

Ways out of homelessness

The Casa Ioana's Association

Name of the programme	The ACASĂ Programme
Aims and Objectives	<p>Casa Ioana passionately believes 'that everyone has the right to decent housing, meaningful activities, satisfying relationships and the good health to enjoy life.'</p> <p>Our mission is 'to make a positive difference in the lives of families and single women confronted with domestic violence together with other families and single women facing or at risk of social exclusion.' We empower women and children to rebuild their lives, free from violence and fear, by providing a wide-range of life-saving and life-changing services, as well as a voice for the voiceless.</p> <p>Casa Ioana accomplishes its mission primarily through its ACASĂ Programme, which provides temporary accommodation and easy access to innovative community-based social and psychological support that assists our beneficiaries to achieve their full potential</p> <p>Casa Ioana's primary objectives are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ deal with the causes and consequences of domestic violence and family homelessness, by preventing it at the grassroots level, addressing its symptoms and reducing its recurrence ▪ equip people with skills for independent living, by making independence an integral part of our ACASĂ Programme through encouraging full participation of beneficiaries ▪ provide support services where quality is verifiable by improving services, evaluating service outcomes, improving staff training programmes and offering cost effective services
Description	<p>Casa Ioana grew from an organisation providing accommodation and support services to various vulnerable groups, predominantly children with disability, young people leaving institutional care and others experiencing social exclusion and homelessness.</p> <p>We were the first organisation to support mothers in keeping their families together by preventing their children being taken into local authority care due to the family's fragile situation. As women started to come together, the needs of women and children who were experiencing domestic violence and family homelessness became known. Our first family shelter was set up in 2000, to support women and children experiencing domestic violence and family homelessness.</p> <p>Casa Ioana celebrated 20 years of activity in July 2015.</p>
Core elements	<p>Casa Ioana's integrated ACASĂ programme meets the particular needs of families and individuals over an extended period. We work with a broad network of both public-sector agencies and other service providers to help women and children resolve all their problems and acquire the necessary skills and assistance they need to regain family stability and affordable housing. We address the multiple underlying issues of domestic violence and</p>

family homelessness, rather than simply focusing on providing short-term emergency shelter.

We are dedicated to improving our services and we work hard to learn about the people we work with, e.g. their backgrounds, their needs and their ambitions. We have a hugely varied group of people to support and are committed to providing the holistic and personalised support they need to move on with their lives.

Casa Ioana's services fall under three general headings:

- temporary accommodation
- psychosocial support
- peer support

Our support package includes, but is not limited to:

- children's education, activities and childcare
- employment support and training
- family mediation
- individual and group counselling
- legal advice and support in obtaining temporary restraining orders where applicable
- medical support and advice
- personal financial advice and training
- support and advice on affordable housing

Funding

In 2014, Casa Ioana received 24% of its funding from the Romanian Ministry for Labour with the rest coming from the private sector, fundraising events and projects. This income was up 21% on 2013 and totalled €123,530. Corporate partners provided a further quarter of our funding.

Income	2013 €	%	2013 €	%
Carried over from previous year	7,829	8	4,311	3
Beneficiaries' contributions	3,047	3	3,303	3
Ministry of Labour (subvention)	30,377	31	29,632	24
Corporate partners	36,287	37	30,906	25
Individual partners	0	0	3,259	3
Financial donations	8,670	9	22,115	18
Fundraising	6,256	6	24,033	19
2% income tax	3,381	3	2,758	2
Conferences, seminars, etc.	2,001	2	953	1
Projects	0	0	2,126	2
Atelier Ioana	0	0	135	0
TOTAL	97,848	100	123,530	100

Impact/ results

Our key successes in 2014

- we provided safe temporary accommodation to 117 people, including 57 children and young people
- our psychosocial team supported 56 families and 13 single women
- we provided substantial support to 60 adult beneficiaries to overcome issues related to personal responsibility, living skills, social networks, physical and mental health, meaningful use of time and accommodation management
- our psychosocial team helped 29 women and their children make positive

accommodation moves

Despite a policy which gives priority to families and individuals with the most difficult and complex needs, more than 80% of our beneficiaries manage to make a positive move on each year. In 2014, this accounted for 83% of our beneficiaries.

