Asociația OVIDIU RO

Fiecare copil în grădiniță

4th Year Report to Partners, Stakeholders & Investors

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October 2014

Helping children get from

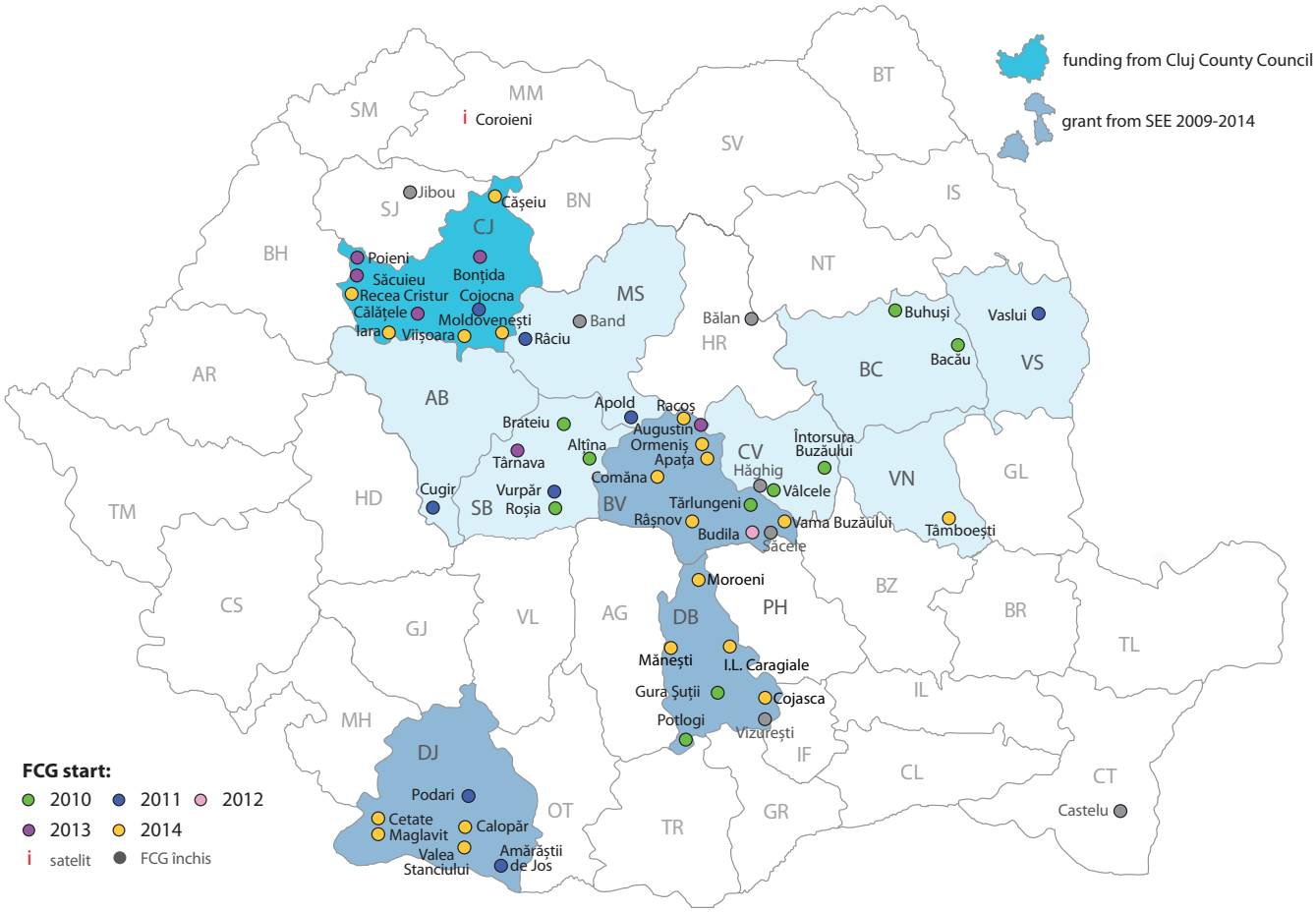


since 2004

Fiecare copil în grădiniță

1500 impoverished preschool age children from 25 rural communities
Daily *gradinita* attendance: 81%

120,000 impoverished preschool age children in Romania*
Daily *gradinita* attendance: who knows?



Approximately 200,000 children are born annually. Based on existing statistics and experience, OvidiuRo estimates that 20% of the 600,000 age 3-5 children meet FCG poverty criteria.

Partners:

MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI NAȚIONALE

MINISTERUL MUNCII FAMILIEI, PROTECȚIEI SOCIALE ȘI PERSOANELOR VÂRSTNICE

eea grants

FONDUL ONG

Consiliul Judetean CLUJ

Inspectoratul Scolar Judetean CLUJ

Consiliul Judetean BRASOV

Consiliul Judetean DAMBOVITA

Consiliul Judetean DOLJ

Inspectoratul Scolar Judetean DOLJ

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Major Investors in *Fiecare Copil in Gradinita*:



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Preventing the transmission of disadvantage across generations is a crucial investment in Europe's future… with long-term benefits for children, the economy, and society as a whole.

European Commission Recommendation, 20 February 2013[1]

[1] European Commission Recommendation, Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage, Brussels, 20.2.2013, C(2013) 778 final, p 2, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c_2013_778_en.pdf accessed on September 4, 2014

I. Why *Gradinita* Is Good For Romania

Early education is positively correlated to higher graduation, higher employment, and lower incarceration rates.

Preschool Education and Its Lasting Effects: Research and Policy Implications, W. Steven Barnett, Rutgers University, 2008

In 2013, President Barack Obama called for making preschool available to every 4-year-old in America, opening a national discussion that continues to permeate the front page of every U.S. newspaper. Eighteen months later, the newly elected Mayor of New York City succeeded in enrolling 50,000 4-year-olds in preschool. China recently set a goal of giving its children three years of preschool education by the year 2020.

Why all this sudden attention on early education? And why should it matter to each of us that every child in Romania be attending *gradinita*[2]?

The international data is undeniable: children whose minds are challenged in early childhood do much better when they enter school, and this makes an enormous difference for their later success in life. From birth to age 5, a child's brain undergoes its most rapid growth and development. This period sets the stage for all later learning and adult functioning.

Studies have shown that well-educated parents talk to their children more often, use a wider and more varied vocabulary, and speak more positively to their children than parents with low education levels. And of course, the better educated are more likely to read to their children from an early age.

So it is hardly surprising that children who are exposed to early language and books become better students in school – and more employable in adulthood.

According to the World Bank, 77% of Romania's children are enrolled in *gradinita* but only 37% of *Romania's high-risk children* are enrolled[3]. All across Romania, children from the poorest quartile of the population enter school without the most basic literacy skills (such as the ability to identify ten letters of the alphabet). Their homes are devoid of books and their parents are not even aware of the importance of talking to their children, much less reading to them. Unlike the print-rich homes of better educated families, their homes may have no printed matter at all. Thus, these children enter the school system far behind their peers and are unable to ever catch up. "School After School" programs just aren't enough to close the gap, or more accurately, the gulf that has already separated poor rural children from their middle-class urban peers by the time they enter *clasa pregatitoare*.

This wide gap, although not "repairable", IS preventable. The solution begins with quality early education. The skills gulf is not just a problem for the poor, on the wrong side of the gap – it creates a social and economic burden that must be borne by educated, productive members of society. Doing the right thing for one's own children is essential, but if we do not do the same for the children of the uneducated and socially marginalized, our legacy to our own children will be a society with built-in costs and handicaps that stifle Romania's overall competitiveness, as well.

