

**“TOGETHER FOR BETTER HEALTH, FOR US, BY US”
March-June 2014 Report**

Goal: to improve health and access to medical services for impoverished children, aged 3-5, from OvidiuRo’s *Every Child in Preschool* communities.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING REPORTED PERIOD:

Children and families

- 240 people (90 children and 150 adults) in Nou village, Rosia commune, Sibiu County, received free medical consultations during the Medical Caravan organized by 27 medical students and 12 specialists from the Together for Rural Health project.

Health and hygiene education

- 320 children ages 2-4 took part in the educational module “Hopscotch Two” focused on health, hygiene, and independent life skills – March-June 2014. 31 teachers from 14 communities conducted the eleven-week module for toddlers and their parents.
- 49 teachers participated in a training session on Hopscotch Two organized by Maria Gheorghiu, OvR’s executive director and head trainer.
- 29 teachers participated in a speech therapy workshop on March 21, held by Mirela Serban, the therapist who works with the children from Altina (Mirela Serban is also the Sibiu county speech therapist coordinator). The objective of the training was to help teachers learn how to address the needs of children with poor vocabularies, undeveloped phonetic hearing and difficulties in pronunciation by offering them easy methods they can apply in classroom.

Face-to-Face meeting and round table with the health stakeholders

- The F2F meeting on June 12-13 consisted of a one-day field visit to Valcele commune, Covasna County, and a round table with Romanian officials and health stakeholders hosted by the Slovakian Ambassador, His Excellency Jan Gabor. The community visit allowed the group to get acquainted with the program and see the realities of Roma health in poor Romanian settlements before discussing the most pressing problems to Roma health with the authorities and other health stakeholders.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Medical caravan

The classrooms in Nou village (Rosia commune) were transformed into medical examination rooms for two days in March. Twelve specialists, accompanied by 27 medical school students from the Carol Davila University of Bucharest, offered free consultations to the villagers in paediatrics, cardiology, internal medicine, rheumatology, ophthalmology, and laboratory medicine. 150 adults and 90 children were examined. Patients had a general check-up and, depending on the results, went to a specialist to receive medication, EKGs and ultrasounds. The Medical Caravan also included training on HPV (Human Papillomavirus) prevention and a class on personal hygiene and healthy nutrition for young children. The courses were taught by the participating medical students.



The most common health problems identified among the 90 children were hypothyroidism, heart disease, skin infections, pneumonia, and hearing and vision problems. Many kids had cavities, vitamin deficiencies and rickets. Some of the children were overweight due to improper nutrition consisting of high carbohydrate foods such as potatoes, rice, bread, prepared snacks, and sweets.



Through the T4BH grant, OvR supported the medical caravan with medicine and travel reimbursement. In order to keep the costs of the caravan as low as possible, the OvR team and the students sought donations of in-kind goods and services – food from Carrefour, the bus from Atlassib, water from LaFantana, medical equipment from Beurer and Colentina Hospital, medical robes from Hilmi Medical Center. The local community also contributed. The City Hall provided free accommodation for the students and doctors, put the school bus at the students’ disposal (the accommodation and meals were in one village and the consultations were in another). The cook from Waldorf Kindergarten was in charge of all the meals. The school and City Hall staff obtained beds for consultations from a nearby children’s camp. The mayor’s wife, who runs a local NGO, offered some medical supplies. The mayor, his wife, the local coordinator, teachers, and school mediator assisted each day to make sure everything went smoothly. The caravan generated two TV news reports and five articles in the local media and blogs.

Follow up on individual cases

Raul from Rosia, Sibiu County



One of the TV news reports introduces Raul, a four year old born with a hearing disorder. Even though his mother knew about his problem, she never took him to the doctor, but when she heard about the caravan, she brought him for a medical check-up and the doctors confirmed that he needs a hearing aid. Afterward, his mother took him to the Children’s Hospital in Sibiu. The doctors there recommended a hearing aid, bought in April from the T4BH grant. The doctors also recommended that Raul attend the Hearing Impaired School in Sibiu where he could work with a speech therapist daily and advance more

rapidly. Unfortunately, his mother doesn’t agree because of the distance and his young age. Raul’s teacher will continue to monitor his situation.

New glasses for Adriana and Izabela, from Gura Sutii, Dambovita County

For the poorest children of Romania that need glasses, like Adriana and Izabela (5 years old), a visit to the doctor’s office means spending the family’s monthly income. Poor parents cannot even imagine covering the cost of the glasses; hence, eye problems remain untreated and worsen. Through the T4BH grant, Adriana and Izabela received their first pairs of glasses, but soon after, both girls broke them. With help from GSK, Izabela received a second pair and on June 6 Adriana and her parents came to Bucharest where she had some tests and got new glasses for free. In a few months she will return to Bucharest for a medical check-up.



