



My first steps



“If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion - how can God’s love be in that person? *1 John 3:17*”



“My first steps”

... is an illustration of emotions, where through the stories narrated by parents and therapists of the social program “Hello ... Life” you will experience beautiful emotions, challenges, a lot of dedication, but also tears of joy.

Tears of joy from families of children with disabilities who have slowly begun to take some first and safe steps towards improvement, while others still continue to try...

From the first glance at this brochure you will experience the inner strength of children to improve, you will see the hope that thanks to your contribution we have brought in the journey of these children and their families through World Vision Albania’ social program.

“Hello...Life” was made possible with the support and contribution of each and every one of you.

You will witness efforts carried out wholeheartedly, which will make you enjoy and cherish any seemingly small success, but an undoubtedly fundamental one for children with disabilities.

You can change a life... You really can...

Join with “Hello ... Life”
www.tungjatjeta.al

Introduction

"Hello...Life" Social Program

The first national research study on the prevalence of disability among children 2-17 years old, showed that there are **70,000 children with disabilities** in Albania. Only **8% of them receive specialized services**.

Low economic incomes, distance from city centers, lack of transportation or information, or just the mentality –are only a few factors why children could not receive the specialized services that they needed.

Through the social program '**Hello...Life,**' World Vision offers specialized home therapy for 72 children with disabilities and their families. A team of specialists travels every week to the homes of these children in the country's most remote areas.

This community mobile unit, that includes a social worker, a psychologist, a physiotherapist, and a speech therapist, evaluates the situation and condition of the child and the family. Afterwards, based on an individual development plan for each child and their families, the team offers specialized therapy in their homes once a week. To date, a total of 2048 family visits have been conducted. The total number of sessions offered for children with disabilities are: developmental therapy – 749 sessions, speech therapy – 613 hours, physiotherapy - 681 sessions.

This program is unique because the child is not treated separately. Work is carried out on all elements of the fundamental triangle affecting the life of a child: child, family, community.

Family members are trained on every specific case in order to help their children in the process of integration. Until now there are offered 77 individual meetings with family members of children that are part of the social program "Hello...Life". They are consulted and trained for every specific case to help in the social inclusion process of children with disabilities.

Life

Children of the “Hello...Life” social program in Librazhd

“It is impossible to express with words the beautiful moments and the love we receive. Months ago, families hesitated to believe that their children could make any progress. Now they see us as part of the family and when we leave, they say to us: ‘May God reward you for the work you are doing!’ Even when we go home, we still feel emotional about these children and there stories. We keep thinking about the children... how are they doing... whether they ate, whether they did the exercise we asked them to, why is improvement taking so long... are they safe in their families and so many other things...,” – the therapists of the mobile community unit tell us.

It has been more than one year and a half since 36 children with disabilities in the remote areas of Librazhd began to receive the specialized services they needed.

Today, each one of them has taken the first step toward improvement. Get to know some of them...





Hello Altin!

"As parents, our hearts melt when we see that thanks to physiotherapy, Altin is able to do things that were impossible for him before," – says Manushaqe, the mother of the 4-year old suffering from hemiparesis.





The boy has started to run, take steps, grab items with his left hand, articulate short sentences with two-syllable words. He goes to kindergarten and likes to spend time with friends in the group.

His mother says that in the past, she was so worried about her son that she put carpet on every inch of the floor so the boy would not get hurt if he fell. In the past, Altin could not even move one side of his body. He dragged his left leg, felt insecure and fell often... He could not manage to grab anything with his left hand... The situation has improved due to a lot of work and dedication.



Hello Rudina!

Rudina is 15 years old and she is the eldest child of the family. When she was 6 months old, she had a very high fever. "While growing up, she spent more time in hospitals than at home. When she smiled, and even when she cried, we noticed that her lip moved to one side. When she was 2, we went to the hospital for specialized visits, with X-rays and scanners, and doctors told us she had facial paralysis. We were shocked..." – her mother Miranda tells us. After the specialized team started home therapy sessions, Rudina has begun to jump on both legs and do basic facial exercises, fill her cheeks with air, move her lips, raise her eyebrows, and frown her forehead.





Rudina no longer spends the break between classes alone; on the contrary, she wants to spend as much time as she can with her friends.

