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Livelihoods Promotion and Harm Reduction –  
The Street Business Toolkit and an Integrated Approach to Drug Abuse and HIV/AIDS Prevention and  
Mitigation among Vulnerable Youth  
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When Vitaly, Yuri and Katya – three street active young people from Khodjent Tajikistan – arrived at a local hotel to participate in a “Street Business Toolkit” workshop, they didn’t realize they were making history in the Former Soviet Union. First, they were about to take part in a unique pilot activity designed to explore the links between Livelihood programming and the prevention and mitigation of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS. Second, they were part of a program financed entirely by one of Street Kids International’s lead local partner organizations in the region, Almaty based Community Development Center “Accord” – who in three short years had gone from a grant recipient of Street Kids International to a grant maker to Street Kids International.

Vitaly, Yuri and Katya were joined by eighteen other street active young people and a team of youth workers from across Central Asia to explore the process of starting a micro-enterprise. The pilot team was a demanding one, drawing on a core group of “healthy skeptics” among the youth workers, and a participant group of very much street involved young people –many of whom were active drug users, including a few who used inhalants during the first few coffee breaks.

The Street Business Toolkit uses a mix of strategies that appeals to the learning style of adolescents and promotes a space that is conducive to discussing potential personal and financial challenges in setting up a business.

The Toolkit has helped organizations worldwide working in the areas of health, the mobilization of working children, vocational training for vulnerable populations, along with those involved in community micro-finance programs, develop the entrepreneurial skills of young people. Young people who complete the Street Business Toolkit can identify livelihood opportunities that promote a healthier style of living. They are able to connect their practical experience with core business concepts and are better able to contribute to the wellbeing and development of their families and communities. In addition, Street Kids International and its lead partners often find that when young people are able to assert their economic role, take initiative in their lives, and articulate goals as individuals as well as members of their family and community, they are also able to assert their rights including access to better community services such as health.

## International Harm Reduction Program



The link between Livelihood support and the prevention and mitigation of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS is one that is being made more and more intentionally by a number of leading youth serving organizations world wide. A major breakthrough in this collaborative effort came about as a result of an interactive workshop hosted in 2002 by UNICEF the UNFPA and both the Population Council and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). This workshop, entitled "Charting Directions for a Second Generation of Programs", challenged traditional adolescent reproductive health organizations to make the key link between harm reduction, health promotion and economic empowerment. A growing body of research in this area is making the case for vigorous livelihoods support to vulnerable youth – especially young women – not just as a complement to the provision of outreach services and primary health interventions, but as a necessary component of the kind of integrated program that can empower young people to act on the knowledge and skills they develop via longstanding health programming.

For those interested in beginning to work in this area, it is important to know something about what is meant by a livelihoods approach. The field of youth livelihoods is well grounded in the concept of sustainable livelihoods development. Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) is a relatively new approach to poverty alleviation. Its origins lie in the work of Robert Chambers and Amartya Sen. The concept and practice of sustainable livelihoods, was further developed by, among others, the UK Department for International Development (DfID) and a Canadian, Naresh Singh, in his work with the International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. Livelihoods posit that people pursue livelihoods outcomes (health, income, reduced vulnerability etc.) by drawing on "assets" to pursue livelihoods enhancing activities. Opportunities for pursuing these activities

are influenced by the structures (government and private) and the processes (institutions, policies, programs and cultural factors) which people face. In aggregate, these conditions determine access to assets and livelihood opportunities, and the ways in which these can be converted into productive and sustainable outcomes.

Pursuing a livelihood is a process of reducing vulnerabilities and risks and building capabilities, largely through the enhancement or transformation of (human, social, financial, natural and physical) assets. This conceptualization is inherently positive in that it is "people-centered" and takes an individual's existing assets and capabilities or strengths as its starting point (just like Harm Reduction programming) rather than just focusing on their needs. It also seeks to understand how moderate increases of support can leverage large-scale improvements in livelihoods outcomes.

The young people and youth workers who participated in the Khodjent Street Business Toolkit pilot, are part of a cutting edge experiment in making the link between harm reduction, health promotion and livelihood support. Early results from the initial group of young people are most interesting. A number of young people have already started businesses and some are on their second loan already. Others have already gone bankrupt a few times but never with a loss so big they had to abandon their links to the host NGO. A few young people have translated improved livelihood opportunities into a reconnection with extended family members, and an end to homelessness. Many have brought groups of friends to the host organization in Khodjent, all interested in being participants in the next "Toolkit" workshops.

Street Kids International and its lead local partners have already begun to prepare for additional national level launches of the Street Business Toolkit in other parts of the Former Soviet Union, and are pleased to be a contributing member of the global alliance advancing the links between youth livelihood and youth health and wellbeing.