Ana Boros from Hetea, Covasna County

During one of her visits in Hetea, Gabriela, the health mediator, was approached by 44

year old Ana Boros because she felt a great pain in one of her breasts. Through the health grant, Ana benefited from several medical tests: blood tests, a secretion exam, mammography, a breast and axillary ultrasound, and was seen by an endocrinologist. After she gets all the results, Ana will receive the diagnosis and the doctor will prescribe treatment.

Trainings

Speech therapy workshop

On March 21, 29 teachers participated in a workshop held by Mirela Serban, a well trained speech therapist, on working with pre-schoolers who are not intellectually stimulated at home. The teachers were exposed to modern methods of developing vocabulary and communication skills. Many of the participants said that the course was very useful; the following week they started introducing phono-articulatory exercises and facial gymnastics in their daily activities.



Hopscotch Two training

For three hours, 49 teachers and Maria Gheorghiu, OvR's executive director and lead trainer, discussed the developmental particularities of two-year olds in terms of early brain development and brain architecture, with a focus on health and basic hygiene. The teachers shared best practices in helping parents enhance their children's natural learning ability.

Hopscotch Two

Hopscotch Two is a kindergarten class held once a week from March to June for children without previous preschool exposure. In a non-threatening, low-key setting, toddlers and their parents (usually moms) gradually adjust to the routines of preschool, so it will be easier to adapt to coming everyday next year. This spring, 320 children learned the basics about health, hygiene, nutrition and life skills. The T4BH grant covered:

- (a) The stipend for 30 teachers who conducted the module;
- (b) A healthy snack for both children and parents.
- (c) Hygiene products and school supplies.



Face-to-Face meeting

On June 12, the T4BH group traveled three hours to Valcele to visit two settlements where OvR implements the health component – Araci and Hetea. Before heading into the community, the group visited the Araci kindergarten where they talked with the teachers and observed a health activity.

The big group parted into two smaller ones and headed to the communities of Hetea and Araci





accompanied by a member of the local team (school director, doctors, nurse, former health mediator, teachers, County Health Department representative). The visit confirmed everybody's expectations: Poor Roma live in deplorable conditions (often more than seven or eight persons sharing a room with no windows), in isolated areas where over 300 people share one water pipe. After the visit, the group met with the mayor. All parties agreed that the project has helped but there is still much work to be done. There was a long discussion between the community

representatives about the health mediator positions as well as the need for additional support for the doctor. This is a difficult issue as many of the reasons for which more people cannot be hired are bureaucratic and there seems to be no solution at this time. Gabriela, the health mediator trained by Sastipen, gave up being a health mediator, since the City Hall made no steps towards hiring her. The visitors asked the mayor how he planned to improve the health conditions of the poorest individuals. He replied that access to potable water was his highest priority.

The round table discussion with key Romanian health stakeholders, hosted by His Excellency Jan Gabor, the Ambassador of Slovakia to Romania, took place on June 13. Among the participants were the personal advisor of the Minister of Health, doctors and health mediators, representatives from the British and Bulgarian Embassies, the National Institute for Public Health, as well as other NGOs. First, the four GSK NGOs presented their programs, focusing on the obstacles encountered at a grassroots level when it comes to poor people's access to health care. The main theme of the dialogue concerned common problems encountered and lessons learned from participants' experiences. The conclusion was that the public sector has to collaborate with the private sector and join efforts in changing national health policies. The European Public Health Alliance published an article about the Face-to-Face meeting, which can be found here: <http://epha.org/a/6089>.



Filling in the gaps

From March to June, the standard activities continued. The immunization campaign in Hetea was successful; the vaccination rate grew by over 50% in less than two years. Every week the doctor is now seeing over 50 individuals (who no longer have to travel 6 km to get to the doctor's office). The doctor joined the T4BH group for the community visit, but had to leave very quickly to take care of emergencies. The ten children from Altina who benefited from weekly sessions with the speech therapist made some progress, but in order to catch up they have to continue their therapy in the next school year. Fifteen children obtained transportation to medical specialists and a group of eight mothers from Buhusi continue to receive monthly birth control pills.

CONTINUING CHALLENGES

- **Lack of human resources:** For example, not enough speech therapists and parents' inability or unwillingness to work on speech problems at home.)
- **Systemic hurdles to family planning:** The lack of specialized health services available locally, high cost of contraceptive program implementation, and the difficulty of discussing contraception openly in poor communities.
- **The bureaucracy involving the hiring of public employees:** Out of five mediators trained, only one was officially hired – the other three got jobs as a school mediator, preschool teacher, and class assistant. The fifth and most proactive mediator finally gave up because the City Hall still had not hire her 12 months after she got her diploma. Consequently she took a job as a caretaker in a hospital for the elderly.

- **Severe deficiencies in the medical and social service infrastructure in rural areas** and the discrepancy between the national discourse and realities at the grassroots level. A first step would be to get decision makers to visit communities so projects can be based on a better understanding of the real obstacles that stand in the way of access to health for the poor.
- **Funding** so all children are able to receive needed medicine, vitamins, immunizations and health education.

