



Engaging Parents to Promote inclusive education for pre-school children in Kosovo

Situation

Until the 1990's, education in Kosovo was highly segregated, with access to education for disabled children being limited to a handful of 'special schools' or schools with attached classes for children with disabilities. Inclusion of children with special educational needs has increased during last few years. During the 2009/2010 school year the number of children with special educational needs receiving support and being included in the mainstream schools has increased by 30%, from 909 children to 1179 children. Save the Children has been playing a key role in advocating school reform and engaging in capacity building of school administration, families and young people to create inclusive learning environments and opportunities.



Action

Previously, cases of children with disabilities attending pre-school education had been scarce, if not non-existent. Save the Children's program to promote inclusive education has been working to reverse this trend. The program supports early child development as a prerequisite for successful inclusion of children with disabilities in later education. The project has provided trainings for parents of children with disabilities, other children and school staff with the aim of de-stigmatizing disability, providing support to enhance the quality of data and day care and interaction programs with these children. Through this intervention, parents have become active participants in promoting the welfare of their own children. They are cooperating with teachers, professionals and other parents to facilitate the successful inclusion of their children. The success of this model has led to its replication nationally, therefore substantially changing the lives of hundreds of children with disabilities in pre-school age.

Lessons learned

- Guided involvement among parents of children with disabilities with teachers, professionals and other parents needs to be taken into account and supported to facilitate the successful inclusion of their children.
- Best practices needs to be documented and shared among institutions at municipal and ministerial level for effective replication of project.
- Community attitudes are key in reaching children with special needs.
- Well-trained community mobilizers play a huge role in reducing the stigma for both parents and children.

Impact

- 45 children with disabilities included in the project program "Promoting Inclusive Education for children with disabilities at pre-school level" and implemented in three kindergartens
- Up to 620 children in general have benefitted from quality education in three inclusive kindergartens
- The Ministry of Education has recognised it as unique model which will be extended to all municipalities in Kosovo in close cooperation with all the relevant institutions.
- The program has resulted in increased professional capacities within mainstream schools and preschool services to plan and respond to disability needs and provide appropriate services.
- Another concrete outcome has been the development of positive attitudes of professionals and non-disabled children and their parents towards Children with Disabilities and their parents.
- Through inclusion of all the relevant stakeholders, including here the Ministry of Education, directorates for education at the local level and kindergartens, the model was created a network of professionals that supports the inclusion of children with disabilities with the school system.
- Though participation in working groups on education and protection, Save the Children has directly contributed to development of the National Action Plan for People with Disabilities 2009-2011.