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**“COMMUNITY SERVICES TO VULNERABLE GROUPS”**  
USAID Cooperative Agreement Number: AID-121-A-00-05-00703

**FINAL PROGRAM REPORT**  
Reporting period: September 12, 2005 – September 11, 2015  
**Component I “Supporting Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Belarus”**

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## **I.BACKGROUND:**

In 2004, prior to implementation of **Supporting Orphans and Vulnerable Children**, 11,821 Belarusian children were institutionalized in 179 state-administered orphanages and boarding schools. In fact, 65% of orphaned children were living in institutions and 85-90% of institutionalized children were 'social orphans' or children with living biological parents who were unable to provide proper care, or children of parents who have been denied parental rights. At this time, child protection workers were not working under a unified child protection framework and there was no national case management system. Child protection workers' main job was to monitor and reprimand families rather than support them and, in cases of child protection risks, children were routinely removed from the family. As the negative effects of institutionalization on children were not widely understood, the existing system of community-based services failed to address the core risk factors of institutionalization, and foster care emerged as the next best option for children living outside of family care.

### **PROJECT GOAL AND OBJECTIVES**

In 2005, **Supporting Orphans and Vulnerable Children** project sought to reduce the number of institutionalized children in state-administered orphanages and boarding schools by supporting at-home family care and by reducing the number of children being placed in institutions. In pursuit of this goal, the project aimed to foster a cultural environment conducive to family-based care, and move children from institutions into less restrictive environments when prior circumstances necessitated removal from their family home with a special emphasis on targeting social orphans. The project's activities focused on working with families and social service professionals to prevent separation and reintegrate children within their original family units.

The project has three main objectives:

- Improve access to and further develop an integrated system of community-based prevention and services for families with institutionalized and at-risk children;
- Improve the quality of training and education available to social service providers;
- Provide technical assistance to social service providers through policy development, methodology consultations, and advocacy efforts.

**The project achieved the stated goal to reduce the number of institutionalized children in state-administered orphanages and boarding schools by supporting at-home family care and moving children out of institutions.**

#### **OBJECTIVE 1: Improve access to and further develop an integrated system of community-based prevention and rehabilitation services for families with institutionalized and at-risk children**

The project developed a multi-layered system of community-based prevention and rehabilitation services while also delegating the responsibility to local communities to ensure the sustainability of project results. Project communities have developed experience and expertise in the selection of community-based service that address the main risk factors of child abuse and neglect, thus respond to different needs of vulnerable families and children, providing them with tailored rehabilitation programs. In total, 16,783 children and 19,318 were meaningfully served by 718 new/improved community-based services in 168 geographic locations.

#### **OBJECTIVE 2. Improve the quality of training and education available to social service providers.**

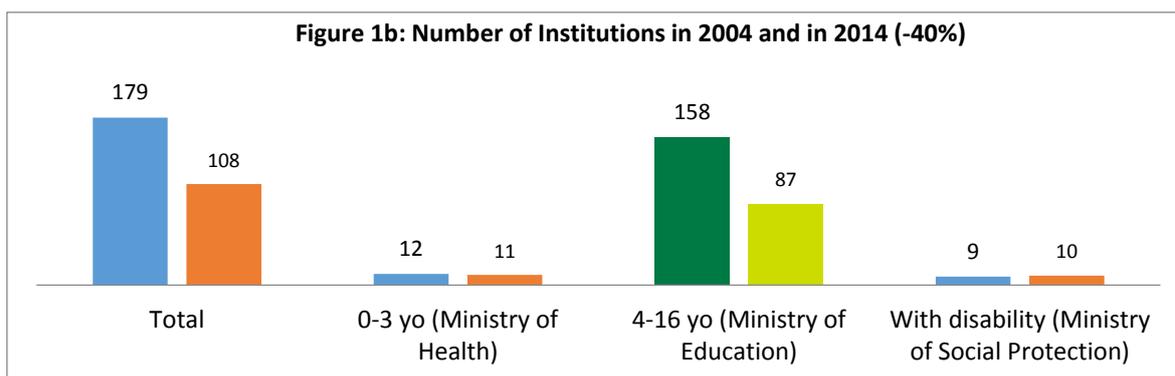
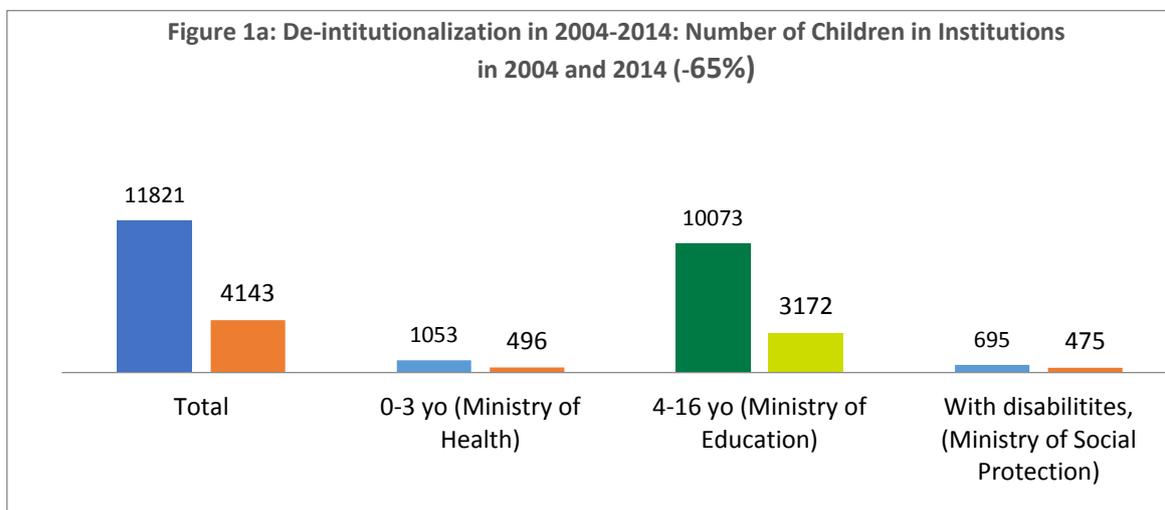
The project exposed Belarusian child protection specialists, authorities, and decision-makers to the best international practices of child protection, including practical skills for coping with child abuse and neglect. The established cooperation with the network of local departments for Education and higher/re-training institutions enabled project implementers to train child welfare workers on a large scale and form a solid cadre of professionals. Through 2010-2015 project years, annually about 5,000 child protection specialists were provided with step-down trainings on child protection by local trainers previously trained by the project. All of the universities that provide social service training and 100% re-training institutes have child protection programs incorporated into the regular curriculum.

#### **Objective 3. Provide technical assistance to social service providers through policy development, methodology consultations, and advocacy efforts**

Several ChildFund’s Task Groups of local experts developed 10 unique documents that address the gaps in regulatory and methodology environment in child protection. These Standards and Guidelines explain and promote informed decision-making that guarantees consistent and effective placement decisions, collegial approach to decision-making, and standardized assessment free from subjective judgment. Local specialists used these materials to develop local regulatory documents that reinforce multidisciplinary cooperation and reformation of child protection system. By the end of the project, such locally approved documents govern child protection process of two oblasts (39 communities in total) and 12 communities in other oblasts.

On a national level, during the course of project implementation the percentage of children institutionalized after being sheltered decreased from 34.1 % in 2004 (baseline) to 16.5% in 2014. According to UNICEF (2013), 53 communities (36%) in Belarus stopped sending children to institutions and 80% of these communities participated in **Supporting Orphans and Vulnerable Children**.

This marked decrease in the number of children placed into institutions is based on the development of effective community-based support services to OVC and their families as well as alternative family type placement – both of which helped to reduce the number of children placed in institutions. Between 2004 and 2014, the number of children in institutions decreased by **65%**, (from 11,821 in 2004 to 4,143 in 2014). At the same time, the number of institutions decreased by **40%**, from 179 to 108 (see Figure 1: De-institutionalization 2004-2014, below).



## II. PROJECT OUTCOMES

### A. Summary of FY 15

In project year 2014-2015, the project’s activities focused on the sustainability of changes introduced within the course of project implementation. The approach to sustainability focused on:

- a. increasing the number of communities that implement child protection system reforms and effective preventive and rehabilitation services for OVC families;
- b. capacity building for social service specialists;
- c. expanding training programs to universities, developing networking ties within university community;
- d. encouraging and supporting strategic partnerships between communities and re-training institutes;
- e. strengthening the ability of re-training institutes and universities to independently deliver innovative training programs provided by ChildFund and train new cohorts of child protection specialists;
- f. countrywide dissemination of new methodological documents that provide “know-how” on key elements of family-centered child welfare services.

Despite the high level of staff turnover in the child protection system, by September 2015 almost all targeted oblasts achieved the sufficient number of the communities that started implementation of the de-institutionalization model. Minsk, Mogilev, Brest oblasts achieved their project target of 65%; Grodno oblast exceeded the target of 65% and reached 72% of the communities that started implementation of the de-institutionalization model.