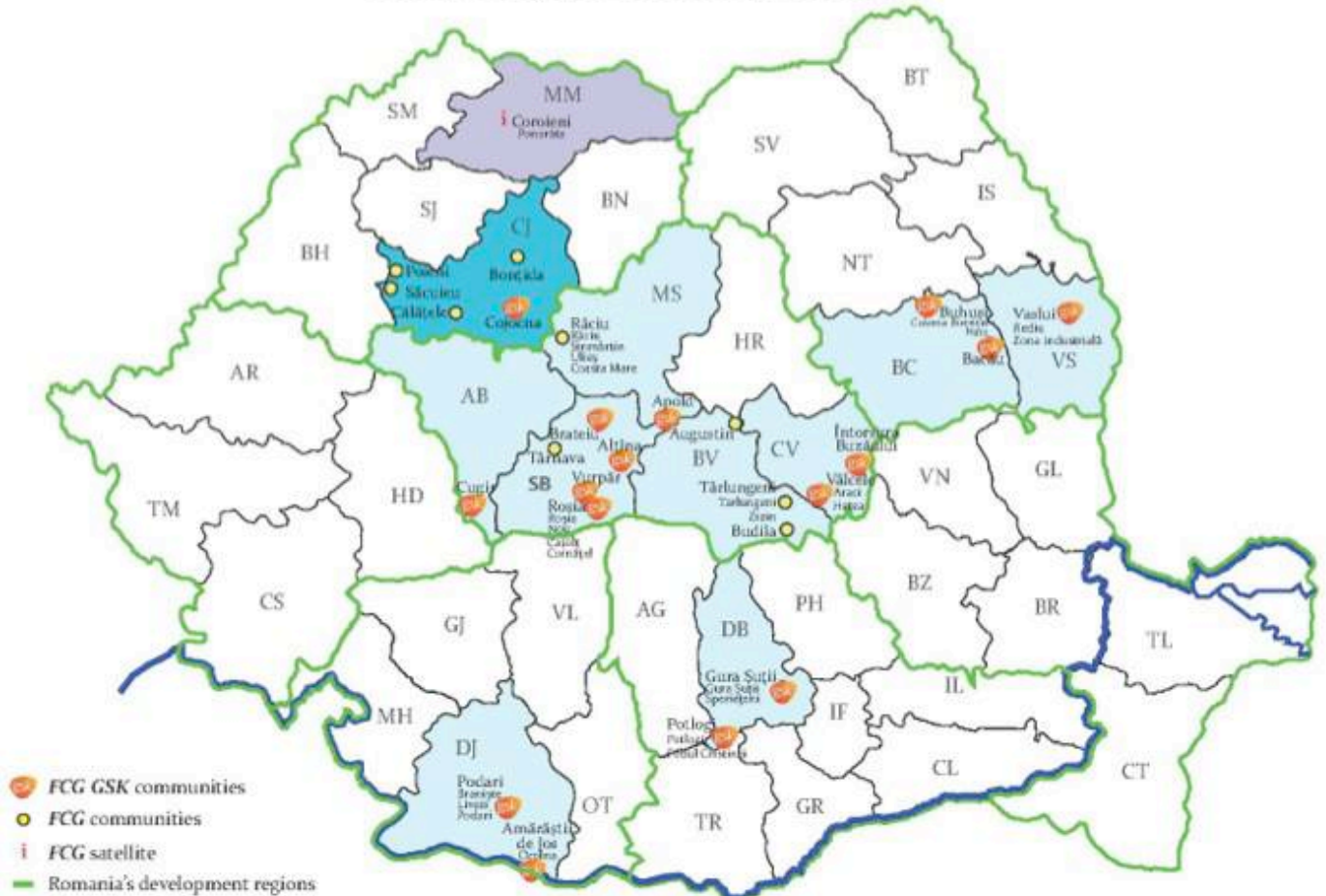
TIMELINE FOR NEXT THREE MONTHS

- New medical caravan together with the medical students – community TBD.
- First medical dental caravan in Sibiu community.
- Continued standard health activities in 16 communities from September – medicine and transportation to the doctor’s, health education, fund for hygiene (toilet paper, soap) and monthly fruit day.

APPENDICES

1. **Grant communities:** 16 *Vâlcele, Întorsura Buzăului (Covasna), Cojocna (Cluj), Apold (Mureș), Roșia, Vurpăr, Alțîna, Brateiu (Sibiu), Cugir (Alba), Amărăștii de Jos, Podari (Dolj), Potlogi, Gura Șuții (Dâmbovița), Buhuși, Bacău (Bacău), Vaslui (Vaslui)*

Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță GSK 2014



2. **Interim Financial Report** – see attached Excel document