

## Foster Care Agencies

### *Romanian Children's Relief/Fundati Inocenti*

The organizational assessment for Romanian Children's Relief/Fundati Inocenti (RCR/FI) included individual interviews with the president of the board, the agency director, the administrative manager, the agency psychologist, and an infant caregiver/pre-school teacher. Additional information was obtained during a two-day teaching seminar, three home-based interventions with client families, observations of daily activities within the placement center, and participation in the organization's annual review meeting. The annual review meeting was especially informative, as it allowed the team to observe problem-solving and program planning sessions between the agency, its funding representative, and its governmental partner, the Department of Child Protection (DPC).

RCR/FI, housed in a renovated residential institution, holds as its mission the aims of improving the life and health of institutionalized children, the transition of children from institutional care to foster families, and the reintegration of children into their biological families. The unifying factor in all discussions of agency mission was the early identification and integration of abandoned children into foster or biological families, and the provision of educational and developmental mechanisms for them to become productively integrated into society.

RCR/FI is funded in part by the LIFT Foundation, created by Katherine and Richard Miller in 1988 to improve the lives of orphaned children. The Foundation promotes the "basic human right of children to be loved and to live with dignity" (The Foundation, 2003). Through its projects, LIFT endeavors to combat the social conditions that "separate children from their families" (What We Do, 2003).

At this point in the agency's development, it is dependent upon funds from the LIFT Foundation along with donations from individuals. Although support from the US government has made significant renovation and programming possible, the American administrative manager noted that US expectations for progress are based on Western standards and do not fully account for RCR/FI's stage of development as a Romanian social service organization.

The agency is turning more toward solicitation of funds from the Romanian government and local NGO's, as well as grant applications. These avenues of monetary support may provide better developmental links for the agency. This may reduce current limitations on use of funds that are currently restricted for specific purposes.

As RCR/FI endeavors to engage governmental support, state allocation of funds for foster families proves to be a barrier. In Bistrita, foster parents receive stipends from the Mayor's office for taking in children, but the salary is low and parents are often encouraged to take two children for the stipend of one. Since many foster families are struggling financially themselves, this makes it difficult for them to take in more than one child. Intra-governmental allocation of funds to the DPC reflects this same relationship, with the DPC receiving a smaller proportion of funds than other government sectors. Current government support for children in foster care includes a 210,000 lei stipend for the child, and an extra 290,000 lei for the child's expenses if he or she is placed with a family.

To support the progress of children transitioning to life outside the institution, RCR/FI engages in the following projects: 'foster care training, education, and development', 'a childhood literacy program involving foster parents and children', 'a life skills program for older children', 'a developmentally-sensitive infant and pre-school residential program' and, 'an early identification/intervention program for newly abandoned children based at the local maternity

hospital'. The early identification program aims to stem the continual flow of newly abandoned children in hospital, integrating them into developmentally sound care as early as possible. The agency hopes to direct future efforts toward pre-natal counseling for women who are at-risk of abandoning their children. One of the primary reasons for the evolution of the newer, comprehensive array of services is to satisfy all aspects of this mission from infancy to foster care and finally to life skills and literacy training.

RCR/FI is one of the private nonprofit agencies in Romania that is dedicated to increasing access to services for Roma children. Prejudice against the Roma presents a barrier specific to Roma children who require social services. Many Romanians we interviewed viewed them with suspicion, categorizing them as “beggars” and “thieves”. Some suggested that the Roma become wealthy through their begging, allowing them to build enormous houses on ill-gotten gain. During our time in Romania, we witnessed several young Roma children being chased out of restaurants and public spaces when they were caught asking for money. As prejudice against the Roma persists, abandoned Roma children will continue to find it difficult to obtain educational, health, and foster care services. Currently, three-quarters of the children participating in RCR/FI programs are of Roma descent.

One RCR/FI staff member believes that it will take several generations and strong advocacy for Roma and Romanian children to co-exist and have equal access to services. Additional strategies are needed to deal with the mobility of Roma communities that makes providing social services difficult.

RCR/FI is continuously in flux with the intake of newly abandoned infants, children released due to institutional closings, and the movement of children into new foster families. Additionally, new foster families are recruited on an ongoing basis, necessitating regular

orientation and training seminars for new foster parents.