### **OBJECTIVE 1: Improve access to and further develop an integrated system of community-based prevention and rehabilitation services for families with institutionalized and at-risk children**

- **Parenting Skills Enhancement Program** was implemented in schools and preschools in 53 geographic locations. 2470 parents (280 groups) attended the Parenting Skills Enhancement Program and 43% of these parents (1062 people) attending the course were those under the supervision of child protection services or those parenting children with disabilities. 100% of all parenting groups were carried out with local communities' resources. This year Parenting Skills Enhancement Program was strengthened by the community public awareness campaign by ChildFund. It aimed to increase the demand for parenting education among community members. It was conducted in 37 communities and proved its effectiveness: the demand for the Parenting Skills Enhancement program increased in 94,5 % of communities covered by the campaign.
- The **PRIDE training program** for foster and adoptive parents was implemented in 45 geographic locations in 56 organizations by the alumni of ChildFund's training program using local community resources.
- Through sub-grants, two pilot communities developed a local implementation model of **SafeCare home visitation services** that considers availability and specificities of local resources. One model was implemented in urban areas in the regional center of Grodno; the other model was implemented in rural and remote areas in Chaussy district (Mogilev region). While the urban model was based on mobilizing ECD centers in Grodno city, the rural model involved health care specialists from villages as well as specialists from the local schools. Both models were presented and received recognition at the final roundtables of educational authorities and specialists from Grodno and Mogilev regions. Local authorities elaborated plans for its further development and geographic expansion using existing community budgets. The roundtable on SafeCare model conducted last quarter for child protection specialists from other communities resulted in the official requests to Mogilev oblast retraining institute to conduct a SafeCare training for child protection specialists of 10 districts of Mogilev oblasts.
- Three **Afterschool clubs** – an effective service for preventing unnecessary family separation and institutionalization of children that was piloted in 2012-2013 – proved to be sustainable. This year, local authorities allocated budgets to continue the functioning of the afterschool centers in Rogachev, Polotsk, and Zhodino. In partnership with ChildFund, the Polotsk Socio-pedagogical Center, hosted the Vitebsk Regional Conference to disseminate their experience on youth afterschool clubs as a means to ensure children's right to live in a family. Representatives of 100% of child protection services from all over the Vitebsk region as well as the regional authorities took part in the meeting. As a result of the conference, the Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee issued a special order that by the end of 2015 each community in the Vitebsk region will open a youth afterschool club for children from at-risk families. Financial support should be provided through community-allocated resources.

## **OBJECTIVE 2. Improve the quality of training and education available to social service providers.**

- Implementation of child protection system reforms through the Family-centered and PRIDE approaches were supported by **step-down trainings** conducted by a cadre of local child protection specialists trained as the trainers by ChildFund and partner re-training institutes. This year, ChildFund observed a growing leadership of the local trainers: number of specialists trained by TOT alumni increased 51%, number of served localities – 19%. The growth displays a new phenomenon: in addition to Re-training institutes and universities, 27 communities practicing Family-centered approach became the informal training hubs in their oblasts. These project communities served as the centers of excellence to spread the innovative programs and provided peer-to-peer support to less experienced communities in their oblasts. 100% of the trainings were conducted with the community resources. By September 2015, 83 communities from all over Belarus had specialists trained on the Family-centered Approach in child protection services. The on-going training of new cadre of child protection specialists is crucial in situation of high staff turnover and sustainability of introduced changes.
- In the context of a high level of staff turnover in the child protection system, the role of **universities and re-training institutes** in preparing new cohorts of well-trained specialists is essential. The goal of improving the quality of training and education available for social service providers was achieved through a partnership with the network of re-training institutes and cooperation with universities that train education and social work students. While re-training institutes continued in-service training for the practitioners from child protection system, universities were focused on pre-service training for new cohorts of the young specialists. By September 2015, the Family-centered Approach course is integrated into the regular curriculum of 100% of universities that supply the system with young qualified workers. In 2015, two new groups of university faculty completed TOT on PRIDE methodology and 100% of started to use PRIDE materials either to upgrade the traditional university courses with PRIDE content, or to develop new curriculum based on PRIDE model that will be approved and ready for use by the beginning of the next academic year 2015-2016. ChildFund's project sustainability plan ensured universities and re-training institutes' capacity and motivation to independently deliver innovative training programs: during two **networking meetings**, faculty members of six universities and re-training institutes, who were previously trained on the Family-centered Approach and PRIDE methodology, shared experiences, challenges and successes that they faced implementing innovative ChildFund programs.

## **Objective 3. Provide technical assistance to social service providers through policy development, methodology consultations, and advocacy efforts**

- The new methodological manual on **Social Rehabilitation of Families at Risk (Parts I and II)** was published and distributed to child protection authorities and specialists as the comprehensive reference for organizations on rehabilitation processes, case management and closing, and the effective assessment of the work carried out. This publication completed the series of methodological recommendations and quality standards that have been prepared by the ChildFund Task Group since 2007. This series covered the full spectrum of functional areas of the child protection system, including early detection, investigation of child abuse and neglect, case planning and family-centered casework. In their feedback, community child protection specialists emphasized the exceptional relevance of the Methodological Recommendations for specialists' professional needs and highlighted the materials' straightforward, practical application even by those specialists who have not received specialized training.
- The Final conference was organized for project partners and other stakeholders to present the resources developed within the project. The event gathered 80 project partners: oblast and rayon Departments for Education, local child protection services, partner universities and re-training institutes. Delegates of international NGOs (UNICEF, Forum Syd), Embassies of USA and Finland to Belarus, and national mass media enhanced opportunities for networking development among all stakeholders. The meeting informed the audience on the project outcomes achieved on the local, oblast and national levels, presented the professional resources created within the project and available to them, and strengthened the networking between the project partners. The series of methodological materials developed within the project were distributed to every participant.
- Since 2012, ChildFund advocated for the creation of that would address the specialists' growing demand to receive professional support and advice from a professional, unbiased, non-controlling body. In 2013, ChildFund provided a sub-grant in order to pilot the first in the country Resource Center on child protection. Ministry of Education highly appreciated the positive results of the pilot project and in 2013 issued a request

to establish such centers in every oblast of the country. Oblast Re-training institutes should serve the administrative basis for such centers. By September 2015, 100% of the Re-training institutes created Resource centers on child protection to insure on-job support to local child protection specialists. The new Resource centers use legal documents (a Statute of the Resources Center), the methods of creating and managing a database of community specialists, methodological resources, and the approach to annual planning outcomes developed in Minsk within sub-grant provided by ChildFund.

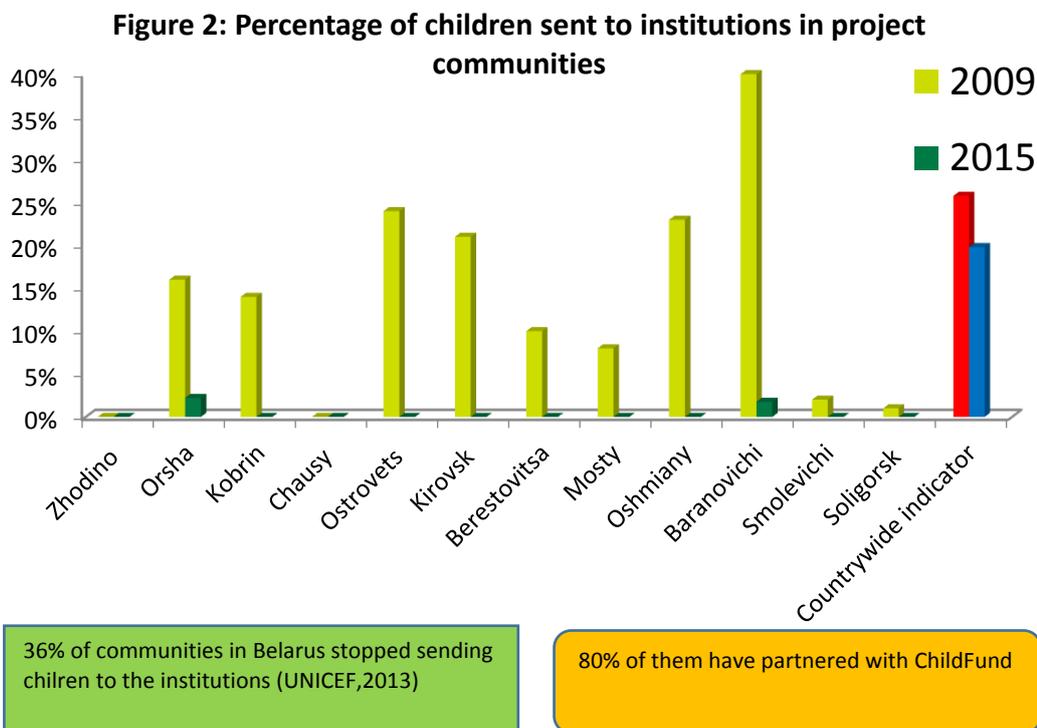
## B. Overview of Project Outcomes

Institutionalization of children in Belarus has been caused by child maltreatment and the inability of the existing child protection system and community-based services to ensure rehabilitation and family type placement for abused and neglected children. During 10 years of project implementation, an effective community-based model aimed to prevent institutionalization of children was developed and disseminated nationwide. The model included:

- a reformation of the local child protection system and its capacity for early detection, investigation and rehabilitation of families at risk;
- new community-based services aimed to support at-risk families and children identified by child protection services targeting and addressing risk factors of child abuse and neglect (i.e. parenting skills, substance abuse, domestic violence, information campaigns on child abuse and neglect prevention) and;
- the development of community-based alternative family-type placement for children.

