

MEDPAK
(Protect the Rights of People
with Disabilities)



TWO YEARS REPORT

2014 - 2016




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PUBLICATION OF MEDPAK ASSOCIATION



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PER LA COOPERAZIONE
ALLO SVILUPPO

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When parents learn that their child has a disability they begin a journey filled with strong emotions, difficult choices, interactions with various specialists and a constant need for information and support. In this context also comes the report, which primarily is toward people with disabilities, parents and members of the MEDPAK association who have been protagonists of the implementation of projects and achievement of objectives that advance the mission of our association: Protect the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities across Albania.

Dear parents, this experience, which we have not chosen by ourselves, has made us different, has made us better persons. Because of it, we have taken an unplanned journey; we have become stronger and intuitive to handle our problems, because people grow out of difficulties.

This summary is at the same time helpful for professionals who work with families and their children with disabilities, to get acquainted with our

efforts in advancing the realization of the rights of people with disabilities and capacity building of the parents and specialists, working with and for people with disabilities.

We dedicate this report also to all our financial and spiritual supporters without whom our ideas and thoughts will not be able to be implemented and become a reality in assisting the group to which we work.

We express our gratitude to all the partners, collaborators, public institutions and other organizations that work to improve the lives of people with disabilities and their families by coordinating work, ideas, efforts and contribution of all who have the will to implement the legal framework and facilitate social inclusion of persons with disabilities in society.

**Chairwoman of the association
Zela Koka**

MISSION:

Defending the rights of persons with disabilities through the recognition and enforcement of laws and regulations, training of members and beyond, sensitizing the community to increase the demand for implementation of laws, the creation of services in order to achieve a dignified life for all.



VISION: EQUAL IN RIGHTS, DIFFERENT IN NEEDS

Our work is based on the principles:

- **non-discrimination**, through which it is ensured that persons with disabilities are not treated differently, starting from the damage that they have;
- **equality**, including gender equality;
- **autonomy** of persons with disabilities and respecting their independence of decision-making;
- **ensuring accessibility** through the removal of obstacles of all kinds;
- **inclusion**, through which is enabled the participation and equal right of persons with disabilities in all areas of life;
- **participation** of persons with disabilities through individual consultation and active involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, including children with disabilities.

Our Aspirations / Strategic Plan

- Greater involvement of persons with disabilities for any planning and proposal for improvement of their lives and realization of their rights;
- Lobbying and advocacy to improve legislation, fulfilling the rights to education, employment, training, qualifications and other services for people with disabilities and their families;
- Promotion of independent living of people with disabilities in their community.



“Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs in Education in Albania” Project

For the eighth year MEDPAK association in partnership with Save the Children and the Ministry of Education and Sports, has implemented projects focusing on the education of children with disabilities. The ongoing **“Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs in Education in Albania”** extends in the period of three years (July 2014-June 2017) and aims to create access and education in inclusive schools for children with disabilities and learning difficulties in seven regions of Albania: Gjirokastra; Korca; Elbasan; Durres; Burrel; Peshkopia and Vlora. This project is funded by the Italian Development Cooperation/ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy and implemented by Save the Children in partnership with Protect the Rights of Persons with Disabilities association (MEDPAK), and Regional Education



Directorates (RED) in Korca, Elbasan, Durres Burrel, Peshkopia, Gjirokastra and Vlora, as well as local government units in these regions.

The project “Inclusive Education” was an ambitious and visionary initiative, based on the approach of evaluation of disability as an issue of human / children rights and with the clear intention of carrying out a process of reforming policies, cultures and practices. Facing the reality of education for children with disabilities, evaluating special schools as the best option for their education, the prevailing culture of rejection of these children in kindergartens and schools, etc., were warnings of a challenging work.



This project is based on the strategic objectives of the Ministry of Education and Albanian Government to create quality schools with the aim of creating an inclusive society. School community, students, teachers and parents are benefiting from this ease of the work for the creation of comprehensive schools and kindergartens. RED staffs in: Gjirokastra, Korca, Vlora, Burrel, Durrës, Elbasan and Peshkopi increase their capacity with regard to the establishment and functioning of multidisciplinary committees to assess the educational needs of students.