Simultaneously, the DPC is altering its organizational structure to reflect a more comprehensive array of services, including a kinship identification and recruitment program and additional life skills services for older children. RCR/FI will assist with the reunification service segment, providing support for children and families as they re-unite.

Under the current system of foster care, the DPC recruits foster families, usually through newspaper advertisements. Interested families complete applications and progress through further interviews if they meet DPC criteria. Once families are selected to receive a foster child, they receive support from the RCR/FI psychologist. There is an upper limit of two children per family.

A strength of RCR/FI is its initiation of the cooperative relationship with the DPC. The quality of this relationship was evident not only in the spirit with which the meetings were conducted, but also in the atmosphere surrounding an informal meeting between our team, the DPC leader, and RCR/FI's director. Observations suggest that communication and cooperation are foundational qualities of the relationship between the agency and government directors; subsequent interactions between the DPC head and RCR/FI staff provided additional support for this observation.

As RCR/FI and the DPC evolve together, they are forced to fulfill the service demands created by rapid influxes of children released from institutions. In response to global and EU pressures, institutions close with as little as two weeks' notice, stretching RCR/FI's resources as it attempts to serve the large number of children who are released. Despite extensive renovations resulting from a World Bank donation to the DPC, the facility is stretched to capacity by the number of programs needed by its children. When seminars, meetings, or trainings are held,

programming must be cancelled because there is no other suitable location in the building to conduct the children's groups.

During the annual review meeting, DPC and RCR/FI staff discussed necessary changes that will be required by the impending expansion of services for both agencies. Corresponding to these changes will be an agency self-evaluation to determine whether RCR/FI resources are being used efficiently, or if additional cost-savings can be found as services are reorganized.

The staff unanimously agreed that the ratio of children to social workers is high, impinging on their ability to provide quality care for the children. A continual theme throughout our discussions was the need for strategic planning to structure the rate of service growth needed to satisfy the needs of the child welfare system, while limiting the potential negative impact rapid expansion could have on the organization.

In an effort to further its comprehensive goals, RCR/FI specifically recruits and welcomes training with experts from other countries. These seminars are used to bridge gaps that may exist between agency vision and its implementation of progressive practice methods. For example, significant work is being done on smoothing the reunification process based on the agency's earlier difficulties with transition between long-term foster care and reintegration with biological families. Training is viewed as a foundational step for enhancing the structure of this difficult process.

Although its director believes the agency is making progress in developing its child welfare expertise, the fact remains that most of the staff learns by doing. Many staff members were educated or employed in other sectors such as economics or elementary teaching; while these skills are being maximized for use by the agency, staff members often struggle in dealing with challenges such as substance abuse, maternal depression, or debilitating childhood illnesses.

Without educational backgrounds in these areas, staff members are concerned that progress in learning is slow, and that they are reliant on training by outside experts to help them in their practice.

A common theme endorsed by staff members was the need for additional expertise to manage the upcoming expansion of services. Topics of interest included childhood physical and emotional disorders, family systems and counseling interventions, school-based interventions, and improved communication with children. Staff members were interested in interventions that carry substantial practical impact, since caseloads are high and visits are sometimes infrequent.

Although lacking formal instruction, agency workers add value to the organization by remaining extraordinarily enthusiastic to learn and open to others' expertise. New trainings have been deemed essential by staff members as they prepare to implement a host program that facilitates transition of children from long-term foster care into their biological families. Workers expect this process to be difficult, as children will have developed strong attachments to their foster parents while being relatively unfamiliar with their biological parents.

Much of the agency's efforts are directed toward foster care development; however, this does nothing to stem the continual flow of newly abandoned children into the child welfare system. Currently, staff believes that the government devotes few resources to prevention, evidence by a lack of focus on pre-natal counseling or identification of women at risk for abandoning their newborns. Maternity hospitals are the sites where the majority of abandonment occurs – it is not uncommon for a mother to enter the ward under a false identity, give birth, then leave the hospital without her infant. The continued high level of infant abandonment ensures a long-term role for RCR/FI in the child welfare system – however, it also necessitates that substantial resources eventually be directed toward pre-natal counseling and development of

methods to identify women at-risk for abandoning their infants.