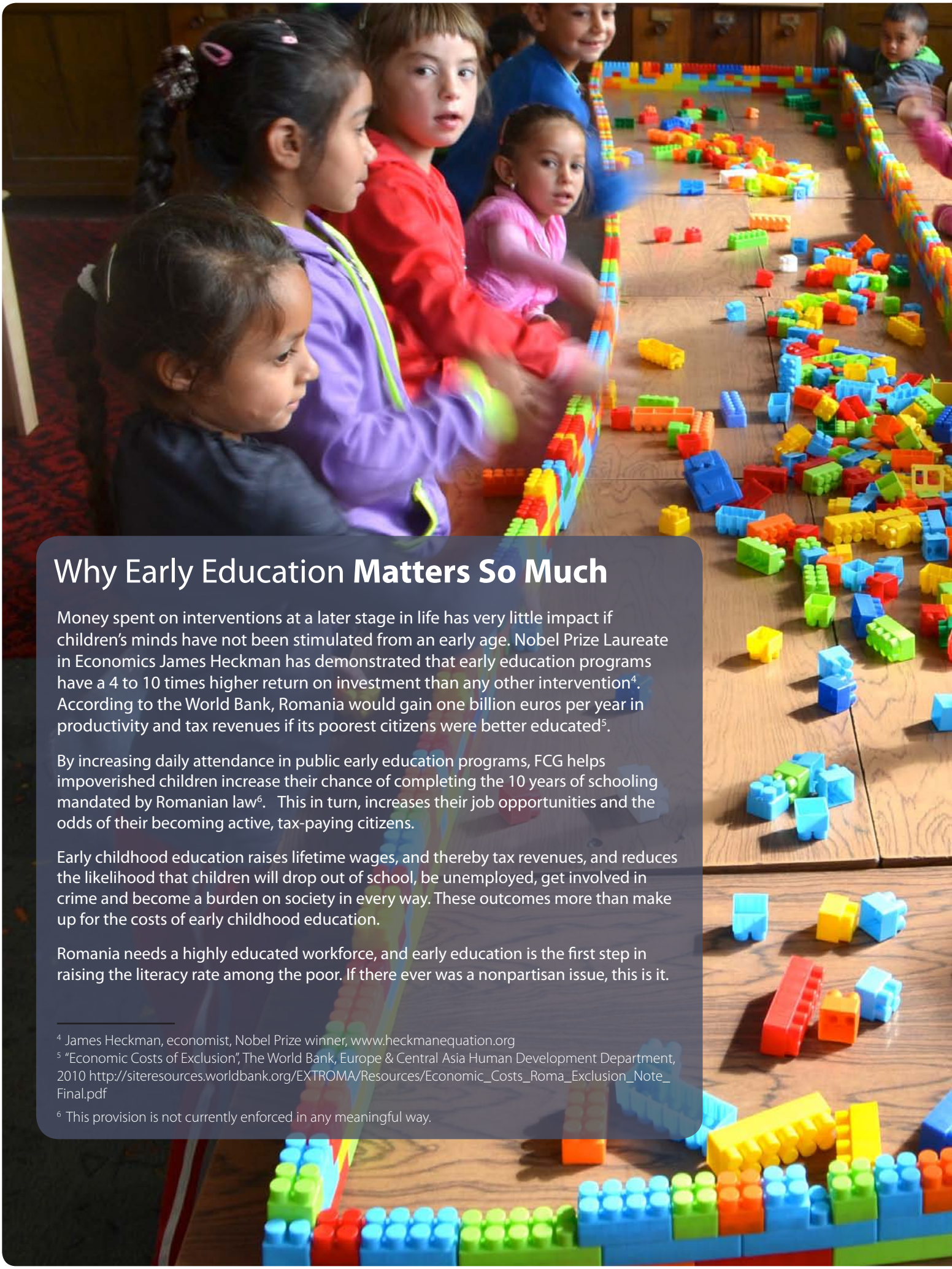
[2] *Gradinita* is the Romanian term for preschool & kindergarten (age 3-5).

[3] Toward an Equal Start: Closing the early learning gap for Roma Children in Eastern Europe, World Bank, 2012

4.11 million children in Romania

17.4% dropout rate

710,000 Romanians expected to drop out of school before 9th grade over the next two decades - unless the pattern is broken by a comprehensive national action.



Why Early Education **Matters So Much**

Money spent on interventions at a later stage in life has very little impact if children's minds have not been stimulated from an early age. Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics James Heckman has demonstrated that early education programs have a 4 to 10 times higher return on investment than any other intervention[4]. According to the World Bank, Romania would gain one billion euros per year in productivity and tax revenues if its poorest citizens were better educated[5].

By increasing daily attendance in public early education programs, FCG helps impoverished children increase their chance of completing the 10 years of schooling mandated by Romanian law[6]. This in turn, increases their job opportunities and the odds of their becoming active, tax-paying citizens.

Early childhood education raises lifetime wages, and thereby tax revenues, and reduces the likelihood that children will drop out of school, be unemployed, get involved in crime and become a burden on society in every way. These outcomes more than make up for the costs of early childhood education.

Romania needs a highly educated workforce, and early education is the first step in raising the literacy rate among the poor. If there ever was a nonpartisan issue, this is it.

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[4] James Heckman, economist, Nobel Prize winner, www.heckmanequation.org

[5] "Economic Costs of Exclusion", The World Bank, Europe & Central Asia Human Development Department, 2010 http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTROMA/Resources/Economic_Costs_Roma_Exclusion_Note_Final.pdf

[6] This provision is not currently enforced in any meaningful way.



Investing in early childhood development is both essential to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and smart economics.

World Bank Report 2012[7]

[7] "Toward an Equal Start: Closing the early learning gap for Roma Children in Eastern Europe", pag 61 – World Bank, 2012

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Education policies should involve prioritizing investment in quality childhood development… working with parents, and incentivizing their participation.

World Bank Report, 28 February 2014



© Johannes Kruse

Why *Fiecare Copil in Gradinita* works

Fiecare Copil in Gradinita (Every Child in Preschool) prevents school abandonment by (1) organizing communities to prioritize early education and (2) incentivizing impoverished parents to send their 3-to 5-year-old children to *gradinita*. An award-winning program that has been cited as a model by both *The Economist* and the World Bank, FCG has also been endorsed by the Romanian Minister of Education, Remus Pricopie. But to date, FCG has received no funding from the EU. It has been funded largely by the Romanian corporate sector and an American non-profit organization.

The program was launched by Asociatia OvidiuRo in partnership with the Ministry of Education in July 2010. Since then, each year 1300-1500 children in two dozen rural and semi-rural communities have benefited from early education and better nutrition through FCG.

Fiecare Copil in Gradinita (FCG) targets the poorest children – those living in overcrowded, inadequate housing in isolated areas with sorely limited access to potable water and standard health care. In the winter, the unemployment rate is close to 100% due to the low education level of the adults combined with a low demand for unskilled labor.

Food coupons, conditional on children's attendance in preschool, have proven to be a highly effective and efficient tool to stimulate destitute, functionally illiterate parents (with an average of four years of schooling) to bring their young children to *gradinita* every day. The parents receive €12 in food coupons at the end of the month if they take their child to preschool every day. In Romania, the monthly child allowance (which is unconditional) is €10, so this is a significant increase for families surviving on their children's allowance.

SUMMARY OF FCG Impact

Short-term: Immediate increase in attendance, better use of resources

- Increases enrolment and daily ***gradinita*** attendance of the most vulnerable children;
- Maximizes use of human and material resources (heating and classroom maintenance remain the same if only a fraction of the enrolled children attend);
- Gives parents the opportunity to improve their children's nutrition;
- Provides clothes for the poorest children through the local community budget;
- Brings more DGASPC attention to the neediest families through the day-to-day involvement of its social workers.

Long-term: Change of mentality and education patterns

- Increases genuine inter-agency collaboration;
- Encourages more inclusive teaching practices;
- Reduces the need for remedial interventions in later school years;
- Encourages honest and responsible school record-keeping;
- Changes parents' assumptions about the "right time" to start their children's education;
- Changes teachers' perceptions of Roma children's capacity to learn;
- Gives local authorities and local Roma leaders a common goal and vision.

The real program effects will be medium and long term.

Valentin Cuibus, Cluj General School Inspector



There was an evolution and a clear progression with this approach. Now the children are integrated, their parents have more respect towards teachers and themselves. They are more tolerant and more inclined to stick to a schedule.

Gabriela Lupu, Cugir deputy-principal

II. Results

Cumulative Results 2010-2014:

81% attendance of 3200 high-risk children*

Whitout this program, the children in ***Fiecare Copil in Gradinita***, in all likelihood, would not have had any kind of formal early education before entering primary school - at age 6, 7 or 8, or would have attended sporadically and had major learning gaps. These children are now acquiring the same knowledge and skills as their "Main Street" peers.

