



## HOLT ROMANIA

### FUNDATIA DE CONSULTANTA SI SERVICII SOCIALE PENTRU COPII SI FAMILII

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## ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2003

After 12 years of intense activity as Romanian branch of the prestigious American organization Holt International Children's Services and at the end of a transition year full of events and challenges, we can proudly say now that the year 2003 was the first year when we fully functioned as national organization, namely HOLT ROMANIA – Family and Children Social Services and Counseling Foundation.

As you already know, the Romanian organization used as model not only the specialized personnel and the successful programs developed by the American organization, but we also followed the same principle to guide us in our hard work for the benefit of the Romanian children. This principle belongs to Harry Holt, the father of Holt International Foundation, and it says, "Every child deserves a home of its own".

The prevention of abuse/neglect/institutionalization/abandonment, our efforts to fight the damaging effects of institutionalization and to emphasize the undisputed advantages of the alternatives to placement, the great need for high quality social services for children with a focus on family and community, all this was part of our activity for the year 2003 and made us more determined in fighting the inert system, the shallowness and the lack of professionalism and minimum standards in child protection in Romania.

Our mission for the year 2003 was to develop and implement social services and programs aimed at:

- keeping children safely in their biological families, when possible, in order to avoid neglect and abandonment;
- reintegrating institutionalized children in families, when this is done in the child's outmost interest;
- supporting and promoting domestic adoption as a complex social process to ensure the chance to a home for each eligible child.

With the financial support of Holt International Children's Services – Eugene, OR, USA, LIFT Foundation USA, UNICEF Romania and Rotary International we managed to run and develop several programs.

Our organization's general objectives are as follows:

- to support children and their families with a view to reduce risk of abuse/neglect/institutionalization/abandonment;

- to promote children's rights to a family and to complex social services;
- to develop and implement programs on family preservation (keeping the family unit), on domestic adoption and on parental education;
- to develop training and technical support programs, to organize seminars and conferences, and other activities as well aimed at strengthening the ability of the local authorities, NGOs and community in general to provide qualified child protection services;
- to cooperate with national and international organizations that provide social services for children and families in order to establish efficient partnerships.

HOLT ROMANIA –Family and Children Social Services and Counseling Foundation activates in 4 administrative areas in the country: Constanta, Mures, Iasi and Bucharest (sector 1). Our head office is in Constanta and in 2003 the other centers from Bucharest, Mures and Iasi were legally registered and started to function as local branches.

In 2003 we continued to develop and implement the following programs:

1. Crisis Intervention Program, with 3 components:

- Pregnant Women Counseling
- Counseling for Families at Risk
- Social Services for Children abandoned in medical units and placement institutions.

The program started in 1993 and is mainly aimed at keeping the child in the biological family in order to avoid abuse/neglect/institutionalization/abandonment, when this is done in the child's best interest.

The objectives of this program are to prevent unnecessary institutionalization of the child aged between 10 and 12 years from the local community, to reintegrate institutionalized children in their biological families, to strengthen the family's ability to deal with risk factors and to ensure proper living conditions for their children.

The target group for this program consisted of children at risk of being abandoned/abused/neglected/institutionalized from rural and urban communities in the following administrative areas: Constanta, Mures, Iasi and Bucharest (sector 1).

As part of this program we provided counseling, information on legislation, family planning, health and care, child growth, moral and financial support, alternative solutions to overpass the crisis and assistance in identifying and accessing community resources.

2. Domestic Adoption Program

This is another program we started in 1993 with the purpose to promote, encourage and support domestic adoption as a viable alternative to placement and institutionalization. For this program we have set the following objectives:

- to reduce the number of institutionalized children eligible for adoption;



- to ensure the full growth and development of children in domestic adoptive families;
- to develop an integrated national adoption system.

The program is addressed both to children eligible for adoption (unknown parents, parents' consent, official registration of the abandonment) and to families willing to adopt a child. Through this program we provide a whole range of services: recruitment of adoptive families and children eligible for adoption, evaluation and training of families willing to adopt a child, evaluation and preparation of eligible children, assistance during the adoption process and after the placement, individual and group intervention (support groups, parental education).

### 3. Long Term Maternal Assistance for institutionalized brothers

The program started in 1999 at the initiative of LIFT Foundation USA. The purpose of the program is to provide a stable family environment for groups of brothers aged between 10 and 12 years. These children usually come from placement centers (some of them even come from different institutions) and do not stand any more chance to return in their families. During this program we have recruited, evaluated, prepared and placed 17 children (3 groups with 3 brothers and 4 groups with 2 brothers) in 7 foster families in Mures. In 2003 one child no longer remained in placement.

The program also provides long term social assistance services consisting in information, counseling, moral and financial support in order to ensure optimum conditions for the child, supplementary support to meet the child's specific needs (furniture, clothes, transport, holidays, psychological counseling, medical care).

