

**“TOGETHER FOR BETTER HEALTH, FOR US, BY US”
July-September 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

- 198 people (119 children and 79 adults) in Budila, Brasov County, received free medical consultations during the third caravan organized by OvidiuRo together with Bucharest Medical Students’ Society within Together for Rural Health project. Thirteen specialists, accompanied by 24 medical school students from the Carol Davila University of Bucharest, offered free consultations to the villagers in paediatrics, cardiology, internal medicine, dermatology, infectious diseases, urology and ophthalmology.

Health and hygiene education

- 36 children ages 4-7 took part in 2 pilot Summer Schools focused on health, hygiene and independent life skills – August 2014. 8 teachers were trained by Maria Gheorghiu, OvR’s executive director and head trainer.

Vitamins

- 1644 children from 18 poor communities have received vitamins for a 3-month treatment that aims at increased immunity, appetite and focus at school.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Medical caravan

A two-day mobile hospital was set up by OvidiuRo and Bucharest Medical Students' Society in Budila, a poor community where people rarely make it to the doctor unless their condition is already life threatening.

From the 119 children and 79 adults who were examined, around 30% received recommendations regarding further specialized medical investigations. As expected in extremely poor communities, many of children’s diseases are caused by malnutrition (consisting mostly in carbohydrates) and lack of hygiene. Food diversification among babies is made very early with juices, sweets and French fries. A collateral outcome is that a baby with severe breathing disorders was sent by doctors to an emergency room in Brasov where the medical team decided to put him in foster care because of his mother negligence (it was the 21st hospitalization).

The local team from Budila set-up the school with beds for consultations, they provided accommodation for the doctors and hired somebody for the weekend to prepare the meals. The local team also spread the word in the village regarding the free medical examination and supervised the activities. Now the social worker is monitoring children in need for treatment.



Health Summer Schools

We organized two pilot sessions in Budila (for three weeks) and Cojocna (for one week) to properly adapt Summer Schools' methodology for 2015 edition. Maria Gheorghiu, OVR's executive director and head trainer was the one that held all the workshops in order to have a first hand experience with children of various ages.

During Summer Schools, children learned about their bodies, health and hygiene through games and stories, but actually a large amount of time was spent on teaching children necessary basic good habits, as properly sneezing, blowing their noses, washing hands or brushing teeth. These experiences reinforced our belief that it's a great need of summer schools in order to join teacher's efforts to adapt children in kindergarten.



Vitamins

We managed to order vitamins from a manufacturer, so we've got a very good deal (we received a double amount of vitamins + 20 % discount) The number of children that are receiving vitamins was raised from 1200 to 1644 and we plan to provide other 200 children from new FCG communities with vitamins in the next 6 months. Moreover, children will receive vitamins for three months instead of two, from October to December. Nevertheless, our choice to order chocolate flavored vitamins has been shown to be tricky given the unexpected effect that children associated vitamins with chocolate. On one hand it made it difficult to open discussions about a healthy lifestyle starting from this confusion, but on the other hand there was no need to convince every day children to take the vitamins since they found pleasure in it.

Follow up on individual cases

As an outcome of the medical caravan and through T4BH program, 4 children from Budila received financial support for further investigations in Bucharest and treatment (transport, parents' hospitalization, medicines). Adriana was found underweight, with moderate malnutrition and anemia, Darius is suffering from sequel of rickets, Benjamin was found severely underweight, with sequelae of rickets, suffering from malnutrition, phimosis and hepatomegaly (enlarged liver) and Ionel was found with atria septal defect (congenital heart defect). The social worker is now monitoring their health conditions.

Vladut Ganea from Hetea has returned to Bucharest at Marie Curie Hospital, as recommended, to have a surgery for right tibia malformation. The hospital conditions are pretty bad, for several days Vladut and his mother didn't had their own bed so they had to sleep with another couple of mother and children in a one person bed. Now they've got only a small children's bed



where both of them are sleeping. Vladut is supervised by one of the most reputable doctor in orthopedics in Romania, but the hospital is too crowded, it has a bad management and each patient receives very little attention (for example, a lot of children have 3 weeks since they were hospitalized without any deeper investigation, they are just sitting and waiting for their turn). Through T4BH program, we are giving them all the support needed day by day (food, diapers, hygiene products, medicines). We are still seeking more specific details about the surgery procedure and the amount of money needed, since it's not a standard surgery and it's very likely that some advanced medical devices will be needed. We also plan to take his mother to a gynecologist since it's on the 4th or 5th month of pregnancy and she was only once at the doctor, when she found out that she's pregnant.

A group of seven mothers from Buhusi continue to receive monthly **birth control pills**. The 8th women who used to receive them stopped the treatment and got pregnant due to a combination of factors. She said that first she forgot to take them when she left the city and after that she stopped the treatment because she didn't know if she is pregnant or not. She didn't take any pregnancy test and she left things to chance because of her religious husband who didn't know that she was taking birth control pills.

Basic medical tests (throat swab and stool sample)

This is the third year when GSK makes these tests available to FCG children – they are required for all children before preschool starts but, as they are not free, poor parents rarely afford them. FCG Children from Budila, Cugir and Cojocna had those tests in September and other 13 communities are planning to have them in October.

CONTINUING CHALLENGES

- **Lack of human resources:** the shortage of health mediators or community nurses who are trained, hired and mentored remains a hard to solve systemic problem in the communities where we work. . Many poor people don't know how to solve their medical problems, where to go and how to present their problems, so the lack of health mediators is highly affecting their recovery, while the work-load required to following up health cases is assumed by FCG local coordinators as extra tasks.
- **Lack of teachers' concern about class hygiene:** hygiene or health education are not standard practice in kindergarten, and it is a long process to determine teachers to be proactive in teaching children how to properly cough, blow their noses, or wash hands - and to incorporate hygiene education in their daily teaching routines.

NEXT STEPS

- Basic medical tests (throat swab and stool sample) in other 13 communities
- Follow-up on individual cases
- Health education: awareness campaign for children regarding the importance of washing hands and correctly coughing and blowing their noses
- Fund for kindergarten hygiene supplies (toilet paper, soap) in 42 communities
- Fruit Day in 21 communities, with a possibility of extension in case of local teams commitment to health education
- Incentive for doctor and nurse to go for medical visits in remote Hetea from Valcele.

APPENDICES

1. **Grant communities:** *Poieni, Săcuieu, Călățele, Iara, Vișoara, Moldovenești, Cojocna, Bonțida, Cășeu (Cluj), Râciu, Apold (Mureș), Cugir (Alba), Brateiu, Alțina, Târnava, Vurpăr, Roșia (Sibiu), Augustin, Ormeniș, Apața, Târlungeni, Zizin, Râșnov, Budila, Vama Buzăului, Comăna (Brașov), Întorsura Buzăului, Vâlcele (Covasna), Buhuși, Bacău (Bacău), Vaslui (Vaslui), Moroeni, Mănești, Gura Șuții, I.L. Caragiale, Potlogi (Dâmbovița), Podari, Cetate, Maglavit, Valea Stancului, Amărăștii de Jos, Calopăr (Dolj)*