*An at-risk student is one who, by virtue of their circumstances, is statistically more likely than others to fail academically. The criteria of at-risk or high-risk status often focus on ethnic minorities, those who are disabled, or those who are characterized by low socioeconomic status (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/At-risk_students).

FCG implemented by

41 kindergartens in **34** communities in **15** counties

2600 high-risk children attended *gradinita*

5200 children age 3-14 participated in summer programs

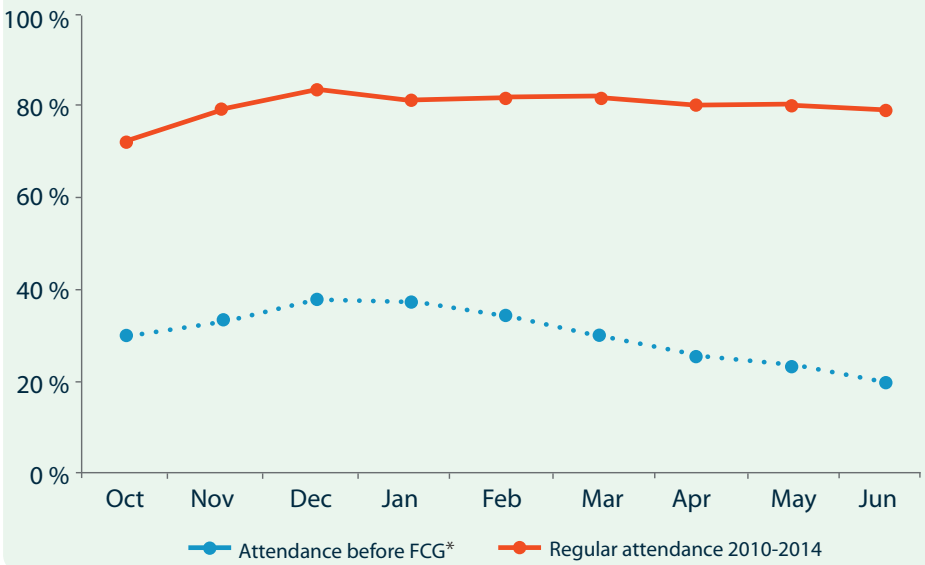
1200+ children and family members received health care

740 toddlers and their mothers got accustomed to *gradinita*

2600+ parents participated in *gradinita* activities

600+ teachers trained in child centered methods

81% Attendance of FCG children – 2010-2014



*Before FCG, daily attendance taking was not the norm so direct comparisons are not available, but teachers report that rarely more than 40% of these children ever attended. A 2012 World Bank Report found that on average, only 37% of Roma children were even *enrolled in preschool* – which says nothing about their actual attendance rates.

Before FCG I'd have children in first grade who would start crying after writing one row. Adapting to primary school, without having been to preschool, is just too big a leap.

Claudia Pop, clasa pregatitoare teacher, Apold



© Ruti Alon

It really shows in *clasa pregatitoare*. Both in vocabulary, but most of all, socially – in terms of keeping a schedule, improved hygiene, and friendships with the other children.

Rozalia Mihu, Cugir school principal

And, after *Gradinita*, What Then?

Ninety-eight percent of the children who have been to kindergarten through FCG have matriculated directly into clasa ***pregatitoare*** or first grade.

For the first time, in September 2013, some FCG children had the benefit of starting ***clasa pregatitoare*** with three years of preschool 'under their belts'. Their primary school teachers consistently report a major improvement in their "teachability". One reported that parents of children who had participated in FCG kept the habit of notifying the teacher of their children's absences, and that the FCG children's attendance remained high even without food coupons: "9 out of 13 children are attending, while eight or nine parents come to parent-teacher meetings. Before a maximum of two poor parents might attend". She also noticed the children come to school when it rains "even when they live at the end of the village".

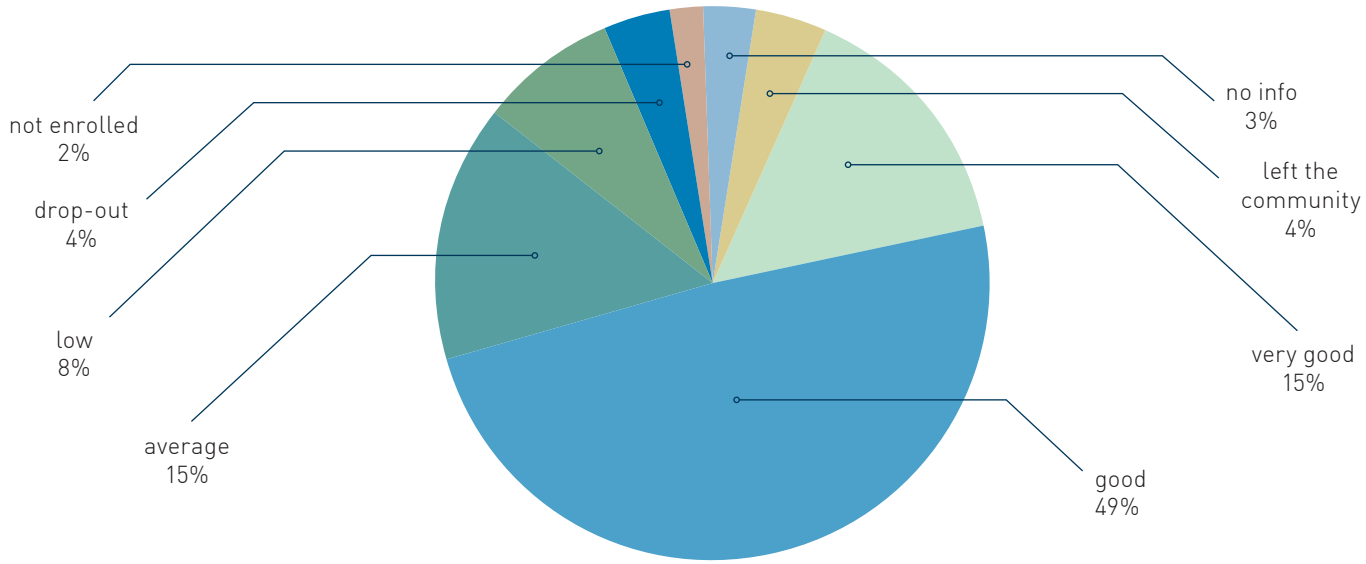
Most children who were in the program now have 'very good' or 'good' attendance in school (over 80% of school days), despite not receiving the food incentives.

In school

98%
of ***FCG*** children matriculated directly into ***clasa pregatitoare*** or first grade

65%
of ***FCG*** children continued to have good or very good attendance

School attendance of former FCG children (*clasa pregatitoare* through 3rd grade)



Children who don't go to ***gradinita*** are lost from the start.

Tarnava teacher



Birthrate

10.4	9.7	21.6
EU	RO	Tarnava



A Case in Point: Tarnava, Sibiu

Before FCG		After FCG
19%	enrolled in *gradinita*	96%
14%	average daily attendance	85%

OvidiuRo staff first visited Tarnava in the spring of 2012 during discussions with the Sibiu County Council about scaling up FCG. Tarnava was on the School Inspectorate's list of poor communities and the school principal, Mr. Badulescu, was eager to meet the OvR team.

Forty-four percent of Tarnava's 3000 inhabitants self-identified as Roma on the 2011 census. 160 families receive social aid, and 600 unemployed adults live on two streets separated by a valley. Most houses are one-room shacks serving as bedroom, kitchen, and living room for six or more people. Toilets (even outdoor) are rare. The parents subsist on social aid and occasional labour, collecting iron from the garbage dump on the way to Copsa Mica. Few people have deeds for their houses. According to the mediator, the residents had once owned land in open fields, but they sold it to pay off debts and the younger generations were gradually left owning nothing.

When FCG arrived, most of the preschool age children were not enrolled, and the older kids rarely attended. (The younger children thought Adi, the school mediator, was the President of Romania.)