To this end, the agency will focus on reproductive planning for couples and counseling for pregnant women who may be at risk for abandoning their infants. An initial target for these counseling services will be the population of pregnant women who already have children in the child welfare system. To facilitate outreach, the agency is researching acquisition of educational tapes from Planned Parenthood for viewing and discussion with women in group sessions. Of particular concern for the DPC and RCR/FI is the compatibility of Planned Parenthood philosophy and birth control with the Romanian cultural expectations of women and corresponding designation of females as childbearers. A second target for the program will be community physicians who can advocate contraception and provide education for couples who may be reluctant to initiate birth control.

A final factor in the external environment is the length of time it takes for an abandoned child to come under the DPC's protection. According to the DPC, child welfare would be better served if abandoned children could be identified early, perhaps even before birth, rather than allowing children to languish in institutions for several months until abandonment is certain. Identifying at-risk mothers and providing counseling may bridge this gap and promote faster transition to foster care for children.

RCR/FI is currently guided by a US-based board of directors consisting of an Executive Director, President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Each RCR/FI employee sends a weekly report to the board for evaluation of service delivery in a specific component of the program. The Executive Director and RCR/FI's Director correspond daily via the Internet, engaging in problem-solving and brainstorming sessions. The Board of Directors controls funding and budgeting, visiting Romania twice yearly to evaluate the results of its monetary

strategy. Part of the Annual Review Meeting involves ensuring the continued link between funding strategy and the agency mission.

Eileen McHenry is the agency's Executive Director, and is based in the Boston office. Mike Carroll, a photojournalist by profession, planted the seed for the organization when he came to document the AIDS epidemic in Romanian institutions in 1989. He currently serves as Board President, taking responsibility for fundraising efforts. In Bistrita, the agency Director is Laura Huzmezan. She provides oversight for all local agency functions and acts as liaison between the agency and the US Board of Directors. An American administrative manager has provided ongoing support for Laura's directorial functions, and will transition out of this role in mid-May. Alexandra Samartean is next in the chain of command as the agency's primary infant/pre-school teacher and family counselor.

Leadership at RCR/FI is poised on the brink of an important transition. For the previous year, the administrative manager, an American, has brought significant expertise to the agency based on her experience in social service provision in the US. As her time with RCR/FI comes to a close, administrative functions will fall solely upon the director, who has spent significant time shadowing her American counterpart. The administrative manager expressed strong confidence in the director's ability to promote the organization's growth and mission and complimented her unfailing dedication to agency goals. The Romanian director, however, expressed substantial fear that the transition may not go smoothly, and questions her ability to guide the agency effectively. Despite her doubts, however, it seemed evident that agency staff value the director's commitment and trust her to stand as an effective leader.

As leader, the Director tries to set a professional example for the staff members while creating a comfortable and collegial atmosphere. Part of her role involves acknowledging and

discussing the fear inherent in extensive organizational change. A significant task involves encouraging staff to recognize their strengths rather than become discouraged by their limitations in expertise. Additionally, the Director tries to add stability and structure to staff roles by having written job descriptions, codified agency rules, and standard policies.

Comments from the Director indicate that she places a high level of importance on personal responsibility and that she often experiences reluctance to delegate tasks to others. Part of her own professional development has been to recognize and acknowledge the strengths of others so that she feels better equipped to assign responsibilities to them.

Currently, the Director attempts to put each staff member in charge of a project while watching from a distance and providing expertise, if necessary. With the rapid organizational expansion, having satellite operations at the hospital makes it impossible for her to personally oversee every function. As a result, she reports learning to trust her employees and expect that they will perform well. To increase her comfort level as the organization grows, she conducts thorough assessments of employee abilities, basing work assignments on her two-way conversations with staff about structuring the functions they serve.

The agency director conducts these bi-directional employee assessments at six-month intervals. During these open-ended evaluations, she not only conducts performance reviews, but also solicits feedback from employees about what they like and dislike about their roles in the organization. She requests employee evaluations of her leadership and methods, stressing honesty in service of the mission and the value of constructive criticism. As director, she takes this employee input very seriously, and uses it to improve her own job performance. She prompts staff to provide insight into what they envision themselves doing in their future with the agency. She solicits and appreciates creativity and allows employees to create individual

atmospheres in which they feel confident and useful.

She spends a significant amount of time on paperwork, filling out reports for government offices and RCR/FI's US donor. She pointed out that although the stipend from the Mayor's office is low, the paperwork required to obtain it is extensive. As such, she looks to strike a balance between satisfying the reporting requirements of government offices and becoming more efficient so that she can spend more of her time evaluating, planning, and delivering services.

