

General support to enhance the health and human rights of marginalized communities in Russia affected by HIV/AIDS through education and technology

Interim report

(2019 - 2020)

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Introduction

In 2018-2019 Levi Strauss Foundation has provided a grant of 100.000USD to help support the work of Andrey Rylkov foundation through a newly established Dutch non-for profit Stichting Skosh and improve capacities of both organizations. The aim of such arrangement was to pilot a more flexible structure or work through both Russian and Dutch NGO in the difficult time of political uncertainty and governmental repressions against NGOs in Russia. Below we summarise the main achievements of both organizations during the 1,5 years of the project implementation.

Background:

The Andrey Rylkov Foundation for Health and Social Justice (ARF) is a Russian NGO that works to promote and implement humane drug policies based on tolerance, protection of health, human rights and dignity. The grass-root NGO has been registered in 2009 and since then became an inspiring path-setter in most innovative advocacy and human rights work in Russia and internationally.

We work in several directions:

(1) Direct services to people who use drugs and community support on the streets of Moscow including free access to health products such as condoms, sterile syringes and test-systems as well as access to expert advice, support and education on health, social and legal matters.

(2) Documenting human rights violations, taking retribution measures and systematically reporting them to relevant national and international bodies, predominantly international human rights mechanisms. The information and cases are also used to improve the environment for health and rights protection - by educating the International human rights bodies and soliciting their recommendations and by strategic litigation.

(3) Community empowerment and systems strengthening through community education on health and human rights, supporting self-organizing of people affected by drugs and HIV in Russia on various levels - from local to international.

(4) Creating enabling environment for health and rights protection of people who use drugs by changing the public perspective through educating the public about societal benefits of humane drug policy, dismantling the war on drugs ideology; developing a new public discourse on drugs. This is achieved by maintaining a public presence, participation in all relevant and wider societal debates on various platforms and, importantly, regularly working with mass media.

In the recent years ARF works under a constant pressure from the Russian government who refuses to support evidence-based internationally recognized approaches to HIV prevention among people who use drugs, such as harm reduction and needle/syringe provision and besides has itself involved in a series of actions to suppress civil society activity in Russia, especially of NGOs who do not submit to Putin's 'Party line' on all kinds of issues including in HIV field. In 2016 ARF has been included into the list of 'foreign agents'. That put the organization under additional stress of reportings, audit but also made it very vulnerable to financial punishments (fines) and made local funding inaccessible. In August 2018, the Ministry of Justice proposed to accept a new law, which would demand that all HIV-service NGOs that receive foreign funding should get their activities approved by the Ministry. The law still didn't come into force, but is still under discussion. If this law is accepted it will serve to restrict evidence-based WHO-recommended prevention activities such as needle and syringe programs and other harm reduction interventions, as well as advocacy for opioid substitution therapy. Besides, in 2019-2020 the Duma is reviewing the existing legislation on 'Drug propaganda' with the aim to make them even more punitive. ARF has already been fined heavily under the law in 2018 and further restrictions may increase the relevant risks.

In light of all said, in 2017 we started to develop a flexible sustainability plan for ARF with the main aim to preserve our life-saving street outreach in Moscow and important advocacy/strategic litigation work we are doing in Russia. We have established and registered an NGO in the Netherlands called Stichting Skosh (Skosh Foundation). This is a small non-profit with a focus that is wider than ARF's—according to Skosh's charter, it focuses on harm reduction and drug policy work in Eastern European/Central Asia (EECA) region. Skosh has received small seed funding from AFEW International that allowed it to cover part time directors salary and to provide small-scale technical assistance to organizations in Russia and Tajikistan.

In August 2018 ARF had multiple internal meetings and consultations about how to move forward, ultimately deciding to keep both paths alive—not to shut down ARF in Russia just yet and to continue with the current grants and programs and, at the same time, pilot the alternatives more intensively. We wanted to seek for new modalities of resistance to the government pressure needed to continue life-saving services to key populations. It is important to note that this scheme has not been invented by ARF/Skosh as many human rights organization have already completely switched to this way of work (working from a European NGO and directly contracting consultants in Russia). However, in our case we decided to keep the Russian entity until it becomes completely impossible for it to work. By that time, we should have the whole alternative scheme established and running.