In October 2013, when funding from the Sibiu County Council did not materialize, Keep Calling, an IT company based in Sibiu and Atlanta, Georgia, agreed to partially fund FCG scale-up in the county. The Tarnava mayor and school principal jumped at the offer. The ProTarnava Association, an NGO of local teachers, agreed to coordinate the program. At the end of October OvidiuRo trained the implementation team, and during the November school break, the school mediator and social worker went door to door to recruit children and make social inquiries. Thirty-six children were enrolled in the first month, a new classroom was set-up, and the principal found a retired teacher to come back – her salary paid by OvR for the 2013-2014 school year, and taken over by the Inspectorate in September 2014.

Forty-nine children were enrolled in November. From the first month, attendance was spectacular – 83% of the newly enrolled children came to *gradinita* daily.

But over the course of the school year, the local team had to wage two battles: (1) to enroll all the other impoverished preschool age children and (2) to successfully integrate the sudden influx of severely disadvantaged children.

The first battle was won after the school mediator and OvR staff repeatedly met with the parents – the last five enrolments occurring in April. Ultimately, only two out of the 69 eligible children remained unregistered.

The adaptation process remains a challenge. Hygiene issues (particularly lice) and the FCG requirement of parental involvement created tensions with other parents and some teachers, as the ratio of severely disadvantaged children grew from 19% before the program to 54%. **Still, the results speak for themselves: 67 poor children who had not previously set foot in a classroom are now coming regularly – and making visible progress from one week to the next.**

III. Key Ingredients

for successfully integrating high-risk children in the education system

Taking Root in the Community

OvidiuRo works continuously with local authorities and implementation teams to make sure the FCG program runs smoothly - so it has a chance to become an integral part of the local education system – not just a temporary NGO-spawned add-on.

Intersectoral collaboration is a multi-year, multi-level undertaking, the goal of which is to make communication and collaboration between educational, social and health institutions the norm.

It also takes time for poor parents to begin to regard early education as both their child's birthright and their own responsibility as parents. Such major transformations do not happen in a year or two or three. (Further discussion p. 30)

It takes at least two years for the team to really be able to work together. It's also easier now because parents finally understand that they have to bring their children *every* day, and take part in school activities. This has even improved the behavior of parents who are not eligible.

Cojocna social worker

The third year of the project was the best so far. Not only that the children's attendance and progress is obvious. My surprise was that the parents' attitude changed dramatically. They see the value of preschool now.

Marilena Andreescu, Podari school principal



Sotron Doi, Podari, Dolj

Building a Professional Local Team

OvidiuRo conducts annual workshops to help teachers, social workers, and school mediators work more effectively with children from disadvantaged families and share common problems and best practices.

Preschool teachers are a young child's first contact with the education system, and for many poor children, their first contact with the world beyond their own dirt path. These teachers are key to making children feel welcome, safe, and eager to learn. This is a special challenge in rural areas where many teachers are not qualified, their remuneration is low, and the probability of their staying in the school unlikely (as many hold temporary positions). Working with children who have not been talked to very much, played with by adults or read to is a challenge for which many are unprepared.

Android tablets specially designed for preschool age children, called Tabbies, are being incrementally added to the curriculum. (Further discussion p. 30)

The biggest challenge is training local professionals to focus on solutions - not on problems. There is a long way from *access* to *quality* education. In the first year we focus on monitoring daily attendance, establishing learning routines and basic hygiene rules. In the second year we move into classroom management and learning designs that engage children's curiosity.

Maria Gheorghiu, OvidiuRo cofounder



Teacher training in Tarlungeni, Brasov, March 2014

Tracking Attendance of High-Risk Children

Regular attendance in a quality preschool program is critical for children whose parents don't know how to read and write.

Maria Gheorghiu, OvR cofounder

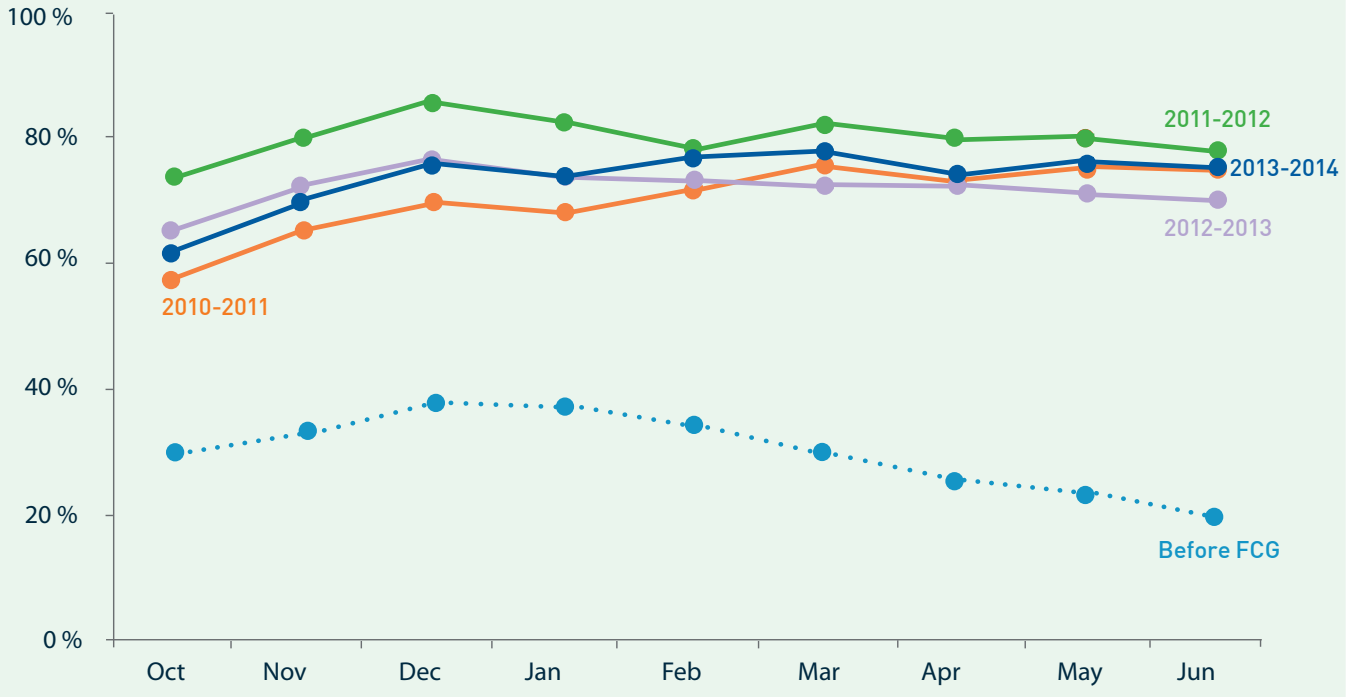
Many of the children in FCG see picture books for the very first time when they enter the *gradinita*. They learn how to hold a book and turn the pages. They learn how to form a line and stay in it, how to use crayons, pencils and scissors. They get accustomed to the daily school routine, to dealing with other children, to working in a group – all variety of skills that children are expected to have mastered when they start primary school.

Attendance patterns for FCG children

Gradinita attendance peaks in December, and tapers off in the last three months of the school year as parents take their children along for seasonal work.

The fourth year's average attendance levels dropped slightly -- from 80% in 2013 to 76% in 2013. This could be related to a general worsening of living standards in rural Romania and decrease in RON purchasing power. Perhaps 50 lei (the value of food coupons provided through FCG) is not as motivating for parents as before, and parents might choose more easily to leave their village, with their children, in search of old iron, some work, or a bite to eat. Or there could be a slight diminishment of the program's novelty (and effect) over time – even so, daily attendance rates remain to an unprecedented high, compared to under 45% before the program was implemented. (Further discussion p. 30)

FCG children's attendance



Note: Attendance rates before the program reflect annual estimates provided by school principals or based on direct observations of OvR staff combined with statements from local teams (as such, monthly fluctuations are not available).

Forging Relationships with the Poorest Parents

**FCG forms the habit of going to school.
This creates a discipline for the entire family.**

Princess Marina Sturdza, January 2014, Cluj

Through strategic incentives ***FCG*** gets impoverished parents in the habit of bringing their children to *gradinita* every day regardless of the weather, children's mood, distance, or other chores the parents might consider more important at the moment.