### 4. Center for Mother and Child in Bucharest

It started its activity in 1996 in a building provided by the Directorate for Child Protection within the "Sfanta Ecaterina" Social Services Complex, located in Bucharest, sector 1. This center can shelter 10 mothers and their children at the same time for 6 months. Sometimes these mothers are in desperate situations. Without the support of the family and of the community, many of them would not be able to fight for their children any more. Therefore, the center offers the mother and the child a chance to stay together.

The Center for Mothers is a program developed by Holt Foundation for single mothers in difficult situations who wish to keep their children. The services provided within this program consist of sheltering, moral and financial support, counseling on infant care and education, psychological assistance, occupational training and counseling for mothers, socializing strategies, legal advice in establishing the child's paternity.

### 5. Parental education and Parents and Children Resources Centers in Bucharest, Constanta, Medgidia and Iasi.

The program for parental education is the most recent one and is developed in all four branches of Holt Romania, namely Bucharest, Iasi, Mures and Constanta. It

started 2 years ago as a response to the great need for education of parents at risk of abandoning their children.

In our opinion the best place to develop such a program is the Parents and Children resources center and Holt Romania has established 4 such centers in Bucharest, Constanta, Medgidia and Iasi. This project was meant to be a community-based program to ensure increased access to information and education for families, to strengthen families by developing parent skills and reducing risk factors that lead to abandonment.

The studies conducted on disadvantaged communities revealed the fact that risk of abandonment/placement of children is mainly linked to poverty and low education of parents.

The first years in the child's life, when attitudes towards self and parent skills develop, represent a critical period and it is very difficult to train parents and teach them positive methods of raising their children. We believe it is easier to prevent negative patterns from the beginning than to try and change them later.

Children lose their families on various reasons. The lack of means of subsistence, some conservative communities, the lack of family support, ignorance, wrong mentality and lack of education are just some of the causes that still lead to abuse and neglect of children, ending sometimes with unnecessary institutionalization and placement of children in care institutions or even to abandonment. Deprived of the warmth and affection of a real family, children develop slowly and sometimes these behavior malformations are irreversible. That is why we believe it is most important now for all state institutions and NGOs to join their efforts and to focus more on preventing rather than on fighting against the damaging effects of abuse/neglect/abandonment/institutionalization.

These are our achievements for the year 2003:

Permanent placements:

- 37 children were placed in Romanian families with a view to be adopted
- 47 children returned in their families after having been abandoned in medical units (maternities, pediatric or dystrophic sections) or in child care institutions.
- 814 children remained in their biological families as a result of the complex social services provided by our organization.

Impacted children:

- 17 children in long term maternal care
- 118 children placed in institutions
- 397 children benefiting from the Holt International Children's Services sponsorship program
- 1180 beneficiaries of the Crisis Intervention program
- 54 children and their mothers sheltered in the Holt Center for Mother and Child in Bucharest
- 1272 children benefited from post-placement services.

#### Families:

- 968 families assisted within the Crisis Intervention program, of which 76 cases of child reintegration, 825 cases of family preservation, 24 cases of pregnant women and young mothers counseling, 43 mothers temporarily sheltered in the Center for Mother and Child in Bucharest.
- 990 families benefited from post placement services
- 81 Romanian adoptive families.

Our organization's Board of Directors consists in one seat for each administrative area in which we activate and the executive Director of the Foundation, as follows:

1. ADRIAN-VIOREL NICOLAESCU – President, legal advisor for COMPRESUTIL and member of Rotary Club Constanta
2. VASILE MIFTODE – member, professor at “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University in Iasi
3. MIRCEA PINTILIE – member, engineer and mayor of the town of Medgidia
4. ATTILA MAKSAI – member, businessman from Targu Mures and Holt adoptive parent
5. LIVIA TRIF – National Executive Director

#### Our main sponsors are:

- Holt International Children's Services – for all the programs developed in 2003. Total annual grant: \$280,000.
- LIFT Foundation USA: \$40,000
- UNICEF Romania – for the program called “Promoting parental education by establishing Parents and Children resources Centers” in Vaslui, Arges, Neamt and Botosani . The program started in 2002 and was completed in August 2003. The total grant was of \$46,000
- UNICEF Romania for the program called “Promoting parental education by establishing Parents and Children Resources Centers” replicated in Braila, Giurgiu, Salaj and Suceava. The total grant was \$49,600, of which \$9,600 to be used in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2003.
- Rotary International; \$25,000.

As far as child protection reform in Romania is concerned, there are still many things to be done. Fortunately, there are many people and institutions really interested in doing something good in this respect and our organization is one of them.

For those interested in finding more about us or about our services, we can be reached at the following addresses:

De introdus adresele pentru fiecare centru.