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GEORGIA

FIRST PERSON

Fighting for the Rights of the Disabled

A disabled law student works for the rights of disabled children



Photo: USAID/Andrea Dickson

“Meeting so many people from other countries working on disabled children’s rights made me believe that there really is a chance that we can make a difference in Georgia.”

—Lika Revishvili

A law student from the former Soviet republic of Georgia, 18-year-old Lika Revishvili has been physically disabled since birth. Lika gets around with the help of a crutch and her father, who has devoted 24 hours a day to helping her.

But in Georgia, people with disabilities are deeply stigmatized. They are usually excluded from mainstream society, often attend separate schools, and are sometimes institutionalized. The fact that Lika made it to law school is extraordinary. Her success is largely contingent on the sacrifices her family makes for her, but most Georgian families do not have the resources to provide for their disabled children.

Since 2000, USAID has sponsored delegates from more than 20 developing countries to attend the biannual International Congress on Including Children and Youth with Disabilities in their Home Communities. Lika was selected to be one of 16 candidates representing Georgia at the 2004 conference in Norway, which addressed the legal rights of disabled people and explored programs that work to include disabled people in community life. Attendees focused on how to create formal networks of support within communities that integrate the health, education and recreation needs of disabled children.

After returning, Lika said she thinks Georgia is one step closer to realizing the importance of integrating disabled people into community institutions. “Meeting so many people from other countries working on disabled children’s rights made me believe that there really is a chance that we can make a difference in Georgia,” said Lika.

Another Congress participant offered Lika a job when she returned, and she now educates non-disabled children about the legal and human rights of disabled kids. “I could never have imagined myself in the role of a trainer for children having no disabilities, but attending the Norway Congress gave me a lot of confidence and so I agreed,” she said.

Lika and the rest of the Georgian delegation plan to continue to work together in the future to improve disabled children’s access to education and social services in Georgia.