Therefore the main aim of this core grant was to develop the sister organization model which in the future may also be useful for NGOs in other countries experiencing closing spaces for civil society and contribute to ARF's regular work through SKOSH.

Long-term Goals:

The long-term goal of the grant project is to contribute to the prevention of HIV in the very unfavorable climate of political dictatorship in Russia and find new modalities of resistance, community empowerment and organization in order to protect people's health and save lives.

Short-term Goals:

1) Building the capacity of Stichting Skosh in the Netherlands, especially its capacities to promptly respond to the needs of the Andrey Rylkov Foundation for Health and Social Justice (ARF) and other players involved in the HIV/AIDS response in Russia.

2) Developing a flexible model of HIV/AIDS service provision and advocacy work in Russia and best practice documentation.

Main achievements in line with the objectives

The goal of this project is to support organizational development of SKOSH Foundation as well as contribute to the already ongoing activities of ARF -- street lawyers, strategic advocacy and litigation work, training and exchange of our Russian partners.

We planned to carry out strategic planning of SKOSH / Partners work focused on community system strengthening and developing new models of response to the HIV epidemic in the unfavourable political climate. Among the activities planned for these two years:

- Support capacity building of a newly established NGO SKOSH (administrative expenses and contribute towards the director's salary)
- Strategic planning of the organization work and collaboration with ARF and consultation with partners and Board
- Advocacy and educational activities for SKOSH/ARF including participation in conferences, training (for ARF staff), key international events such as Commission on Narcotic Drugs etc.
- Co-funding of activities in Russia, in particular, legal consultants, information officers, interpreters, case managers.

The following progress has been made under these objectives:

1. Support capacity building of a newly established NGO SKOSH (administrative expenses and contribute towards the director's salary)

The LSF grant in combination with a smaller support from AFEW international in 2019 has allowed to establish the administrative work of SKOSH. Directors part time salary was paid through the first part of 2019 until June, after which the Director started to work on a volunteer basis. The grant also allowed to hire accountant firm that carries out regular reporting for the organization. The grant covers regular banking and administrative costs, such as internet and mobile. In terms of administrative work we did not face any problems, except a problem with the Dutch bank that refused to support financial transactions with Russia due to European financial sanctions which put burden on the banks. The bank has allowed us to select only one account where money can be sent. We still haven't selected, as our plan is to establish a commercial entity in Russia (A limited liability company that would allow to make all necessary purchases/payments in Russia if/when ARF would stop functioning). The LLC has not been established in Russia, since there is no urgency felt in this action so the main challenge in SKOSH operations was that we cannot really transfer money to Russia at the moment. Therefore in the period of the project operation we have significantly under-spent the money that we initially planned to spend towards consultants (since most consultants, outreach workers, coordinators etc have Russian bank accounts).

2. Strategic planning of the organization work and collaboration with ARF and consultation with partners and Board

We planned to carry out Strategic Planning meeting with five main team members that is working on development of ARF/ SKOSH activities and a Dutch partner specialising on gender issues in March 2020. It was planned that the results of this meeting will be discussed with SKOSH Board Members (Mikhail Golichenko and Jean-Paul Grund) and will inform the future organization work in coordination with ARF. All logistics to this meeting has been organized, but unfortunately we had to defer it to hopefully October 2019 due to coronavirus epidemic. We have lost a little bit of money on purchasing the tickets that could not be refunded so far.

3. Advocacy and educational activities for SKOSH/ARF including participation in conferences, training (for ARF staff), key international events such as Commission on Narcotic Drugs etc.