Parents of FCG children have low education levels themselves and their own negative associations with school. A valuable FCG element is that it offers teachers and parents the opportunity to get to know each other as people, not only as stereotypes. Parents become more comfortable in the school environment, while teachers have repeatedly reported that their relationships with parents have improved since the program was initiated. Over time parents' ingrained habits about the "right time" to start their children in the education system changes.

In addition to requiring daily attendance, a second precondition to receiving food coupons at the end of the month is parent participation in two activities: Parent Day (a monthly activity with both children and parents) and Parent on Duty (five times a year parents are asked to spend the school day assisting the teacher). Under the 2014 EEA grant, our partner, Asociatia Learn and Vision, will design a parent education component. Starting with needs-assessment focus-groups in each community, three types of training sessions will be developed: with poor parents on good childrearing practices, with teachers on multigenerational education, and with "resource parents" and school mediators on parent-teacher relationship. (Further discussion p. 31)



Mother & son in Hetea, Covasna, 2013

Improving the Health of Vulnerable Children

Poor children get sick more often and stay sick longer than materially better off kids – which naturally affects their attendance and performance in school.

Virtually all the children who qualify for FCG live in dismal third world conditions - without a nearby source of clean water, toilet facilities, or reasonably accessible medical care. They live in cramped, overcrowded, improperly heated, jerry-rigged structures. Plastic or cardboard often cover the windows of rooms shared by half a dozen or more people and heated by makeshift stoves that continuously leak smoke into the room. These conditions have led to Romania's having the highest rates of infant mortality and tuberculosis in Europe. Even when FCG parents do manage to obtain a prescription, they often don't have the cash to buy medicines that are not free or for which the community's monthly allocation has run out.

The Together for Better Health component, added to FCG in 2012 with the support of GlaxoSmithKline, helped poor children get medical checks more frequently and receive proper treatment; facilitated the involvement of health mediators, and increased immunization rates in isolated communities. (Further discussion p. 31)



Health Caravan in Rosia, Sibiu - March 2014

2013 – 2014

2440 children received fruit and hygiene products once a month

1220 children and parents were examined during medical caravans

IV. Getting the Word Out

The basic idea, the flexibility and finesse of this program caught our attention.

Istvan Vakar,
President of Cluj County Council

Some say the Roma issue is a European one, others that it is a national matter. In any case, it is a very local issue, because it is the local authorities that do the work of social inclusion on the ground.

British Ambassador Martin Harris

A central part of OvR's strategy is to raise awareness in the business community and in the general public of the importance of early education for Romania's disadvantaged children. But equally important is bringing it to the attention of policy makers.

In February 2014, the Cluj County Council was the first to allocate public funds to scale-up FCG. The County Social Services and Child Protection Department is in charge of program management with assistance from OvR, and in partnership with the County School Inspectorate. Funds cover the cost of the conditional food coupons. The British Embassy also supported the program with a £10,000 contribution. Discussions continue with the Covasna and Sibiu County Councils.

A second approach to scaling up was initiated this year through the EEA 2009-2014 Grant through the NGO Fund in Romania, which is designed to segue into the County Council annual budget over time. The "2014 European Economic Area Funds grant from Norway, Iceland & Liechtenstein" provided funds for FCG to extend to six new communities, in partnership with county and local authorities. However, with a total of 45 applications submitted by local councils in the three counties, FCG started in 13 new communities in September 2014. Extra funds are being provided by The Alex Fund, Carrefour Foundation grant, Raiffeisen's contribution in Brasov County, and proceeds from OvidiuRo's October 2014 Halloween Charity Ball. (Further discussion p. 31)



CLUJ

100 children

10 communities

First County Council to allocate public funds for FCG food coupons

The partnership was launched in February 2014 with a press event that generated 32 articles, 7 TV and 3 radio appearances.

BRASOV

730 children

9 communities

DAMBOVITA

310 children

6 communities

DOLJ

415 children

6 communities

Funded by EEA Grants & Raiffeisen

The Brasov County Council, School Inspectorate and OviduRo launched its FCG partnership with a visit to Budila by journalists and County partners. The event generated 19 articles, twelve TV news and talk shows, and two radio news mentiones.

VRANCEA

40 children

1 new county

Sponsored by Cargill

OvR launched the program in Tamboesti with 40 children in September.



Local and Regional Awareness

They wouldn't be in gradinita now if their parents hadn't been supported, morally and financially. But the help for these families came from OvidiuRo and its sponsors. Each month, parents get food coupons worth 50 lei if the children attend every day.

TVR Iasi News, November 2013

OvidiuRo takes every opportunity to bring together its government and corporate partners to meet with local journalists and visit FCG communities. Such events allow journalists, politicians, and corporate executives to interact directly with FCG children, parents, teachers, and local authorities. It is always an eye-opening and often emotional experience for the participants, designed to help the local media understand, and report, better on the challenges local communities face in integrating their poorest children into the education system, as well as the remarkable progress that can be made when partners with a common vision meet.Perhaps most importantly they see the obvious interest and enthusiasm of poor, often Roma, parents toward early education.

National and EU Notice

Early intervention and prevention are essential for developing more effective and efficient policies, as public expenditure tends to be greater when addressing the consequences of child poverty than when intervening at an early age.

European Commission Recommendation, 20 February 2013

In 2013, the Ministry of Education, under the direction of Minister Remus Pricopie, formed an inter-ministerial Early Education Working Group with the Ministry of Labour and OvidiuRo to lay the foundation to transform FCG into a national government program. One of the main tasks of this group is to prepare the scale-up mechanism – i.e. clarify the legal framework so that food coupons (tichete sociale) conditional on children's attendance in preschool can be allocated by public authorities. In September, the Ministry of European Funds joined this group. Early education programs for impoverished children have been included among funding priorities within the European Structural Funds for 2014-2020, while conditional incentives in the form of vouchers are under discussion in various EU funded programs. Hopefully, this next round will allow local jurisdictions to apply for funds to continue the program or to set-up new programs.



Ambassadors' Early Education Initiative meeting, February 2014

Ambassadors' Early Education Initiative

At the behest of Ambassador Mark Gitenstein, the Ambassador's Early Education Initiative was formed in 2012 by nine ambassadors to Romania: Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, UK and USA to support OvR's efforts to promote early education as the base for a competitive European work force. Six more ambassadors have since joined (Bulgaria, Denmark, Norway and Sweden in 2013 and Ireland and Poland in 2014). In February 2014, Minister of Education Remus Pricopie and Princess Marina Sturdza participated in the group's annual meeting at the residence of Italian Ambassador Diego Brasioli.

Since 2012 Ambassadors from the Netherlands, Germany, Great Britain and the US, the Speaker of the British House of Commons, and the President of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies have visited FCG programs. The UK Embassy, which first invested in FCG in 2012 in Dolj, increased its funding in 2014 with £10,000 toward the program expansion in Cluj.

Beyond Romania

Early education can help lift children out of poverty and family dysfunction, and contribute to achieving the goals of the Europe 2020 European Platform against Poverty.

European Commission Communication, 17 February 2011

FCG inspired project in Bulgaria In 2012 OvR was selected by the World Bank Strategic Impact Evaluation (SIEF) to co-develop a major randomized controlled study with the World Bank and researchers from Sciences Po (Paris) and the University of California Berkeley, to compare the efficacy of conditional cash transfers linked to preschool attendance with other types of interventions in increasing preschool attendance and skill acquisition by Roma children. However, the funding for the large number of new sites required by the rigorous experimental design was not to be found in Romania.

Consequently, OvR introduced the researchers to the America for Bulgaria Foundation, which financed the implementation of a similar incentive-based program in Bulgaria (managed by the Trust for Social Achievement). This academically rigorous evaluation was launched in June 2014 and involves 2,000 Bulgarian children living in 200 communities. The results will inform the development of more efficient, evidence-based early education policies in Bulgaria and the region.

