

Family kindergartens in rural areas of the Republic of Belarus

Contributed by UNICEF Belarus

A 2003 UNICEF-supported survey of parents and professionals in the Republic of Belarus revealed that more than 60 percent of parents have problems educating their young children. Despite the fact that preschool attendance in the Republic of Belarus was high at 82 percent, in rural areas attendance reached only 52 percent in 2006.

The national goal is to achieve 85 percent of preschool attendance in rural areas by 2010. However, this goal can only be reached with the introduction of new and innovative approaches like family kindergarten. Since 2005, kindergartens and other new models of preschool education have been opened in different regions of the Republic of Belarus.

UNICEF is backing a variety of new approaches to Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Belarus, including initiatives to help parents raise their children in more nurturing environments that stimulate development. An open model of pre-schools aims to establish them as learning and resource centers for the entire community. UNICEF supported projects are underway in some of the most vulnerable regions in Belarus, and studies have already showed positive changes in parenting practices.

Funds from IKEA support UNICEF Belarus to strengthen national institutional capacities and resources such as developing early childhood development learning programme guidelines and methodology, training of early childhood development professionals, and supporting national partners in the improvement of existing services for young children and families. Additionally, family informational and resource centres are being set up.

The family kindergarten in the rural village of Mostok in the Mogilev region was established as a new open model of kindergarten/family support center. UNICEF assisted this project, which was led by the Ministry of Education.

The nearest regular kindergarten to the village Mostok is situated in the village of Grybany, three kilometers away. Three kilometers does not seem far. But when small children under the age of six must walk three kilometers alone every day from their houses to the kindergarten and back despite weather and physical conditions, the distance becomes much greater.

Six year old Kostya Davydenko, walked to the nearest kindergarten in Grybany before the UNICEF supported family kindergarten was opened in Mostok where he lives. When asked his opinion about the kindergarten he stated, "It's warm here".



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Kostya Davydenko, 6 year old.

The family kindergarten model is an excellent solution for young children, who might otherwise have to stay home alone while their parents are working, to attend school.

Kindergarten nurse Ekaterina Vasilievna is a mother of three year old boy attending the same kindergarten.

The family kindergarten helped them to survive as a family. Ekaterina worked as a shop assistant before her pregnancy, but after her maternity leave, she found herself without a job. She also divorced and her financial situation was worsening. But, the family kindergarten gave her an opportunity for a new job, and to receive early childhood education and new parenting skills.

Ludmila Rubcova, is the director of the family kindergarten, and owner of the house where the project operates. Three rooms of her house became the kindergarten through a separate entrance: kitchen/dining room, bedroom, place for games and a bathroom. Rubcova, already trained in education, received additional training in early childhood education in line with the UNICEF supported project. The local education authorities are supervising her on a regular basis and providing methodological support. Individual development and nutrition plans for every child are based on special diagnostics and family support activities. The kindergarten is also supplied with a variety of books, toys, games, and stationery materials with the funds from IKEA and UNICEF.

The family kindergarten model became sustainable due to efforts and collaboration between many institutions and people: the collective farm is providing vegetables and potatoes free of charge. The local education authorities, with assistance from UNICEF and IKEA, are developing programmes, methodological materials, and trainings for parents. The secondary school in the village is supporting kindergarten in organizing different performances and classes.

Thus, the family kindergartens have become true community centres.



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Family kindergarten in village Hilchicy, Gomel region