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WE ARE SAFE ! The development of child abuse prevention program in Lithuania

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BACKGROUND

The research shows that child abuse is highly prevalent worldwide, including in Lithuania (Bellis et al., 2014; Zelviene et al., 2020; WHO, 2014). There is considerable knowledge that child abuse significantly impacts mental health and psychosocial functioning at a young age and in adulthood (Gilbert et al., 2009; Lewis et al., 2019; Thoresen et al., 2015; Vibhakar et al., 2019). Still, many children, adolescents, and adults lack the skills to recognize and respond to abuse (Daniunaite et al., 2020). Therefore, the development of effective child abuse prevention programs is of vital importance. Answering this need, the Children Support Centre's experts developed the program "We Are Safe." Children Support Centre is a non-governmental organization, specializing in child abuse prevention and intervention, operating in Lithuania since 1995.

PROGRAM "WE ARE SAFE" ACTIVITIES

The program "We Are Safe" adaptations:

- for children up to 6 years old
- for children aged 7-10 years
- for adolescents aged 11-14
- for adolescents aged 15-18
- for school-age children with developmental challenges

The program "We Are Safe" implementation steps:

- program presentation for the community
- lectures for parents/guardians
- interactive activities for children

The activities for children cover these topics:

- child rights
- emotions
- my body safety
- violence and abuse
- safety online
- how to seek help

More than 2000 children and adults participated in the program in 2022.

PROGRAM "WE ARE SAFE" GOAL

The program "We Are Safe" aims to provide organizations working with children and families with a tool for implementing child abuse prevention.

The program was prepared during the implementation of the project "Empowered children and families: model of prevention and intervention services", supported by Active Citizens Fund, financed by the Financial Mechanisms of the EEA and Norway grants (2020 November – 2023 January).

Project coordinator: Children Support Centre.

Project partners: Human Rights Monitoring Institute (LT), Utena Education Centre (LT), Voksne for Barn (NO).

STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

This is the first prevention program in Lithuania to prevent all four types of child abuse (sexual, physical, psychological abuse, and neglect). The important strength of the program is its scope, involving children, their parents, and all community members). Moreover, the program provides the methodology for working with children from different age groups and children with developmental challenges.

The program is in Lithuanian. There is a great need to translate the program material into the languages of the minority groups.

NEXT STEPS

The spread of the program is ensured by organizing training for specialists, working in educational, social, and other fields. The evaluation of the program's efficacy is under development.