



SUCCESS STORY

A Teen Coping with Violence Close to Home

After the violence, teen participates in psychological counseling despite social stigma



Photo Credit: April Carman

Bek, right, sits with Elena, his counselor in Osh. Since October, Bek has agreed to meet with Elena regularly, despite social stigma around these services.

“We’re very grateful that this out-patient service is available, and that we met Elena. We trust her.”

– Bek’s mother

Telling Our Story
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Sixteen-year-old Bek was enjoying the summer after finishing a college certificate program when the initial wave of violence erupted in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010. Bek’s family of four lives in Osh and after the June violence, his mother kept him indoors for weeks to protect him. His mother describes Bek as a shy teenager who is a great big brother to his sisters. [Bek is not his real name – it has been changed to protect his privacy.]

By late summer, Bek became more shy and withdrawn. He was also having difficulties sleeping due to nightmares from the violence he had seen firsthand and from watching eyewitness videos on the internet. His mother wanted Bek to be seen at the Osh Oblast Mental Health Center, but he refused, not wanting his friends to label him as “crazy.” In Kyrgyzstan, there is severe social stigma around receiving mental health services. Staff of the Mental Health Center recommended taking Bek to a community-based psychological counseling station funded by the USAID Medical Relief Program for those impacted by the violence in Osh. These mental health stations were established in four conflict affected communities in Osh city and Osh Oblast after June’s events.

In early October, at the mental health station in Navoy, Bek and his mother met Elena, a doctor and psychiatrist. At first, Bek admits he didn’t share his real concerns and fears with Elena. He told only his mother. Over time, with weekly out-patient appointments, Bek began to trust Elena and to tell her more.

Bek is starting to feel better and to process his experiences. He reports he is able to sleep through the night and is once again attending courses and studying regularly. His mother notices a significant difference in her son. She states that he is talking with friends again, is more social and is sleeping better.

Bek and his mother admit they’ve never known anyone who had participated in mental health counseling and, prior to June, neither ever thought anyone in their family would seek the help of a psychiatrist. However, now that they’ve experienced for themselves the kindness and patience of a professional counselor, they would recommend this important health service to friends and family members in need of mental health support.