Meeting of EEA NGOs In June, OvidiuRo hosted three South Eastern Europe NGOs as well as representatives of the European Public Health Alliance and GSK's offices in London and Brussels, to share experiences from their Together for Better Health projects. The meeting included a field visit to the FCG programs in Araci and Hetea (Covasna). The second day Slovak Ambassador Jan Gabor hosted a round table in which the NGOs shared best practices and discussed major challenges with representatives of the Ministry of Health and the National Public Health Institute and other Romanian NGO leaders.

V. The Private Sector's Role:

Sustaining FCG in the Medium Term

"There are 60,000 NGOs in Romania. If you help one project one year and then something else the next year, you cannot build anything. You have to invest in a long-term partnership."

Pascal Prigent, former GM, GlaxoSmithKline

OvidiuRo's goal is to make early education a national priority and to transfer local FCG costs to the government by 2020. In the meantime, OvR primarily relies on partnerships with private companies. Over 50 companies have contributed funds to OvR over the past decade; some of them have transformed their donations into sustained, long-term investments in early education. In general, corporate funds give an NGO flexibility to make program changes and respond to community needs when public funds are not readily available, or cannot cover all the needs.

"Major Investors" are companies that provide multi-year support of €25,000 and above for FCG. Some companies support a particular community's program, investing in local media attention, and annual review – with a minimum of bureaucracy and red tape, this is a cost-effective and fruitful approach.



Daniela Mihalcea - Mayor of Tamboesti, Angel Tilvar - Member of Parliament, Maria Gheorghiu - OvR Cofounder, Vasile Varvaroi - Cargill CEO, and Dragos Barladeanu - Vrancea County Council VP at press conference, September 2014

Since 2004

Athenee Palace HILTON HOTEL has supported OvR's work for 10 years through its in-kind contributions to OvidiuRo events, its hosting of OvR board meetings and teacher conferences, and through its annual Small Change, Big Difference campaign.

KMG International (Rompetrol) has provided fuel for OvR staff to travel 1,000,000 kilometers since 2004 and organized clothes and food caravans to FCG communities. The partnership was recognised at the 2014 Civil Society Gala in Bucharest.

Since 2005

PRO TV is both a long-term Major Investor in FCG, and OvR's main media partner – and over the years it has played a critical role in communicating the importance of early education for the poorest children in Romania. The monthly news reports about FCG have greatly increased awareness about the program and illustrated dozens of stories about the children and parents who benefit from OvidiuRo's programs. At the same time, these news items help counteract common stereotypes, such as the idea that poor Roma parents do not want to educate their children.

Since 2006

CARREFOUR investment in OvidiuRo's work evolved from being an event table-sponsor in 2006 to an exemplary multi-faceted corporate-NGO partnership for which Carrefour and OvR won First Prize at the 2012 "Gala Societatii Civile" in Bucharest. In 2010, Carrefour "adopted" a kindergarten in Constanta with over 100 impoverished preschool-age children and co-financed there the erection of a water pump for a street with literally no access to running water, enabling 60 families (350 people) to obtain clean water for the first time.



Raiffeisen volunteer, Daniela Tinica, recruiting children for kindergarten, April 2014

Carrefour Romania provides financial support plus products for FCG beneficiaries, events, and health caravans, and gives store vouchers to local team members. Since 2013, Carrefour Foundation has granted over € 100,000 to the FCG annually.

Since 2007

RAIFFEISEN added to its long-term sponsorship of FCG a volunteer program among its Brasov employees, to offer them the possibility of supporting a social cause in their county. The volunteers spent four hours in a cold rainy day in Budila, going door-to-door helping recruit children for *gradinita* and subsequently raised contributions among their friends and colleagues for FCG. A video that documents this successful model of employee social engagement was created by film maker, Tom Wilson.

Since 2008

PORSCHE ROMANIA A major financial supporter for six years, Porsche donated an Audi SUV in 2013. In the past, Toyota and Fiat have donated vehicles. OvR's fleet of five vehicles covers over 100,000 km per year to train teams, oversee program implementation, monitor attendance and evaluate potential sites.

Since 2011

CARGILL, the American agricultural commodity company, offered to fund an ***FCG*** implementation in a community near its Craiova plant in 2011. The program results and support shown by local authorities led to its continued funding of Podari's FCG program (now in its fourth year), despite Cargill's closing its facility in 2013. In August 2014, Cargill announced that it would expand its financial support to a new program in Vrancea.

Since 2012

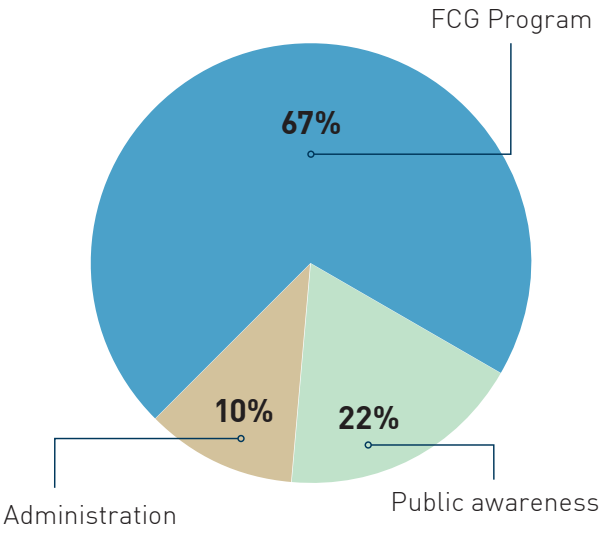
GlaxoSmithKline, the UK pharmaceutical company, is responsible for the addition of the health component to FCG described on page 21.

GDF SUEZ, the Belgium energy company, enabled the opening of a new kindergarten in Gura Sutii, Dambovita. The old kindergarten structure had been deemed unsafe for occupancy in 2011 but lack of funds prevented the local authorities from finishing the new structure. GDF helped finance the completion of the project and other companies soon followed. Dedeman, LaFarge, Holcim, Orange and Distrigaz Confort supplied materials. Energy Assistance donated electric. GDFSuez continues to support FCG in Gura Sutii, where extreme poverty qualifies half of the 74 children for FCG.

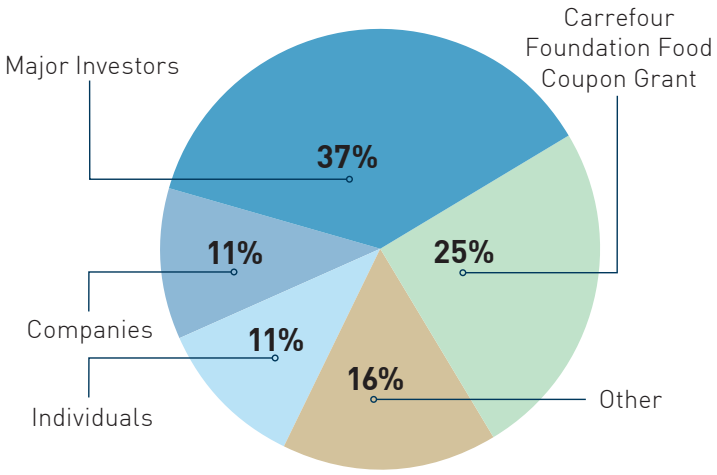
VI. Financial Summary

EXPENSES	2013	2014 (ESTIMATED)
Fiecare Copil in Gradinita Program	381,818	500,000
Salaries	156,761	200,000
School lunches & clothes	7,532	12,000
Classroom education materials	18,528	27,000
Medical expenses	18,054	16,000
Teacher training & Summer Schools	13,510	30,000
Transportation	39,128	40,000
Parent incentives in form of food coupons	128,305	175,000
Public Awareness	96,563	134,000
Salaries	72,992	80,000
Utilities	8,208	9,000
Other expenses	15,363	45,000
Administration	62,367	72,000
Salaries	34,862	37,000
Utilities	7,118	5,000
Consumables	9,797	10,000
Telecomunications	4,457	10,000
Equipment (inventory items, services, repairs)	6,133	10,000
TOTAL	€ 540,738	€ 706,000

