



WACAP

WORLD
ASSOCIATION
FOR CHILDREN
& PARENTS

ANNUAL REPORT
PERMANENCY PLANNING PROJECT
JUDET ARGES, ROMANIA

SUBJECT: COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT NUMBER EUR-0032-A-00-3046-00
Awarded September 24, 1994

- I. Executive Summary of Accomplishments and Challenges
- II. Description of the Agreement activities from inception of the Project
- III. Significance of these Activities
- IV. Comments and Recommendations
- V. Fiscal Report September 24, 1993 - September 30, 1994

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND FAILINGS

OVERVIEW: The World Association for Children and Parents (WACAP) signed agreements with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education in March, 1991, to begin a permanency planning pilot project. The Ministry of Health, The Ministry of Education and the Romanian Adoption Committee (RAC) assigned WACAP to the county of Judet Arges, where the pilot was started with WACAP funds. In May, 1993, WACAP received funding through a Local Currency Agreement, and in September, 1993, WACAP received funding through U.S.A.I.D. Cooperative Agreement EUR-0032-A-00-3046-00, to expand the Permanency Planning Project. The project is currently funded through December, 1995.

The goal of WACAP in this project is to provide comprehensive permanency planning services to institutionalized children, and to children at risk of abandonment in maternity hospitals to prevent these children from living out their childhood's in institutional care. WACAP designed the project to model proper child care while in the institutions, and to demonstrate the services necessary to prevent prolonged institutionalization of children.

Permanency planning is a process that evaluates a child's needs, and results in a plan being made for the future of the child based on their individual assessment. The plan is always based on the best interests of the child. In this project, the first priority in developing a permanent plan is to assess the possibility of

integrating the institutionalized child into his or her birth family if at all possible.

The statistical goals of the project were based upon the United Nations Children's fund Report (October, 1991), The Causes of Institutionalization of Romanian Children. It was expected that permanent plans could be implemented for 70% of the 381 children institutionalized at that time in Cimpulung, Romania. Of these, it was expected that 23% could be returned to their birth family, 27% would be eligible for adoption, and 50% would remain in the institutional setting or in foster care.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: From May, 1993, through December, 1994, WACAP's permanency planning intervention in Judet Arges has resulted in the following, comparing projected mid-term results with actual results to date:

Projected Results

133 Casework Initiated
36 Reunifications
31 Adoptions
66 Remain Institutionalized

Actual Results

102 Casework Initiated
27 Reunifications
30 Adoptions
19 Remain Institutionalized
17 Institution Refused Plan
5 Transferred
2 Died
2 Disappeared

Casework was initiated in 102 cases. Permanent plans were implemented in a total of 85 of these 102 cases due to resistance from the institution in 17 cases. An additional 9 of the 102 cases had results which were not projected in the original United Nations study noted above.

Of the 85 children whose cases were initiated and completed through this Permanency Planning Project, 67% (57 children) have successfully left the institutional setting for family placement. This result is 17% higher than the statistic projected by the United Nations. In addition, if the nine cases of children who died, were transferred, or disappeared is deducted from the number of permanent plans implemented, 57 of 76 children were successfully placed with families, which is 75% family placement. In this project only 29% of the children who were offered social services remain institutionalized. The United Nations study predicted that 50% of children offered social services would remain institutionalized.

An extremely important factor in the success of the project has been the commitment, persistence and skill of the social workers in locating the natural parents of the child, and then gaining their trust, cooperation and participation in making a permanent plan for the child. This project has demonstrated that birth parents are willing and able to take responsibility in the decision making process about the future of their child. It has demonstrated the very

positive results of family reunification, as well as the careful process of voluntary relinquishment of parental rights.

The Project Manager and other staff members have met repeatedly with the directors of the institutions in Judet Arges, as well as representatives of the central and local governments and community leaders, to establish an understanding of the goals of the project, and to demonstrate the benefits to children of individual family living.

CHALLENGES: The goal of the permanency planning project has met with strong resistance within the institutions. Despite various strategies to improve communication, understanding and collaboration, resistance has increased, with the institutions stating that they do not and will not support a plan of desinstitutionalization. Without the support of the directors, the project cannot succeed. There continues to be fear among the staff of the institutions that they will lose their jobs if the number of children in care is decreased. Ongoing private adoptions completed outside of the authority of the RAC are also a strong factor in preventing family reunifications or referral of children to the RAC for adoption. WACAP has not yet received Juridical Entity status, which has impacted our ability to recruit and retain qualified Romanian social work staff.