These interventions were supported through capacity building for multidisciplinary teams of the specialists and strengthening regulatory and methodological environment.

The impact of the de-institutionalization model had dramatic effects on the number of children entering institutions: by the end of 2015 the percentage of institutionalized children in project areas was 1% while the rest of the country's rate was 16.5% (See Figure 2: Percentage of children sent to institutions in project communities).



**Reformation of the local child protection system, including early detection, investigation and family rehabilitation** was one of the key elements of community-based model aimed to prevent institutionalization. Reformation of the child protection system included a shift from uncoordinated work by different specialists to coordinated work in multidisciplinary teams. Ten years ago, specialists often duplicated their efforts, used subjective and ungrounded decision-making about the removal of a child from a family and family re-unification process. These specialists lacked knowledge, skills and services for rehabilitation of at risk families. Moreover, most of them held personal beliefs that institutionalization was the best option for orphaned children. Over the ten years of project, 82 communities from five targeted oblasts (80%) moved towards the creation of well-coordinated, multidisciplinary teams. The teams were trained on a family-centered approach, the importance of evidence-based decision making based on professional investigation of child abuse and neglect, planning and implementing rehabilitation services according to the individual needs of each family and providing family-type care for children whose parents were unable to demonstrate visible progress in rehabilitation and unable to provide a safe family environment.

As one Child Protection Specialist from the Ministry of Education said: “Ten years ago we went out to reprimand families. Now we go out to support them.”

The system of social services that existed in Belarus before the project started seemed to have “missed the target” as it did not address the main factors that contribute to coping abilities of families with children who are already using residential care services, or those who are at high risk of abandoning their children. The service provision tended to benefit other client groups rather than supporting at risk families. The project encouraged **development of new community-based services** aimed to support at-risk families detected by child protection services as well as risk children, orphans, children in institutions and foster care, and children with disabilities. These new services unlike those provided before the project addressed the main risk factors of child abuse and neglect. The common risk factors that lead to family separation include alcohol abuse, poor parenting knowledge and skills, use of physical punishment to discipline children, domestic violence, poor health or a parent’s or child’s disability.

Prevention and rehabilitation services created by the project in communities for families at risk include: family-centered case management and rehabilitation, home visitation interventions based on SafeCare (for parents raising children up to 3 years old), parenting skills enhancement programs (for parents raising children between the ages of 3-17 years old), services for parents raising children with disabilities domestic violence services, self-help groups for parents struggling with alcohol and drug abuse. Support services for institutionalized and other vulnerable children include: life skills education, afterschool clubs, integration services for children with disabilities, social and financial literacy, preparation for independent living, psychosocial interventions and alternative family-based care.

ChildFund awarded approximately \$835,203 for a total of 115 sub-grants implemented by NGOs and community-based organizations to develop the new community based services mentioned above. Throughout the life of the project communities and organizations continued providing new and improved services to OVCs and their parents created within sub-grants without financial support from the project. By the end of the project, most of the services (97%) were supported by allocated community resources which demonstrates growing community buy-in and sustainability of introduced changes. In total, more than 16,783 children and 19,318 parents were served by 718 new community-based services in 168 geographic locations in Belarus as a result of this project.

The project facilitated the **development of community-based alternative family-type placement** for children whose biological parents were unable to care for them. In 2005 when the project started, foster care and group-home care were beginning to emerge (the first foster families were created in 2000). The system of selection, pre-service and in-service support to foster families and their children did not exist in Belarus. Belarusian system did not have specific programs to support foster families while the local capacity to produce effective and modern programs to meet such families’ needs was very poor. The regulations of the early 2000s presented serious impediments towards introducing any programs for foster care that originated from outside of Belarus: the legislation required that only Ministry of Education approved programs could be used. The approval process of the MoE did not consider approval for any programs developed abroad which meant that Belarus could

*“Ten years ago we went out to reprimand families. Now, we go out to support them.”*

-Child Protection Specialist,  
Ministry of Education

not use or adapt programs that were considered international best practices – there were gaps in program development and no programs for foster parents approved by the Ministry.

The project is proud to have liberalized the legislation that led to the de-centralization of key decision making process regarding the programs that should be used for foster families. It opened new opportunities for the implementation of any international programs for foster/adoptive parents in Belarus in the future. Now, at the end of this project, it is responsibility and choice of the community specialists what programs will be used regardless of where the program was developed. ChildFund brought to Belarus the full model of working with foster/adoptive families starting with strategic planning, recruitment information campaigns, pre-service training for candidates, on the job assessment, and in-services programs – all are based on **PRIDE model** which was developed in the USA. PRIDE helped to improve quality and provide more systemic approach towards development of alternative family-type care for children,

*“Incorporation of ChildFund’s practice-oriented programs into curriculum of Belorussian universities is **sustainable trend** because:*

- 1) *Universities have adapted these programs to the requirement of our educational system and created scientific and methodological background for its implementation*
- 2) *Universities initiated inclusion of these programs into the state educational standard*
- 3) *Students provide high assessment to these programs”*

- Elena Bay, Head of Department of Social Work, Brest State University

In order to improve quality and provide more systemic approach towards development of alternative family-type care for children, ChildFund introduced Belarusian specialists and foster parents to PRIDE model which serves the resource for the development and support of family-type community care and resource for adoptive and foster parents. PRIDE helps foster and adoptive parents to develop five essential competencies, including: protecting and nurturing children; meeting children’s developmental needs and addressing developmental delays; supporting relationships between children and their biological families; connecting children to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime, and working as a member of a professional team. PRIDE implementers developed experience in organizing effective recruitment campaigns in their communities, provided training programs for prospective candidates for foster care and adoption (pre-service training) as well as substantial training for foster parents (in-service support). At the project’s conclusion, 71 communities out of 102 (70%) in five targeted oblasts followed the PRIDE model in the development of community-based, alternative family-type placement for children.

Next, PRIDE became instrumental in moving children out of institutions. For example, Divin Children’s house trained their staff and inhabitants of their village on PRIDE’s methodology. Most of the trainees became foster parents for the children that were previously living in the Divin children’s house. Children’s institutions were closed in other partner communities: in Zhodino – in 2007 (200 children were moved to family type care or re-unified with their families), in Orsha – one institution in 2006 (200 children) and the second one in 2013 (65 children); Volozhyn – in 2009 ( 94 children). Chaussy became a “town without orphans” meaning they did not have any institution in their community but stopped sending children into neighboring institutions. Moreover, during the last three years they stopped removing children from their families due to effective methodologies and family –centered approach that they learned from ChildFunds and successfully adopted in their community.

ChildFund convened a Task Group which consisted of child welfare practitioners and faculties from re-training institutes. The group worked to support adaptation of the PRIDE programs and contextualized it for the Belorussian context and system. Two documents were developed by the Task Group for PRIDE model (PRIDE curriculum, Trainer’s guide and Training manual); the effort coupled with ChildFund’s successful advocacy efforts to modify the legislation eliminating the requirement that only officially approved programs be used and made possible full value incorporation of PRIDE model into curriculum of the re-training institutes and universities countrywide. This ensured further dissemination and sustainability of PRIDE model in Belarus.

ChildFund provided substantial contributions for improvement of the quality **of training and education available to social service providers**. UNICEF found that insufficient capacity of child protection specialists is one of the barriers for effective child protection system development. <sup>1</sup>The majority of those who perform the role of social workers in the child protection system do not have a social work background. Training and re-training of social workers is heavily academic and lacks the requisite fieldwork. The introduction of modern social work practice is still on pilot basis and university programs and curriculum do not reflect modern approaches to child protection.

By the end of the project, 100% of all **universities and re-training institutes** in the country had trained faculty on ChildFund’s models and methodologies – elements of de-institutionalization model. These programs have been integrated into the curriculum of all universities and re-training institutes in the country—ensuring that all existing and new cohorts of child protection specialists have the knowledge and skills to prevent the institutionalization of children and ensure their well-being.

Partnership with re-training institutes helped to significantly increased geographic coverage: the project interventions have expanded from 5 communities to 168 geographic locations (see Figure 3: Project Expansion). About 53% of all districts in 5 targeted oblasts of Belarus (54 out of 102 districts) practiced the full de-institutionalization model by the end of the project.