EXPENSES 2013: € 540,738



INCOME 2013: € 683,050



INCOME 2013

Total Income € 683,050

Major Investors	Amount	in kind
BRD	15,000	
Cargill	15,800	
Carrefour Foundation	168,000	
Carrefour Romania	14,700	✓
GDF Suez Energy Romania	24,500	✓
GlaxoSmithKline	49,000	✓
Hilton Hotels	1,600	✓✓✓
Porsche		🚗
Pro TV	27,000	✓
Raiffeisen Bank	92,000	
Rompetrol	15,000	✓
Total	**€ 422,600**	

Other	Amount	in kind
Alex Fund	88,000	✓
Agentia Nationala pentru Romi	9,600	
British Embassy	12,200	✓
Global Fund for Children	760	
Total	**€ 110,560**	

Companies	Amount	in kind
Accent Travel	5,000	
Azomures	2,750	
Bucharest Stock Exchange	2,250	
Dedeman	5,500	
Duda Studio	500	
GSK Consumer Healthcare	2,750	✓
HelpNet	2,750	
ING Asigurari de Viata	5,000	
Media-Tique	3,500	
Microsoft	1,200	✓
Net-Connect	2,750	
Niran Co Products	750	
Orange	2,750	
Rinf Outsourcing Solutions	8,700	
Romexpo	2,750	
Siemens	5,000	
Smart Management Solutions	750	
Trident Pharma	9,600	
United Media Services	2,150	
UPC	2,750	✓
UTI	600	
Vodafone	2,750	✓
Zenith Media	3,800	✓
Contributions under € 500	1,890	
Total	**€ 78,190**	

Individuals	Amount	in kind
Cosmin Alexandru	520	✓
Bogdan Atanasiu / Dan Intl.	2,700	
Florina Brandhuber	800	
Daniel Daianu	3,500	
Adina Enescu	500	
Anca Ghika	800	
Steven & Valeria van Groningen	1,135	
Isabelle Iacob	1,000	
Ioana Alina Iordache	1,200	
Bryan & Mimi Jardine / Wolf Theiss	660	
John Ketchum & Edit Vesser	600	
Oliver & Fabiola Meister	825	✓
Konrad Miemann & Hannelore Spindler	1,200	
Cristian Mungiu / Voodoo Films	870	
Giulia Nahmany & Catalin Ilie	600	
Serban Patriciu & Dana Saftoiu	600	
Radu Pilat / Heist Industries	680	
Daniel & Florina Roberts	900	
Cristiana Stoica / Stoica & Asociatii	4,900	✓
Aude & Gilles Vaes Harou	620	
Anca Vlad/ Catena	2,750	
Peter Weiss & Aspasia Sigala	600	
2% Campaign	2,650	
SMS Campaign	18,000	
Contributions under € 500	15,090	
Event tickets/ movie	8,000	
Total	**€ 71,700**	

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VII. Supplemental material

FCG Essentials

CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPATION IN FCG:

High level of extreme poverty: In most rural areas, the majority of people are just scraping by, but FCG is only for children in families with:

(1) €35 maximum monthly income per member,
(2) Inadequate housing, &
(3) Low education level of parents.

Strong commitment and skills of local team: Communities must exhibit both commitment to the goal of getting every child in ***gradinita*** AND demonstrate that they have the human capital to do so.

Coherence of local early education strategy: renovated kindergartens and previous efforts at getting poor children into the education system are signs that the local authorities sincerely want to address the under-education of the poorest children. OvR looks for communities whose strategy goes deeper than simply wanting to raise the number of children in the kindergarten. An appreciation of the complexity of the issues and a willingness to tackle the obstacles, in whatever form they take, is important for success.

Large number of poor children in concentrated areas, rather than dispersed throughout the community, get priority consideration. Because the "ghettoized" poor are both geographically and economically marginalized, there are virtually no educated role models among them. Also, the power of peer pressure works wonders when a few of the more respected members of the enclave "get with the program".



HOW FCG WORKS:

- A **local team** (comprised of the school director, preschool teachers, a social worker, and a school mediator) implements FCG under the auspices of the mayor and local council. To participate in FCG, the local administration is required to convene a **"local action group"** to approve the program and customize the implementation plan according to the local situation.
- The Local Council must allocate at least €35 per year per child for **clothes and shoes** for the children in the program.
- In addition to providing **food coupons** for children's regular attendance, OvR allocates €15 per child per year so teachers can purchase **school materials** of their own choosing.
- OvR also provides **training and on-site consultation** to the Local Action Group and implementation team and organizes teacher training workshops in modern teaching methods.

Why Food Coupons Make the Difference

"It's so simple. I'm surprised we didn't think of this before."
Dullo Szilard, School Principal

All programs that advocate for early education recommend proactively enrolling children at risk, communicating with parents, and helping alleviate 'hidden costs' by providing clothes and school materials.

Fiecare Copil in Gradinita is the only program in Romania that offers impoverished parents financial incentives linked to their children's daily attendance in preschool (a variation on the popular "conditional cash transfer" method widely studied and increasingly used in Latin America and Africa). Information and mediation are important but it is the conditional incentives that move significant numbers of poor parents to act on a daily basis – and dramatically increase poor children's attendance.

To receive the coupons, children must attend preschool every day or have an officially excused absence and parents must attend a monthly parent-teacher meeting. While €12 per month in any form is an inducement to destitute jobless parents, the payment method – food coupons *(tichete sociale)* – is its own positive factor. The vouchers, accepted virtually everywhere, are better than cash because they are:

- More acceptable to other members of the community as a form of social aid;
- Easier to manage distribution and track;
- Less fungible (purchase of cigarettes and alcohol are excluded);
- Directly targeted to children's nutritional needs.

In Romania, hot meals at school are out of the question because rural kindergartens have neither the facilities for food preparation nor access to registered suppliers. Nor is cash a viable option because small rural villages do not have bank branches (and people subsisting under the poverty line rarely have bank accounts).

WHY FOOD COUPONS ARE BETTER THAN OTHER INCENTIVES

A study in Ecuador and a World Food Program report found that:

- When given cash, people bought less food than when given food coupons, and did not always spend the money on children's nutrition;
- Food coupons created a more diverse diet, while cash stimulants had no effect on children's calorie consumption;
- Food coupons increase household nutrients at 2 to 10 times the rate of a like value of cash income;
- There was no administrative cost difference between food coupons and cash;
- Food coupons generated twice their amount in economic activity (every dollar spent for these coupons produces $1.84 in economic production) .

WHY FOOD COUPONS AREN'T ENOUGH

While conditional incentives are a necessary ingredient in recruiting disadvantaged children and maintaining their regular attendance in preschool, other factors are also essential for permanent change. The involvement and continuous support of local authorities are very important for the program's success. Where the mayor, school inspector and principal fully support the program, its impact is huge. This is not only a consequence of funding and human resource allocation. **The crux is making early education of at-risk children a community priority**. When that happens creative solutions are found. The teams implementing FCG are proof that by continually bringing early education issues to local attention, holding regular Local Action Group meetings, and circulating the initial positive results, the community starts to believe change is not only possible, but that THEY are making it. Working in FCG, the members of local and county teams understand better the problems in their communities and become more motivated to go above and beyond their standard job responsibilities – thus, they become more active and involved in the life of the community.

Key ingredients of a Successful Program

TAKING ROOT IN THE COMMUNITY (P. 16)

In Cugir, most of the poorest children were registered for preschool through FCG. The City Hall and school management strongly supported the program, but some teachers and parents complained about having disheveled dirty children in the kindergarten. In the first year, a separate kindergarten group was formed in the school building. In the second year, the FCG children were dispersed by age, despite continued objections from a vocal few. Without the enduring support of the deputy principal and mayor, the program well might have died during this period. But they stuck by the program and in the third year conflicts diminished sharply. Cugir started its fourth year as an autonomous community in September 2014.

The first FCG year is usually characterized by tensions, as:

- Parents need time to shift their mindset from unconditional social aid to a system that requires them to bring their child to *gradinita* every day;
- Other parents need time to understand the poverty criteria (extremely low income and poor housing);
- Teachers need time to get used to FCG's strict daily attendance taking rules (children cannot receive the food coupons in a month where spot-checks reveal mistakes or omissions in attendance records);
- Everybody must adjust to unusually high numbers of severely disadvantaged children in the ***gradinita*** every day. This implies more work for teachers, and a whole array of hygiene, health and behavioral issues.