It is the conclusion of WACAP that the project cannot continue in this community, and must move to a location where the directors of the institutions value the goals of the project, and desire technical assistance and training to achieve these goals.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE AGREEMENT ACTIVITIES FROM INCEPTION OF THE PROJECT

The project has provided the following services to these institutionalized children:

- developmental assessments including medical, social and education evaluations
- increased educational activities and individualized attention through American volunteers and Romanian educators who are hired for this purpose
- nutritional supplements
- social services and counseling to birth family members whose children are institutionalized
- social services and counseling to pregnant women and those at risk of abandoning their children in maternity hospitals
- follow up visits to families who choose to parent and take their child home
- support and transition services to those children preparing to leave the institution for family reunification or adoption

The project was responsible for completing the above through the following activities:

Social Services: The project has employed six social workers at various intervals, working in the Leagan, Casa De Copii Cimpulung, and the maternity and pediatric hospitals in Pitesti. A qualified Romanian social worker was designated as the team leader; she has received supervision and support from an American counterpart social worker. This team has met weekly to discuss issues of family reunification, and to address the barriers to deinstitutionalization, and have completed weekly case reviews. Resistance to social services being offered within the institutions was a primary obstacle to their success, and resulted in fewer social workers being hired by the project than originally planned. As noted earlier, this team's ability to locate the birth family of an assigned child, and to gain their trust and confidence in making a plan for the child, has been extraordinary. The team has also demonstrated success in providing post placement supervision and support to assist children in successfully leaving the institution to live with their birth family after months or years of separation.

Health: An American physician and nurse team completed physical, neurological and developmental evaluations on all children residing in the Leagan de Copii and Casa de Copii, Cimpulung, in June, 1993. For two months, they held weekly meetings with the staff of both institutions to discuss issues relative to child development, pediatric medical practice, nutrition, and the prevention of infectious disease. They also provided basic health screening to staff members who wished medical consultation. They concluded that the single greatest health risk to these children was the endemic spread of Hepatitis B; based on their findings, a grant has been awarded to WACAP by two local Washington state Rotary groups, as well as Rotary International, to provide a vaccination program for children and caregivers in the institution. The Hepatitis B project will be implemented in the new project site.

In August, 1994, 14 medical professionals from the University of Oklahoma performed extensive medical evaluations for 66 children residing in the Leagan de Copii. In addition, they provided a total of 14.5 hours of child development training to 6 doctors, and 4 educators, 2 nurses and 3 infirmieres.

The project hired a Romanian physician to work in the Casa de Copii, Cimpulung, to provide regular medical care of the children as well as to train the staff in activities which would improve the basic hygiene and therefore health of the children.

Networking: WACAP has provided additional health screening as well as specific medical intervention for numerous children in the institutions through the assistance of American organizations including Project Concern International, Operation Smile, Child Rescue International, and Northwest Medical Teams, as well as through collaboration with Budimax Pediatric Hospital in Bucharest. 7 children have received surgery in Bucharest for cleft palates, congenital hip dysplasia, strabismus, and spastic paralysis. In addition, The University of Bucharest School of Social Work, the

Romanian Orphanage Trust and Holt Children's Services International have been consulted on numerous occasions regarding common concerns relative to institutionalized children and the goals of this project.

Nutrition: WACAP's Permanency Planning project has provided approximately \$700 in local currency for financial assistance to the Leagan de Copii, Cimpulung, to improve the dietary needs of the children. The project distributed 963 boxes of baby food to the Leagan and 36 large boxes of food to the Casa de Copii in cooperation with Feeding the Children. In response to requests from the directors of the Casa de Copii and the Leagan de Copii, WACAP has purchased and given children's vitamins, specific oral antibiotics and skin ointments for these institutions in the amount of \$2,110.56.

Education: The project initiated 80 hours of behavioral therapy and education to 8 severely developmentally delayed children in the Casa de Copii, working in groups of not more than 5 children to demonstrate that these children had the capacity to learn and that their behaviors could be modified and improved. The project provided a summer program for both 1993 and 1994 in the Casa de Copii to augment the standard education provided by the institution, and to provide training for educators in additional educational and behavior modification activities. The project has employed a Romanian educator to work half-time in the Casa de Copii; this person has become an invaluable member of the WACAP team.

Volunteers: WACAP volunteers worked on site from May, 1993 to present who have providing 9144 hours of assistance in the Leagan de Copii and Casa de Copii Cimpulung. The function of the volunteers has been to demonstrate positive alternative methods of child care and to provide an opportunity for one-to-one interaction between child and caretaker on a more regular basis. The growth and development of children has been significantly enhanced by the volunteers. Volunteers have updated developmental assessments, have monitored the special needs of individual children and have created stronger links of trust with the institutional staff. Volunteers have provided transitional support to children preparing to leave the institution for home placement, and have modeled positive support to birth families who visit their children in the institution.

