



“It is a real happiness to live in your own house, where you can come after work and drink tea from a beautiful cup, on the beautiful kitchen and just enjoy the life...”
- Zebo dreams

Now Zebo is smiling. She gained hope for the future. But there was a time, when all people turned against her. Life seemed to be over. Close people did not accept and did not understand her. Her health worsened day by day and Zebo could not find a job and with three kids she left homeless. And all this happened because of HIV infection. In a heavy condition Zebo was taken to infectious diseases hospital in Kurgan-Tube city without any hope to remain alive.

In 1995, Zebo left to Russian Federation for earnings with her small kids after a divorce. She got employed in the café first as dish-cleaner and then started to help on the kitchen as an assistant to chef. She had a special taste and talent for making salads and second course meals. Zebo organized her kids to be enrolled to the kindergarten and seemed life was getting better. Later, when the children went to school, Zebo was able to accumulate a small capital, opened her own fast food kiosk, where she cooked and sold: cutlets, pancakes, pies and sweets. But it was difficult to live in a foreign country and bring up

children. Zebo met a man who wanted to build a new life with her, raise her children and be the friend she dreamed about for so long. Sometime after the marriage, Zebo has learned that her husband was drug addicted. She has been in a desperate situation, but he assured her that he would take a medical treatment, find a job and take care of her and the children. In the meantime, Zebo started to get tired at work, felt feeble and lost weight. She did not pay attention and continue to work and fight for her happiness, since her husband did not stop using drugs. Zebo started to have fever and had diarrhea, which she could not treat herself and therefore visited a doctor. She was hospitalized and there they revealed that Zebo has HIV. It was 2015 and Zebo fell into depression, divorced and came back to Tajikistan with children since there was no place in Russia for her anymore.

She was met with cold reception at home. She had no her own apartment and she has been invited to live at her close relative's house, but when he learned about that she was HIV+ he asked her to leave his house. Because of her status, she could not find a job, everywhere they asked for the HIV test results. She used her small savings to rent an apartment and arranged her kids to go to school. Money were spent very quickly and she got worse and in a heavy condition Zebo was hospitalized to the infectious disease hospital of Kurgan-tube city. And here for the first time Zebo has learned about "AFEW-Tajikistan" in Kurgan-tube city that helps people living with HIV with medications and food.

“When I felt better I visited this organization and was really surprised by the friendly and supporting atmosphere. I realized that I am not alone with my problems and that there are people, who are ready to give me a helping hand. After several conversation I visited AIDS center and initiated ARV therapy and passed TB, hepatitis and STI and other gynecological tests”- says Zebo.

Zebo became a frequent visitor of the Khatlon office of AFEW-Tajikistan where she was given information about life with HIV, psychological, legal, food and medical support as well as participated in self-help groups.

“One of the most effective ways of work with people like me was to bring us together and form the support groups. I got opportunity to exchange my personal experience and knowledge. The spirit in the self-support group and attitude to new people raised my self-confidence and self-esteem”- Zebo continues her story.

In 2017, Zebo took part in the training on "Basics of Entrepreneurship" organized by Republican public organization AFEW-Tajikistan under the framework of the Project: "Reducing social, medical, legal

and economic impact on the life of women returned from labor migration or deported from the Russian Federation”, with the financial support of the Open Society Institute –Assistance Foundation in Tajikistan. Having received her certificate, Zebo, with the help of the social worker of AFEW-Tajikistan, requested Khukumat of Kurgan-tube city and office of the Women's Committee in Khatlon region to support her in opening of the small kiosk. Positive response from the local government authorities supported Zebo to get 2000 TJ Somoni loan from the bank. Zebo has spent this money to get all necessary registration documents and opened a small kiosk to sell food products.

“I am grateful to people working at AFEW-Tajikistan for the given hope! Thanks to their support I learned how to live with HIV, how to get self-confident and now I can support my children. My small business found to be in high demand and I am planning to expand it and save some money to buy my own house. It is a real happiness to live in your own house, where you can come after work and drink tea from a beautiful cup, on the beautiful kitchen and just enjoy the life...» - Zebo ends her story in a dreamy mood.

Note: AFEW – Tajikistan supports women returned from labor migration in the field of health protection, raising the level of legal, financial and economic literacy as well as in getting vocational education and training.