

vided by MSF and prescribed with special prescriptions, was complied by our medical coordinator and by doctors from Turgovishte.

Free medicines are distributed by the municipal pharmacy based on prescriptions, which every patient has to present. In extraordinary circumstances and in case of emergency the MSF team buys the medicines and gives them directly to the patient. The free medicines distributed each month amount to 500-600 leva.

**This activity was made possible with the active cooperation of one of the local municipal pharmacies, which stores and distributes our medicines for free.**

### **Opening a social consultations bureau**

As a result of the high unemployment rate combined with a high birth rate the inhabitants of the Malcho Malchev District live mostly on social assistance. The lack of such assistance, even for a very short period of time, has a dramatic impact on the family budget.

From the moment we started operating in Turgovishte, we realized that there is no proper communication and mutual trust between the Roma community and the local institutions. Another serious obstacle to solving the problems of the Roma community is the fact that Roma do not know the system and are unable to follow its procedures.

This inspired us to open a social consultations bureau, which would advise Roma on how to apply before the local healthcare and public institutions. The bureau was designed to act as a mediator between the Roma population and the local institutions. These functions were undertaken by the MSF social worker.

For some time we tried to convince the local social workers to take shifts and serve the inhabitants of the neighborhood but they came reluctantly and this idea was dropped out.

We then decided to involve the members of the Roma youth NGO "Nov Put – 98", which produced much better results. When a problem occurs, people now tend to turn to them directly. With the assistance of young activists from this organization we helped many people apply for jobs and register with a general practitioner, we publicize information on available positions, which the Employment Bureau provides us every week, etc.

The involvement of Roma in solving the problems of their own community is very important because it builds useful skills and increases motivation.

One of the patients of the primary healthcare unit, for example, had to be hospitalized, but refused because he lived alone with his disabled son. We turned to the local social services unit asking them to take care of the boy for ten days or so, but they told us that they are understaffed and cannot afford to visit people in their homes. Then we turned to the above mentioned NGO whose representatives visited the boy three times a day for two weeks, cooked for him, provided him with groceries, cleaned the house, lit the stove, etc.

#### **4.1.1 Common problems with which people have come to us (apart from requests for financial support or help in finding a job)**

1. Appeals from people who have been refused social assistance (including our food packages). In each case we personally asked local social workers for explanation. In most cases the refusal was well-founded, but there were also some violations. In some cases social workers had refused to hear the appellants out and had sent them away. Most misunderstandings were cleared out after we intervened. The reasons for the refusal or approval were carefully explained to the people involved.

2. Appeals for onetime support or for emergency aid in case of illness, accident, etc. We managed to procure such support for some of the appellants, especially when a health problems had to be solved (for example, for a boy suffering from a mental disease who had to go through