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SUCCESS STORY

Giving a Voice to Hearing-Impaired Women in Istaravshan



Twenty women with disabilities received a job, education, and some the ability to “speak” for the first time.

In a small workshop in Istaravshan, women in snow-white aprons and kerchiefs are working behind almost noiseless brand-new sewing machines. In one room they are sewing cotton underwear, in another they pack and label the finished products, and in a third they are learning embroidery. These rooms are unusually silent, but as soon as a sign-language interpreter translates for the workers, the women cannot be stopped – everyone wants to tell their story.

Through EFCA-Tajikistan’s Good Governance Initiative Fund, this workshop was created in partnership with the CSO “Foundation for the Development of Society” to train and employ people with disabilities. Sponsored by USAID, the project was a success thanks to joint efforts by representatives of civil society, the state, and local businesses. Mumin Fazilov, a factory owner in Istaravshan provides raw materials for the workshop and sells the finished products under his brand “Nohid”. A special mark on the packaging shows that the goods are made by people with disabilities.

“I immediately liked the idea and decided to try it,” Fazilov says. “After all, these women are absolutely normal people, just with hearing problems. They can and want to work.”

Twenty women with speech and hearing impairments received a job, education, and for some, the ability to communicate for the first time. Most of the women and their families could not speak or understand sign language. Among them, Sanam, aged 35, has been hearing impaired since birth and although she was taught sign language at school, she later lost these skills.

“I was at home, and everything was very bad. I did not go anywhere, did not work anywhere, and did not communicate with anyone, because I could not,” she says. “My husband did not know how [to use sign language]. No one spoke to us, and we did not communicate with each other. It was very, very bad. Now everything is different: they teach me here, and at home I teach my husband. Here I was taught to sew, I have girlfriends, and now I will receive a salary.” Thanks to support from the Employment Center under the Ministry of Labor, all of the women were trained and received state-recognized certificates confirming their work skills.

By law, the working day for these women is 4 hours; in their spare time they can practice sign language, learn additional sewing skills, or be taught how to work on computers.



Within the framework of the project, the workshop will continue under a contract with Fazilov for three years – but it won't stop there. At the end of the contract, all of the equipment will be transferred to a new public organization called “Development Fund for the Disabled” that was created during the project implementation. 50% of the founders are people with disabilities.

“We want that in the future, when the project is over, these people can continue their business,” explains Bakhtiyor Abdujaborov, the head of CSO “Foundation for the Development of Society”. “And they will be able to do it: the base is already ready, the whole process is started. They can bring great benefits to the state, and greatly improve their own lives. This is the most important task of public organizations: to change the lives of ordinary people for the better and help their country – in the long term.”