"In the past, she could only say a few sentences, not very clearly. Now, she can articulate clearly a short story made up of 8 sentences, - says Eva, the speech therapist of the team "Hello...life."

During the months she received therapy, she managed to overcome one of her greatest challenges: Walk in a straight line without losing balance.



Hello Flamur!

"Sometimes at night, he tells me in bits of sounds, - Ma, me school? - I smile - Yes! - I tell him. But I understand he is afraid although he has a great desire to go to the arts school. I am afraid about him too! If he had had a support teacher since he was young, it would have been easier," - his mother confesses.





Flamur has been equipped with a hearing aid and now, not only does he hear well, but he is also able to articulate a few words and sentences.

Flamur used to read lip movements when others spoke, but he could only express himself through colors. The walls of his classroom in his 9-year school in his birth village, are decorated with the paintings of the 14-year old who now attends the arts school in Elbasan. After he began receiving the necessary therapy at home from the specialized team of the "Hello...Life" social program, Flamur's color palette was enriched with sounds, words, self-care, more friends, and more dreams.



Hello Arta!

Thanks to regular therapy, Arta has begun to tell more about herself and her daily routine. Relying on the walker, she can move from one room to the other, and even sit, crawl, and move without help if she's lying down.





Arta will not miss a single day of school. She knows how to read but still has some difficulty in writing. While Arta's only friends used to be her dolls, now sitting in a school desk, she tells her friends about the exercises she does at home with the 'friends' who are helping her walk, learn and play.

"She can't wait for the girls to come; she keeps asking me about them. When they are here, she is happy and she tries to do the exercises!" – her mother, Florina, tells us and she adds that her daughter reminds her to repeat the exercises the therapists have requested as a homework. *"Bicycle!"* – specifies Arta, the girl diagnosed with cerebral palsy.



Hello Selma!

"There is nothing more joyful than watching your own child make progress. I see that Selma is well both physically and emotionally. I hope very much that she will continue this way and, why not, even walk, one day..." – says Lindita, the girl's mother, who takes care 24 hours a day for her daughter and her son who is only one and a half years old.





6 The 6-year old is one of the children part of the “Hello...life’ social program. She has been diagnosed with Spina Bifida, and in the past she could not sit or talk. After she started receiving specialized therapy the little one is able to form short sentences and even to move. She goes every day to kindergarten and enjoys the free time she spends with her friends during weekends.

Selma now can sit for a long time, helping herself with her hands on the couch and, sometimes she can stay sit. She replies, when asked a question, and manages to grab items of different sizes with both hands.

Hello Donald!

"...he no longer cries during therapy; now he can concentrate and make some moves that were impossible for him before..." – says Dorela, the team physiotherapist.





“**W**hen he turned 10, we celebrated his birthday for the first time because finally he began to show signs of improvement... if he could just try the cake we bought for him...” – says Pranvera, the child’s mother.

He has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy. In the past, he never received the specialized services that he needed. The nearest center was 30 minutes away and his mother could not carry him there. Now that he receives regular specialized therapy sessions at home, he has started to move his right foot, lie down without crying, raise his head and move it in different directions.



Hello Klajdi!

"I would like to mention the endless emotion that I felt when I saw Klajdi crawl with hands and feet, a child with cerebral palsy who could not move in the past," – says Enela, the social worker.





Klajdi has spent most of the time in his house and rarely outside in the garden filled with trees. He spent many years isolated from others and never went to school. He could neither speak nor walk.

Now, the boy enjoys to meet people. The therapy he is receiving from the specialized team is giving the first results of improvement. Klajdi now can move his hands, interact during therapy, put circles on a cone, and even change position.



Hello Mariglen!

"...he has begun to articulate some syllables and do some math exercises and also has made friends. He manages to categorize geometrical figures and form simple puzzles with numbers, animals, and three geometric shapes," – psychologist Mimoza says about Margilen, the boy diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.





The 11-year old now wants to go to school, speak through syllables, create short sentences, make friends and stand up for younger kids.

In the past, he was not able to communicate; he would smash things on the ground, not play with other children, and didn't even want to go to school.

His mother, Fatushja, says: *"We receive a disability allowance for the boy, but we buy flour with it. What can we do... we have no other income and there are 4 children to feed. He needed therapy, but we have not been able to take him to get services, until the World Vision girls came to help. Now the boy seems to be doing better."*



Hello Sara!