<sup>1</sup> UNICEF concept note "Child Care System reform- Commitment, Partnership and Action"-a regional consultation on progress and next steps in child care system reform in Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, 2009

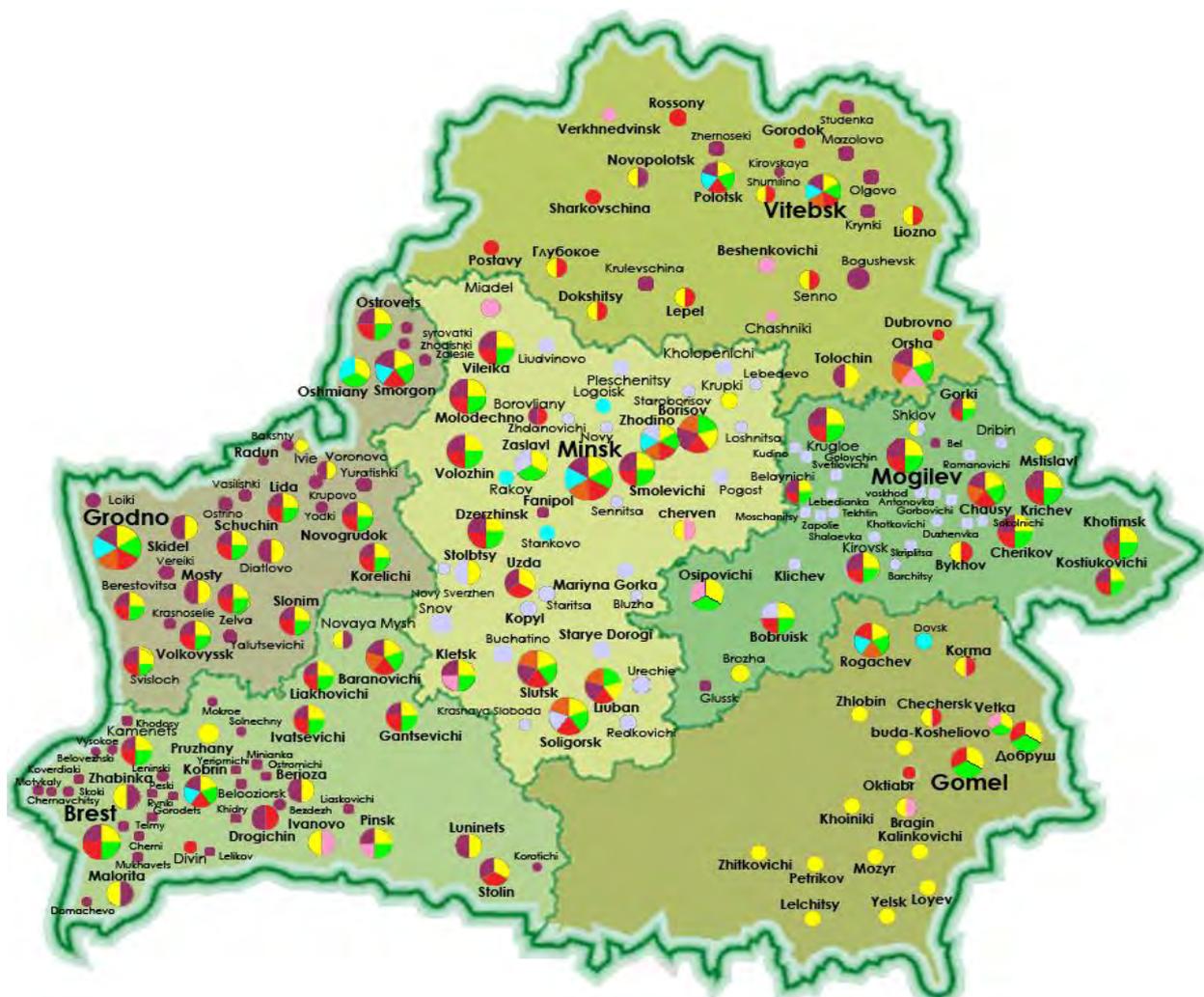


Figure 3: Expansion of Project from 2005-2015

**Advocacy efforts** by ChildFund and members of its Task Groups resulted in positive changes in the national/ local legislation and ensured smooth implementation and sustainability of project innovations. ChildFund facilitated discussions about improvements and amendments to national legislation and policies. The project participants from the different localities formulated more than 50 proposals and recommendations. By the request of the project participants ChildFund accumulated and delivered their proposals to the appropriate authorities of the Ministry of Education. Most of the ideas were accepted and considered in the national programs and policy documents.

During the course of project, ChildFund' s Task Groups comprised of local experts assessed gaps in the regulatory and methodological environment and closed the most important ones with 10 unique developments. These included a set of quality standards and methodologies for child protection system:

- 1) Standard on Investigation of Child Abuse and Neglect,
- 2) Standards on Rehabilitation of Families at Risk,
- 3) Methodological recommendations for Investigation of Child Abuse and Neglect ,
- 4) Collection of Methods of Rehabilitation work with Families at Risk,
- 5) Methodological Recommendations for the implementation of the Standard on Rehabilitation ( part1 Planning
- 6) Methodological Recommendations for the implementation of the Standard on Rehabilitation Part 2 Case Management),
- 7) Guide for PRIDE trainers ,
- 8) Training Manual for prospective foster /adoptive parents,
- 9) Training module on Child Abuse and Neglect for Parenting Skills Enhancement Program
- 10) Training program on Domestic Violence in Child Protection Services.

The Standards were used by the local specialists as the basis for the development of the local regulatory documents that consolidate multidisciplinary cooperation and reformation of child protection system in their communities/ oblast and ensure sustainability of family-centered approach. The Collection of Methods of Rehabilitation work with Families at Risk helped to broaden the palette of tools used by the practitioners in their rehabilitation work with families.

Members of the ChildFund's Task Groups successfully conducted sensitization workshops for the network of Committees on Juvenile Delinquency from Minsk city, Minsk, Mogilev, Vitebsk and Brest oblasts. These Committees coordinate child protection systems at the community, oblast and national levels, assessing the outcomes of rehabilitation work with at-risk families and determining appropriate response including alternative family care for children living in high risk households or reunification. The workshops helped to shift attitudes: moving from an exclusively deficit focused and punitive method of work to a rights-based, family-oriented approach. For example, the team expressed their desire to incorporate the quality standards in child protection system that were developed within the project such as the investigation of child abuse and neglect as well as the rehabilitation of biological families. These actions ensured the sustainability of the changes introduced notwithstanding the high staff turnover within the child protection system. While these standards were officially approved by the pilot communities in 2005-2008, in the subsequent project years (2009–2015) the process moved from the community to the national level. The results of the series of sensitization workshops, coupled with the National Conference on Quality Standards in Child Protection conducted by ChildFund in 2011 in partnership with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, the Academy of Post-Diploma Education, which gathered 150 authorities from education, health, and law enforcement from Belarus, exceeded our expectations. Each oblast developed their own action plan for incorporating the quality standards into their child protection systems. Minsk and Grodno oblasts became the first of 7 oblasts that officially approved standards for investigation and rehabilitation based on those developed by the ChildFund Task Group. Now, each community in Minsk and Grodno oblast must use the procedures and criteria to ensure a family-centered approach in the delivery of child protection services, that is, an informed decision-making process that protects child and parents' rights. Each oblast developed their own action plan for incorporating the quality standards into their child protection systems. The package of services was significantly enriched with innovative services established by child protection agencies and NGOs within sub-grant projects. The Task Group continued working and elaborated quality standards for child protection services that were approved by the National Conference on Standard for Child Protection System conducted by the Ministry of Education/UNICEF/ChildFund.

In summary:

- The project activities covered **168 geographic locations** in Belarus.
- About 53% (54 out of 102 districts) of all districts in 5 targeted oblasts of Belarus practiced the full de-institutionalization model by the end of the project.
- **13,810** specialists from **5,676** NGOs and community based organizations were trained on ChildFund's innovative programs and approaches.
- **81%** of training participants reported practical application of knowledge and skills acquired in their services to children and families.
- **About \$835,203** was awarded to 115 sub-grant projects implemented by NGOs and community-based social organizations to develop community based services targeting the main factors of child abuse and neglect
- More than **16,783 children** and **19,318 parents** accessed **718** community-based services created/improved due to the project interventions in **168** geographic locations nationwide
- ChildFund's multidisciplinary Task Groups developed a series of 10 **unique regulatory and methodological documents**