It is often in the second year that teachers start talking about the potential of children previously written off as slow learners, as the benefits of daily attendance start to show, and their relationship with parents improves. Teachers are encouraged to visit families which greatly increases their understanding of children's difficulties in studying at home.

In the third year, teams function more smoothly and have fewer disputes with parents. FCG becomes more ingrained in teachers', social workers' and school mediators' daily practices, and they resent less the fact that FCG does not offer extra payment. Most principals and local coordinators OvR interviewed showed very high trust in FCG's effectiveness, and wanted to continue it despite the hard work. OvR communicates constantly with local authorities, makes spot checks and studies attendance fluctuations to improve program results.

OvR empowers local coordinators for independent program management. Starting September 2014, 13 communities became "autonomous" (local coordinators make all program decisions alone, while OvR managers only revise quarterly reports and give occasional advice), and 8 "semi-autonomous" (local coordinators decide alone which children qualify for food coupons and suggest customized solutions to problems, while OvR managers continue to perform attendance audits). This will allow OvR staff to concentrate on training and supervising the 17 local teams starting the program this school year.

BUILDING PROFESSIONAL LOCAL TEAMS (P. 17)

Local Team Training: Each September OvR staff provides step-by-step workshops in ***FCG*** methodology for local teams to clarify program activities and roles. This is especially important for integrating new team members given high teacher mobility in rural areas.

Spring Teaching Workshop: Each spring OvR co-founder Maria Gheorghiu and Betsy Grob, an early education specialist from the Bank Street College of Education in New York, conduct on site trainings for teachers in FCG communities. In 2014 the focus was on building learning communities. Teachers who participate in OvR's summer workshops are invited to share their experience during the Best Practice Conference.

Coordinators' Retreat: August 2014's 3-day meeting in Fundatica, made possible by Raiffeisen Bank, brought together 45 local coordinators, school inspectors and County Council partners. It was the biggest such meeting so far, as the number of FCG communities have grown by 80% this year, and OvR must train a new generation of coordinators.

TRACKING CHILDREN'S ATTENDANCE (P. 18)

Accurate attendance keeping is essential in FCG methodology. But Romanian *gradinita* teachers lack the habit of keeping daily attendance because it is not strictly required: the Annual National Report for Education *(Raportul privind starea invatamantului)* includes only 'enrolment' as an indicator for preschool participation. There is also a generally accepted practice of inflating attendance records to reflect positively on the institution and ensure that teachers keep their jobs – by showing a minimum number of children in attendance so groups do not get combined and positions eliminated.

All too often when OvR staff visits kindergartens in prospective communities, they find only 10 to 15 children present out of an enrolment of say, 25 (i.e., 40-60% attendance). Teachers' most common explanation is "yesterday came more, but today many are sick". An extreme case occurred in May in a kindergarten with 80 registered children in four groups -- where only 6 children attended, and were being watched (not taught) by one teacher while the other three chatted in another room.

Officially *gradinita* starts at 8:00 and ends at 13:00. However in most communities, starting time is closer to 9 and dismissal is not later than 12. OvR requires teachers to fill out the attendance form by 9:00 each morning. Teachers often initially perceive this as an unnecessarily bureaucratic procedure, rather than a reliable way to track daily attendance and develop parents' habit of bringing them on time. Their resistance also may have deeper roots in the old habit of inflating attendance rates, described above. Teachers are also prone to leave the attendance sheet blank for children missing at 9, hoping they will show up later. OvR is strict about this procedure because unless the timesheets are consistently taken each day at the same time, children's arrivals tend to vary, negatively impacting class activities.

Spot Checks: OvR coordinators conduct frequent "spot-checks" of the attendance reports. An infraction results in a warning to the local team; for a second infraction, OvR withholds the monthly allotment of food coupons for the class in question. The local community can either: (1) cover the cost of that month's coupons from local funds, or (2) postpone distributing the food coupons for that month, explaining why to parents. Although unpopular, this policy is necessary to change both teachers' and parents' old habits. Otherwise, exceptions become the rule. The principal's involvement and support of the basic tenets and rules are key to smooth enforcement of this vital program procedure.OvR's initial and ongoing training, auditing of attendance records and application of sanctions when inaccurate or incomplete reports are detected have led to increased accuracy over the course of the four years and account for some of the decrease in reported attendance.

Keeping records: In 2012, OvR began the costly and tedious process of developing an online database for centralizing attendance information and eventually tracking students over the course of their education. In 2014 OvR piloted an online application for tablets and smartphones to monitor attendance in real time – designed to streamline attendance taking and OvR's end-of-month centralization work. With this special attendance-taking app, teachers can use Tabby to take attendance and submit daily attendance over the Internet, which could be a major boon to both the ease and reliability of the data collection. (Each child has a page of his own with his photo and details. Each morning the teacher completes the attendance app, and they are transferred in real time into the FCG database.)

FORGING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE POOREST PARENTS (P.19)

It is resoundingly clear that 1) the majority of uneducated, struggling parents do want their children to get a better education than they got and 2) these parents are willing to make personal sacrifices for their children's betterment.

Leslie Hawke, OvR cofounder

Sotron Doi ("Hopscotch 2"): This optional module is designed for parents who are anxious about sending their youngsters to *gradinita*. Sotron Doi is an 11-week program offered in the spring for 2-4 year old children and parents to prepare them to start daily preschool the next autumn. Parents (usually moms) and children meet with a teacher, paid extra by OvR, in a friendly, low-key setting for two hours a week so both children and mothers can acclimate to the school environment and become more comfortable with school personnel. It is also an opportunity to transmit good childrearing and health practices.

In the communities in which OvR operates, it is resoundingly clear that the majority of uneducated, struggling parents very much do want their children to get a better education than they got and that these parents are willing to make personal sacrifices for their children's betterment. Parent education programs are widely available in Romania, but there are none specifically targeted to functionally illiterate parents who often lack even the most basic awareness of good and bad childrearing practices.

IMPROVING CHILDREN'S HEALTH (P. 20)

GSK's 3-year €150,000 grant allowed OvR to add a health component to FCG in 2012. "Together for Better Health" (T4BH) invited local communities to develop their own projects accoding to local needs. Medical check-ups, inoculations, emergency medication, health mediator salaries, health education, and family planning were the main needs identified. Since autumn of 2012, 1200 children have received medical tests, vitamins, medicine, vaccines and needed interventions; 2400 adults were counselled about children's health, and five women were trained as health mediators by SASTIPEN, and their salaries covered for the first year.

While sorely needed, the project is not simple to implement, nor currently self-sustainable at present. The lack of integrated health, education and social services combined with the decrepit health system infrastructure in rural Romania present daunting challenges. Other obstacles to long-term success: lack of human resources, bureaucratic hiring hurdles, widely inconsistent quality of health mediator activity, and the discrepancy between national healthcare discourse and grassroots realities.

OvR will continue to provide health education, fruit and hygiene products, and to collaborate with medical caravans as part of FCG as long as GSK is a partner. But chances are that without GSK funds and OvR's oversight, this important element of FCG would atrophy.

D. GETTING THE WORD OUT (P. 21)

Cluj County was the first to allocate public funds to scale-up FCG. For 2013-2014, Cluj County Council's financial allocation covered 100 children, expanding FCG to four new communities: Bontida, Sacuieu, Calatele and Poieni. For 2014-2015, the program expanded to another 4 communities (Caseiu, Iara, Moldovenesti, Viisoara). Covasna County is analyzing taking over funding of the 250 children in current FCG communities, while OvR would use the released funds to expand FCG to another 250 children in the county. After two years of discussions with the Sibiu County, scaling up with government funds is currently on hold here.

SEE 2009-2014 Grant helps expand FCG in three counties. The purpose is two-fold: to strengthen OvR's partnership with County Councils and School Inspectorates as a further step toward national scale up and to add a more robust parent & teacher education component to FCG. OvR chose to utilize the EEA funds in Brasov, Dambovita and Dolj, due to the proven interest of public authorities in expanding the number of FCG programs in their counties. Thus, 500 more children will benefit from preschool this year. The objective is for participating County Councils to take over the cost of food coupons for the 2015-2016 school year.



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