Facility Improvements: The project made extensive structural improvements to the Leagan and Casa de Copii buildings in Cimpulung. The improvements have included the structural renovation of both buildings at an approximate cost of \$32,000, and the painting of the interior and exterior of the Leagan. Volunteers have also provided repairs to equipment and the office facility as needed.

Offices: Offices were opened in both Bucharest and Cimpulung. The Cimpulung office was leased from the local government, and a building in disrepair has been renovated into several small office spaces now in excellent condition. When WACAP relocates the project, the renovated building will be ready for immediate use by others.

Gifts in Kind: The project has received approximately \$2,500 gifts in kind which were distributed to the institutions, the children, and to families in need in the community. More than 4,200 pounds of supplies have been shipped to the project site from the United States. These materials have included clothing and educational, medical, nutritional and hygienic supplies.

Sponsorship Program: A program was initiated in February, 1992 in which 40 children are currently sponsored. This program is supported directly through families in the United States who are identified by WACAP. Sponsors contribute funds to assist in purchasing items requested by the institutions, such as vitamins, and also contribute by gathering and sending desired supplies.

Permanency Planning Manual: The draft outline of the manual has been completed. Completion of the manual has been delayed pending relocation of the project, and additional success in implementing the permanency planning strategies necessary to deinstitutionalize children.

Monitor All Children Leaving the Institution: The skills of the social workers in supporting children being deinstitutionalized through family reunification or Romanian adoption have made a positive contribution to the success of these placements. Resistance within the institutions has not made it possible to monitor all children, however.

III SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE ACTIVITIES

This project has been successful in demonstrating that children residing in institutions in Romania can successfully leave the institutions for family care, either through family reunification or adoption. The statistics demonstrate that it is possible for social workers to locate the birth parents of these children, and to gain their trust and participation in making a plan for family placement of their child. Had the project received the cooperation of the institutions, it is likely that the mid-term statistics would be much higher than the anticipated levels.

The success of the project, despite the lack of cooperation from the institutions, indicates several positive aspects. It demonstrates that well trained social workers can be effective in communicating with birth parents, in gaining their trust, in helping them to assess their strengths in reuniting with their children, and in supporting both parent and child during the transition from institution to family life. 90% of the reunifications initiated by WACAP are stable after more than six months, and the children have been observed to be adjusting well in these placements. It is important to note that the projects success appears to be sustaining as well.

The project demonstrates that birthparents, once located and trusting of the social worker, can be engaged in making appropriate decisions about their child's future. Those parents not able to take their child home are able to support a plan of family placement through

adoption rather than long term institutional care once they understand this alternative is available for them to consider.

There are follow up reports on every child who has left the institution for family placement through this project. Each of these reports demonstrates dramatic improvement in the child's overall growth and development, and supports the significance of this project as being in the best interests of institutionalized children in Romania.

An additional success of the project has been the long term benefit gained through formal and on the job training provided to Romanian project staff. The training includes a broad array of information including office procedures, not for profit objectives, ethical practices, conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity, and social work practices. By design, the project has utilized 100% Romanian employees for direct service delivery, thereby multiplying the long term benefit of the project impact in Romania.

IV. COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The ability of this project to identify existing barriers to family placement of institutionalized children in Romania, and to acquire the necessary skills and strategies to reduce these barriers, has been significant. The statistics at mid-term indicate a higher than anticipated success in family placement of children, and demonstrate the ability of this project to have significant impact on the future of institutionalized children in Romania.

The goal of the project at this time is to relocate to a more cooperative environment, where it is expected that the statistical results, and overall achievements of the project, will increase accordingly.

Barbara Knowles
Barbara Knowles
Director of Programs
1 December, 1994

WACAP
Annual Report (Fiscal Report)
Cooperative Agreement #
EUR-0032-A-00-3046-00

09/24/93
THRU
09/30/94

TOTAL AMOUNT

SEATTLE

Salaries:	\$62,871.32
Fringe benefits	9,620.09
Travel/Per Diem	9,609.48
Other Direct Costs:	
Grant Manager (Consultant)	6,000.00
Equipment	3,350.90
Miscellaneous	1,293.88
Telephone/FAX	2,308.02
Volunteer Expenses	293.34
Nutritional Supplements	2,110.56
Donated Good & Services	46,935.63
Children's Clothes	200.00
ROMANIA:	
Payroll	4,264.00
Volunteer Expenses	963.41
Project Office Rent	276.00

Subtotal	150,096.63
Indirect costs	57,577.99

Total 09/24/93 thru 09/30/94 207,674.62

Cost Share 51,918.66

AID Obligated Amount \$155,755.97
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