"She can stand straight herself, she's leaning on her hands..." – were the only words that Sara's mother said when she saw her sit by herself, with her hands on the couch, with her body and head straight.

"We are very proud that Sara has achieved some small victories. She is able to do exercises with help, and she can sit for a few seconds relying on her hands. She can focus, is more sociable, and establishes eye contact; she can say the syllables 'pa,' 'ma' – 'ta'" – says Eva the speech therapist.





The 8-year old has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Even today, her father remembers the bitter memories of that winter night in January 2011. *“We went to bed and suddenly we heard Sara crying. She was only one month and a half. It was midnight. She was shivering. She had high fever. We wanted to cool her with water, but the pipes were broken from the cold. We managed to find some water for her. The next morning, we took her to hospital.”*

Kujtim says due to low economic income and the distance from the center that provides specialized services his daughter did not receive the needed therapy. *“Sara cannot tell us what toys she likes, what she would like to eat, or what pain she feels. We cannot tell when she has a toothache until she is swollen,”* – says her mother Bukurie. Today, we notice Sara’s improvement. For a year, the specialized team has been going every week to the little girl’s home.



Hello Bruna!

"I have seen a lot of improvement in my daughter. She has begun to make sounds and say some words. I have so much hope that one day she will start to speak. I am worried who will care for her when I will not be by her side anymore, that's why I want her to be able to take care about herself" – says Mimoza in tears.

Today, she's 8 and after months of therapy by the specialists of the "Hello...life" team, she has begun to articulate some words, that she was not able to pronounce before, such as: school, baby, cow, horse...





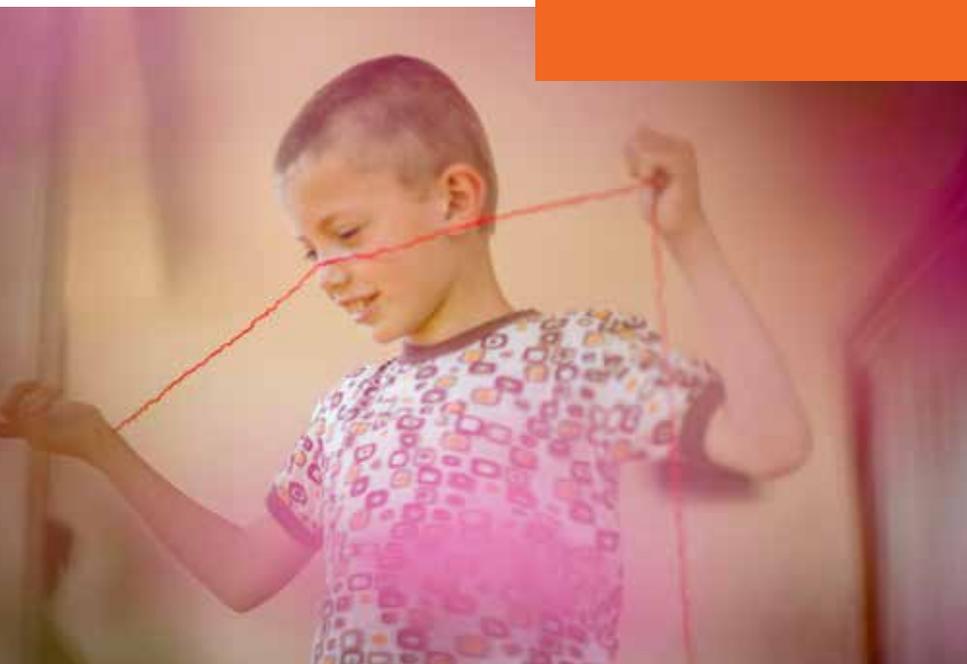
Bruna is friends with everyone in the neighborhood. They love their little friend who plays with kids in the neighborhood, plays with the dog and likes to pick fruit from the trees. She is the third daughter in the family; she came to life after two sisters.

"My pregnancy went very well. Even during the first months after she was born, we didn't notice any change. When she turned 1, she could say 'ma,' 'pa' ... Then she stopped saying words. I talked to her and she would not respond. She couldn't even hear me. We could not believe it," her mother Mimoza says. After a battle to accept the difficult reality, they sent Bruna to Tirana; at the time she was two years old. "The doctors told us about scanners and X-rays but we could not afford these examinations; we had no money," – her mother says.