While much of her role involves staff organization and function, the Director also makes an effort to promote group cohesion and relaxation. To this end, she established monthly social outings so that staff members can become familiar with one another outside of the workplace. These outings all involve activities entirely separate from agency functions, such as shopping, cooking special meals, or going to a restaurant.

As local agency leader, the Director found it difficult to discuss her strengths, but when pressed, acknowledged that she has good interpersonal and diplomacy skills, and is able to meet needs without using force or anger. She considers herself to be a team player, able to work comfortably with individuals at all levels of the organization. She focuses on being direct with constructive criticism as an area for future improvement.

As with the agency structure, the dual role of American and Romanian culture is evident in RCR/FI's management practices. The American administrative manager necessarily played a large part in establishing management practice within the organization; however, she reports actively attempting to adopt a background role so that transfer of managerial functions to the Director will flow smoothly. The majority of decision-making occurs between the Director in Bistrita, and the board in Boston.

Ongoing structural change will set the tone for the upcoming year with the departure of

the American administrative manager. This individual is the second American to serve this function since the agency's creation in 1991, and the Board of Directors plans to transfer all administrative responsibility to the Romanian staff.

Among the administrative manager's many responsibilities include creating a transition plan for transfer of managerial duties to the Romanian staff, accounting and financial tracking, ensuring timely payment of utility bills, allocating program money according to the Board's budget specifications, and facilitating communication between agency offices in Bistrita and Boston. Additional functions to be handed over to local staff include grant-writing, liaison functions with the DPC, further development of the infant and pre-school programs, and administrative support for the Director.

The administrative manager acknowledges that upon her initial arrival, the boundaries surrounding her role in the agency were indistinct. The blurred definition of her role represented both an advantage and a disadvantage. As an American who signified expertise and knowledge, many staff members, including the Director, automatically looked to her for guidance. They often expected her final approval of important agency decisions. Her response was to encourage the Romanian staff to arrive at their own decisions while allowing her to make suggestions and teach them best practice methods. Additionally, workers from Romanian culture are used to having a readily identifiable, distinct leader from whom to take direction; the modalities of group process and shared decision-making were difficult for them.

From the American administrative manager's point of view, she noted that a foreign person, despite a warm welcome from local staff, automatically feels like an "outsider" to the organization. She faced initial barriers that included an inability to speak the language and difficulty understanding customary social practices in Romania. A large part of her adjustment

to living there was learning the ways of a new environment before feeling like an effective contributor to the organization. On the other side of her experience in Romania, she now expresses a concern about re-adapting to life in America as she travels home to prepare for graduate school.

Part of the administrative manager's role has been to facilitate and encourage independence in decision-making on the part of the Director and staff. A policy and procedure manual was created by the first administrative manager and was reviewed in 2002 by the board. That manual was created with little input from Romanian staff members; however, all staff has seen it and the funding organization maintains a copy. One of the proposed changes to the procedure manual is the implementation of increased mechanisms for communication between DPC social workers and RCR/FI staff.

RCR/FI has worked hard to bridge the transition between American collaboration in management to a Romanian-led organization. While this transition has created significant anxiety on the part of the Director and staff members, it is also viewed as an opportunity to put into practice management techniques and practice principles learned through the agency's long commitment to training and education. As RCR/FI matures, it raises the bar for itself, bringing its performance more in line with that of progressive Western social service agencies. As such, RCR/FI will promote itself as a site for effective collaboration with Western organizations who take interest in Romania's child welfare system.

The agency's teacher/counselor for the infant and pre-school programs will remain in charge of the infant and toddler residential suites, developmental assessments, and collaboration with the consulting physical therapist. Additionally, she will continue to conduct and develop the meetings with children and their foster and biological parents.

Additional staff includes a full-time infant caretaker in the residential facility and a part-time staff member who acts as liaison with the maternity ward in the local hospital. This part-time position was created to further the goal of early identification and intervention for newly abandoned children. This individual provides caretaking and developmental support for infants as their abandonment status is verified and they await release from the hospital. This staff member is key to the linkage between hospital staff and early intervention by the agency, as infants often wait several weeks for medical clearance to leave the hospital.