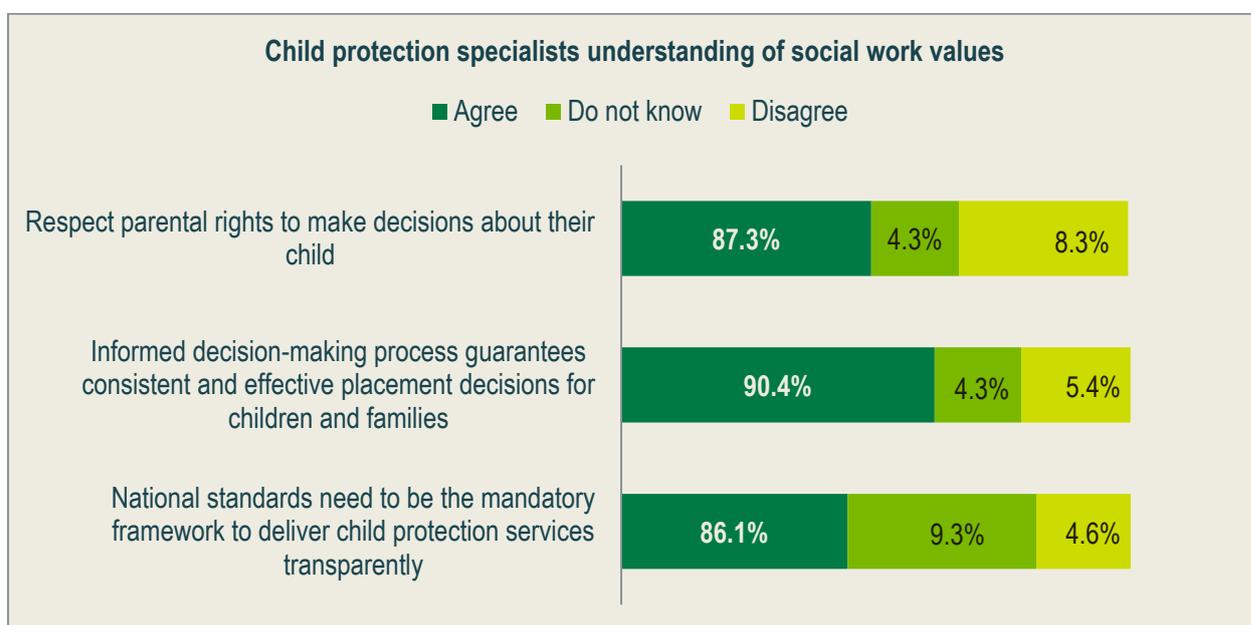
Moreover, the project created a platform for sustainability of de-institutionalization process in Belarus based on the following project outcomes:

- People: Emphasis placed on adequately trained specialists and the created National trainers' teams enabled to train new cohorts of specialists on new methods and forms of work
- Effective innovative methodologies adapted to Belarusian environment
- De-institutionalization model developed and implemented in a large number of communities
- New, effective community-based services targeting the main risk factors of separation and abuse

- Improved local child protection systems
- Regulatory environment has the capacity to deliver and monitor quality of child protection services ( quality standards and methodological recommendations on child protection , training programs )
- Improved quality of training for child protection specialists: 100% universities and re-training institutes have motivated trainers on all ChildFund's innovative programs and these programs adapted and incorporated into curriculum of universities (pre-service training) and re-training institutes ( in-services training)
- Strengthened NGOs participation in child protection arena
- Increased public understanding and participation in child welfare and protection

### **Shifts in professional attitudes and values**

ChildFund carried out an online survey with a hundred child protection specialists representing 100% of oblasts and various level of involvement (socio-pedagogic centers, education departments, re-training institutes and universities); the response rate 69%. The child protection specialists were asked about their professional attitudes and beliefs regarding child protection.



### III. METHODS OF ASSISTANCE

The approach taken towards this project by the ChildFund was based on a well-balanced combination of:

- Proven international theory, practice, and methodology in the field of de-institutionalization;
- Existing in-country experience, facilities, and requirements;
- Participation and empowerment of local communities and;
- Partnership with the oblast and national level educational entities ( universities and re-training institutes) , authorities , and qualified and competent NGOs

Given the complex nature and history of the issue of “social orphans” in Belarus as well as very difficult operating environment for NGOs, ChildFund implemented the project in several distinct phases.



Figure 4: Phases of OVC project implementation

**Phase One: Pilot stage( 2005- 2009)** a comprehensive review and mapping of major stakeholders in the sector, including government authorities and institutions as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and at-risk families, collection of baseline information. During Phase One, ChildFund identified five pilot communities (Zhodino, Volozhyn from Minsk oblast; Kobrin from Brest oblast; Orsha from Vitebsk oblast; Chaussy from Mogilev oblast). The selection criteria of pilot communities included scope of problems of the target populations, presence of local institutions that would be open and supportive of project interventions, and openness and desire of local administrations to support interventions.

Implementation of the de-institutionalization model in the five piloted communities began with **capacity building** interventions provided by international experts. Evidence-based models and methodologies such as family-centered community-based prevention and rehabilitation services, alternative care systems and support services for institutionalized and vulnerable children (PRIDE model ) were delivered by international experts to multidisciplinary teams of the specialists ( child protection, education, ECD, health, law enforcement) from the targeted communities. The participants of these training programs were trained on training-of-trainers methodology. It allowed them to share the new knowledge and skills with the colleagues from their communities through step-down training. All together they piloted and adapted new methodologies /approaches delivered by international experts through creation of new services for vulnerable children and their families. Competent and qualified NGOs were invited to provide training on topics such as domestic violence and substance abuse in the targeted communities. The project supported these processes with sub-grants and technical assistance. At this stage of project implementation almost 100% of new services were developed through the small sub-grants.

In order to mobilize community resources towards development of family care, ChildFund facilitated the creation of **Community Advisory Boards (CAB)** in the targeted communities. CAB included representatives of local authorities, key stakeholders (parents, CBOs, specialists from education, health, police) and local media. CABs were instrumental in developing public dialogue, raising awareness about institutionalization and family type care, assessing community needs and planning development of new services for OVC and their parents.

In order to ensure smooth implementation of new services and reformation of child protection system ChildFund initiated and supported the activities of the **National Task Group** that conducted assessments of regulatory environments, identified gaps and developed new regulatory and methodological documents to address any gaps. The Task Group consisted of representatives of the Ministry of Education, oblast level authorities, practitioners from the targeted communities (child protection, health) and ChildFund specialists.

For each methodology, a **National Trainers Team**, consisting of child protection and education specialists previously trained were formed.

The main result of Phase One was the development of an effective de-institutionalization model that decreased the level of institutionalization within the targeted communities in comparison with the nationwide level (4% in the pilot communities compared with 24% across the nation). Three of five targeted communities stopped placing children in institutions altogether and reached “zero”% of institutionalization.

The model was based on: 1)reformation of local child protection systems and its capacity to detect, investigate and rehabilitate families at risk; 2)development of new community-based services aimed to support at-risk families and children detected by child protection services and address the main risk factors (parenting skills, substance abuse, domestic violence); 3)develop information campaigns on child abuse and neglect prevention; and develop community-based alternative family-type placement for children. These interventions were supported through capacity building to multidisciplinary teams of the specialists and strengthening the regulatory environment.



**Figure 5: ChildFund De-Institutionalization Model**

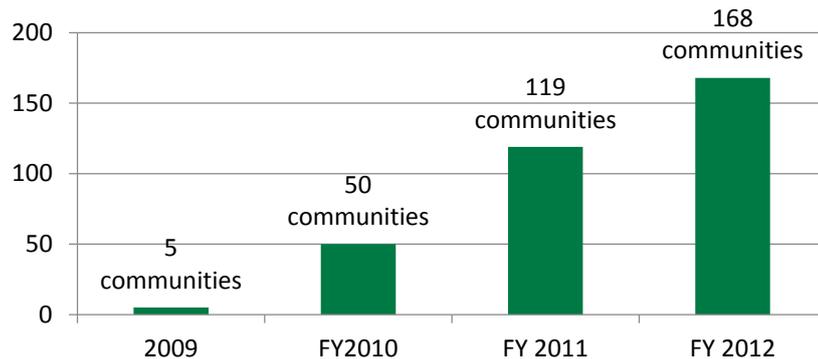
**Phase Two (2009-2012): dissemination of the model** was conducted in the pilot areas of the five targeted communities to new territories. Dissemination included the transfer of model and methodologies adapted in five targeted communities and articulated how support would be provided to implement these services in new communities. To ensure the dissemination process was cost-effective and sustainable, ChildFund developed strategic partnerships with the network of oblast Re-training institutes – the state-sponsored educational entities responsible for upgrading professional knowledge and skills of teachers, psychologists and child protection specialists throughout Belarus. The National Trainers Team members become Master Trainers and experts in their methodological area, gaining a reputation of technical leaders at the local, regional and national levels. These trainers trained child protection authorities, Re-training Institute instructors and government stakeholders in key

elements of de-institutionalization models in one or more of the following approaches, depending on their area(s) of expertise:

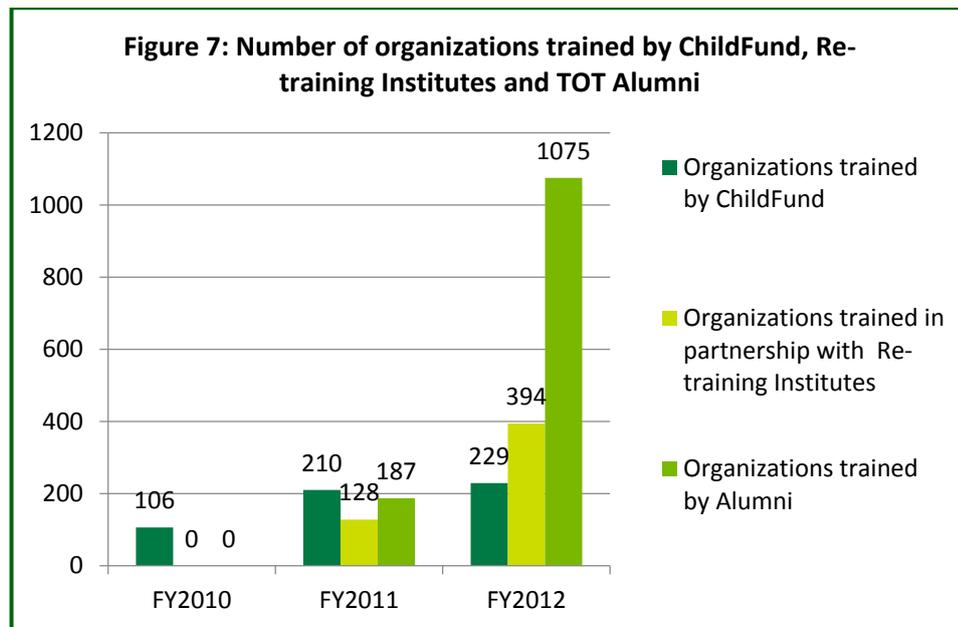
- Family-Centered Approach (case management, including early detection and family rehabilitation)
- Parenting Skills Enhancement Program (parenting education program for at-risk families)
- Safe Care Home Visitation (home visitation program that promotes healthy child development and safe and supportive home environments)
- PRIDE Model (model of recruitment, training, support and supervision of foster families).

Re-training Institute instructors piloted these programs and trained child protection specialists from new communities. The strategic partnerships established with the network of re-training institutes were extremely effective. This approach supported a quick and efficient mechanism to disseminate ChildFund’s model, gain access to new communities, and increase geographic coverage of the project from 5 to 168 communities. This partnership was based on a cost-share model whereby the training costs for the participants (travel, accommodation, meals, and training facilities) were provided by the partner institutes while the costs associated with the trainer’s fee and handouts for the participants were covered by ChildFund. This cost share method resulted in a 10 fold increase of the budget per number of trained specialists.

**Figure 6 . Number of communities involved in OVC project activities in FY09 (baseline)- FY12**



The alumni of the training courses in re-training institutes were trained on Training-of-Trainers methodologies. This training allowed participants to apply new knowledge and skills into their own work with children and families and also disseminate the innovative methodologies to their colleagues working in education, health, ECD and law enforcement. As a result, the number of organizations with trained specialists increased 5.7 times (from 187 to 1,075) in one project year ( Figure 7).



Approximately 87% of organizations (1,469 out of 1,698) were trained by the partner re-training institutes and alumni of the project training programs from the different regions of Belarus ( Figure 4). This key outcome demonstrates that ChildFund instituted high quality training programs that met the needs and expectations of Belorussian specialists. This data all shows the high motivation and willingness of Belorussian specialist to adopt a new style of working and reform the child protection system in their communities.

**Active advocacy** supported positive change in the environment for service provision. While Re-training institutes trained the front-line child protection practitioners from new communities, ChildFund's master trainers conducted a series of sensitization workshops and round tables for their supervisors to build consensus between field staff and their managers ensuring smooth implementation of the model in new communities.

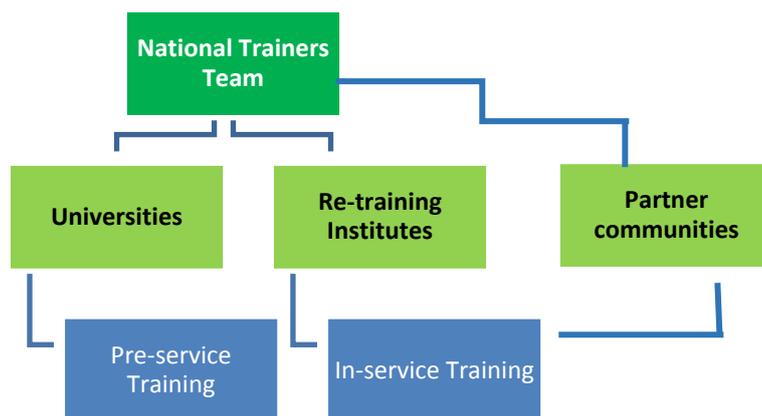
The pilot communities demonstrated sustainability of project interventions implemented in previous years and continued to decrease the institutionalization of children. The new communities demonstrated progress in prevention of institutionalization. The average percentage of institutionalization in ChildFund-assisted communities decreased from 4% in 2009 to 2.5% while the countrywide indicator decreased to 17.52%.

### **Phase Three (2012-2015): sustainability of introduced changes**

The goal of sustainability was achieved through strengthening the national trainers' teams, incorporating innovative training programs into the regular training curriculum of the Re-training Institutes and universities, and gradually transferring funding responsibilities for innovative services from sub- grants to the local communities.

One of the main factors that challenged sustainability was the high level of staff turnover in child protection services. On-going training of a new cadre of child protection specialists is crucial when there is high staff turnover. In order to address the issue, project interventions strengthened improvement of quality of education and training available for child protection specialists. Sustainability Action Plans for 2013-2015 were drafted by partner re-training institutions in order to incorporate ChildFund innovative training programs into their regular curriculum. The national cadre of trainers was enriched with the first group of university faculty. By the end of the project 100% of all universities and re-training institutes in the country had trained faculty on ChildFund's models and methodologies around the elements of de-institutionalization model. These programs have been integrated into the curriculum of all universities and Re-training Institutes in the country—ensuring that existing and new cohorts of child protection specialists have the knowledge and skills to prevent the institutionalization of children and ensure their well-being. In addition to providing training, Master Trainers also provide follow-up support to trainees. Many Master Trainers have decades of experience training child protection specialists and leaders, creating a strong sense of ownership and commitment for quality child protection service delivery. The government through local resources is increasingly supporting trainings. ChildFund supplied partner universities and re-training institutes with the collection of the training materials,

handouts, and books for students. Figure 2 (below), shows the “cascade” approach to the system of training through the National Trainers Team:



**Figure 8: ChildFund “Cascade” Training Model**

In addition to Re-training institutes, which provide continuing education, and universities, **27** communities practicing family centered approaches in child protection served as informal training hubs in their oblasts. These project communities served as the centers of excellence to spread the innovative programs introduced by ChildFund and provided peer-to-peer support to less experienced communities in their oblasts via consultation and training.

Partner communities and organizations continued providing new and updated services to OVC and their parents. Most of the services (97%) were supported by allocated community resources, which demonstrates growing buy-in and sustainability of introduced changes. The percentage of communities that are now implementing the full De-institutionalization Model has been steadily increasing and reached 53% (54 out of 102) in all districts in five targeted oblasts. At this stage of project implementation, the financial support for new and updated services provided by the project to its partners in the regions was very limited and based on cost –share mechanisms whereby at least 50% or more of the resources were provided by a partner organization.

Partner communities demonstrated the growing leadership in promoting dissemination of innovative services and approaches that they practiced as a result of their engagement with this project. ChildFund provided support and consultations while the leading role and initiatives belonged to local counterparts. For example, in 2015 Polotsk socio-pedagogic center presented Afterschool clubs for children and teens at risk at the Vitebsk oblast seminar for education authorities. Oblast Department of education was impressed with the outcomes of the afterschool clubs. The DoE issued official recommendations to all districts within their oblast to start afterschool clubs for children and families at risk. By September 2015, four communities had initiated Afterschool clubs with support from community resources.

To support local communities in delivering innovative services, ChildFund awarded Minsk City Re-training Institute with a sub-grant to pilot the first resource center on child protection in the country. The Ministry of Education was very appreciative for this partnership and because of the positive outcomes of the pilot project and in 2013; they issued a request to establish these centers in every oblast of the country. Oblast Re-training institutes now serve as the administrative units for these centers. By the end of the project, 100% of the Re-training institutes created resource centers on child protection to insure on-job support to local child protection specialists. The new Resource centers used legal documents (a Statute of the Resources Center) , the methods of creating and managing a database of community specialists, methodological resources, and the approach to annual planning that were developed in Minsk within sub-grant provided by ChildFund.

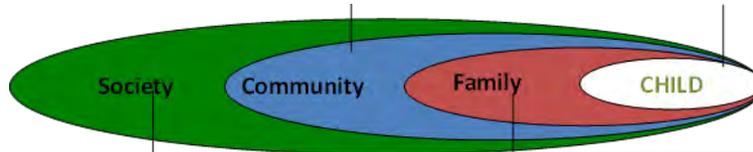
#### **IV. KEY PROJECT SUCCESS FACTORS:**

The following key factors contribute to the program’s success:

- **Multi-level and Multi-faceted Approach** – See Figure 9: Project Interventions and the ecological model (below).

