Asociația OVIDIU RO

Fiecare copil în grădiniță

5th Year Report to Partners, Stakeholders & Investors

2014-2015 School Year

Maria Gheorghiu & Leslie Hawke

HOW ROMANIA IS CHANGING THE EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

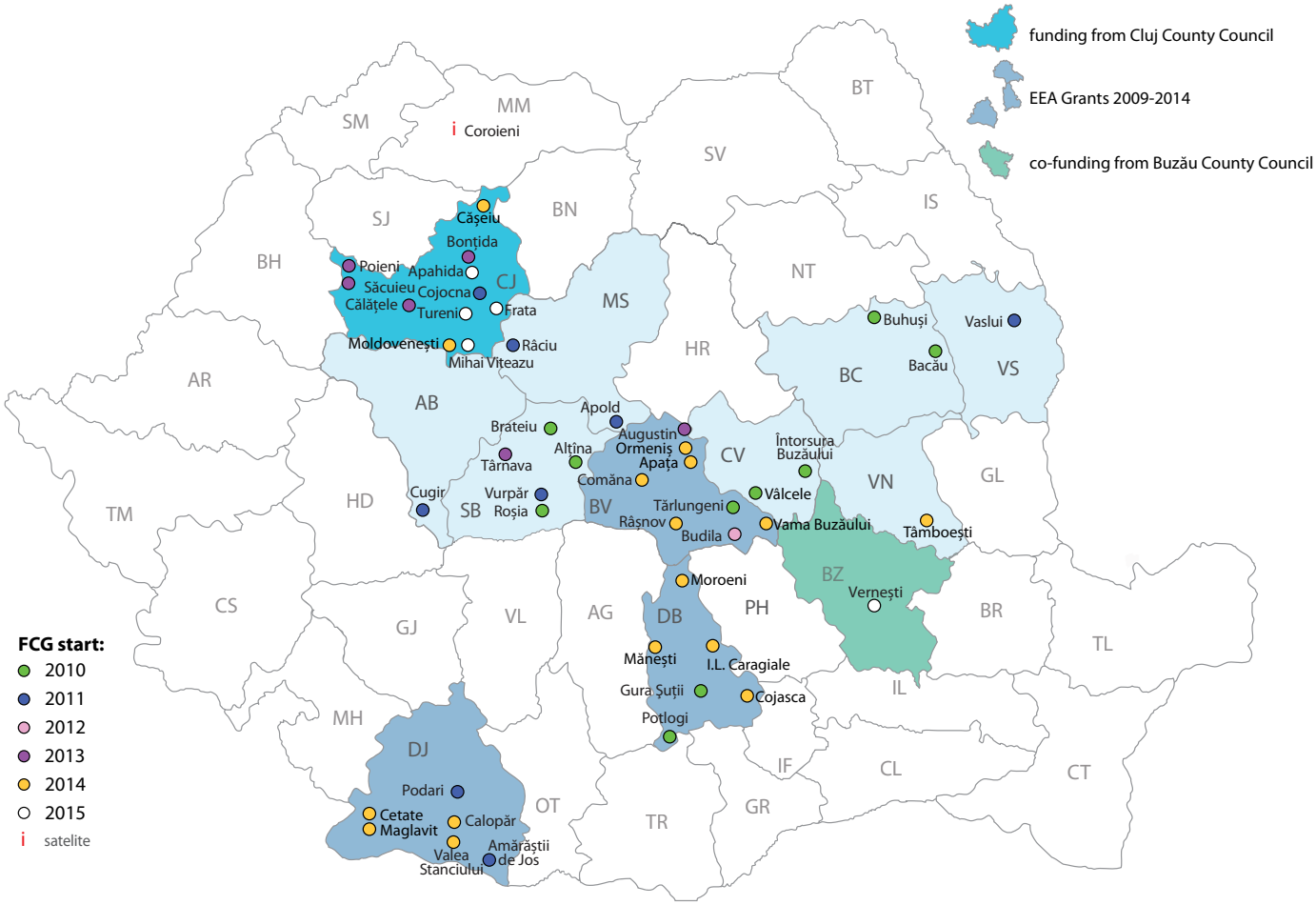


FONDUL ONG

The Alex fund

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Fiecare copil în grădiniță



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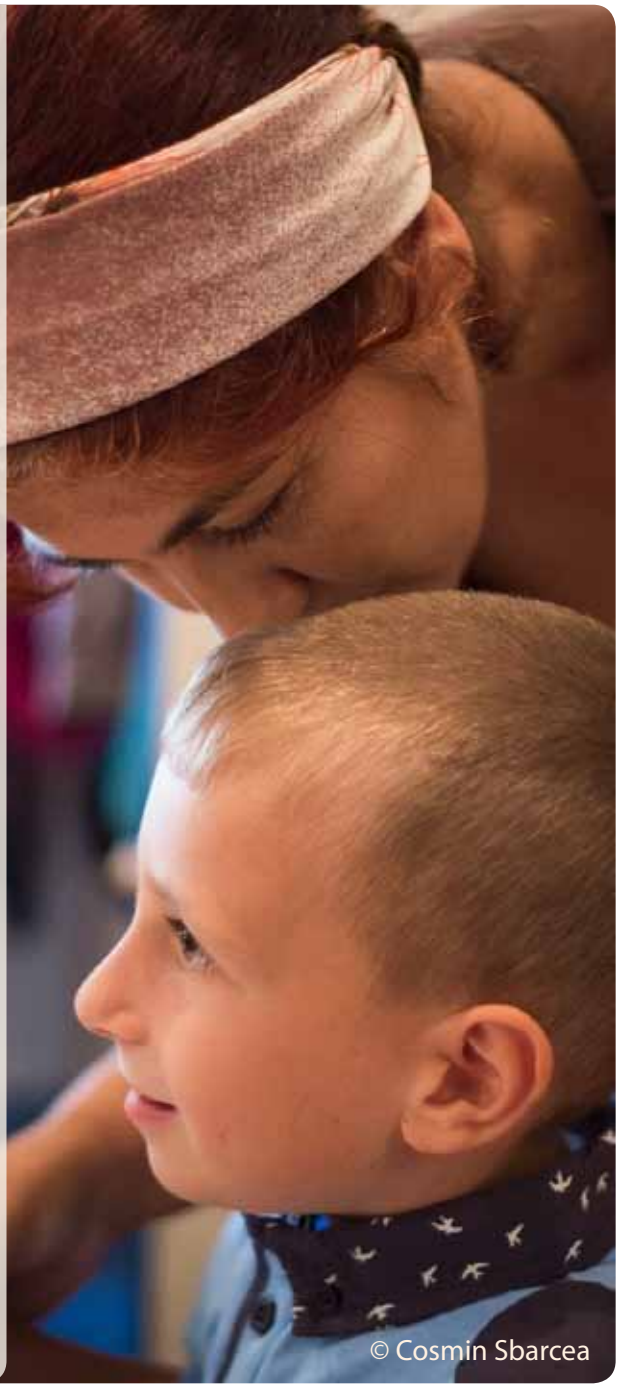
Consiliul Județean DAMBOVITA

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Major Investors in *Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță*:

aef · Athénée Palace Hilton · Cargill · Carrefour · CATENA · DEDEMAN · Fondation Carrefour · gsk · NN · Raiffeisen BANK · rompetrol (KazMunayGas Group Member)

How *Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță* (*FCG*) Works



"My older girl was also in the program, and now she's in 2nd grade. You might not believe this, but she only gets 10's. She told me that when she grows up she'll go to high school in Brașov. I already picture her holding the diploma."