Afterwards, when Bruna was 4, they took her to a doctor in Librazhd. She was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. With a lot of dedication, also from her family, the little girl has begun to write without using her hand for support, respond to questions and know opposites, such as more-less, up-down, or left-right.

Hello, Ardian!

Ardian could get out of the room where he used to stay and play only play games with his imagination. Now he can play games with his real friends. Unlike before, now he is able to get dressed, to play on the swing and go to school every day .





F The first and only word that Ardian said was: “*Ma.*” After he turned one, everything changed. He said no more words and started to get nervous. His parents took him to Tirana for examinations. “*We were told he had autism,*” –his mother, Nexhmia, recalls. At the time, the diagnosis for her son was unclear to her and to the rest of the family. They began to get more and more information on the diagnosis, particularly after the kid became one of the children receiving free specialized home therapy from the “Hello...life” social program.

As for the other children, the specialists drafted and began to implement an individual development plan for Ardian and his family. First, the 10-year old would start crying when he saw the therapists but now he smiles from the balcony when he sees them coming.



Hello Alesia!

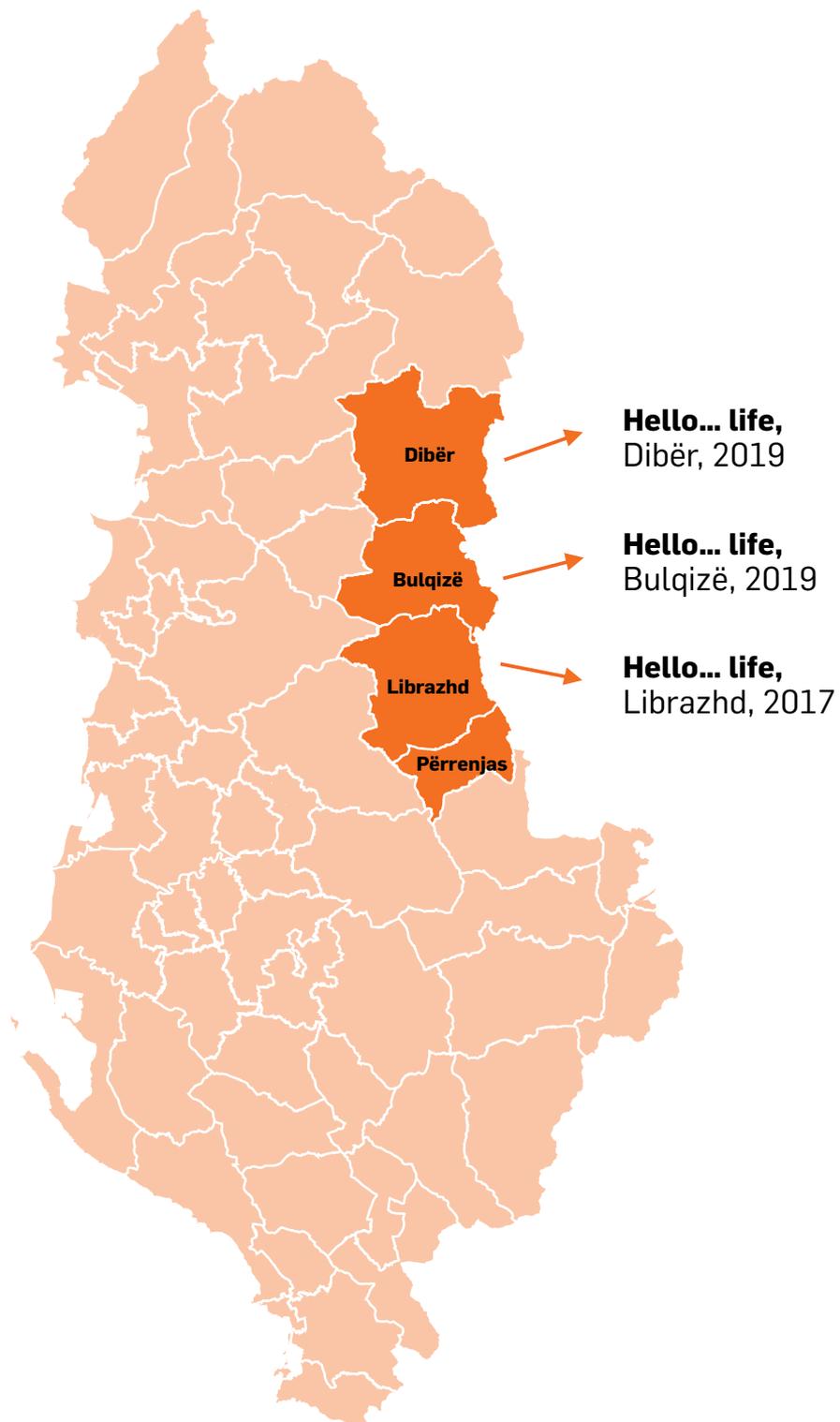
Zhaneta's day and night are dedicated to her daughter's wellbeing. She sleeps after Alesia has gone to bed and wakes up before her little one. With a lot of persistence and dedication, the 11-year old manages to crawl without help and do the back bridge exercise.





