the representatives of SSA on selection of the locations for foster carers recruitment. Consultations included analyzing of current

number and deficit/need of foster carers in all regions of Georgia. Also, analyze of the target groups of recruitment.

Foster care needs assessment done by World Vision Georgia in 2017, revealed that the most appropriate target groups of foster parents are:

- Staff of schools
- Staff of kindergartens
- Staff of day care centers
- Staff of primary medical centers

Following the above-mentioned assessment, CoG planned informational meetings with the staff of day care centers (as CoG focuses mostly on specialized foster carers, staff of day care centers are considered more relevant to that type of foster caring). There was organized meetings with the Tbilisi, Rustavi and Mtskheta day care centers in May-June, 2018. 80 persons from different day care centers attended the meetings. Apart of giving information to day care centers' staff about fostering and possibilities of become foster parent, CoG got very important suggestions from them too – how should be information disseminated about foster caring to best reach the population. The main point from the meeting participants was that probably people do not have information about the opportunity to become foster parent and that is a main reason why there is a low demand on becoming foster parent in Georgia. Therefore, it is necessary to disseminate information with the massive informational sources more widely. CoG local expert reflected that point in the FC development strategy in the part of recruiting foster parents.

On 31st of May, 2018 CoG local experts and representative of UNICEF organized visit in Marneuli and Bolnisi (Kvemo Kartki Region). Meetings in Marneuli were at SSA office and PDO and in Municipality of city in Bolnisi. The aims of the meetings were to discuss the needs (including issues of recruitment new foster parents) of the foster care in particular locations and plans on strengthening foster care.

The follow up indicators of recruitment actions were visible in the end of 2018 year. SSA referred list of 40 foster parent candidates to CoG for training. Candidates were mostly from Tbilisi, also from Kvemo Kartli and Mtskheta Mtianeti Region. Comparing to the same date of

2017, there was no demand for becoming foster parent in Tbilisi. CoG organized three training groups for those 40 candidates in the end of 2018 and in the beginning of 2019.

Assessment of Child Admission and Outflow dynamics at the Tbilisi Infant House

In October-December, 2018 CoG implemented assessment of Child Admission and Outflow dynamics at the Tbilisi Infant House. Report of the assessment was sent to UNICEF Georgia in January 2019. UNICEF Organized meeting with the representatives of MoLHSA and partner organizations, where CoG presented outcomes of the assessment, in February 2019.

Training for foster carers - In October 2017 CoG local experts revised and edited existing training module for foster carers. During full period of the project, CoG in close collaboration with SSA organized 11 training groups in Tbilisi and different regions of Georgia. As for the agreement with SSA, regarding the needs of foster parents in particular region, CoG got list of the training participants from the SSA representative, before every training. According to the initial agreement, CoG was meant to provide 10 days intensive training for the specialized foster parent candidates. After changing Georgian law on adoption and foster care (January 2018), preparative training become obligatory for registration of foster parents. According to the law, duration of preparative training for regular foster parents is 21 hours and for specialized foster parents 28 hours. Thus, 10 days intensive training, which was planned in frames of the project for preparation of foster parents would be too much distinctive from the law regulations. Therefore, CoG made an agreement with SSA that trainings conducted in frames of the project would last for 6 days (36 hours). 10 days intensive training was only conducted for the very first group the project in Akhaltsikhe, in October 2017.

In frame of the project, CoG totally trained 129 foster parents in Georgia. The training program is considered for preparation of specialized as well as regular foster parents.

The topics of the training were:

- Description of State child care services
- Child with disability in foster care
- Child rights
- Preparation of child to transfer in poster family
- Social and educational inclusion

- Specification of infant care
- First aid for children
- Medical care of children with disabilities
- Characteristics of Child Development
- Violence against children
- Child developmental disorders
- Challenging Behavior
- Professional stress and burnout

ToT Training of SSA MoLHSA staff – Initially, training of trainers (ToT) was considered as one of the activities of the project, as the changes in the law on adoption and foster care, regarding the preparative training which should be conducted by the representatives of SSA or/and MoLHSA, were announced earlier.