Ioana Oțelaș, Budila parent

Each community's role:

- Local administration convenes a local action group to customize the implementation plan to local needs;
- Local Council allocates €35 a year per child for clothes and shoes for the children in *FCG*;
- Local team (school director, preschool teachers, social worker, and school mediator) implements *FCG*.

OvidiuRo's (OvR) role:

- Allocates €11 in food coupons per month to parents who take their children to preschool every day;
- Allocates €15 per child so teachers can purchase school materials of their choosing;
- Provides training and on-site consultation to the local action group and implementation team;
- Conducts teacher training workshops in modern teaching methods.

SUMMARY OF *FCG* Impact

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

- Increases enrollment and daily *grădiniță* attendance of the community's most vulnerable children;
- Maximizes use of human and material resources (heating and classroom maintenance remain the same if only a fraction of the 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 County Child Protection Services attention to the neediest families through day-to-day involvement of 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.

How Public Authorities Are Changing the Educational Landscape

"In my opinion, investing in early education is the most important investment we can make."
Vasile Ivanoff, General Secretary, Dâmbovița County Council

"OvR's program and food coupon mechanism is a remarkably successful initiative."
Ion Prioteasa, President, Dolj County Council

Romania made a major leap forward in addressing the extreme education gap between Roma[1] and the rest of Romania's children when the Parliament passed a bill promoting every child's right to participate in kindergarten on the 7th of October 2015. The vote in the Romanian Chamber of Deputies was 289 votes in favor, 1 against and 5 abstentions having gained full support from all the political parties in Romania. (The bill was passed by the Senate Chamber in June.)

This legislation will finance[2] a national program to encourage 3- to 6-year-old children living in poverty to regularly attend *grădiniță* (preschool and kindergarten). Based on OvidiuRo's *Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță* model, parents living under the poverty line will receive €11 per month if their child attends preschool every day.

Like many of the best programs, *FCG* originated "bottom-up" – as a joint venture between an NGO (OvidiuRo), local authorities and neighborhood schools – to address the widespread phenomenon of early school abandonment that was rampant in many poor rural communities. The authorities knew this was a serious problem but they had neither a long-term strategy nor the resources to tackle it. Many communities had benefited sporadically from short-term outside grants (e.g., Roma Education Fund, EU Social Fund, Swiss Fund) but most of these programs terminated as soon as the outside funds ran out, and therefore ***never lasted long enough to take root in the community or to make any measurable difference in student outcomes***.

Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță was different from these other programs in four basic ways:

1. **Significant investment from the local authorities:** The local council was required to provide at least €35 per child for school clothes.

2. **Long-term commitment from OvidiuRo**: It was clear that OvR was there to help develop and sustain the programs, not just to check their invoices.

3. **Medium-term management transition plan:** In 2014, OvR introduced a process to wean well-functioning programs from management dependence on OvR, making 13 communities "autonomous" (i.e., local coordinators made all program decisions and monitoring independent of *FCG*, while still providing quarterly reports to OvR). At the same time, eight communities became semi-autonomous. (OvR continues to monitor and audit attendance records but local coordinators make local day-to-day decisions.)

4. **Positive word of mouth:** The success of the pilot programs piqued the interest of other communities and county authorities, enabling the program to grow organically in the first few years.

Cluj County Council was the first public authority to allocate funds to scale-up *FCG* when in 2014 Cluj covered food coupon costs in four new communities. In 2015 the number of Cluj communities grew to 10. The County Child Protection Services runs the program in partnership with the County School Inspectorate.

[1] Program participation is based solely on family income, not ethnicity. Nonetheless, the majority of families that qualify due to extreme poverty are Roma, although most do not identify as Roma on government census forms.

[2] Approximately 39 million lei for 111,000 children.

The Role of the European Economic Area Grant



"The EEA grant played an indispensible role in catapulting FCG from a small constellation of pilot projects to a national program in 18 months." Leslie Hawke, OvidiuRo cofounder

The 2014 European Economic Area grant from Norway, Iceland & Liechtenstein vastly accelerated OvR's parnerships with county councils and school inspectorates as a step toward national scale up. The grant also added a more robust parent and teacher education component to *FCG* and funded an independent impact evaluation that concluded that *FCG* has a strong impact on attendance of poor children in preschool AND on the attendance rate after they leave preschool (see p. 16).

Most importantly, with the Civil Society Development Foundation tehnical assistance, the EEA grant enabled OvR to target its financial and human resources to expanding the program in three counties: Braşov, Dâmbovița, and Dolj, where the County Councils were already favorably impressed with *FCG* outcomes.

The OvidiuRo RFP sent to all jurisdictions in the three counties resulted in 45 applications for the six slots in the EEA funded budget. Thanks to the fortitude of OvidiuRo's field team – and financial support from **Raiffeisen Bank** in Braşov, **Cargill** in Dolj, **Carrefour Foundation** and other donors from the business sector, OvR was able to accept over twice as many new communities as the grant covered – from 6 to 13, thus ***providing early education to an additional 700 disadvantaged children***.

The most ambitious grant objective was to transfer the food coupon costs from the EEA Grant to the county operating budgets by the beginning of the 2015 school year. Toward this end a series of meetings and Media Day events were held in each county. These activities were effective in raising general awareness and garnering support from county authorities – but they also brought to the fore a major hurdle to scaling up nationally: did counties really have the authority to allocate food coupons (*tichete sociale*) for this purpose?

Tichete sociale are mentioned in the 2011 Social Assistance Law as an acceptable form of social benefit payments, but the necessary secondary legislation setting forth the specific regulations, was never issued. While food coupons were being used by local authorities in certain counties (e.g. Cluj), Braşov, Dâmbovița and Dolj county councils were not willing to allocate public money for this purpose without the clear, specific legal authority to do so – despite encouragement from both the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labor.

After numerous government meetings, in late February 2015, it was concluded that the only way to clarify the mechanism by which public authorities can allocate food coupons for preschool attendance, was to draft a special law. The support and counsel of the State Secretary of Labor, Codrin Scutaru led to the introduction of legislation by a prominent Parliament member, Daniel Constantin, in March. Despite the widespread opinion among policy advisors and politicians alike that a quick legislative fix would be virtually impossible, OvR proceeded to work on getting the legislation passed so that the programs started in 2014 with EEA funds could continue for the 2015 school year even though the EEA monies had largely run out.

A favorable notice from the Government in September, led the Deputy Chamber Labor Committee to modify the legislation. Instead of merely giving the counties the authority to allocate food coupons for this purpose, the Chamber of Deputies amended the legislation to make the program (food coupons conditional on preschool attendance) a national program funded from the state budget – since the counties that needed it the most would be the least able to afford it from their local budgets. The bill was passed on the 7th of October and signed into law by the President on the 28th of October 2015.

