



SUCCESS STORY

Providing Vulnerable Youth with a Continuum of HIV/AIDS Services

A public-private partnership provides youth in St. Petersburg with critical HIV/AIDS services.



HealthRight International

A group in St. Petersburg participates in an activity a USAID-supported HIV Youth Prevention Alliance activity.

The HIV Youth Prevention Alliance combines the resources and expertise of USAID and partners to strengthen HIV/AIDS services for vulnerable youth in St. Petersburg.

Russia's HIV/AIDS prevalence is the second highest in Eastern Europe and Central Asia – the only region where prevalence rates are clearly continuing to rise. Street children and other vulnerable youth are at particular risk of infection. Often lacking nurture, support, and guidance at home, many of them struggle with substance abuse and engage in other behaviors that increase their risk of infection.

In St. Petersburg, Russia's second largest city, there are an estimated 10,000 vulnerable youth. Within this population, HIV prevalence estimates have reached an alarming 37.4 percent. Yet there have been few opportunities for vulnerable youth to receive clinical diagnoses, treatment, and care. Prior to 2005, there was little municipal infrastructure in place to provide them with critical HIV/AIDS services.

Recognizing this unmet need, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) entered into a public-private partnership called the HIV Youth Prevention Alliance. The aim of this alliance has been to implement a community reintegration and HIV awareness program for vulnerable youth. USAID's partners in this joint initiative are Johnson & Johnson, HealthRight International, and Doctors to Children, a local organization.

With support from the St. Petersburg City Administration, the Alliance established a community drop-in center and an overnight shelter for HIV-positive street youth. In March 2009, the partners continued their efforts by launching a campaign to reach at-risk youth with HIV prevention messages. The Alliance has also developed a cadre of social workers in the public and private sectors who are trained in risk assessment, family intervention, and HIV prevention for street youth. In addition, the Alliance provides youth with a broad continuum of services that includes mobile voluntary HIV testing and referrals to treatment and care.

To date, the program has reached more than 5,000 individuals, with 720 children returning to their families and 153 children placed in foster care. The community drop-in center has served 645 HIV-positive youth, and another 45 adolescents have become residents of a halfway house supported by USAID. A package of best practices in HIV prevention will soon be disseminated to government institutions and nongovernmental organizations across St. Petersburg.