In March 2018, training of trainers (ToT) was conducted for two groups of representatives of SSA and MoLHSA (5 days training for each group, totally 16 participants). The topics of ToT were the same as for foster parents.

Considering the project plans, those trained SSA and MoLHSA staff would provide preparative trainings for people willing to register as a foster parent in future. In addition, CoG considered inviting trained staff as co-trainers to join trainings for foster parents, during the project. Even though, CoG provided information before every training to SSA for ensuring attendance of trained staff for ongoing training, attendance of trained staff could not happen before the last training group. The reason SSA staff could not attend the trainings was that they are always overloaded by their professional tasks and there was no time for them to attend trainings.

Representatives of SSA attended last training as co-trainers in February 2019. Two co-trainers of the training were – practitioner social worker – Anna Bardavelidze and representative of head department of Social Service Agency – Eter Zurebiani.

Ongoing support of foster carers – CoG multidiscipline team of psychologists (specialists of child development), occupational therapist and pediatrician implemented ongoing support of those foster carers, to whom after the successful process of matching, CoG supported transition

of children from Tbilisi Infant House. In frame of the project CoG team conducted ongoing support to the foster parents in every region where children were transited. The aims of the visits were to assess developmental progress of children living in specialized foster care; In particular - adaptation of children to new environment, assessment of their health, social-emotional and functional development and to give relevant recommendations to the foster parents for the future.

Multidisciplinary assessment of children and support SSA social workers with new placements of children with disabilities in trained foster care families

According to the project activities, CoG multidiscipline team assessed children living in Tbilisi Infant House periodically. The aim of the assessment was to determine health and developmental condition of children, to get recommendations on their placement in foster care. Apart of assessment of children skills and health condition, occupational therapist and psychologist made recommendations on adaptive equipment every child might need in foster care, according to particular child's needs. During the project, CoG multidiscipline team assessed every child living in Tbilisi infant house. Fifteen children of them were transited to foster families during the project (In Tbilisi, Senaki, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe and Ozurgeti).

In all fifteen cases, children were equipped with the necessary adaptive equipment, recommended by the occupational therapist and the psychologist. Adaptive equipment included adaptive table/chair, orthopedic matras, stroller, adaptive dishes and developmental toys.

Development of the monitoring toolkit – According to the project, CoG local expert in collaboration with MoLHSA monitoring unit, should develop monitoring toolkit better reflecting the needs of children with disabilities in foster care, as well as in specialized small group homes. In December 2017, CoG local expert organized meeting with the monitoring unit of MoLHSA to discuss main issues monitoring unit has in the process of assessing the services, where children with disabilities live. Also, on the meeting, CoG local expert agreed the topics, which might be adjusted for further modification of the tool.

In 2018, CoG local expert facilitated several focus groups and workshops with the monitoring unit to modify monitoring toolkit. At the focus groups, discussion was about the details of the

monitoring toolkit – fields the monitoring toolkit should cover, formulation of statements in the questionnaires’ etc. During one of focus groups, monitoring unit of MoLHSA raised a need additionally to have topics on a challenging behavior assessment in the toolkit. After the agreement between monitoring unit and CoG local expert, the document would cover topics on disability and challenging behavior.

After the draft document of the toolkit was done, CoG local expert organized field supervision visits, with monitoring unit in Kutaisi (small group home, foster care) and Tbilisi (foster care). The aim of the field visits was to use the toolkit in practice for piloting, also, to supervise monitoring unit members on the field.

In August 2018 CoG local expert organized meeting with the monitoring unit of MoLHSA and UNICEF to present and discuss the final version of the monitoring toolkit. After the agreement on the final version, the document was sent to monitoring unit, as well as to UNICEF.

Monitoring toolkit prepared by the CoG local expert became a part of the monitoring instrument of MoLHSA monitoring unit.