The Business Sector's Role


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"We have been supporting OvidiuRo for over eight years because we believe that education has the power to change destinies." Steven van Groningen, President & CEO Raiffeisen Bank Romania

Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță is an award-winning program that has been cited as a model by both *The Economist* and the World Bank, and yet *FCG* has received very little European government support over the years. Rather, ***it is the Romanian corporate sector and an American non-profit organization, The Alex Fund, that have enabled FCG to grow from 13 communities in 2010 to 45 communities in 2015.*** Over 50 companies have contributed to sustaining OvR since 2004. Some of them, like **Carrefour**, **Raiffeisen** and **KMG** (formerly Rompetrol) have transformed their donations into major, sustained, long-term investments in early education.

"Major Investors" are companies that provide multi-year support of €25,000 or more. Some companies, such as **Cargill**, support a particular community's program – while others (e.g., **ProTV**, **GlaxoSmithKline**, **Dedeman**) cover the general operating costs currently helping OvR reach 2500 children in 12 counties.

Food coupons, conditional on preschool attendance, will soon be an option in all Romanian communities, but all the other costs of implementing, expanding, and monitoring the program – potentially for over 100,000 children in extreme poverty – still need to be provided by OvidiuRo. Only an escalated investment from the business sector will allow the program to flourish all across Romania and achieve the same success with public funds as it did as an NGO pilot project.

Since 2004

Athénée Palace HILTON 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 "Small Change, Big Difference" campaign.

KMG International (formerly Rompetrol) has provided fuel for OvR staff to travel over a million kilometers since 2004 and organized clothes and food caravans to *FCG* communities. The partnership was recognized at the 2014 "Gala Societății Civile" in Bucharest.

Since 2005

PRO TV has been OvR's main media partner for more than a decade. Over the years **ProTV** has played a critical role in increasing public awareness about the importance of early education for Romania's disadvantaged children. The monthly reports on the prime time news hour have illustrated dozens of stories about the children and parents in OvidiuRo's programs and these news items have helped counteract common stereotypes, such as the idea that poor Roma parents do not want to educate their children.

Since 2006

CARREFOUR's investment in OvidiuRo's work evolved from sponsoring a table at an event in 2006 to an exemplary multi-faceted corporate-NGO partnership for which **Carrefour** and OvR won First Prize at the 2012 "Gala Societății Civile". **Carrefour Romania** provides financial support and donates products for *FCG* beneficiaries, events, and health caravans, and gives store vouchers to local team members. In September 2015, **Carrefour** (1) provided school supplies for all 5000 kindergarten children, (2) conducted a cash register campaign, and (3) ran OvR's public awareness campaign video and radio spots in its 28 hypermarkets. To date, **Carrefour Foundation** has also granted a total of €577,700 to the *FCG* program.



"Although Parliament voted to nationalize the food coupon component, all the other FCG program costs are still the responsibility of OvidiuRo."
Leslie Hawke, OvidiuRo cofounder

Since 2007

RAIFFEISEN added to its long-term sponsorship of *FCG* a volunteer component in 2014 for its Braşov employees to offer them the possibility of supporting a social cause close to home. A documentary created by film-maker Tom Wilson is available on the Ovid.ro website. The volunteer program was expanded to the "Kindergarten Teacher for a Day" Project in September 2015. See page 11 for more about this hugely popular volunteer action.

Since 2011

CARGILL 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 fifth year), despite **Cargill**'s closing its Craiova facility in 2013. **Cargill** expanded its financial support to a new program in Vrancea in 2014 and continues its support for the 2015-2016 school year.

"We appreciated the public-private sector partnership created for supporting this program and I strongly believe this is a model to follow in other areas, also." Vasile Varvaroi

Since 2012

GlaxoSmithKline is responsible for the addition of the health component to *FCG* described on page 26. A three-year grant in 2012 was extended in 2015 for an additional three years.

Since 2014

AEF (Romstal, Autoklass, et.al.) is supporting 140 children in the *FCG* program in Roşia (Sibiu). With its national network of stores, **Romstal** has helped deliver and store books, educational materials and in-kind donations for the program. **AutoKlass** donated the use of two cars in 2015 to facilitate the *FCG* impact study described on page 16.

Dedeman, one of Romania's most successful home-grown companies, has supported OvidiuRo's work since its early days in Bacau. In 2014, **Dedeman** became a Major Investor by sponsoring 100 children. In 2015 **Dedeman** also donated outdoor billboards and printed materials for the public awareness campaign.

"OvidiuRo is bringing the poorest children to grădiniță, giving them a better chance to education than their parents had." Dragoş Pavăl

Catena, the Romanian pharmacy chain, sponsors 270 children in *FCG* programs annually.

Since 2015

NN Romania - the life insurance and pension services provider currently supports 260 *FCG* children in Dolj County in Amărăştii de Jos, Calopăr and Valea Stanciului.

"Supporting a program with such a valuable mission means, in fact, a smart investment that our company makes in the future of Romanian society." Marius Popescu

The Diplomatic Community's Support



Ambassadors' Early Education Initiative meeting, February 2015

"This program encourages access to education, and that means promoting equal opportunity."
Norwegian Ambassador Tove Bruvik Westberg, Mănești, Dâmbovița County, June 15, 2015

At the behest of former US Ambassador Mark Gitenstein, the **Ambassadors' Early Education Initiative** was formed in 2012 by ten ambassadors to Romania from Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, UK and USA. The initiative supports OvR's efforts to promote early education ***for all***. In the spring of 2015, Ambassador Brummell, Ambassador Lauk and US Chargé d'affaires Thompson visited *FCG* programs.

On 15 June, Ambassador Tove Bruvik Westberg and the Minister of Labor Rovana Plumb visited the *Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță* program in Drăgăești-Pământeni, Mănești village, one of the six communities in Dâmbovița where the **EEA Grant** through the NGO Fund enabled 285 children living in extreme poverty to attend *grădiniță* (compared to 80 children enrolled the year before).

Beyond Romania: an *FCG* inspired program in Bulgaria

In 2012 OvR was selected by the World Bank Strategic Impact Evaluation team (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. The purpose was to compare the efficacy of conditional cash transfers linked to preschool attendance with other types of interventions in increasing preschool attendance by Roma children. However, the funding for the large number of new sites required by the rigorous experimental design was not to be found at that time 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 6,000 Bulgarian children living in 240 communities. The results are informing the development of more efficient, evidence-based early education policies in Bulgaria and the region.



Civil Society Involvement



2015 Public Awareness Campaign

"Text 'GRADI' to 8844 and help a poor child get a proper preschool education and a chance to become an active member of the society."
Cătălin Măruță, Pro TV star

This year's public awareness campaign was a major collaborative effort involving numerous talented individuals, sponsoring companies, and media outlets, including but not limited to:

- **Marcel Iureș**: narration of audio and video spots
- **Tom Wilson**: direction of TV & radio spots
- **Cătălin Măruță**: public endorsement on the 'La Măruță' show and on prime-time ProTV News.
- **Chainsaw Europe**: editing of TV & radio spots
- **Zenith Media**: pro bono air space
- **30+ TV channels & 7 radio channels**
- **Dedeman**: outdoor media billboards in 100 locations, nationally
- **Carrefour**: in-store promotion and advertising in 28 hypermarkets
- Print ads and editorial content courtesy of **Forbes, BIZ, Sapte Seri, GETT's, Hotnews, Nine O'Clock, Business Review, Gazeta de Sud, Monitorul Expres, ColumnaTV, Urbankid.ro, Totuldespremame.ro**
- **Enescu Festival** open-air screenings and leaflets
- **Edenred:** over 700,000 flyers promoting the SMS
- **Social media** (e.g. the *FCG* supporter testimonial campaign on Facebook)

Phase One: Awareness building
Aug 15 – Sept 15

Following a series of Media Days in Braşov, Dâmbovița and Dolj, conducted in partnership with local and county officials, the campaign called on the general public to take an interest in whether their community's poorest children were attending early education programs.

