

expensive treatment, or for a child that had to be transported to Varna to be seen by a medical specialist).

3. Appeals for financial support by people whose homes have been damaged by the 1999 flood in the Roma neighborhood. Two families have received support from the local authorities to repair their houses. Decision on the appeals of four other families is pending. Thanks to our contacts with a Swiss NGOs we managed to raise funds to cover the building materials necessary for the renovation of 15 houses.

4. Appeals and petitions against municipal regulations. People react strongly against a new decision of the Municipal Council, under which unemployed are obliged to do 10 days of community work (instead of 5) in order to be eligible for social assistance. People say that they are ready to work provided they get the social assistance they are entitled to on a regular basis. It is true that for most of 2001 they have been receiving only half of it.

5. Requests for information. A growing number of young people are willing to emigrate to Western Europe and come to us for advice on how to do it. Of course, we are unable to do much in this respect.

6. Direct appeals to MSF for financial assistance in getting hospital treatment or medicines.

4.1.2 Challenges to social work

1. Inability to solve some of the problems of the Roma community. Unfortunately, we are in no position to create jobs or give out loans.

2. Negative attitude towards the Roma community among some local government officials and social workers.

3. Unwillingness among social workers to come to the neighborhood. They prefer to see people in their offices and have a bureaucratic approach.

We made no miracles with this project but it gave us an opportunity to communicate directly with the people in the Roma community and see for ourselves the dire conditions they live in. Thus, we managed to win their confidence and respect.

We taught many people how to fill up the necessary forms and we encouraged them to stand up for their rights. We took advantage of the opportunity to introduce Roma NGO activists to local government officials, so that they could cooperate directly without our mediation. Today the representatives of these organizations are well known to the Mayor, the Governor, the head of the Employment Bureau, the local social workers, etc.

We set an example of normal attitude – neither discriminatory, not arrogant, nor humiliating – towards people who have almost never felt respected.

Our accomplishments would have been impossible without the contribution of some Roma NGOs and especially the Nov Put – 98 Roma youth organization which became our main partner.

Supporting public life in the neighborhood

We brought together a community board and encouraged several Roma NGOs to join their efforts in solving common problems. We participated in a number of meetings, in which Roma discussed their everyday problems and sought solutions. With the active involvement of two Roma NGOs the problems were prioritized based on their importance for the community.

MSF answered the appeal to support the renovation of the local community club, which is the center of public life in Malcho Malchev District. The MSF team organized and supervised the renovation, which was carried out by two Roma NGOs. Construction works included rebuilding of the roof, plastering the exterior and the interior of the building, renovating the sewerage system and the electric installation. The basement of the building was also reconstructed to