- Socio-pedagogical centers as a base for child protection services
- community-based child protection mechanisms
- Local legislation
- Foster parent recruitment campaigns
- Domestic violence awareness campaigns
- Services for children with disabilities
- NGO and local government capacity-building

- Social & Financial Literacy
- Afterschool Clubs
- Trauma Interventions
- Preparation for Transition to Alternative Care and Independent Living for Children in Institutions
- Services for Children with Disabilities



- Advocacy for Improved Legislation & Implementation of Legislation
- Formation of multidisciplinary teams & networks
- Institutionalization of models & methodologies
- Development of child protection standards
- Changes in beliefs about OVCs
- Government capacity-building

- Parenting Education
- Safe Care Home Visitation
- Case Management & Family Rehabilitation
- Foster Family Training, Support & Monitoring
- Services for Parents of Children with Disabilities
- Family Support Services Referrals (substance abuse, domestic violence, etc.)

- **Coordination and Collaboration between Different Organizations:** including coordination and collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, police, local government, schools, NGOs, orphanages.
- **Strong Partnerships that Create Leadership and Ownership:** partner leadership and ownership has facilitated the adoption of the approaches and models on a large scale.
- **Capacity-building for Sustainability:** all trainings of trainers are now conducted by Master Trainers, and the training program on the Family-Centered Approach has been integrated into 100% of Universities and Re-Training Institutes.
- **Capacity to Work Strategically at the Policy Level:** ChildFund works within the parameters of the political system with support of the government as a strategic partner and ally.
- **Large Cost and Resource Share:** government pays for child protection personnel, as well as socio-pedagogical center infrastructure and operating costs.
- **Time to Pilot, Reflect, Learn, and Evolve:** the 10 year project has allowed for project learning and evolution.

## V. CHALLENGES/ CONSTRAINTS

- Several economic crises broke out in Belarus over the course of the project implementation and provided serious impediments to project implementation. For example, economic crises of March 2011 led to devaluation of Belarusian ruble against the dollar by 189%. This caused the rapid price growth for foodstuffs, gas, and oil. The inflation rate reached 116% by December 2011. The crisis affected the most vulnerable groups of the population, who are ChildFund Belarus' target groups. ChildFund Belarus allocated financial resources through the sub-grant scheme in order to supplement community efforts in establishing and maintaining new child protection services. Some training activities with no high impact were cancelled with the approval of USAID AOR.
- High level of staff turnover in child protection services posed a threat for sustainability of project interventions. Training of Master Trainers and the formation of national trainers' teams on PRIDE, Parenting Skills Enhancement program and the Family-Centered Approach to Child Protection helped to accumulate human resources and then train faculties of re-training institutes and universities to mitigate its negative impact.
- An unfavorable political situation and increased control within the country led to the situation when national level authorities at the Ministry of Education were unable to initiate and lead innovations because of fear of risks and

failure. At the same time, MoE increased control and demands to the grassroots level of child protection systems without providing additional funding or resources. This situation created a favorable lacuna for community-based project interventions by ChildFund. Local specialists and child protection organizations were eager for partnership and assistance from the ChildFund in order to improve their capacity and child protection systems.

- Reformation of local child protection systems required new regulations that national level authorities failed to provide. In situations like this, 44 local communities had to take initiative, develop their own regulations (quality standards) that were then approved by their local governments. This process was based on the Law about Local Self-Governance. This Law, developed in the 90's, provided authority to the grassroots level of the governance system, but it was abandoned because of the long history of highly centralized authority in the country. Thus reformation of the local child protection systems stimulated practical application of the existing legal mechanisms helping to de-centralize the decision making authority in area of child protection.

## VI. LESSONS LEARNED

- Correlation of the project activity with country priorities in child protection and national legislation combined with administrative support on the community level proved to be extremely important for successful implementation of project interventions.
- Communities with strong leadership demonstrated better results. All project assisted communities had equal opportunities for the different types of support from ChildFund, nevertheless the package of services that have been developed in every community varies and depends on the interest and enthusiasm of community specialists and their ability and desire to improve local child protection systems.
- In order to provide smooth implementation of innovative project interventions, it is not enough to train front-line worker. Supervisors should be also trained.
- Partnership with the network of re-training institutes was very effective and helped to expand and scale up project interventions, eventually exceeding annual targets with minimum project expenses and cost share mechanisms.
- Educational entities (universities and institutions providing in-service training for the specialists) should be involved in implementation of innovative development programs. These partnerships ensure sustainability of introduced changes over long period of time.
- Sub-grants are instrumental in the development of innovative community services and implementation of the de-institutionalization model. The services and programs created within the sub-grants demonstrated long term sustainability despite serious deterioration of economic situation and limited community resources for social services.
- Successful piloting of new services and targeted communication about its effectiveness with decision makers helped to use administrative resource of the system to promote further dissemination of new services countrywide.
- Long term engagement with the child welfare and protection system at community and national level is essential in creating sustainable relationships and substantive cooperation and change

## VII. IMPORTANCE FOR USAID

- The project activities helped to relieve suffering of the most vulnerable population, demonstrate good will and support to the Belarusian people from the American people. The project enhanced well-being of children and youth - the country's most precious resource. Their health and well-being are essential for future generations to flourish.
- The project contributed to USAID's overarching mission in Belarus: **To support the Belarusian people in achieving a government that respects their democratic rights and fundamental freedoms through:**
  - Promotion and respect for human rights (including children's rights ) and freedoms
  - Facilitation of positive systemic changes

- Strengthening civil society and civic participation

Promotion of basic human rights and freedoms: All methodologies and programs that ChildFund brought to Belarus are based on social work values and principles. That's why along with enhancement of social wellbeing of vulnerable populations the project exposed Belarusians to core values of social work: social and economic justice, equal opportunities, right for self-determination, making independent decisions, value of diversity – that are the basic human rights and freedoms. This exposure was organized in a natural manner that was socially and culturally appropriate and thus it did not generate opposition but rather support from the governmental authorities. The project helped people at all levels, children, families, communities, professional, bureaucrats and policy makers to engage with core issues related to child rights and protection and how they can play a role to, empower them to take responsibility and initiative.

The project promoted systemic changes: The project provided opportunities for groups at different levels to contribute and input ideas for improving the condition of children and families at risk and **to advocate** for the changes within the existing political and social systems. These opportunities provided the power and means for people to become free and responsible social beings. In a highly centralized Belorussian system the project activities facilitated growth of local leadership, supported local initiatives and de-centralization of decision-making. The project reached people from rural and remote areas with limited access to information and development .

The project also helped people to participate in the political process which significantly affects the scope of alternatives that will be available to them (i.e. creation of Community Advisory Boards on de-institutionalization and child protection, preparation of the proposals to the national policies, programs and strategies in area of child protection, development of local regulatory documents).

Strengthen civil society and civic participation : NGO's project management and technical capacity were enhanced through training and implementation of sub-grants. Participating NGOs produced tangible results. Representatives of vulnerable groups involved in NGO projects had the opportunity of self-determination, expression of their opinion and were able to influence a political agenda. The project facilitated public dialogue around child protection issues and mobilized community members to take responsibility and actions through project activities such as community volunteer groups, family group conferences, Community Advisory Boards, and active participation in detection of at-risk children and families.

One example is **social movement for the improvement of the national adoption system**. One of the important steps towards it is creation of a computer database ( photo-listing) of children available for adoption in Belarus. This INTERNET system helps to decrease risks of corruption in adoption services and increase opportunity for a child to meet their new parents. This initiative was offered to the National Adoption Center by the participants of ChildFund's training course on modern adoption services and rejected by them. A group of 40 adoptive parents mobilized by one of the trainees, an adoptive mother , started a public advocacy campaign for making adoption system more open and transparent. Mass media expressed its interest to this new initiative. The most popular Internet portal TUT.BY interviewed the leader of this movement Natalia Shekh, the alumni of Adoption training course PRIDE program. (For more details, please see <http://news.tut.by/tv/274091.html> .)

Due to partnership with mass media in few days more than 600 ordinary citizens, adoptive parents from all over Belarus signed an official appeal calling for improvement of the existing recruitment methods, making them more transparent and available for public control. This appeal was submitted to the Ministry of Education and discussed through series of follow-up meetings between the leaders of the social movement and top level authorities from the Ministry of Education and the National Adoption Center. As the result the first in the country data base (photo-listing) was created and available for general public ( <http://dzitya.by/>)

## VIII. OVERALL DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT ACTIVITIES

During 2005-2015 the project was implemented according to its work plans and covered a wide spectrum of activities including maintaining strategic partnerships, supporting sustainability of prevention and rehabilitation services, capacity building for specialists, geographic expansion, and advocacy. All main targets outlined in PMEP for 2005-2015 were achieved.