Phase Two: Call for recurrent SMS donations
Sept 15 – Ongoing

The public was invited - via radio, TV, print ads, online banners and social media - to make a monthly €2 SMS donation ("text 'GRADI' to 8844") to support the early education of poor children. OvR donors were treated to a screening of the acclaimed documentary *Seymour: An Introduction* to officially launch the SMS drive, courtesy of **CinemaPRO**, **Hilton**, **Carrefour**, **Coca-Cola HBC**, **Smybox**, **Digital Cube**, and **Irina Margareta Nistor**.

To promote the SMS drive, after personally visiting the *FCG* programs in two communities, Cătălin Măruță featured two stories about *FCG* families and regularly encouraged poor parents to send their children to preschool on his popular TV show. Over 6000 SMS's were sent in September, October and November. The public response prompted OvR to continue the SMS recurrent donation mechanism indefinitely.

2015 Volunteer Project: "Kindergarten Teacher for a Day"

A hugely popular initiative inspired and empowered by Raiffeisen

"Every visit we received was wonderful for the kids because it rarely happens for somebody else to spend time with them. It made them feel they were important - and then their parents were so proud and happy too. It was like a confirmation - that they are on the right track by bringing the children to grădiniță. For me, as a teacher, every handshake from the visitors meant hope. Thank you!"
Izabella Orban, Apața School, Brașov County

This autumn, 30 cultural and media personalities and 54 Raiffeisen employees accepted OvidiuRo's invitation to be a "Kindergarten Teacher for a Day". Every school day in October these volunteers were brought from Bucharest to one of the *FCG* programs sponsored by Raiffeisen in Brașov and Covasna.

Designed to give the children a chance to interact with other adults from the outside world – ***it turned out to be an eye-opener for both the children and the volunteers***. Greeted with curiosity and enthusiasm, the substitute teachers quickly became heroes to the children as they read them stories, taught them how to draw animals, introduced them to classical music, turned them into TV stars and characters in a story conceived on the spot, and many other creative activities devised by the volunteers themselves.

At the same time, the visitors from Bucharest gained new understanding of daily life among the rural poor. They also provided an important affirmation to the teachers who, day in and day out, receive very little appreciation for their hard work and influential role in the lives of Romania's most vulnerable children.

In January, the volunteers will gather to share their experiences and discuss the implications for possible future actions.

***Marcel Iureș**, Hetea, Covasna County, September 2015*



© Nicoleta Lungu

2015 Volunteer Project



***Andreea Esca**, Hetea, Covasna County, October 2015*

"The only chance those children have to change their destiny is education. But to convince the families to walk long distances to get to the grădiniță in bad weather, to convince authorities to invest in their education and sponsors to support the cause, to overcome preconceptions and lack of interest - these are all barriers that could stop a good initiative. But OvidiuRo managed to find a miraculous solution to overcome all these obstacles and to bring these poor children to grădiniță."
Oana Giurgiu, film maker

"If you look into their eyes you will be able to understand what I can't write for you in just a few words."
Dan Tăpălagă, journalist

***Adelin Petrișor**, Budila, Brașov County, October 2015*



2015 Volunteer Project



***Dana Dulciu**, Raiffeisen volunteer, Apața, Brașov County, October 2015*

"After spending the day with the children I realized that most of our stereotypes are built on the presumption that we all get the same start in life. Access to water and electricity is taken for granted nowadays, but not in Apața."
Răzvan Exarhu, journalist

Special thanks to the 54 Raiffeisen volunteers and: Liana Alexandru, Cezar Paul Bădescu, Cosmin Bumbuț, Marius Chivu, Marius Constantinescu, Dana Deac, Andreea Esca, Răzvan Exarhu, Cristina Flutur, Mihaela Frank, Cristian Ghinea, Oana Giurgiu, Steven van Groningen, Peter Hurley, Eugen Istodor, Marcel Iureș, Marius Manole, Cristian Mungiu, Bogdan Nicolai, Philip O'Ceallaigh, Ana-Maria Onisei, Adelin Petrișor, Florin Piersic Jr., Dan Rădulescu, Marian Râlea, Victor Rebengiuc, Adina Rosetti, Cristina Stănciulescu, Dan Tăpălagă, Ioana Ulmeanu, Luiza Vasiliu.

***Florin Piersic Jr.**, Apața, Brașov County, October 2015*



2015 Journalism Fellowship

In Memory of Oana Livadariu


© Magda Bărăscu

Oana Livadariu (19 October 1980 - 9 January 2015), OvidiuRo's beloved PR specialist and a gifted and respected journalist, died of brain cancer at the age of 34. Oana was a passionate advocate - and practitioner - of using the media to shine a light on the great disparity between urban progress and rural decline in Romania. In her honor OvidiuRo created a special fellowship to encourage young journalists to document Romania's rural, largely invisible poverty, that keeps far too many children undernourished, uneducated and without hope for a better future when they grow up.

Fifteen applications were reviewed by journalists Viorel Ilişoi and Andrei Crăciun and photographer Daniel Vrăbioiu. Four €1200 fellowships, contributed by **The Alex Fund**, OvidiuRo's partner organization in the US, were awarded to:

- Mihai Voinea & Auraş Mihaiu (Adevarul)
- Lina Vdovîi & Ioana Cîrlig (casajurnalistului.ro)
- Oana Dan & Silviu Panaite (dela0.ro)
- Alexandra Dincă & Bogdan Dincă (hotnews.ro)

The miracle in Iazu, the village where gypsies send their kids to discover the universe: "*We didn't even know there is such a thing!*"

Mihai Voinea, *Adevărul*, November 1, 2015


© Auraş Mihaiu

In this Roma community in Dâmbovița, the number of children who attend gradinita rises every year. (…) Somehow, the idea that the parent who doesn't send his kid to *grădiniță* will bear great shame has spread through this community.

(...) "When the parents come to pick up the little ones they're curious to know what we taught them. We have a board where we show the children's work. The parents look there and feel proud and even brag," says kindergarten teacher Mihaela Oprea.

(...) Education is a tough path for impoverished communities, because it never brings results overnight. It takes time and several generations for the effects to be seen. Somehow though, the Roma of Iazu seem to be getting it. (…) The parents have started to realize the transformations their off-spring are going through after their first encounter with education. The youngest members of the family, who had been marginal when it came to family's priorities, have now become the subject of the elders' pride and ambition. The Roma of Iazu are not aware of the bureaucratic wars waged in their name (…) but they've shown that, when offered a hand, they are ready to take it.