The grant was very valuable as it provided sufficient travel money which is very much lacking in ARF work due to donors focus on service provision and practical impossibility to find any travel/education money. Among the activities supported through this grant were ARF team study tours to Paris in the fall of 2019 (ARF staff and some volunteers spent one week on a study tour with the leading French AIDS service/

advocacy NGO AIDES); ARF coordinator trip to Monte Negro to participate in the conference on approaches to drug treatment in March 2019; 7 trips of SKOSH director to Moscow with the aim to coordinate ARF/SKOSH work and to prepare to submitting the 2020 proposal to the GFATM; participation in the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in 2019 and 2020 by SKOSH director and in 2020 the Secretary of the Forum of people who use drugs; a trip to NYC to participate in review of ARF consultative status in UN ECOSOC (ARF status is being stalled by the Russian diplomats on the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs); ARF staff members visit to Minsk, Belarus to participate in local educational activities and several other important trips.

4) Co-funding of activities in Russia.

> Fieldwork. ARF continues its daily work on the streets where we reach out to people who use drugs. We work in the poorest districts of Moscow, 5-7 days a week, providing our participants with clean syringes, HIV self-testing and referral, advice on health and legal protection. Our small office provides space for support groups, family groups, NA meetings, a chemsex self help group, cultural gatherings and other community activities. We try to support and empower individuals and families to protect their rights, to represent own interests and help them to get access to knowledge and skills. We have four lawyers working part time who help our participants to deal with their criminal charges and other legal problems. In the context where drug use is highly criminalized legal aid and human rights empowerment became an inseparable part of our harm reduction work. In 2019 one of the lawyers has been supported through this grant. In 2019- March 2020 we reached out to 4454 people, of them 1530 women, provided 332.000 syringes and needles, almost 40.000 condoms, 1083 HIV self-tests, received 806 reports of lives saved with our naloxone. We have provided 1024 legal consultations, 2427 consultations on HIV and 75 referrals to HIV treatment, 138 consultations/ referrals on tuberculosis and 1234 on hepatitis as well as other important health issues.

While the harm reduction service itself was largely funded by the Elton John Foundation and AIDS Fonds - Netherlands the LSF support has helped to support some legal work as well as embark on a new initiative to develop a comprehensive monitoring database. The main work on the database development took place in 2019 and allowed to develop the tool for ARF field work with the clients. In 2020 the database has been piloted and by now it is established and allows to monitor routine work. We also plan to work on development of more sophisticated set human rights, legal aid, strategic litigation and advocacy indicators and expanding the database.

> Documentation, advocacy and strategic litigation. The harm reduction service figures show that even with the small resources ARF work has a significant impact on improvement of health of people we work with. But to achieve more meaningful impact we need to challenge the political and legal systems that contribute to criminalization, oppression and health inequalities. Built on our day-to-day interactions with participants and colleagues from other cities, we build our advocacy and litigation work. It is focused on documenting human rights abuse; collecting evidence that this abuse is systematic; reporting this through all available channels; taking action on retribution when possible. With those intentions we work on the national and international levels.

In order to use this documentation for the advocacy and reporting to human rights monitoring bodies in the UN, ARF together with Forum of People who use drugs and Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network continued its regular work on reporting to the UN treaties bodies. In October 2019 The [Intermittent report](#) to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has been submitted which emphasises the failures of the Russian Government to fulfil the previous recommendations of the Committee and currently we are working on collecting data for the new report to the Committee on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

> Strategic Litigation. On the basis of our legal cases we also carry out strategic litigation work aimed at undermining the structural oppression, stigma and criminalization on the level of

law. Our lawyers and case managers have helped to submit over 40 cases to the European Court on Human Rights, the UN Human Rights Committee, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, all binding organs for Russia. Our cases target such aspects of law as criminalization of people who use drugs, access to opioid substitution therapy, access to HIV treatment for migrants, parental rights of PWUD, unlawful practices of police, laws and regulations, that limit freedom of expression, assembly and information. Some of the successful cases serve as an important inspiration for people to stand up for their rights. In 2019-2020 on top of lawyers salary, this grant has helped to support case management work on the case of Daniel Diaz-Strukov, a Peruvian healer who's been sentenced for using traditional medicine in Russia. We can provide further information on other strategic cases upon request.