To document each child's progress in the foster care system, RCR/FI keeps updated statistics on the number of children served and presents this information in a yearly program review. Quantitative evaluations are conducted with foster families to document difficulties and successes, thus informing future improvements in program application. Children in the foster care system are evaluated every six months and their progress is recorded. Client satisfaction is also evaluated, including the response of children to social workers, RCR/FI staff, and applied interventions.

In relation to the DPC, continual collaboration between all levels of staff is deemed essential. To facilitate ongoing communication, RCR/FI and DPC staff attends conjoint weekly meetings to discuss issues that impact their dual functions. Additionally, RCR/FI staff meets on an as-needed basis with DPC foster care case managers, assessing children's developmental progress in their foster families and providing consultative services when foster families have specific needs.

One of the most interesting aspects of RCR/FI's operations was the division of labor between the agency and DPC staff. Recently, the organizations altered their policies such that DPC social workers are assigned to either a child or a foster mother, but not both simultaneously.

This system differs from many US models, in which social workers work with families in their entirety rather than selectively defining a child or parent as the service recipient. The underlying rationale for this segmentation of services remains unclear.

Under the US model, families are generally treated as a system in which all members are affected by and can contribute to formation and resolution of problems. In our interviews with staff members, the line between various service domains was drawn so finely that the RCR/FI psychologist was reluctant to make recommendations to her client's foster mother because that represented the domain of a DPC social worker. When queried about this plan of treatment, the psychologist stated that her function was to work with the child, not the foster mother.

An expansion of the use of Life Books represents a positive change, including the creation of life books for every child; these books will be continually updated with statistics about the child and important events in his/her life. The books are intended to follow the child wherever he/she goes within the child welfare system.

New employees are typically hired through newspaper and radio advertisements. Subsequent to their employment, staff members must pass a probationary period, during which their acclimation to the environment and work practices are evaluated for compatibility with the organization. If the employee successfully navigates this initial performance appraisal, he or she is given full employment status.

Once fully employed by the agency, staff members undergo a bi-annual performance evaluation (as discussed previously). Tasks are reassigned, expanded, or redefined based on these collaborative interviews. As is characteristic of American organizations, each staff member has a job description and a set of well-defined responsibilities. It is unclear whether a parallel task definition and performance evaluation system exists within the DPC.

Child development training is requisite for all newly hired staff members. Trainings for RCR/FI and DPC staff are made available by the staff at RCR/FI. Although DPC social workers are not required to attend the trainings, most of them participate regularly and show enthusiasm for learning. The Director felt that the high motivation of child welfare workers, coupled with the encouragement of RCR/FI staff, is responsible for the high turn-out at training sessions. During the training session our team attended, there were a large number of DPC social workers in attendance, and they participated actively in the discussion, asking many thoughtful questions.

Staff members must be able to conduct developmental assessments accurately, effectively collaborate with DPC staff, understand the source of behavior problems reported by foster families, and effectively train foster parents to implement workable solutions to assist the development of children in their care. Workers must also be able to withstand resistance and intense emotions on the part of foster and biological families in their reintegration meetings. Accurate prioritization of children based on their level of emergent need for intervention is paramount for staff members.

Currently, there is no full-time psychologist; the existing psychologist works part-time for RCR/FI and will be utilized for home visits when the agency expands its services in conjunction with the DPC. The social workers will increase their home visit schedules and will take primary responsibility for coordinating the literacy program within clients' homes.

It was clear that some employees were particularly well-suited to their work. One such example was the teacher/counselor, whose original degree was in economics, but whose love for children drew her to apply for this position. Other staff members have observed her skill with the children and their comfort with her; our observations of her at work in the agency aligned with this predominant staff opinion.

All staff endorsed a strong personal concern for the welfare of institutionalized children, believing in the importance of growing up in a family context. Some workers had grown up with adopted siblings and were able to use this experience in their education of foster families. Many employees said that although their work can be difficult and sad, they draw a lot of energy and motivation from the process of helping children and foster families.

The Director observed that the staff at RCR/FI comes across as smart, tolerant, honest, punctual, hard-working, open-minded, and enthusiastic about learning. She appreciated staff members' ability to integrate new ideas into their practice and their willingness to undertake any task, regardless of its nature.

The Director commented that the employees seem to be fulfilled by their work and happy with their jobs; however, the work itself is arduous and sad at times. When client satisfaction was assessed via questionnaires, the Director indicated that the agency received a positive evaluation by the children and families it serves. Correspondingly, RCR/FI won a best practice award in Romania and was selected as a model agency to which other organizations can look for advice and expertise. The Director also appreciated the flexibility given to the agency by the Board of Directors and the leeway to make decisions without micromanagement from donors.

