

**“TOGETHER FOR BETTER HEALTH, FOR US, BY US”****January – March 2015 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**

- 300 people (150 children and 150 adults) in Cojasca commune, Dambovita County, received free medical consultations during the Medical Caravan organized by 20 medical students and 14 resident doctors from the Together for Rural Health project, on March 21-22. Cojasca is a new community in FCG (where the program started in September 2014), with over 200 severely impoverished children. Due to the food coupons their parents receive and with the support of the local FCG Team, the number of children enrolled in kindergarten has almost doubled in the first 4 months of the project, and this fact, together with several visits in the community, made OvR realise how useful a medical caravan would be in Cojasca. This is the 5th caravan organized through this grant.

**Health and hygiene education / Trainings**

- 472 children ages 2-5 were enrolled in the educational module “Hopscotch Two” focused on health, hygiene, and independent life skills – March 2015. 43 teachers from 17 communities have started the eleven-week module for toddlers and their parents.
- 47 teachers participated at three training sessions on “Hopscotch Two” organized by Maria Gheorghiu, OvR’s executive director and head trainer, in Araci, Covasna county, Cetate, Dolj county and Rosia, Sibiu county.
- Educational materials have been sent to all the kindergartens that are implementing “Hopscotch Two”.

**Follow-up on individual cases****Filling in the gaps****IMPLEMENTATION:****Medical caravan**

The classrooms of the kindergarten and school in Iazu village (Cojasca commune, 50 km from Bucharest) were transformed into medical examination rooms for two days in March. Fourteen resident doctors, together with 20 medical students from the Carol Davila University of Bucharest, offered free consultations to the villagers in paediatrics, cardiology, internal medicine, ophthalmology, dermatology, ortopaedics and laboratory medicine. 150 adults and 150 children were examined. Patients had a general check-up and, depending on the results or on what they complained about, they were recommended to have further investigation at a specialist. As we had previously learned from the community doctor, there are many cases of HIV, tuberculosis and hepatitis in Cojasca, but also hygiene problems which translate into skin diseases like scab.

The most common health problems identified among the 150 children were skin infections (scab) and hearing and vision problems. Also, many of the kids are HIV infected from their birth (because their parents are also infected) but, according to their GP, they are under treatment and further observation – no one, in their community, has died of HIV in the last few years.

Other health problems identified are a lack of psychomotor development adequate to their age and lack of ability to express their needs. The whole community suffers from the general lack of education – hygiene education, health education, nutrition education, even basic education, like reading and writing. Most poor mothers do not even know how to properly wash their babies and, in some cases, they only use water, without any kind of soap, which results in fast spread of the skin diseases and infections. Cojasca is one of the communities that receive funds for hygiene products (however, the procured products are only used in the kindergarten) and, following the caravan, the community also received additional hygiene products – garbage bags, toilet cleaning liquids and disinfectants, wet wipes, liquid soap etc.

Through the T4BH grant, OvR supported the medical caravan with medicine, food supplies 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 – water from Coca-Cola, medical supplies from individual donors and mattresses for the students to sleep on from our other Dambovita communities. The local community tried to help as much as they could – they informed the locals about the caravan, they put the names of the patients on waiting lists and handed them order receipts. The food was prepared and served by the local after-school cooks, the sleeping mattresses were placed in the community center and the sheets for the consultation beds were provided by the Mayor. Also, the school deputy principal was present to help us whenever we needed.

On the first day of the caravan, reporters from the national TV station were there to take interviews and to prepare a material on the event. More pictures and other info on this caravan can be found here - [https://www.facebook.com/groups/640934576038266/?ref=br\\_tf](https://www.facebook.com/groups/640934576038266/?ref=br_tf)

### **Follow up on individual cases**

Vladut Ganea from Hetea – Vladut’s mother gave birth at the beginning of February, and because it is necessary for her to stay with Vladut when he comes at the hospital in Bucharest, the last time he visited the doctor was in January, with the help of the local coordinator in Tarlungeni, who brought him by car. However, through T4BH and with the support of the local coordinator in Hetea, Vladut receives the necessary medical materials – sanitary alcohol, bandages, medicines. His condition is good, and permanent contact has been kept with his doctor.

### **Trainings**

#### Hopscotch Two trainings

For three hours during each training, Maria Gheorghiu, OvR’s executive director and lead trainer, discussed the developmental particularities of two-year olds, with a focus on autonomy, health and basic hygiene – practically, the teachers learn that one of the purposes of this workshop is to help very young children gain autonomy: dress/undress by themselves, wash their hands and teeth before eating, serve the healthy snacks by themselves, and then dispose of the garbage properly. The teachers shared best practices in helping parents enhance their children's natural learning ability.

Health Education – Every child who attends Hopscotch Two will receive a new workbook, developed by OvR, which includes features with a focus on brain development – one of these features refers to nutrition and its importance in having a healthy lifestyle.

### **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, approximately 470 children will learn the basics about health, hygiene, nutrition and life skills. Out of the 17 communities that will implement the educational module, 7 are new in our project and Hopscotch Two – they have started **Fiecare Copil in Gradinita** in September 2014, when a number of 13 communities from Brasov, Dambovita and Dolj counties have been selected as beneficiaries, and are supported by OvR through a Norwegian Funds grant. The T4BH grant covers:

- (a) The stipend for 43 teachers who will conduct the module;
- (b) A healthy snack for both children and parents.
- (c) Hygiene products and school supplies.

### **Filling in the gaps**

From January to March, the standard activities continued. Fruit Day and hygiene products are activities that are implemented in all of our communities, and a group of seven mothers from Buhusi continue to receive monthly birth control pills.

In remote Hetea, the doctor and the nurse continued to visit the community, at least twice a month.

As part of OVR's organisational achievements during these last three months, it is worth mentioning that we have a second County Council, after Cluj, that has officially agreed to take over a part of the costs for food coupons for the next school year (2015 – 2016). Brasov is one of the counties involved in the extension of the FCG project through the Norwegian Grants. One other county involved, Dambovita, has also agreed to take over a part of such costs, but only after specific law regulation comes out. Also, Cluj County has extended the co-financing for one more year and has doubled the number of children supported.

OVR has also succeeded to submit to the Parliament a draft law that regulates food coupons, in order to make ***Fiecare Copil in Gradinita*** a national program.

### **CONTINUING CHALLENGES**

- **Lack of health and hygiene education:** As observed during our last medical caravan, poor mothers lack knowledge on how to take care of their children in terms of basic hygiene. They also lack access to any kind of educational resources, that is why skin infections are so spread among them.
- **Poor nutrition is also a major problem in these communities.** Children are oftenly suffering from vitamin carencies because of the rich in carbohydrates, poor in vitamins food they receive, mainly potatoes, rice and bread.
- **Access to quality medical services,** especially for poor families who do not have the resources to visit a doctor at least twice a year and have appropriate check-ups. Funds for better medical cabinets in these communities would be more than welcomed.

### **TIMELINE FOR NEXT THREE MONTHS**

- Implementation of Hopscotch Two, visit all the workshops
- Preparation of Summer Schools
- Continued standard health activities – medicine and transportation to the doctor's, health education, fund for hygiene (toilet paper, soap) and monthly fruit day
- A new medical caravan, most likely in June