(...) In the 1970s, there wasn't a school in Iazu. Gypsies lived as they had always done: digging the ground, baking bricks in dirt ovens and making just enough to keep from starving… and they were largely illiterate (…) "After 1990 it got even tougher. Seeing that a diploma didn't guarantee employment, people found no point in getting an education and started to give up on it. They preferred to send their children to work or keep them around the house. School abandonment had gotten massive," says vice-principal Ion Gheorghe.

This situation is replicated in poor communities all across the country.In fact, Romania has one of the highest illiteracy rates in Europe. This is not only a shameful statistic but a reality that produces negative effects across all sectors. Children who don't go to school or who drop out early generally end up as welfare-dependent adults.

Results for 2014-2015 School Year

"I don't know how to read or write, but all three of my kids have been to grădiniță. One day my youngest came home and wrote his name on the wall. I was speechless."
FCG Parent, Ocolna, Amărăștii de Jos

Without the *Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță* program, ***most at risk[3] children in these communities 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 and behavioral difficulties. These children are now acquiring the same knowledge, skills, and habits as their "Main Street" peers.

The Actual Numbers:

2400 children in 96 kindergartens in 43 communities in 11 counties

1750+ high-risk children regularly attended *grădiniță*

4500 children age 3-14 participated in summer programs

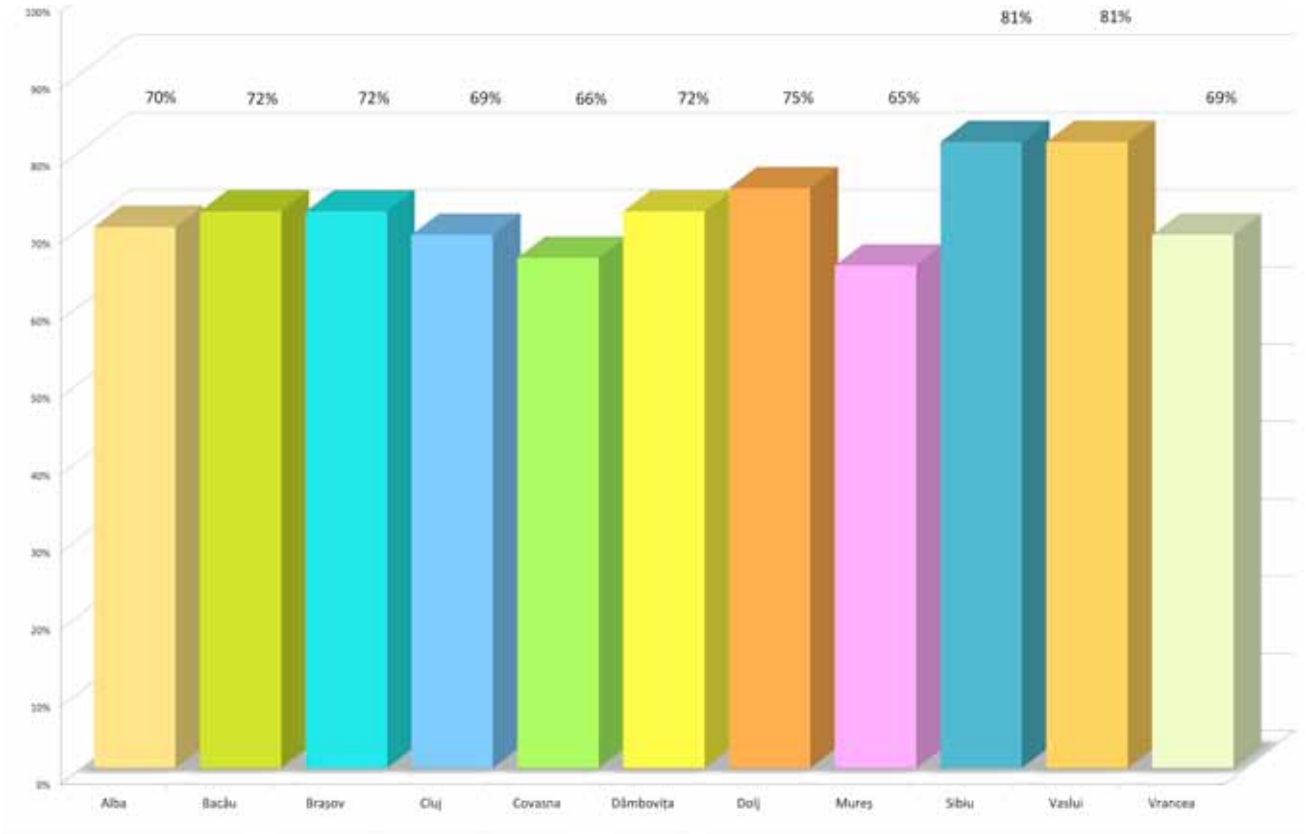
2500+ children and family members received health care

1080 toddlers and their mothers got accustomed to *grădiniță*

1900+ parents participated in *grădiniță* activities

550+ teachers trained in child-centered methods

Average attendance rate: 73%



[3] At-risk students are those who, by virtue of their circumstances, are statistically more likely than others to fail academically. At-risk or high-risk status is often associated with belonging to an ethnic minority, being disabled, or being poor. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/At-risk_students).

Results

Independent Impact Evaluation

"FCG offers a cost-effective way to incentivize poor parents to send their children to preschool. This behavior change seems to translate to an increased willingness to attend school well beyond the end of the program."
P. 5 of Executive Summary

An impact study was funded through the NGO Fund in Romania from the EEA Grant from Norway, Iceland & Liechtenstein (see p. 6) and led by two external experts, German researcher Wolfgang Stuppert, and MIT PhD. candidate Gabriel Kriendler[4] .

The study, conducted between April and July 2015, analyzed 13 communities where *FCG* has been implemented since 2010 or 2011, and compared this group of "program" communities to a group of 26 "control" communities where *FCG* had not been implemented but that were otherwise similar. Program and control communities were located in the same counties, had roughly similar population levels, poverty levels, and fractions of ethnic Roma. Moreover, educational outcomes at preschool and early primary level in these two groups were similar before *FCG* began being implemented in program communities.

The evaluation team found that a direct outcome of the program was that the fraction of children who enroll in kindergarten goes up to 84% in program municipalities, from 68% in comparable municipalities. **That is, the number of children who do not enroll in kindergarten is roughly halved by the program.** The program's effects do not stop at these initial benefits, however. The researchers found that children who have attended kindergarten during the *FCG* program are roughly 30% less likely to not enroll in primary school. In addition to that, the fraction of children who attend school very infrequently is reduced, and completion of the first school year is significantly more likely.

The results indicate that *FCG* increased enrollment rates for children of preschool and early primary ages. In particular, the program had an immediate and large effect for children of preschool age. In 2011, the fraction of children between 3 and 5 years old who were not in preschool was 16% in the program communities, compared to 32% in the control communities. Thus, **the FCG program was associated with a reduction in half of the number of preschool age children not enrolled in preschool.**

For 6-year-old children, the impact of the *FCG* program rose gradually over time between 2011 and 2014 (the last year for which data were available). This is consistent with the fact that the number of *FCG* beneficiaries who graduated from preschool rose over this time period. Non-enrollment in primary school in 2014 in this group was 9% in *FCG* communities, compared to 13% in the control communities. This corresponds to a 30% decrease in the number of non-enrolled children of this age.