M Although she has been diagnosed with spina bifida and paraplegia, Alesia is the best of her class, particularly in science classes.

“When I grow up, I want to become a math teacher,” – says Alesia and shows us the homework notebook where there are only *“excellent”* grades.



Country : Librazhd

Year : 2017

Hello... life started in Librazhd

For the first time in Albania, in June 2017, World Vision Albania and Kosovo launched the social program 'Hello...life.'

36 children with disabilities living in remote areas of Librazhd began to receive regularly therapy in their homes, in the beginning of 2018. Their families could not afford therapy for their little ones while their homes are far from centers that provide specialized services.

Even today, many of the children with disabilities do not receive any service and live isolated.

In the district of Librazhd there have been identified a total of 277 children with disabilities.

MOBILE COMMUNITY UNIT IN LIBRAZHD

"It has been more than one year and a half since the most beautiful and most heartfelt initiative began, and every day is different. It has not been easy for me, leave the city, my home, every day and travel for hours on difficult roads to remote villages, where children wait for me impatiently. Almost all of them have experienced improvements. I can mention Arta who now walks 2-3 steps by herself; Selma who can stay sit for longer now and with a little help can get up and down the couch; Sara who sits on her own with just a little support or changes her position from lying down- sitting by herself; Klajdi who goes up and down the couch by himself, can get to a crawling position and move for a few steps independently or can move his wheelchair; Alesia who now can manage to do the back bridge exercise or crawl on her limbs; Donald who manages to extend his right leg; Oligerta who can extend her both inferior extremities; Oligerti manages to do exercises independently, change position or go up and down the stairs; Emiljano has increased control of his head and manages to hold an object in his hand..." – tells us **Dorela**, the physiotherapist of the "Hello... life" mobile team.



"During the first visits to the families, many of the family members had no information about our professions or how we would help their children. We have tried explaining to them with simple words and examples so it would be easier for them. On the other hand, many family members did not believe that their children could change. That is why during the first meetings we informed parents and tried convincing them to continue doing the exercises with their children as we instructed. That was the first essential step for each of the therapists because change would be

impossible without the parents' commitment. Our greatest joy is when we see the children and their parents at the gates of their homes asking: "When will you come back?" - tells **Eva**, the speech therapist of the team.

Enela: “Working with the children of “Hello... Life” means to be a mechanism that sets into motion the gears for the development of a child with disabilities and his family. You must use all the skills, opportunities, and potential you have as a person and as a professional toward ensuring the best possible opportunities for a healthier growth process in all the areas of a child’ development domains.



Mimoza: “The first meeting with the children of the “Hello...Life” program was touching because, no matter how much you hear about disability, it is different when you see and feel things closer. It seems as if you are turning on a light in a dark room where people have little hope for change. It is a light to give them hope and to help them fight prejudices that these families often face. As you get familiar with their problems and concerns, you realize that the reality is difficult. In these families, I have experienced the heavy burden of the troubles and problems they face. On the other hand, they have given me the strength and the will to change the situation and work with the children with disabilities.”



“My work day starts with the technical check of the car and then I show up at the Municipalities’ community center; together with one of the teachers, we pick up the children from their homes and bring them to the Community Center in Librazhd. After that, with the mobile team, we travel in the field according to the daily plan. We finish all services in the field that the mobile team has scheduled and I return to the Community Center to take the children attending services there to their homes. It is a new experience, filled with emotions that I had never thought I would go through. One of the hardest difficulties for me was during winter, when in many villages it was difficult to travel even with tire chains because of snow.” – says Luli, the driver that takes the specialized team of Hello Life to difficult terrains in Librazhd.

