

Road to Results

ACHIEVING SUCCESS STEP BY STEP

School Health Curriculum Plays Vital Role In The Current And Future Health Of Uzbekistan

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"In our health lesson on drug addiction I learned how drugs have a negative impact on my health, my life, and my family. Now I know to say "no" when offered drugs or cigarettes." So says Sherali, a 13 year old boy who lives in the Ferghana region of Uzbekistan. His school is one of a number of schools piloting the new USAID-funded ZdravPlus School Health Curriculum. The curriculum, which is the first of its kind in Uzbekistan, has been widely encouraged by both local and national education departments, and well received not only by students, but also by teachers, health officials, and the broader community.

In 2000, the Uzbek Government issued a legal order stating that health lessons must be taught in schools across the country. However, the order only outlined a list of health topics, and said nothing about implementation. For teachers with limited resources, implementing lessons based only on a list of topics was a difficult task. Nonetheless, the USAID-funded ZdravPlus Health Education Team in Uzbekistan understood the absolute importance of teaching a responsible approach to healthy lifestyles from a young age. As a result, they decided to develop a series of interactive lesson plans that would become a School Health Curriculum for students aged between six and fourteen.

In June 2002, ZdravPlus joined forces with CAFE-Andijon Development Center — a branch of Central Asian Free Exchange, an international NGO — in neighboring Andijon Oblast, to develop a joint curriculum for consideration by the Ministry of Education (MOE). The first draft of the School Health Curriculum was completed in November 2002. This curriculum focuses on those health topics mentioned in the government order such as hygiene, infectious diseases, reproductive health, and substance abuse. The draft was supported by the MOE for pilots in Ferghana and Andijon Oblast, with full MOE approval anticipated by early summer 2003.

The local Department of Education in Ferghana Oblast was also supportive of the new curriculum, and helped to select pilot schools from seven rayons in which ZdravPlus already conducts health reform activities. During the 2001–2002

academic year, 'health teachers' were selected from fourteen pilot schools throughout the oblast to participate in a ZdravPlus School Health training course. The training course taught the health teachers child-centered interactive teaching methods to make the lessons not only educational, but also fun. A set of lessons was issued at these trainings for use in the pilot schools. These lessons were designed to capture the students' attention, thereby ensuring that the health messages were not only correct, but well received by the students, the teachers, and the community.

Dildora Iminova, a Health Teacher at School #17, Quva Rayon says the new health lesson plans are 'unique and easy to use'. Dildora, who used to teach Russian language, enjoys the new teaching methods more than the traditional lecture format, and says that the skills she has learned would be useful in any setting. Dildora is now well known among her students as a health advisor, and most importantly as a person who has become their good friend and mentor. Some teachers have even reported that students enjoy the classes so much that they come up to them throughout the school day to ask when they will have their next health lesson.



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

The success of the first health lessons was a major factor in their roll out at the oblast level in the 2002–2003 academic year. With the support of the Ministry of Education, and the enthusiastic cooperation of the Ferghana Oblast Department of Education, who helped both to implement and review the health lessons, the ZdravPlus Health Education team conducted school health trainings for health teachers from an additional 40 schools throughout the oblast using the newly developed curriculum, while CAFE did the same with schools in Andijon Oblast. The team also conducted a training-of-trainers for teachers from the Ferghana Teachers' Retraining Institute and representatives from Health and Education NGOs. This additional activity was viewed as a critical part of institutionalizing the curriculum by preparing future trainers who will be able to conduct school health training at the republican level.

As part of these trainings, health teachers participated in two-day courses on first aid offered by the Ferghana Emergency Center (supported by a USAID/AIHA project) and one-day trainings on reproductive health conducted by a reproductive health trainer and gynecologist. The first aid course covered emergency situations such as drowning, choking, loss of consciousness, injuries, bleeding, burns, and poisoning. Seeing the success and utility of this course, the Department of Education subsequently said that they wanted all school nurses to attend a similar course on first aid. The extra training on reproductive health was also positively received by both male and female teachers, who actively participated in open discussions which included some very personal questions that crossed traditional barriers.

A central ZdravPlus tenet is encouraging the population to take responsibility for their own health. ZdravPlus consequently sees the School Health Curriculum as more than a simple learning experience for children and teachers. The curriculum is also considered an avenue through which to encourage schools to become centers of health promotion for their communities, with the school and the child at the hub of this informational web. All health lessons, for example, include homework where the children are expected to go home and teach their families what they have learned. The popularity of the curriculum has also allowed ZdravPlus to encourage

schools to conduct health fairs, and ZdravPlus has provided training on implementing health fairs to all pilot schools. Those fairs which have taken place have been interest-packed events, which have helped to spread a wide variety of important health messages not only to students, but also to staff, parents, and the broader community.

Other events which have led to community collaboration and interest include ZdravPlus' oblast wide competition for the best health song written and performed by students in collaboration with the Ferghana Department of Education and Health [Promotion] Centers. The winners, from school #17 in Quva Rayon, sang a song about diarrhea which they have subsequently performed at a USAID-funded Sports and Health Education Project football match in the oblast, and during the kickoff event for the recent health promotion campaign on diarrhea.

A number of rayons have also independently begun to expand the project beyond their pilot schools. For example, the three original pilot schools in Okhunboboyev Rayon decided to roll out the health lessons to over 60 school nurses from other schools in the rayon, in order that these nurses become health teachers too. On World Health Day, 2003, School #17 in Quva Rayon took its health songs, skits and games to a neighboring school, while other schools invited their communities into their schools for Health Day celebrations, and participated in events planned by Health Centers and Health NGOs working in their communities.

ZdravPlus believes that schools are one of the key settings in which to promote the health of young people and the wider community. Manzura Abdullajonova, a teacher at School #17, Quva Rayon, explains that during the course of last year, one of her seventh graders did not come to school because she had diarrhea. The child's parents wanted to give her antibiotics and other drugs to help her to get better. But the student insisted that they get oral rehydration solution for her, because she knew about it from her health class. She felt much better after taking the rehydration solution and was quickly able to return to school. As Manzura points out, the knowledge, attitudes and skills that we learn at school stay with us for life. This is why ZdravPlus' School Health Curriculum is so important both for the current and future health of the Uzbek population.

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