In addition to the students who never enrolled, 1.6% of 6-year-old students dropped out during the 2014-2015 academic year in *FCG* communities, compared to 2.1% in the control communities. This corresponds to **a reduction of one-quarter of the drop-out rate.**

In addition to its contribution to enrollment rates and prevention of school abandonment, the *FCG* program also has a strong impact on the attendance rate of children after they left preschool. In the 2014-2015 academic year, *FCG* communities had between 19% and 25% fewer 6-year-old children with more than 100 absences per semester. In other words, the *FCG* program is associated with a reduction in the number of children with many absences.

Overall, the FCG program was found to have a large, lasting effect on poor children who participated in it. These children were significantly more likely to be enrolled in preschool, as well as to be enrolled in the first two levels of primary school: *clasa pregătitoare* and *clasa întâi*. They were less likely to drop out of school, and their attendance rate was higher overall. These results re-affirm the importance of preschool education for later outcomes, in line with a large body of previous research studies throughout the world.

prepared by Wolfgang Stuppert and Gabriel Kriendler
September 2015

[4] Findings were based on a compilation of five different and complementary data sources, on educational and poverty outcomes of children who were actual and potential *FCG* beneficiaries. These data were obtained from the National Institute of Statistics, the Ministry of Education, ANPIS, official school ledgers, as well as from repeated surprise visits to classrooms to measure attendance in real circumstances.

Results

Şotron Summer Schools

350 teachers trained, 4500 children engaged, 290 schools involved

"This workshop is the only holiday experience these children have during the summer. For them there's no such thing as 'going on vacation'. They haven't ever been out of their village before."
Daniela Ţugulea, Teacher Roşia, Sibiu County

Between July 1 and August 31, 4500 children had the opportunity to learn about themselves, about others, about the world around them - from the most familiar things to the distant stars.

Şotron Summer Schools arose from the need to:

- Train teachers in interactive child-centered methods;
- Provide the trained teachers with immediate practice in these methods;
- Offer less advantaged children some rich summer learning experiences;
- Introduce poor parents to the education system in a low-stress setting;
- Utilize school facilities in the off-season.

Structured as a 2-week module, *Şotron* can be adapted for use by children from age 3 to middle school age. The children explore the world around them, starting with their own body, and expanding to their community and ultimately to other galaxies through a special set of *Şotron* materials that include a book, notebook, maps, magnets, and drawings. ***Designed specifically for summer programs in disadvantaged communities, Şotron provides the basis for a new learning model that invites exploration***, investigation and structured discussions created to help children learn how to articulate, interpret and analyse the world around them.

Children's reactions and interactions during class were televised in a special ProTV segment: http://www.ovid.ro/2015/09/stirile-protv-atelierele-de-vara-sotron/

Since 2001, 10,000 children and over 2,000 teachers have participated in *Şotron* Summer Schools.

Primary funder for the 2015 Summer Schools:

gsk
do more
feel better
live longer



© Bogdan Dincă

Frequently Asked Questions


© Cosmin Sbarcea

Why does *Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță* work?

"Once poor parents are integrated in the educational system, they DO bring their children to grădiniță – even if they are not eligible for the food coupons anymore." Simona Cristea, Budila social worker and program coordinator

FCG 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 *grădiniță***.

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 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 €11 in food coupons at the end of the month if they take their child to preschool regularly. In Romania, the monthly child allowance (which is unconditional) is €19, so this is a significant increase for families surviving on their children's allowance.

Why Do Food Coupons Make the Difference?

"It's so simple. I'm surprised we didn't think of this before."
Szilard Dullo, Araci school principal, Covasna County

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.

FCG 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 €11 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.

Frequently Asked Questions

Are Food Coupons Enough?

"The crux is making early education of at-risk children a community priority."
Maria Gheorghiu, OvR cofounder

Absolutely not! 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.

Key Elements of a successful program:

1. **The continuous unequivocal support of local leaders**. Where the mayor and principal fully support the program, its impact is huge. This is not only a consequence of funding and human resource allocation. When early education becomes a community priority, 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 better understand the problems in their communities and become more motivated to go above and beyond their standard job duties – thus, they become more active and involved in the life of the community.

2. **Door-to-door recruitment**. Ensuring that all 3- to 6-year-old children are identified requires teams of mediators, social workers and teachers to knock on doors in the poorest enclaves and talk to parents about the benefits of preschool for their child. Many uneducated parents neglect enrolling their children for quite logical reasons: *grădiniţa* is not mandatory, it involves costs (like school clothes and shoes; they do not realize its important for their children's development, or discomfort in dealing with the school authorities based on their own past experience).

3. **Strict attendance monitoring**. Incentives only work when the rules are meticulously followed. In the beginning parents have to be helped to understand that they must bring their children to preschool *every day*; if the child is sick or an unexpected situation arises, they must bring a medical note, or announce beforehand to the teacher and sign a "*scutire*". This requires teachers to consistently take daily attendance, only excuse documented absences, and make no concessions or special cases. The first couple of months are always turbulent, as some parents will want to see how far they can bend the rules. Strict interpretation in the beginning will pay off in the long run.

4. **Parent involvement.** Monthly food coupons are conditional on two factors: (1) children's daily attendance, and (2) parents participation in a monthly Parent Day activity plus five mornings spent as a teacher's assistant. These interactions with teachers in the school environment have far-reaching consequences on impoverished parents' comfort level with the teachers and the education system in general. They increase parents' appreciation of the teachers and their awareness of their child's progression in school. It also helps teachers to better understand where their students are coming from.

5. **Provision of school supplies and clothes and shoes** for children who are living under the poverty line.

But after *Grădiniţă*, What Then?

"It really shows in clasa pregătitoare. 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, Alba County

"FCG also has a strong impact on the attendance rate of children after they leave preschool."
2015 Independent Impact Evaluation led by Wolfgang Stuppert and Gabriel Kreindler

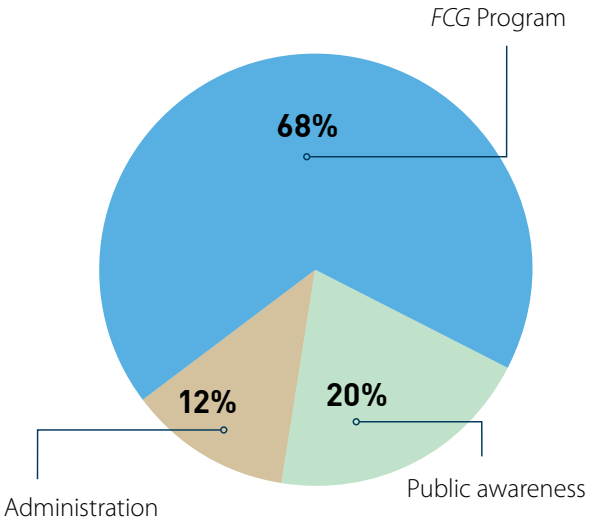
Primary school teachers consistently report a major improvement in the "teachability" of disadvantaged children who have had the benefit of preschool – and the more, the better. Most children who were in the program now have 'very good' or 'good' attendance in school (over 80% of school days), despite the lack of food incentives. See p. 16 for the results of a 2015 independent evaluation of *FCG*. The full report is available at www.ovid.ro/en/studiu-de-impact/.