The main activities of this project are:

- The inclusion of children with special educational needs in classes and groups with their peers based on PEI designed for each of them.
- Establishment of multidisciplinary committees in RED / EO, empowering them through formal and informal training.
- Organizing and development of training courses for employees of education to implement inclusive practices.
- Organize and develop training courses to employees of psycho-social service as an important part of the commission.



- Formal and informal meetings with parents to make them an active part of the work at school and kindergarten.
- Exchange of experiences between parents and teachers who work directly with children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, with their colleagues in regions where this project previously implemented.
- Setting resource environments, one in each region, to facilitate the education of children with disabilities.
- Equipping schools with teaching materials to support the education of children with special educational needs.
- Infrastructural intervention of some facilities in schools so that they become more accessible to children with special needs.
- Documenting statistical data periodically to assess the needs of children through years.



The major achievements during the implementation of this project

1. One of the advantages of the project was to **increase the capacity of teachers** by offering accredited training modules in collaboration with the University of Tirana and Korca. Teachers are actors who constitute the most important link in the implementation of the overall process. Student success is inevitably linked with their accountability, level of knowledge and skills in teaching and the effectiveness of law enforcement. Training of teachers had in focus the latest developments on issues that are related to disability, disorders features and disabilities and also ways, approaches to support and facilitate the education of children with disabilities and special education needs in inclusive schools.



The training modules used by specialists who work directly with children with disabilities or learning difficulties, are described briefly below based on the topics of training.

✓ Training with specialist of RED commission for the International Classification of Functioning for Children and Youth.

Specialist of the commission on Educational Directory basis got trained in three sessions for the International Classification of Functioning for Children and Youth (ICF-CY), with the purpose to realize more professional evaluations through the same tools used in international level.

✓ Inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education in Albania.

Adapted training module for the education workers focused on the types of disabilities and learning difficulties and the characteristics of the behavior of these children. The material continues with information for the teacher in finding the necessities and supporting resources for an inclusive school, the role of social model and its effect in the learning of children with disabilities, developing problems of children and orients them in relation to the collaboration between specialists and parents to enable a quality education and a positive learning environment.

✓ **To understand and manage the behaviors of autism children in inclusive classrooms.**

The training was focused in knowing autism, its characteristics, the difficulties that teachers face in managing autistic children behavior in classes. Teachers got informed for the usage of techniques like positive reinforcement as tool for motivating autistic children, and other aspects of individual work methods of effective inclusion in class.

2. Training with parents of children with disabilities

Parents of children with disabilities are the main actors of inclusion. They face serious difficulties and obstacles in the growth and education of their children. Lack of sufficient knowledge about the characteristics of children's development, ways how to handle emotions properly in supporting inclusive processes significantly highlighted the need for trainings to parents. Training with parents were focused on addressing all their needs and difficulties to educate children and to add information on how to work with their children and how it can help in the realization of inclusive processes in kindergartens, schools and society.

✓ **Recognition of parental rights and education of children with disabilities;**

This training module increased the capacity of teachers and other specialists about structural elements of PEI, the reason why is because it's necessary, how is drafted, what this document should contain and how to ensure the effective implementation of this plan. The material offers different models of individual education plans and completed concrete example plans of children with disabilities.



✓ **What should we know about the process of upbringing and education of children with disabilities and learning difficulties;**

This module aims to raise the level of knowledge and skills of parents on dilemmas of growth and socialization of children with disabilities and learning difficulties. Through the information in this manual, the parents become aware to practice the appropriate techniques to promote and develop the skills and habits of independence and autonomy of children and understand the importance of creating and appropriate environment that facilitates and stimulates a good mental, social, emotional growth of the children.



✓ **Teaching students with learning difficulties:**

This model includes complete information regarding types of learning difficulties that often these children and school age face, their characteristics, obstacle in the education process and the method how the teachers must build their work depending from the different learning difficulties.



