“Vaikų linija” and “Jaunimo linija” (“Child Line” and “Youth Line”) are two organisations that for about 20 years have offered their help to children and youths who feel lonely or experience psychological or physical violence, bereavement or suicidal thoughts because of a lack of support in their lives. The activities of these organisations are carried out by volunteers, who provide free anonymous assistance by phone or the internet. However, financial resources are needed to train them.

Public institution “Vaikų linija” is a non-governmental organisation that was established in 1997, with about 160 volunteers currently involved in its activities. Association “Kauno jaunimo linija” began its activities in 1991, and at the moment it has 250 volunteers. The main task of the volunteers is to help children and adolescents find answers to questions they are concerned about and to teach them self-awareness. Awareness has also improved among adults, who are informed about the main causes of distress in children and how to help and understand them.

Training of Volunteers to Provide Emotional Support Was Conducted with Financial Assistance from Switzerland

The Lithuanian-Swiss Cooperation Programme funds five areas:

- Improving perinatal and neonatal healthcare
  - 24 hospitals

- Introduction of energy efficient technologies into hospitals, including the modernisation of heating, water-supply, ventilation and air conditioning systems
  - 21 hospitals

- Fundamental research development
  - 11 scientific projects and a Scholarship fund

- Supporting the activities of Lithuanian NGOs by strengthening community organisations and their cooperation with local authorities
  - 97 subprojects

- Modernisation of the judicial system
  - 1 project
Public institution “Vaikų linija” (the Beneficiary) and its partner association “Kauno jaunimo linija” introduced project “Strengthening of Agencies that Provide Emotional Support to Children and Youths by Phone and the Internet, with Development of Their Institutional Capacities”. The project was financially supported by the Fund for Non-Governmental Organisations under the Lithuanian-Swiss Cooperation Programme. It enabled volunteers to be trained, and the websites of the agencies to be updated and their strategies developed.

Ivona Suchodolska, a psychologist who trains volunteers, said that the main objectives of the project, which ran from September 2013 to September 2014, were to strengthen institutional capacities of the agencies that provide emotional support to children and youths and to improve accessibility and quality of services offered. The priority was to improve skills of volunteers and to widen access to the support they provide. Therefore, valuable training was arranged for volunteers at “Vaikų linija” and “Jaunimo linija”, with financing from the Lithuanian-Swiss Cooperation Programme.

“It can be unambiguously stated that the project was very important, valuable and useful,” Suchodolska said. “Training seminars were organised for volunteers and staff, with the aim of ensuring the provision of qualified emotional assistance by the agencies. Almost 300 participants took part in the seminars. Moreover, “Vaikų linija” and “Jaunimo linija” had the opportunity to strengthen their institutional capacities, which would not be possible without financial resources.”

Financing allocated to the project was used to update the website of “Vaikų linija”, obtain equipment required for work and to create strategic, action and communication plans for both agencies to enable a targeted and systematic implementation and development of activities, ensure communication with sponsors and to increase the number of volunteers.

Financial support from the Lithuanian-Swiss Cooperation Programme was also used to develop a fundraising (financial-independence development) plan and programmes for volunteer recruitment, training and motivation. In addition, it helped to improve the information resources of “Vaikų linija”, including video clips of the activities of the agency.

The total budget for the project “Strengthening of Agencies that Provide Emotional Support to Children and Youths by Phone and the Internet, with Development of Their Institutional Capacities” was EUR 83,063. Financial support from the Lithuanian-Swiss Cooperation Programme amounted to EUR 63,543.
Diabetes mellitus is a frequently diagnosed, severe and usually lifelong disease. It is estimated that about 360 million people suffer from the condition worldwide. Advanced genetic testing enabled this disease to be linked to alterations in a single gene. About 17 genes are now identified in which changes can lead to the development of diabetes mellitus at a young age. It was discovered that insulin injections are not necessary in all cases, and treatment with tablets can be even more effective. Lithuania and Switzerland are implementing a joint project that aims to identify individuals in Lithuania who suffer from diabetes mellitus having the gene mentioned above.

Diabetes is an aggregate of disorders caused when the body is unable to metabolise glucose. The disease, which is difficult to diagnose, can develop even in childhood. If a child or a young person experiences extreme thirst (drinking up to 10 litres of water in 24 hours), frequent and heavy urination (even at night), sudden fatigue, indolence, unexplained weight loss, severe weakness or itchy skin, medical advice should be sought immediately and a blood glucose test should be carried out.

How is diabetes treated?