Financial Summary

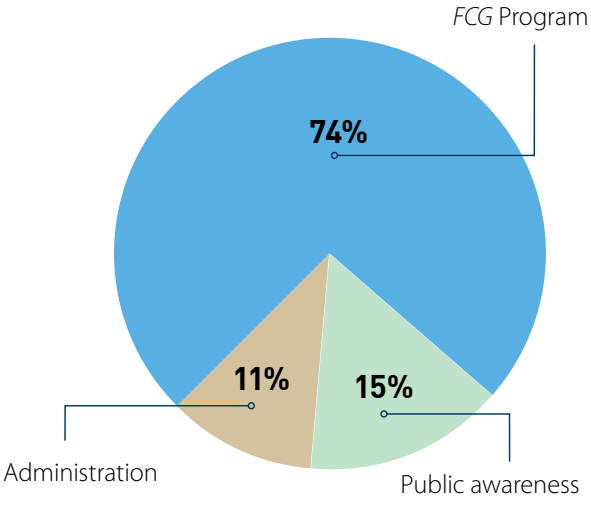
EXPENSES 2014 & 2015

	2014	2015 (ESTIMATED)
Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță Program	481,839	573,000
Salaries	172,864	195,000
School lunches & clothes	8,651	20,000
Classroom education materials	29,838	85,000
Health-related	25,043	5,000
Teacher training & Summer Schools	18,852	53,000
Transportation	55,940	35,000
Parent incentives (food coupons)	170,651	180,000
Public Awareness	138,490	115,800
Salaries	108,088	85,300
Printed materials	7,389	23,000
Other expenses	23,013	7,500
Administration	88,605	81,000
Salaries	48,510	46,000
Utilities	10,389	7,000
Consumables	7,467	12,000
Telecommunications	6,348	9,500
Equipment (inventory items, services, repairs)	15,891	6,500
TOTAL	€ 708,934	€ 769,800

EXPENSES 2014: € 708,934



EXPENSES 2015: € 769,800



Financial Summary

INCOME 2014 - € 947,470

Major Investors	Amount	in kind
AEF	36,000	✓
Cargill	6,500	
Carrefour Foundation	208,000	
Carrefour Romania	15,000	✓✓
Dedeman	27,220	✓
Fildas / Catena	59,500	
GlaxoSmithKline	63,000	✓
Hilton Hotels	1,720	✓✓✓
KMG International	8,000	✓
LIDL	22,600	
Pro TV	52,000	✓✓
Raiffeisen Bank	4,500	✓
Total	**€504,040**	

Other	Amount	in kind
Alex Fund	73,700	✓
Israeli Embassy	8,000	
EEA Grants 2009-2014	122,000	✓
Total	**€203,700**	

Companies	Amount	in kind
Amset Prodexim	1,000	
Ana Hotels	680	
Anconi Construct	700	
B2B Expert Mobile	2,300	
Banca Transilvania	1,600	
Bucharest Stock Exchange	4,500	
Cargus International	1,700	
Deutek	4,500	
Domo Retail	3,400	
Electro Real System	680	
Estep B2B	5,400	
GDF SUEZ	8,000	
Japan Stone SPA	680	
Kaufland Romania	7,200	
Keep Calling	3,300	
KPMG	4,100	✓✓
Louis Berger	3,400	
Luxten Lighting Company	1,020	✓
Madrivo	13,850	
McGuireWoods	680	✓
Meaning & Ider	1,230	
Niro Investment	1,200	
Total		

Companies	Amount	in kind
Noriel	1,360	✓
Novomatic / Admiral	3,400	
Ogre Events SRL	2,400	
Orange Romania	3,400	
Patria Credit	4,500	
Pfizer Romania	3,400	
ProEstetica Medical SRL	1,700	
Regatta Estate SRL	1,700	
Rinf Outsourcing Solutions	7,200	
Romstal Imex SRL	760	✓
SE-GES Energy Investments	3,400	
SIF MOLDOVA	9,500	
Technosoft	1,350	
The Artist	650	✓
Transiris IT Consulting	1,020	
Trident Pharma	5,660	
United Media Services	5,620	
UPC	6,800	✓
Victoria Art Business Center	3,400	
Vilau | Asociates	3,400	
Vodafone Foundation	3,400	
Contributions under 500	2,450	
Total	**€ 145,140**	

Individuals	Amount	in kind
Bogdan Atanasiu / Dan International	2,720	✓
Klaus Bleckenwegner	500	
Florina Brandhuber	1,000	
Irina Budrina	680	
Daniela Bulat	1,020	
Anca & Guy Burrow	1,100	
Marc Cannizzo	500	
Adela Vrînceanu & Serge Ioan Celebidachi	8,500	✓
Sandro Celebidachi	1,020	
Selina Celebidachi	1,020	
Sion Celebidachi	1,020	
Nelu & Rada Coman / Transenergo	5,100	
Daniel Dăianu	2,500	
Laurențiu Floroiu	800	✓
Mikael & Sorina Fredholm	1,020	✓
Jan Garrison	1,200	
Anca Ghika	10,200	
Vlad Grama	1,000	
Ioana Iordache	1,020	
Total		

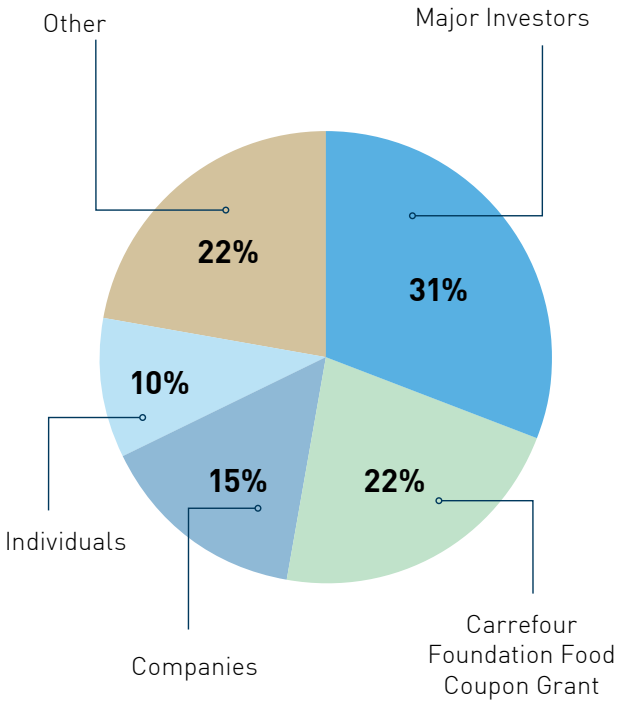
Individuals	Amount	in kind
Bryan & Mimi Jardine	1,360	
Diana Cosmin & Eduard Mărgelatu	680	
Fabiola & Oliver Meister	1,700	✓
Maurice Meiță / Casa di David	2,040	✓
Roxana Morea	550	
Cristian Mungiu / Voodoo Films	640	✓
Mihaela Nenciu & Andrei Neguț	500	
Valeria & Steven van Groningen	950	✓
Jerry van Schaik / Rembrandt Hotel	680	
Irina Pogonaru	830	✓
Georgiana & Florin Pogonaru / ECDL	900	
Ștefania Popp	1,360	
Laura Kungl & Cristina Sârbu	720	
Konrad Niemann & Hannelore Spiendler	2,850	
Cristiana & Valeriu Stoica / Stoica și Asociații	3,400	✓✓
Alexandra Tînjală		✓✓✓
Pompiliu Voinea	500	
Susan Walsh	680	
2 % Campaign	4,260	
Contributions under 500	28,070	
Total	**€ 94,590**	