Internal staff meetings occur twice per month, during which issues are brought to all staff members for discussion. Issues on the agenda include administrative issues and clinical case presentations. A training topic such as child development or new therapeutic intervention techniques is usually built into the meeting.

During discussions with the agency's teacher/family counselor, she acknowledged the existence of strong team support as she juggled multiple responsibilities and difficult families. According to her, team members were available to discuss complicated clinical cases and to

provide assistance if parents became emotionally volatile during meetings.

The American administrator believes that the primary strength of the organization lies in the dedication and support of its US donors and Board of Directors. Without their backing and continued support, RCR/FI would not be able to survive financially or to navigate the complexity of changes required by its large population of clients. She credits much of the successful collaboration to RCR/FI's organizational flexibility, motivation, and ability to tolerate rapidly changing social policy and its implementation. Other, similar programs have already folded due to black market influences, corruption, and lack of cooperation with outside funding organizations.

Agency-Specific Recommendations. A vital area of need for RCR/FI and the DPC is effective change management. According to Burke's (1994) model, this agency is truly undergoing transformational change, considering the rapid expansion of its service array and the exponential impacts this will have on staff and clients. A potential source of assistance is further collaboration with Case Western Reserve University and the Mandel School of Social Sciences, that has been involved in the growth of the organization in the last few years.

Additionally, RCR/FI has begun to occupy a position in which assessments of service users and client outcomes will be invaluable in directing future programming. Assessing client outcomes can inform the planned expansion and help in outlining client needs more definitively.

The DPC, in its search for more rigorous practice guidelines, may also benefit from collaboration with the Mandel school and other universities. As it develops links to the identity of social work as a discipline, it will become better informed about the latest practice models and how they can be adapted to its role in providing government services to families.

Lastly, there are several recommendations in terms of direct service and therapeutic

intervention. Of the utmost importance is the need for training in the family systems model, which presents the family as a dynamic unit rather than as a set of networked yet isolated individuals. This training will be vital to effectively linking therapy with parents to interventions with children – optimal therapeutic outcomes will not be forthcoming if parents and children are treated as independent service recipients by RCR/FI and DPC staff. It is recommended that RCR/FI and the DPC re-evaluate their decision to separate their interventions with parents and children.

Continued training efforts in behavior charting, family counseling, and developmental assessment will be vital to refining placement efforts. Staff should take advantage of opportunities to train with knowledgeable scholars and to utilize hands-on practice opportunities so that they may receive constructive feedback about their improvements in practice skills.

Lastly, staff members may benefit from considering the role of fathers in foster care, reintegration efforts, and in family planning. Many workers with whom we spoke stated that fathers might be reluctant to endorse family planning and contraceptive efforts. Unless fathers are involved in this process, and in the process of foster care and reintegration, significant difficulties may be encountered in families' implementation of therapy recommendations.

### ***The Romanian Foundation for Children, Community and Family***

The Romanian Foundation for Children, Community and Family, legally registered in 1997, aims at protecting children's rights. Across all aspects of the organization, FRCCF promotes the best interests of the child, seeking to ensure physical well being, emotional and mental development, the ability to be raised in a family environment, and other rights stipulated in the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child.

While the majority of FRCCR offices are located in Transylvania, it does have one satellite office in Bucharest and headquarters in Cluj. Its annual budget is one million US dollars, provided by Everychild in the United Kingdom, which is a branch of the Christian Children's Fund. Interviews were conducted with the Deputy Director and the County Program Director. These executives are accustomed to holding interviews with foreign evaluators and making presentations to potential donors. No interviews with social work staff or clients were obtained.

FRCCF has forty projects across six counties in Romania. The agency's initial focus was on the creation of prevention projects to retain children within their family rather than being institutionalized. Subsequently, agency programs expanded to include community assistance projects. Today, each county has a community center that acts as an umbrella for the "Family Homes" project. Family homes are a melding of institutional "group care" philosophy and family-oriented foster care interventions. There are approximately thirty-three family homes in operation; each is run by a couple and accepts up to ten children at a time. The home approximates the environment seen in US "group homes", in which a group of clients live together in a home-based setting under the guidance of a residential staff of caretakers.