An early diagnosis is very important for applying appropriate treatment to delay the development of chronic complications and to maintain blood glucose (sugar) close to a healthy level. If the level of glucose is elevated for a long period, it can result in lesions in small and large blood vessels and lead to the development of complications with diabetes mellitus.

Dr. Dalia Marčiulionytė, senior research associate at the Diabetes Mellitus Laboratory of the Endocrinology Institute at the Academy of Medicine, said that the only and most effective treatment is insulin injections. Special devices (pens) can be used for these, with 5-6 injections usually required per day. More accurate doses are ensured when insulin pumps are used to deliver the medicine. It is always necessary to know the blood glucose level, with the need to test it about 5-10 times per day (puncturing the finger skin each time). Insulin doses should be timed around meals and with varying physical activity taken into account.

“This is a rather difficult task, involving several pricks per day and treatment procedures to be performed every day, without holidays; it’s a lifelong process,” Marčiulionytė said. “All patients and their relatives are therefore educated to make treatment-related decisions.”

Other treatment options are available for monogenic diabetes

Different forms of diabetes are described. Type 1 and type 2 diabetes mellitus are caused by complex factors, such as pancreas-specific antibodies, different genes and environmental factors; other forms of diabetes can be predetermined by the altered functioning of a single gene. In recent studies antibodies were not found in some patients with type 1 diabetes mellitus. This finding suggests that monogenic diabetes usually associated with mutation or damage to a single gene can be implicated. Such a diagnosis requires genetic tests that are challenging from both a technical and financial point of view, so this disease often remains undiagnosed.

“When diabetes is diagnosed in children or young people, the disease is a result of autoantibodies that damage insulin-producing pancreatic cells,” Marčiulionytė said. “Insulin injections are prescribed to treat the disease. However, it was noticed that antibodies do not occur in all young individuals diagnosed with diabetes.
Diabetes mellitus. In such cases, genetic [monogenic] diabetes can be diagnosed if an altered [mutated] diabetes-related gene is discovered. This disease can in some cases be treated with tablets or even controlled with the right diet. Therefore, the project, which is implemented together with the colleagues from Switzerland, is very important for young persons in Lithuania suffering from diabetes mellitus. She added that the diagnosis of monogenic diabetes mellitus is important for both the patient’s family members and any unborn children, who can have the same alteration in a single gene.

Joint study by two countries to look for altered genes

Project “Genetic Diabetes in Lithuania”, implemented within the framework of the Lithuanian-Swiss Cooperation Programme “Research and Development” and led by the Endocrinology Institute of the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, aims to test all children and adults up to the age of 25 who suffer from diabetes for potential genetic diabetes. The study, which began in November 2012, covers a large number of patients and will allow an assessment of the prevalence of genes that predispose people to diabetes in Lithuania.

It was expected that 1200 persons (700 children and 500 adults) would be enrolled in the study; however, 1298 have actually enrolled, with 948 children and 350 adults.

Antibodies specific to pancreatic cells that are characteristic for type 1 diabetes mellitus, an autoimmune disease that requires treatment with insulin, were not discovered in 131 participants. “Blood samples from these individuals were sent to Switzerland,” Marčiulionytė said. “Tests were carried out at Geneva University Hospital to specify the nature of diabetes mellitus and to find the change in the gene that resulted in its development. Genetic [monogenic] diabetes mellitus in newborns was diagnosed in three individuals. These people received successful treatment with oral medicines, as injectable insulin preparations are not required to treat them. The results of treatment improved for these patients, as well as their quality of life. People with an alteration in the specific gene related to the development of diabetes mellitus, diagnosed in Switzerland, were tested repeatedly and the results are being analysed.”

The study implemented by the Endocrinology Clinic of Kaunas Clinics, the hospital at the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences and the Endocrinology Institute has not yet been completed. The study is expected to end in April 2016, but the analysis of final results could take longer.

Financing for the project amounts to as much as EUR 2,308 million, including EUR 568,173 from a Swiss financial support fund and EUR 100,266 additionally provided as co-financing from the State budget of Lithuania.
Kėdainiai Hospital Rapidly Changes Its Appearance

Renovation activities under the project “Implementation of Energy-Saving Technologies at Public Institution Kėdainiai Hospital to Provide Healthcare Services to Pregnant Women during Childbirth and to New-Borns” are almost complete at Kėdainiai Hospital. The project agreement signed in summer 2012 provided for that all the activities should be completed before 11 November 2015, and the only activity remaining is testing the internal heating system.