Contributions under € 500

Aag Investment Management, Mirela Anton, Asociația Creative Human, Lucian Belaşcu, Diana Bereczky, Florin Bănuță, Andrei Crăciun, Mioara Codeț, Romeo Combei, Hans Dewaele, Duda Studio, Georg Falke, Klaus & Claudia Galin, GC Business Consulting, GETT's, Camelia Gubavu, Suzana Gras, Ștefan Hantig, Mihaela Hojda, Ramona Iluca, Ioana Ivan, Alexandru Lăpușan, Marilena Mariţescu, Lucian Manolea, Laura Marian, Alexandru Miulescu, Antoaneta Minculescu, Mihaela & Mihai Neagu, Raluca Nedelcu, Georgiana Roşca Neranzi, Virginia Oţel, Daniela Onac, Sandra Pralong, Ana Prisacariu, Andrada Sas, Nora Seroussi, Ștefan Slavnicu, Smart Profit Solutions, Walter & Yvonne Spindler, Cătălina Stanciu, Alice Tache, Trends by Adina Buzatu, Tulemod, Rupert Wolfe-Murray, David Weiss, Andaluzia Zait.

Laurenţiu Floroiu & Mihai Selegean fundraiser via Galantom

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Appendix A: Key Ingredients of an Effective Program

1. Taking Root in the Community



"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, Cluj County

"The third year of the project was the best so far. Not only that the children's improved attendance and progress are obvious. My surprise was that the parents' attitude changed dramatically. They see the value of preschool now"
Marilena Andreescu, Podari school principal, Dolj County

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.

Inter-sectoral 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.

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 *grădiniță* every day;
- Other parents need time to understand the poverty criteria (extremely low income and inadequate 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 *grădiniță* 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 at home, which greatly increases their understanding of their students' difficulties.

In ***the third year***, teams function more smoothly and have fewer disputes with parents. *FCG* becomes more ingrained in the daily practices of teachers, social workers and school mediators, 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.

By ***the third or fourth year***, most programs are ready to function autonomously (i.e., local coordinators make all program decisions independent of OvidiuRo). Starting in 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 eight became "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).

2. Building a Professional Local Team

"It's a long road from 'access' to real 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

OvidiuRo conducts annual workshops to share common problems and best practices and help teachers, social workers, and school mediators work more effectively as a team in the interest of supporting children from disadvantaged families.

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 conducts on-site trainings for teachers in *FCG* communities. In 2015 the focus was on building learning communities. Teachers who participate in OvR's summer workshops were invited to share their experience during the August Best Practice Conference.

Coordinator Retreat & Best Practice Conference: August 2015's three-day meeting in Fundățica, made possible by **Raiffeisen Bank** and **EEA Grants**, brought together 70 teachers, local coordinators, school inspectors and County Council partners. Guest speaker and early education specialist Jane Krill Thompson urged teachers to let the parents know how very important they are to their child's development and future:

> *"We need to help them to understand the value of education and keeping their children in school. You can't change what you don't know. Treating parents with respect, offering support and resources, and giving them information that they can use daily in their homes is a good place to start."*

3. 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

Accurate attendance keeping is the very foundation of the *FCG* methodology. But Romanian *grădiniță* teachers have not developed the habit of keeping daily attendance because it is not strictly required: the Annual National Report for Education (*Raportul privind starea învățământului*) uses only 'enrollment' 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 enrollment of say, 25 (i.e., 40-60% attendance). Teachers' most common explanation is that "yesterday more came but today many are sick." An extreme case occurred 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.

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 their children on time. Sometimes teachers leave the attendance sheet blank for children missing at 9, hoping they will show up later. OvR is strict about this 9:00 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 the reason to parents. Although unpopular, this policy is necessary to change both teachers' and parents' ingrained 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 time.

4. Forging Relationships with the Poorest Parents



"Of course I want to bring him. After the first day he said he wants to go everyday. It makes me happy to see him happy."
Parent, Roșia, Sibiu County

"It is resoundingly clear that the majority of uneducated, struggling parents 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."
Leslie Hawke, OvR cofounder

Through strategic incentives *FCG* gets impoverished parents in the habit of bringing their children to *grădiniță* 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 have 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's education 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).

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. Under the 2014 EEA grant, OvR's partner, Asociatia Learn and Vision, designed a parent education component for *FCG* parents. Starting with needs-assessment focus groups in each community, three types of training sessions were developed: with poor parents on good childrearing practices, with teachers on multigenerational education, and with "resource parents" and school mediators on parent-teacher relationship.

Șotron Doi ("Hopscotch 2"): This optional module is designed for parents who are anxious about sending their youngsters to *grădiniță*. *Șotron Doi* is an 11-week program offered in the spring for 2- to 4-year-old children and parents to prepare them to start daily preschool the following September. 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.

5. Improving the Health of Vulnerable Children

"Because of its excellent results, we extended the program for another three years. Projects with real impact take time, and this requires long-term support." Petru Grădinariu, GSK Romania

The lack of integrated health, education and social services combined with the decrepit health system infrastructure in rural Romania and the shockingly primitive living conditions of poor Roma present daunting challenges to the health and physical development of Romania's poorest 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.

A three-year €150,000 grant from **GlaxoSmithKline** in 2012 allowed OvR to add a health component to *FCG*. The "**Together for Better Health**" (T4BH) project helps poor children get routine medical check-ups, identify potential health problems and receive appropriate treatment and medication. The project has also facilitated the involvement of health mediators and increased immunization rates in isolated communities. The grant was renewed for another three years in 2015 allowing OvR to continue providing medicine, vitamins, fruit and hygiene products, and health education to parents and children, and making diagnostic services available through periodic medical caravans. A new component has been introduced for the 2015-2016 school year: PHASE (Personal Hygiene & Sanitation Education) – a school-based basic health and hygiene curriculum designed to help mitigate diseases caused by inadequate access to clean water.



Appendix B: Why Early Education Matters So Much

"Early childhood is the most rapid period of development in life. There is no other time that can have such a significant impact on intellectual skills, language development, literacy, social/emotional capacity, and resilience. Helping children develop this foundation early on can change the trajectory of their life path."
Jane Krill Thompson, Early Education Specialist

"Children who don't go to grădiniță are lost from the start."
Târnava teacher, Sibiu County


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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.

By increasing daily attendance in public early education programs, *FCG* helps impoverished children increase their chances of completing the 10 years of schooling mandated by Romanian law. 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. In fact, 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.

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 five, 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.

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 are too little, too late 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 pregătitoare*.

This skills gulf is not just a problem for the poor – it creates a social and economic burden that must be borne by the 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.

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