Family programs aim at preventing child abandonment and school truancy, targeting families with many children and little income. The family programs offer education, tutoring, homework assistance, proficiency examination preparation, and literacy courses for children and adults. Community centers sponsor after-school programs that provide food, childcare, and homework assistance. This intervention is designed to reduce family difficulties in maintaining their children's education due to poverty or transportation issues. Currently, 4,500 children and 4,000 adults participate in the family program.

The agency also provides medical and counseling services as well as outreach for outlying mountain villages. Services to mountain communities include visitation and counseling for isolated families who are unable to obtain transportation to cities for services.

Family preservation interventions are aimed at retaining biological children in the home and address the national issue of abandonment due to parental poverty. Assistance takes the form of utility vouchers so that houses have consistent heat and electricity, in addition to donation of consumables and material goods. The program previously provided medications, but discontinued this practice as a result of stricter licensing and distribution laws related to medication.

Child advocacy programming targets children who currently reside in institutions. These children receive regular visits from physicians and counselors to assess their progress and to address developmental and behavior issues. A major function of program staff is to educate institution staff about child development and the rights of children. However, staff members have reported substantial resistance to change on the part of institution caretakers. Under the auspices of the Family Connection Project, social workers take institutionalized children to visit their biological families when possible, setting the stage for possible reintegration. Some children have already been able to reintegrate into their biological families from institutional care.

FRCCF also values prevention efforts, and has established a program for maternal assistance. This program assesses the material and psychosocial needs of pregnant women who are at risk for abandoning their infants.

A major component of FRCCF philosophy is promoting access to services for the Roma population. Each agency project has a percentage of Roma participants, unlike other social

service agencies that direct Roma clients to alternative services. Current programming includes outreach to a small, outlying Roma community that suffers from abject poverty. The Deputy Director indicated that working with Roma clients has been difficult due to previous Romanian prejudice and the lack of culturally competent training on the part of Romanian social workers.

The agency provided an annual review written in both Romanian and in English. This reflects the strong influence of reliance on Western donors for monetary support and the corresponding accountability that is required from the organization. Currently, ninety-five percent of FRCCF funds come from EveryChild UK, while five percent comes from the Romanian state. In 2003, ten percent of agency funding is expected to come from the European Union. Financially, the agency has had to research additional funding opportunities, as the focus of EveryChild will soon be directed toward needs in China and Africa. This year's budget has already been reduced, prompting agency efforts to establish relationships with donors in the United States.

In 2002, FRCCF merged with European Children's Trust (ECT) - Romania. The merger was prompted by the integration of FRCCF's traditional partner, The Christian Children's Fund, with European Children's Trust UK. The larger resulting organization (ECT) acts as an umbrella, overseeing branch operations. The merger led to expansion of services in Maramures county and in Bucharest.

One of FRCCF's primary concerns is the continued deficiency of conditions in childcare institutions. Institution staff has not grown professionally in their childcare methods and progressive training efforts have not been introduced. Respect for children's rights has not been a paramount priority demonstrated by institutional caretakers and many workers still confiscate children's birthday money or presents. FRCCF's psychologist and physician frequently interact

with institution staff in the hope of modeling more progressive methods of childcare; however, they report extreme resistance to learning on the part of the staff.

Many referrals come via word of mouth, enhanced by the agency's reputation in the surrounding community. At initial start-up, clients were attracted to the agency by advertising efforts. Institutions were also contacted at the agency's inception, initiating a relationship between institutions and FRCCF management. Diplomacy between FRCCF and institution staff remains a delicate balance – institutions are typically proprietary and territorial, especially in the face of rapid closures, job loss for staff, and negative press in the global community about living conditions for children. FRCCF social workers would like to conduct educational seminars for institution staff, but find it difficult to made headway given the tenuous balance between the functions of each organization.

With relation to institutional closure, a major problem faced by FRCCF is that children are not given time or instruction to prepare for transition from their long-term environment to new living situations. Institutional closure policy appears to mimic the faltering US deinstitutionalization process in the 1960's (Aderibigbe, 1997), with little warning given to staff and few preparations for clients to transition into the community. An institution may close with as little as two weeks' notice. As with the US experience, many older institutionalized children find themselves homeless because arrangements are not made for them to be placed in foster care or to be reunited with their biological families. These children are at risk for legal involvement, prostitution, health problems, and substance use (Krieg, 2001).