> Community empowerment and system strengthening. ARF serves as the Secretariat of the Forum of People who use drugs in Russia. The Forum aims to identify and link PWUD activists throughout Russia and provide a platform for joint advocacy and human rights work. Its work is naturally guided, coordinated and organized by PWUD. Besides serving as a Secretariat, ARF supported separate activists in the regions in their human rights action. SKOSH/ARF took part in Forums fundraising activities and submitted several applications for financial support of the Forum (to Elton John Foundation and to the UNDEF) but those were unsuccessful. We keep thinking about other funding opportunities for this work. ARF has also provided study opportunities to the Forum members.

In the fall of 2019 ARF has decided to invest more capacities into development of volunteer movement by establishing volunteer schools. After the schools the volunteer pool increased by about 40 people who participate in outreach, case management, community activities such as the movie club for PWUD, create merchandise for ARF, help in putting together a newspaper for PWUD, participate in courts and advocacy work. They suggest new interesting directions of our work.

As part of its coordinating activities with other community organizations in Russia, ARF continued to take active role in the National Dialogue on AIDS. In 2019 this work has significantly intensified due to preparations to the GFATM funding allocated for Russia.

> Work with media. Eight years ago, we started our project Narcophobia that aimed to expose the public stigma and fear of drugs and people who use them, to dismantle the myths produced by the war on drugs ideology and together with the Russian public to explore the new discourse on drug policy, drug-related problems and appropriate response. During the eight years of Narcophobia, we established a tactful dialogue with other communities and civil society sectors, with mass media and social media and affinities of art and political activists and managed to change the perception and discourse of appropriate response. This is very important achievement for us, as we believe that dismantling stigma constructed around poor and marginalized groups is key to changing the course of oppression and subsequent epidemics. Lifting stigma leads to empowerment and action for change. ARF/SKOSH maintains regular communications with mass media, providing interviews, commentary and site visits to the journalists. In this period we collaborated with BBC, Vice, Radio Svoboda, TV Channel Dozhd.

Besides working with mass media we also tried to provide information on drug policy through our own resources. Russian authorities restrict access for the general public and to people who use drugs to vitally important information on drugs and health. One of the key ARF activities is insuring the regular provision of the broader civil society with the adequate information about the HIV and drug policy related processes and situation in Russia as well as regional and global trends and also to promote the activities of ARF. ARF has its accounts (in both languages) in key social networks popular in Russia and abroad such as Twitter, Facebook, VK and we post and tweet news and share information material on everyday basis. It runs its own accounts and accounts of Narcophobia project aimed at providing most up-to-date information and news on drug policy. Some of the SMM work has been supported through SKOSH.

> Public campaigns and action. Despite toughening of legislation on protest and assembly, we continue to organize and participate in public action such as yearly **Support dont punish campaign (we organized public events in Moscow every year), International Overdose Awareness Day. In the summer of 2019** ARF/SKOSH united with many other public activists in Russia to stir the spontaneous campaign/ protest/self- organization in the summer of 2019. The campaign for humane drug policy has been set up by the activists after the [mass public protests that happened in Moscow in relation to Ivan Golunov case](#). ARF has organized 3 large events. The first event, The Day of Russia - 228 was organized on a national "Day of Russia" holiday on June 12, 2019. A mass protest in support of Golunov took place in Moscow on the same day. This event, organized together with the Moscow fashion brand KULTRAB has attracted around 3000 people. The event included public lecture/ talks/ debates and concert. After this, art activists organized an all-summer campaign Summer 228 (228 is the drug offences article of the Criminal code). It included call to artists, theatre, poetry and other sectors to submit their work. The large campaign never happened, as by fall the energy around drug policy activism has drained: on the advise of the presidential administration, the Duma has stalled the process of liberalization of the existing drug law, Golunov's case was 'solved' and the public hope for reform faded. However, in January 2020 a final event in the chain of artistic reflections/ actions supported by ARF through this grant was a four day artistic project ["Requiem 228: a memory lab"](#) in St. Petersburg. During the Summer 228 campaign ARF tried to maintain/ stir public debate and suggested our view of the drug policy reform needed immediately (full decriminalization of drug use, possession, social dealing) through printed leaflets, participation in meeting and discussions on the topic and interviews to mass media. All this work has significantly intensified in the summer 2019.

