



### Supporting families to care for children with disabilities in Georgia

#### Situation

GMiranda, an 11-year-old girl with cerebral palsy from birth, lives with her parents and older siblings in Gvankiti village in Terjola in western Georgia. Like Miranda's health, the family's economic and social condition is very bad, and so, in the past, she would spend her whole day one room, which was the living room, dining room, kitchen and her bedroom all together. Miranda slept in an old damaged bed beside the wood-fueled stove which, in winter is fine, but is especially unbearable on hot summer days. The family's poverty was hard for everyone: Miranda's mother was often irritated and emotionally imbalanced; her father drank often, with bad health consequences. Her teenage brother tried to help the family through agricultural work, but this was never enough for meeting family subsistence needs, especially Miranda's special needs, and the situation left her joyless. The only entertainment was TV and, oddly, three ropes tied to her bed for making, unmaking and remaking various forms of knots to pass the time.



Photo by SC Georgia

#### Action

Through a Save the Children-led disability project, however, a multidisciplinary team started working with Miranda in May (2010). At first Miranda and the family were assessed by a social worker, a psychologist and an occupational therapist, and then an individual care (service) plan was developed for Miranda. For eight months, the care plan was followed, and many new things came to the family. Miranda received simple things for her mental and physical development: pencils/crayons and paper; clay and beads and puzzles; sticks for learning mathematics and colorful geometric toys; also books.

Twice a week since May 2010 every specialist was working intensively with the child and her family and, as a result, Miranda has made great progress in reading and understanding, in simple arithmetic, including the multiplication tables and in being able to tell the time; her sensory-motor and soft motor skills are improved. She is motivated for education and does her homework. She is creative with her clay and drawing supplies. The used computer shared by Save the Children was a bonus in developing Miranda's development, especially by encouraging family care for her; before, her brother would never even touch her, and now he helps her use the computer.

#### Lessons learned

- *Miranda's situation, and her family's is better now, although there will always be challenges.*
- *Rights' education and advocacy for families is possible, with persistence;*
- *Modern approaches to caring for children with special needs can be achieved; but can be costly from Government's perspective and so resisted*
- *Persistent professional outreach and networking on behalf of vulnerable families with disabled children can yield concrete results, small and large, leading to system change*

#### Impact

- With the support of the team social worker, and through her repeated referral of the family to the local Social Service Agency office, the family now receives its entitled subsistence allowance and free healthcare.
- Miranda is enrolled in a day care center with other disabled children in Terjola now, and this has supported her socialization;
- Child is one of the most active and successful center students.
- Her socialization skills have improved significantly – she has made a lot of friends in center.
- A resolution of the regional council of guardianship and care has secured a new bed and a modern oven from the SOS Children's Village family-strengthening project;