Community treatment of severe mental illness remains a significant concern for FRCCF. Large numbers of schizophrenic patients live on the streets with limited access to medications and counseling. Similarly, substance abuse has not received adequate recognition as a national

health problem – one Alcoholics Anonymous organization was initiated in Cluj, but it collapsed when its donor withdrew to support other programs. Healthcare and literacy also remain areas of substantial need.

The agency's goal in the next year is to work through logical frameworks for organization of services and to create objectives and indicators of progress for each project. Administrators began evaluations in 2000 to assess current outcomes for established interventions and community projects.

The Deputy Director expressed a positive view toward the Director, who has worked for the organization since its creation. She credits much of the agency's success to his hard-working, dedicated nature and his commitment to child welfare. She indicated that he represents the agency's accomplishments effectively to potential donors, increasing the likelihood that they will collaborate with the agency.

Little information was gained about the organizational culture from the interviews conducted. To gain adequate information, interviewing additional workers at multiple levels of the organization was an indispensable part of data collection. These interviews were not possible given the agency workers' schedules, so no data is presented on FRCCF culture.

FRCCF has 160 employees, 120 of which are full-time. All are professionals in their respective domains with social workers representing the majority of staff members. Each office houses a multi-disciplinary team comprised of social workers, a psychologist, and a physician. There are five offices in total, including an administrative facility in Bucharest. FRCCF has a well-defined board of trustees and directors comprised of individuals from the Romanian community.

Of significant concern to the Deputy Director is the substantial caseload borne by each

social worker. Each worker carries a client load of up to 150 families in addition to institutional clients. Currently, each family is visited no fewer than three times a year, but the agency realizes that effective interventions require more frequent visits. On the agenda for current problem-solving is how to utilize staff members more effectively given that finances are limited for hiring a large cohort of new social workers.

The Foundation has undergone major systems changes in the past year in response to a decrease in the number of its donors. The funding style adopted by FRCCF to balance the decrease in sponsorship is to solicit funding from individual donors in support of specific, identified children. Under this arrangement, a sponsor agrees to support a particular child by providing a set monthly donation until the child reaches age eighteen. This system operates as individual sponsors take responsibility for each child, and carries with it substantial reporting requirements. Each year, FRCCF creates a progress report for each child; the report and a picture of the child are sent to the sponsor along with personal thanks for continued support. In this way, individual donors get to know their sponsored children and can attach a face and a name to the money they send. While this strategy tends to enable retention of long-term donors, it is also labor-intensive, requiring the efforts of many staff members to create and send the reports.

In Maramures county, the agency has adopted a project-based style of operations. Donors are solicited to give money for particular projects, such as literacy training or Roma outreach. Yearly reports are generated for each project, not for each child or client family who participated. This system is much less labor-intensive than the individual-sponsor programs.

Each year, statistics are compiled on family data such as living environment, income, health status, and satisfaction with services. These data are aggregated and integrated into the

agency's annual progress report, which is shared with current and potential donors. The Deputy Director reported that data for children living in institutions is difficult to gather due to resistance from institution authorities, who refuse the administration of questionnaires.

According to the Deputy Director, selection of staff members has been effective in that the agency is attracting dedicated, committed personnel to conduct its programming.

The Deputy Director shared that the agency strongly needs American partnership, especially in areas of efficiency training and funding. Of particular concern for the agency administrators is the lack of efficient bridges for serving the Roma and inefficiency given the large caseloads carried by the social workers. While the efforts of the organization have brought about substantial improvements in the material and psychological environments of abandoned children, high variability in the conditions for children remain. One of the future goals of the agency is to implement individual intervention plans according to the US model, but given the ratio of staff to children, this has not been possible so far.

When the Deputy Director joined FRCCF, there were seventeen staff members and twenty-seven institutions; all worked together very closely. As the organization grew, operations began to resemble a "factory" environment, with a multitude of complex and increasingly difficult tasks. She acknowledges some concern about the organization losing touch with its aim and philosophy, especially as it courts a variety of donors with differing missions.

The Deputy Director stated that a highly valued agency goal is the idea that interventions for children with special needs is possible and can be made a routine component of social policy in Romania. She praised agency staff for their thoroughness in knowing each family on his/her caseload and its history, despite feeling overwhelmed and burdened by task requirements and