AMBASSADORS

Well-known names in art, sport, and journalism joined the journey of World Vision through the initiative of the social program **Hello...Life**. They gave voice to the cause of children with disabilities in remote areas of the country.



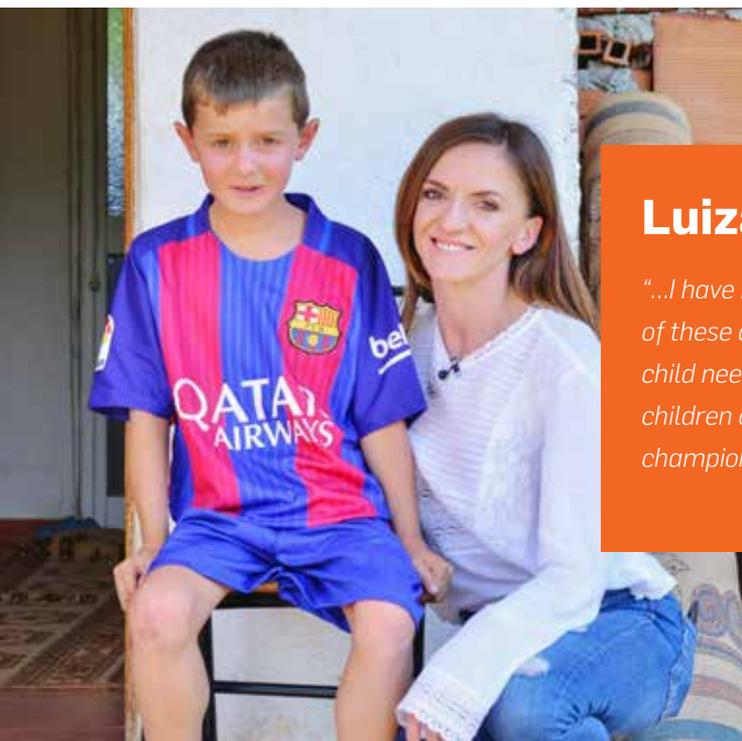
Alban Skënderaj – singer

"...as a father, but also as an ambassador of World Vision, I cannot be silent for the fact that hundreds of children with disabilities cannot receive services. Many of them are isolated in homes; they can't even go to kindergarten or school; they don't get the necessary medications and services; they live in total isolation. They have been denied their childhood, their dignity..."

The children of "Hello...Life" need services, they need us! Together can we change their lives!"

Arlinda Çausholli – journalist, publicist

*"...I invite everyone to join the social program
'Hello Life!'"*



Luiza Gega – athlete

*"...I have run alone and I have won, but the race
of these children is very difficult. I believe every
child needs champions. Help us so that these
children can finish their race. You are their
champions..."*



Nik Xhelilaj – actor

"...frankly speaking, I was touched, overwhelmed, but I was also angry that we are so uninformed. I was surprised, angry... 70,000 children with disabilities. These children today need your help, my help, the help of all of us together. Why? Because 92% of these children, currently do not receive any kind of service.

I invite you to believe in the initiative of World Vision's social program, just like I did..."

“HELLO...LIFE” IN DIBRA

Since April 2019, World Vision signed a partnership agreement with Dibra Municipality for the implementation of the social program “Hello...life.”

In June 2019, 36 children with disabilities living in remote areas of Dibra began to receive regularly therapy in their homes from a specialized team.

After Librazhd Municipality, Dibra was the second municipality in Albania that began the implementation of this intervention model, and included “Hello...Life” team in its organizational chart.



WORLD VISION ALBANIA

World Vision is a community development, Christian, humanitarian, and advocacy organization.

ABOUT
50,000

children benefit each year from World Vision Albania's programs in 25 municipalities. World Vision Albania is known in communities as a mobilizer and the organization that liaisons communities with institutions and organizations for issues affecting children's lives. During this period, we have collaborated with 56 organizations, 18 churches and faith-based organizations.

Our vision for every child, life in all its fullness...

...our prayer for every heart, the will to make it so...

For more information, please visit us:

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My first steps

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'a social program by World Vision Albania'

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