✓ **Lobbying and advocacy**

Lobbying and advocacy, is another module prepared for the parents of children with disabilities as an important group of interest that may influence social policies to achieve objectives of collective interest. Parents are trained to identify effective advocacy and lobbying strategy to shape public perceptions on issues of disability, or interaction with public authorities

3. Implementation of awareness and advocacy activities conducted under the framework of the project and with its support there have been numerous different types. Student governments, as significant structure for changes and decision-making at school, have been the initiator and partner of advocacy activities in schools. Advocacy activities for the rights of persons with disabilities have been developed at the level of important events in cities. On the occasion of international days were distributed to citizen leaflets and information for parents and teachers, which convey messages of respect for children's rights without any limitation, by appreciating them as beings with full rights to education, entertainment, special care, treatment in accordance with their possibilities and abilities etc.



4. Another element of this project under the framework of creating favorable conditions to facilitate the education of children with disabilities, was also the provision with materials of an environment within the school. Provision of teaching materials for kindergarten is better resolved and properly addressed in comparison to the requirements that the school has about teaching tools, especially for children with disabilities.



5. Infrastructural interventions have been conducted in previous years of the project meanwhile for the project under implementation construction assessments were carried out of educational institutions involved in this project for intervention in school infrastructure to carry out the necessary adaptations to provide access to education for all children with disabilities who need these interventions.

Implementation of inclusive education project, aimed to address some of the problems that the education of children with disabilities faces and to create a model that should be replicated and further improved to meet the required inclusion standards of persons with disabilities in education and society.



The project “Strengthening the capacity of civil society to protect the rights of children with disabilities in Albania”

This project is implemented in partnership with the association Partner per Femijet and World Vision UK with EU funds in the regions of Elbasan, Dibra, Tropoje, Kukes, Lezha, Tirana, Vlora, Korca and Shkodra.



The main goal of this project is:

To facilitate the implementation of legislation on the rights of children with disabilities for education and protection, to empower civil society to participate effectively in the formulation of policies based on region for the inclusion of children and children with disabilities;

The project objectives are:

- 1) To contribute to the promotion and protection of children's rights, focusing on fulfilling the rights of children with disabilities.

- 2) To increase the capacity of civil society and non-governmental structures to provide quality services for children with disabilities and to generate initiatives based on their needs.

Beneficiaries of this project are 200 children with disabilities and learning difficulties aged 3-16 years from 10 schools in Elbasan and Dibra, youth groups / student government, civil society organizations for persons with disabilities, parents and families, school boards, teachers, school psychologists (10 schools), 50 professionals from 9 regions (teachers, medical staff, social workers, employees of the Office for the Protection of Children, psychologists), representatives of local government (Elbasan and Diber), 21 civil society organizations (part of the Albanian Disability and Development Coalition (KSHAKZH), organizations working for and with persons with disabilities.





The main project activities

1. Assessment of the situation was made to measure existing practices in Dibra and Elbasan for the implementation of the Undergraduate Education Law for children with disabilities, and based on the findings will be organized:
 - a- consultations with professionals, community members and children with disabilities to discuss recommendations
 - b- consultative meetings with representatives of local government to support the implementation of the existing law on Undergraduate Education and promote inclusive education based on data recommendations;
2. Students of education and social work in collaboration with school principals offered internship in schools involved in the project.
3. There were organized informative sessions for Law No. 69/12 of Undergraduate Education and training of teachers based on the manual "I'm among You"
4. Roundtables were organized for professionals from 9 regions to exchange experiences on inclusive education in cooperation with NGOs and disabled children.
5. There were organized trainings with parents and teacher training in the workplace.
6. Activities with student government, school boards, parent councils.



Results achieved in this project are:

- From the advocacy and lobbying there were created best practices in the implementation of the Law of Undergraduate Education in the District of Dibra and Elbasan.
- Civil society organizations have improved their skills in project management related to the implementation of the rights of children with disabilities and there was created a network of organizations working in regions of Elbasan and Dibra.
- Capacity of multidisciplinary teams was increased

in 9 regions to assess the educational needs of each child with disability.

