



SUCCESS STORY

Community Connections

USAID Study Tour Inspires Disability Activist to Improve Accessibility in Kazakhstan



Part of the Invataxi fleet in Almaty, Kazakhstan. (Photo from Vecheniy Almaty, Almaty City Newspaper)

Theme: Support for Organizations Working with Disabled People

From: Almaty, Kazakhstan

Dates of the Program:
September 10 – October 1, 2008

Host Organization:
Vermont Council on World Affairs

Host Community: Colchester, VT

Success

Sergey Makhashev, Chairman of the non-profit *Bratstvo (Brotherhood)* which unites disabled veterans of the Soviet Afghan war, had the chance to visit the U.S. through the Community Connections Program. Mr. Makhashev was one of 11 participants representing organizations in Almaty that work to improve life for the disabled who travelled to Colchester, Vermont in 2009 to learn about how disabled people live in the U.S. The opportunity to step out of their every day life and share experiences with their U.S. counterparts gave way to many ideas about how to improve conditions for the disabled in Kazakhstan. Since his return from the program, Mr. Makhashev has completed two major initiatives: he founded a company that produces lifting devices and is planning to open *Invataxi*, a taxi service for the disabled.

Background

The disabled in Kazakhstan are nearly invisible for two reasons: limited accessibility of the world outside their homes and the social stigma associated with disabilities. No public transportation in Kazakhstan is handicap accessible. Mr. Makhashev took note of the accessibility of public and private transportation in the U.S. and its potential to impact the lives of many in Kazakhstan. While impacting the public transportation system in Almaty was a good long term goal, he decided that a fleet of accessible taxis would be a more attainable short term goal.

To do this, he proposed to outfit vehicles to make them accessible to wheelchairs. While there are many companies providing lifting mechanisms and other equipment for transportation accessibility in the U.S., there were none in Kazakhstan. Mr. Makhashev decided to start a company to produce the equipment. His company employs 20 people, 6 of them disabled. The city government ordered three lifting devices this year and plans to order six more next year. Additional negotiations with other clients are expected to yield an order for 35 devices.

Makhashev's organization also received funds from the Almaty City Society for the Disabled to start an 18 car taxi service, with vehicles outfitted with the lifting devices Makhashev produced. While the start-up process has hit a few snags, Makhashev and his organization are dedicated to improving transportation for the disabled.

Makhashev has more ideas. He recently organized a group of psychologists to provide posttraumatic stress counseling to members of his organization and plans to seek government support for further work on posttraumatic stress. He is also beginning work on a five-six year project that will result in a development of 4,000 houses that will be accessible to the disabled. The project will employ 200 staff, 50 of them with disabilities.