

## “I can see sun again!”

Story of Tahmina is one of the positive women’s stories in Tajikistan, which due to social and legal support from project: “Bridging the gaps: health and rights for key populations – 2.0” could help to get hopes and plan positive changes in their lives.



*“When I was a four year grade student, my parents already had got five children, which is a usual case in Tajik families in rural areas. Due to frequent childbirths and burdensome care of all five young children, my mother fell seriously ill. I had to quit my school and take the burden of care for the family to my shoulders”-* started her story Tahmina.

Tahmina had managed the whole household, raised her brothers and sisters, sent them to school and met when they came back from school. Her mom has always stayed in hospitals. Her father was at work all days long and came home very late at night.

In one of such evenings, when her father was late from his work and her mom was in the hospital, a bother of her father, her uncle came to their house. Having asked a small Tahmina to go out to the street, the uncle raped her. A neighbor found Tahmina dying and unconscious and took her to a hospital. After that a long process of proceedings started, her mom and dad were on the verge of a nervous breakdown given that in addition to that, the relatives of her farther began to hate the girl, accusing her of what had happened.

*«Policemen regularly visited our house and asked “bad” questions. I remember, I was asked to come to the court hearing, where I lost my consciousness, when saw my uncle who tried to threaten me with his face expression»,* - continue her story Tahmina.

*“My uncle was taken to prison. I became an outcast for numerous relatives from my father’s side. In their effort to protect me, my parents sent me to mother’s relatives and I constantly left to Dushanbe or to other cities of the country”* tells Tahmina. *“I started to meet different people and got to know girls in Kurgan-Tube city. On one of our meetings, these girls offered me to smoke a cigarette and later try marihuana. They introduced me to Azam , who found to be a big drug dealer in Kurgan-Tube. He kept me locked in one of his apartments for one and half year and only rare, late at night he took me to the restaurants and with this he sent money to my parents. He showed me how to take and then inject heroine. This is how I became a heroine addicted”* – Tahmina continues her story. *“After sometime Azam lost his interest to me and I found to be on the street. Since my life depended completely from heroine, I started to steel and get involved in prostitution to buy a dose. Finally, I was taken to prison”.*

In 2013, Tahmina was taken to prison for a theft. After one fourth of the term, she was amnestied and released. When Tahmina returned home, she again faced threats from relatives of her father and left home and was on the street again. After numerous troubles, Tahmina met the familiar drug users and started to use drugs again.

One day, she accidentally met Bahdriddin, a familiar drug user and Tahmina was surprised with the changes he had and how cheerful we looked like. He worked in public organization AFEW-Tajikistan. Bahriddin was a peer consultant there. He told Tahmina about his experience of changes and support and services provided by his organization. Tahmina was curious and decided to visit the Drop-in center for drug users and see everything herself.

During the first visit of the Drop-in center of AFEW-Tajikistan, Tahmina was surprised that despite the fact that she was in dirty dress and with the cracked and bleeding heels covered only by old slippers, she was met warmly, offered tea and just talked about her and her health condition.

*"I was very thin, dirty, I have not remembered when I took my shower last time"* Tahmina recalls that day.

Social workers helped Tahmina to get clean herself up, return to the parents' house, restore her documents and arranged visits to doctors so that she could undergo a medical examination and improve her health.

Since the summer of 2017, Tahmina has regularly visited the Drop-in center and participated in self-support drug user teams. She has been trained in the basics of personal hygiene, HIV and STI prevention, drug addiction treatment and healthy life style. In one of those team meetings, Tahmina learned about methadone substitution therapy program. Friendly atmosphere, warm attitude, respect and opportunity to receive methadone for free, motivated Tahmina for changes.

Since August this year, Tahmina began to participate in the OST program at the narcology treatment center, where she would never go herself because of fear and lack of money. But, everything is over. Now Tahmina takes methadone. She continues to visit self-support teams and has found many friends who understand her and who are ready to support her.

*"Within half a year, with the support from the staff of AFEW-Tajikistan, I have changed significantly and changed for the better. I trusted with the peer consultant and social workers. I started helping my mother, something that I have not done since left my home. They helped me to restore faith in myself. My eyes shine as before, I see sun again and I want to live!"* Tahmina finishes her story with a smile.

Only in 2017, preventive and social services were provided to 688 drug by AFEW-Tajikistan to drug users and vulnerable women in Tajikistan under the framework of the project "Bridging the Gaps: Health and Rights for Key Populations - 2.0", financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.