- The commissions of 9 regions drew up a draft regulation of the functioning of the evaluation commission in DAR for children with special needs in education.
- Children, parents, organizations and members of the school community are aware and have increased their knowledge about inclusive education through community-based programs for children with disabilities in these two regions, Dibra and Elbasan.



Resource Center for protection of rights of persons with disabilities in Koplik

Resource Center for Children with Disabilities in Koplik was founded by a cooperation of the Malesia e Madhe Municipality in association with MEDPAK organization and with Childs Perspective support association in the Netherlands.

The purpose of opening this center has been: Protecting the rights of children with disabilities in order to create a dignified life for all persons with disabilities.

Specific objectives:

1. To provide day care services for children with disabilities and to inform their parents about the rights of persons with disabilities;
2. Children with disabilities to be educated in schools with their peers and adults with disabilities to be able to be employed based on their abilities.
3. To raise awareness in the community of the rights of persons with disabilities and to work on creating an inclusive community.

Working with children and meetings with parents continued normally. The center is open every day and the children continue to attend it and are very satisfied. Parents have expressed that their children are eager to come to the

center. The program applied in working with the children is based on the skills each of them.

There are daily meetings with parents to discuss what has been done in the center with the child, in order to coordinate the work to get a satisfactory result. Parents meet regularly with one another in the center and share their experiences with each other, spend the free time with children and offer to volunteer for the maintenance of the center. Through training they have developed their skills to work with children.

The success and continuity of the functioning of this service are conditioned on the cooperation with the Municipality of Malesia e Madhe.

On the 2nd of April, the International Day of autism, there was organized an awareness activity for the



acceptance of these children and their inclusion in social life. This activity was organized in the city center of Koplik and many bystanders were able to get a very clear message:

Accept these children! It is a common task! Help them grow! They are a potential, but with a different way of expression! Students of the elementary school “Abdyl Bajraktari” and high school “Sherif Hoxha” accompanied by school psychologists, came by the

MEDPAK center all dressed in white shirts with a blue ribbon on it, some of them had in their hands a large banner that read: “Autism, silent voice that we must learn to listen”. The start of activity consisted of a shared journey from the center of the city to its end and each of the students was holding blue balloons which is the color that symbolizes Autism. In conclusion all at one time let go of the balloons in a sign of solidarity.

IV. Resource Center on protection of rights of persons with disabilities Librazhd.

This center operates since 2002. The center now serves more as a center for information and training all the community of Librazhd, teachers, parents, parents of children with disabilities and their peers.

In 2015 it started a new collaboration with the Municipality of Librazhd to convert from a daily center to a center that not only serve children with disabilities but the entire community of persons with disabilities and their families. The aim of the association MEDPAK for this center is to work with people with disabilities to train them for independent living.

In this center there is also a rich library for inclusive education and for the rights of persons with disabilities.



V. Involvement of Children with Disabilities in Summer Camps

Project Title: We Come Together

Implementing Association: MEDPAK

Partner organizations: World Vision Albania

Purpose: To promote through game and entertainment the social inclusion, accepting diversity and providing all children equal opportunities.

Objective:

- ▲ To push and encourage children to cooperate and interact with each other by accepting diversity
- ▲ To enhance the active and social participation of children from vulnerable groups through play and entertainment. The entire organization of the camp had as main intention and objective the activation and inclusion of children without distinction of ability, race and faith.
- ▲ To improve the skills of specialists through practical work. Teachers social workers were part to facilitate the work and activities in the squad

Beneficiaries of the summer camp were 44 children from vulnerable groups aged 8-15 years old.

Methodology:

The methodology followed in the activities of the camp was interactive and focused on educational, social, creative, awareness activities. Activities were of different nature.

Summer camp improved social skills, self-confidence and respect for each other, forming new friendships, developing different activities, gaining independence and giving all children the opportunity of leadership.



VI. Project “Young people with intellectual disabilities: Self Advocacy”

This project has been focused on achieving the goal to strengthen, young people with intellectual disabilities to self-representation and self-advocacy. The focus of the project was to train youth self-advocacy group with intellectual/mental disabilities to actively participate in advocacy activities and increase community awareness of the rights of People with intellectual disability through media campaign. Currently the project has prepared a group of self-advocates of 20 youngsters with intellectual disability.