**Figure 10 : Project Activities /inputs by objectives**

Objective 1: Community-based prevention and rehabilitation services	Objective 2: Capacity building for social service providers	Objective 3: Strengthening the national regulatory and methodological base and disseminating key findings
Calls for Proposals (7)	Training program on Family-centered Approach in child protection in Re-training institutes (6)	Task Group meetings on the methodology guidelines development on child protection programs (18)
Training on project design/ proposal writing (3)	TOTs on a Child-Centered Approach to Child Protection (10)	Oblast and community level roundtable meetings on child protection programs implementation (14)
Review, evaluation and selection of project proposals	TOT courses on Parenting Skills Enhancement program (12)	Sensitization workshops on child protection for the oblast regional Committees on Juvenile Delinquents (8)
Trainings on project management for grantees (5)	TOT courses on family-type care development for orphans (PRIDE methodology) (18)	
Training on M&E and PR for grantees (3)	Forums for trainers of child protection programs (Family-centered approach, Parenting Skills Enhancement Program; PRIDE methodology) (4)	Strategy development and planning workshops for child protection specialists of oblast and its communities (2)
Monitoring and evaluation visits to small grant projects. Final assessment of subgrant projects	Training courses on child protection programs for university faculty (Family-centered approach; PRIDE) (2)	Working meetings with partner re-training institutes, university faculties and MoE on dissemination of child protection programs (4)
	TOT on Aflatoun program of social and financial literacy (2)	
Survey on sustainability of subgrant services	Training program on child abuse and neglect prevention, and Family-centered Approach in child protection for NGOs (1)	Visits to partner retraining institutes
	International TOT on Curriculum Development and Coaching	
Parenting skills enhancement Program implementation (	International training on SafeCare home visitation training program (2)	Final and mid-term project conferences (3)
	International TOT SafeCare/Home visitation International Training of Trainers	
PRIDE pre-service and in-service program implementation	International adoption training program (IHS experts (USA)	National conference on Quality Standards in Child Protection (1)
	International training on Working with Traumatized Children	
Support Services for vulnerable children	The exchange visit to Lithuania on day care centers' establishment	Publishing of methodology materials
	Training on Family Group Conference	
Technical support to communities (Newsletters on Parenting Skills Enhancement program, SafeCare and PRIDE, Resource libraries in communities and retraining institutes on child protection programs (39)	Training on Volunteer Management	
	Trainings on SafeCare program in communities (2)	
115 Sub-grants for the total amount of \$835,203 USD for development of community-based prevention and rehabilitation services for children and parents	Public awareness campaign on promotion of safe parenting	
	Networking meetings for university faculty and national trainers' teams on implementation of child protection programs (2)	

## IX. VISION FOR THE FUTURE:

In addition to providing follow-up support and expansion of current work, ChildFund Belarus and its partners have identified the following areas as key areas of work for the future within the category of child protection system reform:

### **Domain One: Child Protection System Reform**

#### 1. Alternative Family Care for Children

One of the biggest challenges of de-institutionalization in Belarus is that substitute families (foster and adoptive) are not prepared to provide care and support very young children, children with disabilities, and teenagers who have been institutionalized. Taking the achievements of CSVG project further, reducing the need for institutions for children ages 0-3 and ensuring that there is immediate foster care for these children is of primary importance. These policy needs (foster care for young children, adoption policy for children with disabilities, independent living for institutions' graduates) fall under the category of Alternative Care Framework that is adopted by the UN Security Council; many countries are in the process of developing alternative care frameworks. The current needs call for implementation of the key principles of the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children at the national level in Belarus that would enhance the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This could be achieved through:

- Training for foster families on caring for infants, children with disabilities, and teenagers.
- More integrated programming to help institutionalized children transition to alternative care or independent living.
- Policy to support independent living for children aging out of institutions
- Advocate for Alternative Care Framework
- Independent Living Program for children leaving institutions and foster care which includes an independent living assessment, ensuring necessary life skills, guidance and support from caregivers and social support.

#### 2. Child and Family Support

Currently, there is a greater level of awareness about domestic violence (especially emotional abuse) among Belarusians. A decade ago, household matters were private and household and domestic violence issues were not publicized. The awareness increased over the last decade due to the intense work of NGOs, a series of media campaigns, attempts by the state agencies to discuss a better balance of responsibilities and provide assistance. By 2015, it was common for state (schools) and private organizations to provide parenting education, and fatherhood groups or clubs. However, a UNICEF study in 2013 found that 67% of parents in Belarus were emotionally abusive towards children.. Importantly, only 7% of parents recognize violent discipline as an effective relationship-building tool; hence, one of the key factors for emotional abuse in the majority of Belarusian children is the lack of parental skills and knowledge. Other factors include single parenthood, adolescent parenting, and also the ideology of a Belarusian family within child protection that typically excludes fathers as a rehabilitation resource and places blame on the mother failing to acknowledge the father's role and accountability.

This signifies a need for more prevention programs and early interventions, as the child protection system is often perceived to begin when there is a child protection violation. Belarusian legislation requires that timely and effective psychological support is provided by the specialists that have state budgeted positions. However, specialists report that while they are knowledgeable about diagnosing the problem and making referrals, the specialized services are not capable to provide meaningful assistance, so the referrals generally go to a general psychologist. There is a need to develop the capacity and universal provision of specialized psychological support.

This could be achieved through:

- Building capacity of specialists in the areas of mental health and providing psychosocial support to children and families
- Introduction of effective parenting education methods for young parents.
- Expansion of community-based family support mechanisms, increasing access to effective support services for risk families that target the main factors of child abuse and neglect, traumas and accidents: home visitation programs (SafeCare model), the development of informal child protection mechanisms in rural and remote areas (Family Group Conference methodology).
- Policy for de-facto sharing parental leave – maternity and paternity leave.

### 3. Child Protection System Quality

Retention of employees in child welfare, social service, and other human service agencies is a serious concern. The high turnover rate of professional workers in Belarus poses a major challenge for ensuring the quality, consistency, and sustainability of services. While it is true that the positions are not among the highly paid in the country, the main factor for the turnover is the ineffective administration and management system of the sector in Belarus. The area of responsibility of specialists is too wide, the positions are not provided with a precise list of their functions. Such imprecision makes specialists unable to focus, to know or fulfill endless job responsibilities, to structure their work, and to report measurable results. Next, the existing system supplies education/child protection specialists with multiple superiors with whom they are required to report including: local, regional and national divisions of Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, police, courts and others.

Thus, while the intrinsic job value is recognized by the child protection specialists and attracts them in the first place, the effective system of organizational and supervisor support is not developed. There is a need to develop a system of support from supervisors and coworkers that would be instrumental in specialists' retention.

This could be achieved through:

- Development of leadership and management skills staff for child protection authorities on the local, oblast and national levels
- Improved access of child protection system workers to effective information and methodological support, as well as on-the-job support services and methodological assistance.
- Quality standards for child protection and family-centered approach case management
- Trained volunteers complement specialists' work

### **Domain Two: Child and Youth Participation:**

It is common knowledge that self-image is a crucial aspect of the personal development of every human being. This applies to children and youth in particular, since how they perceive themselves will affect the way they interact with others and their future development. It is therefore essential that young people feel respected by adults in order to stand by their rights and become self-confident adults.

In Belarus, child and youth participation, including direct and representative forms of involvement, mainly takes place in 'formal' structures (state children/youth unions; school/college/university councils). An analysis of the law and policies on child and youth participation shows that there is an extensive range of Belarusian legislation on the subject, and the 'formal' participation structures are based on it. However, the 'formal' structures ensure that child and youth participation in Belarus involves a 'top-down' approach, where activities are pre-planned, instead of a 'bottom-up' approach. Whilst positive efforts are now being made to include children and young people in many processes, many who work in the development sector are not confident about how to practice these ideals. Children and youth themselves are not involved in the development of participation methods, and new methods are not being piloted or explored. There is a need for new instruments and tools to improve the participation of children and young people in all aspects of life and society.

Tools to improve the participation of children in all settings can be found by introducing best international practices in child and youth participation, by involving children themselves in developing new participation mechanisms and by

training professionals working with and for children on new effective methods. The research suggests that peers and adults closely related to the children generally listen to their views whereas professionals working with and for children are less likely to do so. Among the factors are preconceptions that adults have about children, such as the erosion of the adult's authority, or a lack of time and resources. Working with various target groups of children/youth needs to be stimulated and can ensure that child participation occurs at ground level and not only in representational structures. An overall conclusion that emerges from an analysis of the existing participation structures is the need for better training of professionals working with and for children, including teachers, legal professionals, health care workers, police officers, social workers, NGO representatives and municipal, regional and national civil servants.

Belarus has many strengths regarding children and youth participation through formal representational structures. However, improvements could be made by developing new innovative child and youth participation methods, providing training, ensuring child-friendly information and involving disadvantaged children and young people.

This could be achieved through:

- Introducing methodologies for working with children and youth as partners across all programs and training for child protection and education specialists.
- Leadership and awareness-raising on children's and youths' roles in society.
- Platforms and opportunities for children and youth to provide their input on social and economic issues that impact their lives, including peer-to-peer groups, children and youth networks.
- Advocating for enabling policies that support child and youth participation.

ChildFund has already gained positive experience in introducing and supporting the programs that include aspects of child and youth participation (such as the Social Interactive Theatre, Life Skills education, Aflatoun and Aflateen social and financial literacy programs), and would like to concentrate more deliberately in these areas. Such work would contribute to building and harnessing young people as assets. Also, it would challenge negative stereotypes of youth and demonstrate how young people can positively contribute to development in various operational areas such as organizational development, policy and planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.