

Road to Results

ACHIEVING SUCCESS STEP BY STEP

The Red Apple Hotline

February 2003

"I call the hotline because it is convenient. I do not have to go anywhere. I can sit at home and receive qualified information on the topic I am interested in."

Gulnara, 32 years old, Almaty



The Red Apple Hotline, a USAID-funded ZdravPlus grant awarded in August 2001, is implemented by the Business Women's Association of Kazakhstan (BWAK) in cities across Kazakhstan. The hotline supports ZdravPlus' work in the primary healthcare sphere by providing information on family planning, safe motherhood, STI & HIV/AIDS prevention, breastfeeding, anemia, and menopause. It is available to anybody with access to a phone line. From the user's point of view, the three main attractions of the hotline service are that it is quick, confidential, and free.

The hotline has its roots in the USAID-funded Red Apple social marketing project which introduced commercial marketing of contraceptives as part of a strategy to develop a private sector in Kazakhstan. When the social marketing project closed, ZdravPlus took over the hotline. The Red Apple name is widely recognized and the hotline had great potential to educate the public on reproductive health issues. Education on contraceptive issues alone is vital in Kazakhstan. During Soviet times, the main methods of birth control were the IUD and abortion. Hormonal methods were said to be harmful to health. ZdravPlus, as part of its ongoing work on contraceptive use, is keen to emphasize the variety of contraceptives now available. The goal is to reduce couples' dependence on abortion as a method of family planning.

Since the hotline's inception, calls have increased steadily. On average, the number of calls increases by 50 percent every quarter. Between May 2001 and July 2002, the hotline received nearly 40,000

calls in total. Of the people that call the hotline, typically 80 percent are women. The majority of questions are about birth control, specifically the use of oral contraceptives. The hotline provides information on contraceptives, prices, and availability and encourages callers to go to their family doctor for services or to consult with them about possible side effects or problems.

Men also use the hotline, usually with queries relating to STIs and contraception. In Karaganda, the chief venerologist recently reported that there had been a considerable increase in visits to doctors by men with sexually transmitted infections, and that they were visiting their family doctors when the infections were in their early phases. He acknowledged that the existence and good marketing of the Red Apple hotline had played an important role in this.

At the outset, BWAK intensively promoted the hotline to ensure that the public in the selected cities were aware of the hotline service and its telephone number. Information was widely distributed through brochures, stickers and posters on public transportation and in other public places, as well as through TV/radio spots and shows. Later, to raise awareness among different population groups, and to encourage calls on different subjects, hotline staff carried out marketing campaigns centered on specific issues such as contraceptives for teenagers, menopause, and gynecological cancers. As a result of the first campaign, for example, many teenagers afraid to discuss intimate issues with their parents or teachers used the hotline to get confidential answers to questions on contraception.



The USAID-funded ZdravPlus Program provides technical assistance and training to improve the health of Central Asian populations by improving health delivery systems

In reality, the hotline is more than a hotline. The staff have developed a number of user-friendly approaches to working with the population. They organize round tables and meet with and provide seminars for medical students, schools, teachers, parents, and patient associations. They work with parents to help them understand the importance of educating their children on such issues and teach them that it is not simply the responsibility of schools or doctors. According to the manager of the Semipalatinsk hotline, the key to their work is the motto: “Information, information, information.” The staff continually broadens its activities, and they say that a simple ‘thank you’ provides all the encouragement they need to carry on. Staff also target high-risk or limited-access population groups. For example staff are currently carrying out informational outreach work with migrant populations on the edges of the cities who have limited access to healthcare.

Initially, the hotline encountered some resistance from primary healthcare professionals who were concerned that it would make them obsolete. To counter these fears, the hotline management made concerted efforts to work with health professionals to show them that the hotline not only complements but also reinforces their work. Now gynecologists and family doctors willingly display and give out information on the hotline, and women’s consultation centers and FGPs even compete over who can display the most hotline information in their clinics. The surest sign that the hotline has been accepted by the health community is that in addition to providing a resource center for the population, health professionals are now approaching the hotline for information themselves.

The real success of this grant, however, is evident in its implementation. BWAK has been a highly impressive grantee. Despite having only limited

prior health-related experience, BWAK stood out among the applicants with a strong and innovative proposal, an extensive network of branches around Kazakhstan, dedicated and understanding staff, and dynamic leadership.

BWAK’s implementation of the grant has proven that it is the right organization for the job. The overriding success has been BWAK’s ability to ensure the future sustainability of the hotline despite decreasing funds from ZdravPlus. Having received an initial budget for five sites across Kazakhstan, BWAK has actively sought additional funding from NGOs and City Health Departments in order to continue existing hotlines and to establish additional ones. There are now seven sites, and two new ones are planned to be opened in the near future. Raushan Sarsenbaeva, BWAK’s Director, attributes their success to the respect people accord to BWAK. She believes it is important to connect with the authorities, and she makes personal visits to the Akims of each city where the hotline works or intends to work. By adopting a collaborative approach and suggesting to them: “Let’s solve this social problem together”, the authorities have provided their support and responded positively to the hotline.

When asked why BWAK took such initiative when implementing the grant, Raushan answered: “Why should some regions of Kazakhstan have a hotline and not others? We want this program to be socially significant; we want it to be acknowledged not only by the population, but also at a high level, and we want it to reach even the most humble people. It shouldn’t stop at the borders of the city, but should extend to the smallest villages.” Ultimately, Raushan is acutely aware that prevention is undoubtedly the surest form of treatment. A vision wholeheartedly shared by ZdravPlus.

For more information

Office in Kazakhstan

39 Begalina Street
 Almaty, Kazakhstan 480100
 Tel: (3272)915-775, 919-433
 Fax: (3272)919-409
 E-mail: office@zplus.kz

Office in Kyrgyzstan

1 Togolok Moldo Street
 Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan 720405
 Tel: (996-312)663-816, 663-708
 Fax: (996-312)661-024
 E-mail: abt_bish@infotel.kg

Office in Uzbekistan

16 Bozbozor Street
 Tashkent, Uzbekistan 700007
 Tel: (998-71) 169-2212, 169-1491
 Fax: (998-71) 169-1492
 E-mail: abt@zdravplus.uz

Office in Tajikistan

155 Rudaki Street, #7-8
 Dushanbe, Tajikistan 734017
 Tel: (992-372) 245-369
 Fax: (992-372) 245-369
 E-mail: zdrav@tjinter.com

Office in Turkmenistan

43 Gyorogly Street, # 4
 Ashgabad, Turkmenistan 744020
 Tel: (993-12)344-242
 Fax: (993-12)344-547
 E-mail: natalyazp@online.tm