



24<sup>th</sup> April, 2010

## **Charity Ball of Behalf of First Step Georgia**

Today, the business community, government and international community came together to raise funds for Georgian Children with special needs. A Charity Ball was held in Radisson Blu Hotel to support First Step Georgia in developing a day care center for children with special needs. A main supporter and partner of First Step Georgia for this event was HSBC Bank. A Patron of the Charity Ball was Sandra Elisabeth Roelofs.

First Step Georgia is a charity dedicated to supporting services for children and young adults with special needs. The organisation was founded in 1998 in the response to the horrendous living conditions of disabled orphans living in the state-run Kaspi institution. Working closely with the Ministry of Health and UNICEF resulted in closure of Kaspi and thus number of children was saved from death.

First Lady of Georgia, who also is the founder of SOCO foundation declared at the event: “I pay particular attention to the fate of children and young adults who need special services or who are deprived of parental care. Following the ongoing Child Welfare reforms in Georgia, we need to strengthen family, community-based services, set up alternative care formulas in order to reduce the number of children in institutions and on the street, to ensure access to education and health for every child.”

Guy Lewis, CEO of HSBC Bank Georgia said: “We are supporting the “Home-Based Care” project of First Step Georgia and believe that this support can make a real difference in the lives of those children. However we also would like to motivate other businesses in Georgia, as together we can make an even bigger difference. I think this event is a successful start to such a collaboration.”

First Step Georgia is now concentrated on supporting families who have children and young adults with special needs through day care services, home-based care and empowering parents.

Nino Zhvania, the founder of First Step Georgia said: “First Step Georgia has been built up over the past 12 years and we have pioneered new forms of care for children and young adults with special needs. 12 years ago we saw the need to help these children who were living in desperate circumstances. A lot of progress has been made and our objective now is to help families with such children by providing day care and home based care for the maximum number of children.”

Sandro Kvitashvili, the Minister of Labour, Health and Social Affairs stated:

“Responsible society always takes care of their vulnerable members, especially children. In Georgia we need to support and motivate initiatives like this. With our support these children should become integrated, full members of our society. I would like to thank First Step Georgia for their professionalism and dedication.

At the Charity Ball funds were raised through the sale of table and raffle tickets, and an auction. First Step Georgia is planning to organise annual Charity Balls.

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