Within this project we have also invested in preparation of a funding proposal to the German Ministry of FA on our mass media work and project Narcophobia.

Annex 1. List of ARF educational activities

- 1) *Правозащитная неделя для участников*
- 2) *Воркшоп по ориентированной на клиента социальной работе с уязвимыми группами для социальных работников в Департаменте социальной защиты Тверской области*
- 3) *Юридическая викторина для участников во время сбора шприцев "Подснежник"*
- 4) *Викторина для участников посвященная саппорт донт паниш*
- 5) *Недельная обучающая стажировка у нас социальных работников из Питера и Москвы*
- 6) *3 Форум по социальной работе ориентированной на клиента*
- 7) *Викторина по гепатиту для участников во время сбора шприцев "Листопад"*
- 8) *Семинар по гуманной наркополитики совместно с Эмнести во время мундиала*
- 9) *Викторина для участников посвященная международному дню профилактики передозировок*
- 10) *Семинар по ВИЧ для сотрудников проведенный для нас H-Clinic*
- 11) *Участие в конференции по правам уязвимых групп населения*
- 12) *Семинар по аутрич работе для социальных работников Калининграда (Юла)*
- 13) *Юридический семинар для сотрудников проекта*
- 14) *Семинар с Голиченко по международной адвокации*
- 15) *Выставка в сахаровском центре "Моменты позитива"*
- 16) *Выступление в ВШЭ о гуманной наркополитике*
- 17) *Семинар по тестированию на ВИЧ для сотрудников*
- 18) *Круглый стол для ВИЧ сервисных организаций Москвы по самотестированию*

- 19) Семинар для сотрудников по кибербезопасности
- 20) Семинар для сотрудников по снижению вреда от новых наркотиков. Часть 1
- 21) Круглый стол для ВИЧ сервисных организаций Москвы по химсексу
- 22) Семинар по ИППП для сотрудников проведенный для нас H-Clinic
- 23) Недельная обучающая стажировка у нас социальных работников из Питера и Тулы
- 24) Стажировка сотрудников в Берлине
- 25) Семинар по профилактике ВИЧ для сотрудников музея современного искусства Гараж
- 26) Семинар для участников конференции женской сети EBA по снижению вреда и гуманной наркополитике
- 27) Воркшоп о работе с наркопотребителями на Нарративной конференции
- 28) Семинар по тестированию на ВИЧ для сотрудников
- 29) Правовая викторина для участников во время сбора шприцев "Подснежник"
- 30) Юридический семинар с Голиченко по инструментам защиты прав ЛУН
- 31) Викторина по женским правам и свободам для участников во время сбора шприцев "Подснежник"
- 32) Викторина по женским правам и свободам для участников во время дня борьбы с гепатитами
- 33) Стажировка сотрудников в Париже
- 34) Семинар по передозировкам в международный день борьбы с передозировками для сотрудников и волонтеров
- 35) Семинар Александра Савицкого по программе выздоровления от зависимости Smart Recovery
- 36) Семинар по ПИО для сотрудников и волонтеров
- 37) Открытая лекция по психоделикам Марии Амельченко
- 38) Открытая лекция по наркополитике от Александра Дельфинова

- 39) *Участие сотрудников фонда в общественных слушаниях по реформе антинаркотического законодательства*
- 40) *Первая двухдневная школа волонтера ФАР*
- 41) *Семинар по ПИО для сотрудников и волонтеров*
- 42) *Семинар по тестированию на гепатит для сотрудников и волонтеров*
- 43) *Вторая двухдневная школа волонтера ФАР*
- 44) *Презентация о работе фонда на Третьем форуме по химсекс в Париже*
- 45) *Презентация о работе фонда на консультативной встрече ЕКОМ*