Public institution Kėdainiai Hospital has been carrying out a project to renovate its facilities, with financial backing from the Government of Switzerland. Some 87 per cent of outsourcing actives were performed before 1 September 2015: the building that shelters the admissions and obstetrics departments were insulated, including the outer walls, foundations and the roof, as well as the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems were reconstructed. Stasys Skauminas, the head of Kėdainiai Hospital, said that all the planned activities have been completed apart from testing the internal heating system. “For the time being, we cannot proceed with testing,” he said. “We should wait for cooler weather, whereas testing requires a fairly high temperature to be reached while increasing the pressure, but we must not close departments that provide services in the hospital. Almost the only jobs that still need to be done are small and insignificant ones, thus, we have some time and constructors can finish everything without being in a hurry.”

The project manager is in no doubt that a fully completed project will increase the value of the hospital: the building will be renovated both outside and inside, it will be more energy-efficient and will enable provision of higher-quality services to people living in the city and district of Kėdainiai. The total price of the project is almost EUR 0.5 million (EUR 499,727), and the contractor for it is Kaunas-based limited-liability company “Verslo bitė”. Up to 85 per cent of financing needed came from the Lithuanian-Swiss Cooperation Programme, with the remaining 15 per cent covered by the state of Lithuania.

Kėdainiai Hospital is a partner in another project titled “Development of Healthcare Services to Pregnant Women, during Childbirth and to New-Borns in Lithuania”. This project will ensure the provision of modern and comfortable high-quality services to mothers and new-borns. Only healthcare establishments where there are more than 300 births per year were eligible to take part in the project. A survey was carried out to collect information on the equipment required by a hospital and other needs long before the agreement was signed between Switzerland and Lithuania. A procurement package was created that took into account these needs and the resources available, with tenders initiated for the purchase of equipment.

“This project was implemented by Kaunas Clinics, which has a list of equipment required for our hospital, and almost all the items have already arrived,” Skauminas said. He added that the financial resources allocated were used to obtain 29 units of equipment for obstetrics and gynaecology. Among these were monitors of vital functions, anaesthesia equipment, an ultrasound device, an operating-theatre table for obstetric surgery, and beds.

The head of Kėdainiai Hospital said that both projects were highly rated. “We received a lot of equipment that would not be available without external financial assistance and were able to completely renovate a part of the building,” he said. “The corner of the three-floor building accommodating the obstetrics department was insulated and reassembled, with the heating systems of the hospital changed. Thanks to the Lithuanian-Swiss Cooperation Programme, we saved about EUR 0.5 million for other projects.”
Cooperation has Continued since Closure of the Project

The Lithuanian Red Cross Society (LRCS) has been carrying out its humanitarian mission since 1919, providing assistance to socially vulnerable people in our country and other nations. However, the society knows little about the activities it conducts despite it being around for almost 100 years, with both external and internal communication found to be insufficient. Efforts have therefore been made in cooperation with colleagues from Switzerland to change this situation.

An assessment carried out two years ago on the effectiveness of LRCS activities revealed that the organisation had poor communication capabilities: people in Lithuania, stakeholders and partners were insufficiently aware of what it did or its programmes and achievements. Staff at the organisation also experienced a lack of internal communication.

A project was therefore launched under the title “Strengthening of Financial Independence and Organisational Communication Capacities of the Lithuanian Red Cross Society, Following the Best Practice of the Swiss Red Cross”. The project was financially supported by the Lithuanian-Swiss Cooperation Programme and included the development of communications and fundraising strategies, an activity plan, and staff training and education.

The one-year project was completed in May 2014, but considerable benefits are still being gained. Elzė Maciulevičiūtė, coordinator of international relations and communication at the LRCS, said that the aim of this project implemented with partners of the Swiss Red Cross was to develop a strategy for communication and fundraising, as well as an activity plan. Another goal was to ensure that the society communicated information about objectives, activities, values and the results of actions.

“The project based on cooperation between two countries included various meetings, sharing of best practice and analysis of different methods for strategy implementation,” Maciulevičiūtė said. “Communication training was organised for staff, and an awareness-raising campaign conducted for the general public, focusing on fundraising methods and sources.” She believes the results were positive from every perspective.

“Project “Strengthening of Financial Independence and Organisational Communication Capacities of the Lithuanian Red Cross Society, Following the Best Practice of the Swiss Red Cross” has been financially supported by the Fund for Non-Governmental Organisations under the Lithuanian-Swiss Cooperation Programme. The sum allocated to the project was EUR 46,692.

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Sub-project: “Strengthening of the financial independence and organisational communication capacities of the Lithuanian Red Cross Society, following the best practice of the Swiss Red Cross.”

Project: “Strengthening of agencies that provide emotional support for children and youths by phone and the internet, with development of their institutional capacities.”

Swiss contribution - for real and targeted works