Objectives and achieved results:

Objective 1:

To strengthen young people with intellectual/mental disabilities for self-representation and self-advocacy.

About 70 parents, young people with intellectual disabilities and some members from various NGOs have been active participants in workshops conducted in 3 cities Tirana, Librazhd and Shkodra. These workshops were intended to provide parents and representatives from NGOs with information about the project as well as to raise awareness on the rights of their children for self-representation and to understand the importance that their children with disabilities CAN and SHOULD represent themselves. With the knowledge obtained from the



training and workshops organized by parents and representatives of NGOs were determined a group of 20 youths with intellectual disabilities that would be the main group of the project. The young people, during the implementation of the project, were trained to increase knowledge in the field of human rights, advocacy, the method of communication etc. Experts from PIN Czech organizations supported with capacity building of 15 staff members of 2 organizations who implemented the project and 26 young people with intellectual disabilities. Topics discussed were: “The establishment of self-advocacy groups for and by people with intellectual disabilities in Albania” and “The role of self-advocacy groups for and by people with intellectual disabilities”. Along the conducting of training the participants managed:

- To increase their knowledge about the rights of citizens with intellectual disabilities and the need to improve policies and laws related to citizens with intellectual disabilities;
- To identify the methods for overcoming the potential difficulties in the process of establishing self-advocacy groups.

The group was trained for the role of supportive people for self-advocacy groups during regular meetings, identification of new members, networking between groups and representation of group's interests to state institutions, non-governmental and community organizations. During the training discussions were held with the participants and successful models with similar groups in Kosovo and in other countries. Also these organized activities have demythologized the notion of "mental incapacity" and testified in society that they can. From the organized meetings young people themselves have designed the awareness campaign organized on the occasion of December, 3rd International Day of Persons with Disabilities.



Objective II:

Raising awareness on the rights of people with intellectual disabled through media campaign.

In the framework of raising awareness on the rights of persons with intellectual disability, during project implementation there were conducted formal and informal meetings with the community and parents of young people with disabilities. These meetings have been aimed for building bridges of cooperation for active youth participation in this project and the awareness of society for the position of the intellectual disabled people and their self-representation. Informative letters have been sent to various public institutions on behalf of the group Advocacy for Persons with intellectual disability and the two organizations that have implemented this project. A group of representatives of youth with intellectual disability were part of the public hearing of the Parliamentary Committee on Social Services Employment and Health. They raised in this hearing the voice of all young people with intellectual disabilities in defending the rights of this category. On 3rd of December the youth have managed to create and realize themselves an advertisement with the slogan "I CAN" and they took part in social TV shows. As a result of activities during these months it has been achieved that young people:

- Be active in organized meetings
- To establish self-evaluation and self confidence
- Get acquainted and socialize with each other
- Start consolidating as a group
- Be ideal example for the promotion of independent living for people with intellectual disabilities in the country as well.

VII Women's Employment Project, an opportunity to integrate "Potential given opportunity"

This project was implemented during 2014 in the area of Librazhd. It aimed at the economic empowerment of women through their involvement in the labor market and respect for gender equality. Through this project the business was stimulated to create new job positions by enabling women from vulnerable groups (Egyptian, divorced, young mothers with children with disabilities), to earn a wage to support themselves and their families. These women not only financially help their families, but for the first time they sensitize the community to reduce prejudice and stigmatization towards them. During implementation, the project focused on achieving the goal: "Communities and families need to be aware of gender equality, guaranteeing the right to employment"

The main objectives of the project were:

1. Raising awareness in families of gender equality and
2. Mediation between state institutions and businesses for hiring women.

During the meetings conducted it was noted, a lack of cooperation between the Office of Economic Assistance, Office of Labor and Business. MEDPAK organized and facilitated several meetings to stir up cooperation and information sharing

between state institutions and the business sphere. Regarding this matter an agreement of cooperation and support in this project was signed. Women selected from lists of the respective institutions were encouraged to work in the recycling factory. Due to financial difficulties of the factory, meetings were held with other businesses and was signed a business agreement with a newly inaugurated garment factory. Thus, 9 women were employed in the recycling plant, 16 in the garment factory and 1 in a bar-restaurant service (a total of 26 women). "It is a positive step (said Mrs Manushaqe Hoxha, the Job



Center specialist), so we can achieve our objective to employ women and include them in social life.” Mrs. Drita Rresha, showed her enthusiasm for the possibility of being beneficiary of this project, to contribute more to the family and to feel equal. A series of trainings were held for women’s rights and especially men and boys were informed about the importance of women in the family and work.

The main project activities

- Signing agreements with affiliates and partners who helped in the realization of the purpose and objectives of the project;
- The identification of women from marginalized groups who were beneficiaries of the project;
- Assessment of the family, social and economic situation of the women;
- Organization of trainings with various social themes about women’s rights and gender equality;
- Implementation of roundtables with participation of local authorities, local businesses, NGOs and beneficiaries;
- Registration at the Labor Office and the signing of contracts of employment for women beneficiaries;
- Training in the workplace for learning and mastering the techniques of recycling;
- Meetings with the community to promote the employment of women.



VIII. Strengthening of the association MEDPAK branches in different regions of Albania



MEDPAK Association, works on the basis of its branches in 9 regions of the country, to assist parents closer to their residence. Functioning on a voluntary work and with funds obtained from benevolent people and some businesses, causes problems in achieving constantly activities undertaken in these regions.

Despite their advocacy work and lobbying in the government institutions, parents often face promises that never come true and this demoralizes and shakes their confidence. One of the most active branches of the parents is that of Korca, where parents have gathered together to raise their voice for the realization of children's rights. One of the most important activities was the one organized in the framework of the International Day for Autism Awareness in the city theater "AZ Cajupi" which

conveyed strong messages and united voices of parents to demand more rights and services for their children their autism.

On 3rd of December there were held many activities. In collaboration with the University of Korca parents held an event titled "Parent's speech", with the participation of students, professors, teachers and psycho-social service workers of schools where they discussed about the needs and opportunities to provide a quality education for children with disabilities. In cooperation with the Special School, Vocational Training Centre and parents about 50 participants, on December 10th, the International Day of Human Rights was held another event to coordinate the efforts of the three parties, parents, professionals and institutions, to offer their children the best education opportunities and education.

Inspiring words for parents!

Parents of children with disabilities do not see the disability in their children. They see the most precious and wonderful blessing in their lives, they see the CHILD.

It is not easy to describe the experience of raising a child with special needs. Outwardly it may seem stressful and challenging, but at the heart of a parent is an experience of personal growth and development;

Up to the moment you welcome a child with special needs in your life, you have no idea of the depth of strength, one of the best things that a community can do is not to teach tolerance, but to live it, not talk about respect, but live inclusiveness;

When you learn to appreciate the small victories, you do not need a finish line, endurance and your skills;

Enjoy the little things. One day you will look back and will understand that they were the important things-
Robert Brault

We cannot change the way children with autism see the world, but we can change the way the world sees these children! Autism is not a choice. Acceptance is! Join tomorrow April 2nd to show solidarity with the parents and their children with autism. A special thank you goes to the well-known singer Renis Gjoka, who replied to the invitation kindly supporting us in this activity.

It's easy to talk about autism but is very different to live with it ... I would like to give you my pain only for a moment ... not to hurt you, but for you to understand me how difficult it is for us to live in your world...Such is life. Autism is not anyone's fault, he does not choose if you're beautiful or ugly, rich or poor, manager, doctor, or teacher ... we have to try to help as much children as we can for them to obtain such skills and integrate into society. I do not think that it is the worse to raise a child with autism, rather than raising up a child that despises our children with autism... because autism is not anyone's fault. An autism-friendly community is a community friendly to all of us, therefore, give our contribution as citizens, professionals, parents, relatives to support children with autism and their families to live with dignity, not with pity, to have the possibility to develop their potential and contribute to society “.

Eleni Kotelli- Vice President, MEDPAK branch Korçë