Participants The programme's beneficiaries are women and children experiencing domestic abuse and family homelessness.

Staff	Board of Administration			
	Governance & direction			
	Ian Tilling Director			
	Management & support	Silvia Cotar Accountant	Andreea Gheorghe General Manager	Nicoleta Dinu PR & Communications
Service delivery		Dana Drăgan Social worker	Cristina Enache Social worker	Monica Breazu Social worker

Innovative aspects The ACASĂ Programme recognises that safe temporary accommodation is the starting point for women and children experiencing domestic violence and family homelessness. Accommodation contracts are for one year although they can be extended where appropriate.

Outside normal working hours, there is no member of staff on duty in the accommodation centres and can come and go as they please. Beneficiaries manage their rooms and shared general areas. There is a rota system for the general cleaning which is carried out by beneficiaries.

Our services place great emphasis on empowering individuals: a process by which people are supported to take control of their daily lives and to exercise choice. We believe that empowerment means people having the power to take decisions in matters relating to themselves, in relation to their daily lives and in relation to their self-development. The purpose is simply to equip individuals with the skills necessary to maintain their social inclusion.

The programme recognises that families and single women cannot sustain themselves on state benefits alone, even if they have small children. Therefore emphasis is placed on helping beneficiaries back into full-time employment and help with professional child care. Whilst in work, beneficiaries are helped and encouraged to save part of their income so that they will have enough money to put down as a deposit on an apartment and to purchase the items needed to move in. Because an individual's action plan is focused on eight personal domains (responsibility, meaningful use of time, life skills, substance abuse, physical health, mental health, level of socialisation and the management of accommodation) the plan is much more focused on equipping the beneficiaries with skills in making the action more focused on the person's life and can ensure that if a beneficiary meets a crisis in the future, she will be able to cope and manage it. In short, the support offered concentrates on trying to resolve the issues that led up to homelessness while simultaneously building a beneficiary's confidence and motivation to make positive changes.

Beneficiary participation is a central plank in our work, from negotiating individual action plans to completing evaluation and monitoring assessments. Beneficiaries are involved in all matters that relate to them, the accommodation and matters that affect the organisation. They are consulted whenever the organisation is proposing changes to policy and even on strategic planning.

Sustainability Casa Ioana has consistently raised the funds needed to support its activities. Our approach to sustainable funding is based on two principles:

Diversification of funding sources

As part of our diversification strategy, we pursue a range of public and private support and are planning to launch a social enterprise that will provide training and employment to beneficiaries as well as an alternative revenue source for our work.

Obtaining in-kind support from partners

Retaining in-kind support is important to remain sustainable. Casa Ioana's in-kind support is largely entrepreneurial advice, health and safety advice and training, shared collaboration with other organisations with expertise and capacity not provided for within Casa Ioana. Consequently, we are able to add value to our projects and significantly increase the impact of each individual initiative through in-kind assistance.

These two practices have enabled Casa Ioana to sustain and grow our funding year-on-year since 1995.

Lessons learned

We carry out constant monitoring and evaluation which allows us to respond quickly to changes that need to be made. Because we are a small organisation, changes to policy can be completed quickly.

Creating and continuously developing strategic partnerships, with the local authorities as well as other NGOs, enables us to meet all the needs of beneficiaries, because our partners can meet a particular need that we are unable to respond to.

Empowerment and the participation of beneficiaries is key in enhancing a beneficiary's chances of a successful move on.

Not relying on project (short-term) funding and diversifying funding sources makes us more competitive and sustainable.

Obstacles:

Macro:

Romania ranks at, or near, the very bottom on almost all measures of poverty and social exclusion within the EU. 40% of the population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with 29% estimated to be severely materially deprived - almost three times more than the EU average. Demand for social support and shelter is very high and cannot be met. In 2014, Casa Ioana received applications from 75 families and 23 single women, unfortunately, due to a lack of space; we had to refuse 45 families and 16 single women.

In education, the OECD assessed 37% of 15-year old Romanians to be functionally illiterate. The European Commission puts government expenditure in education at 3% of GDP in 2012, again the lowest in the EU.

In health, Romania does better in the sense that its public expenditure was 4.3% of GDP in 2012, which made it only the third lowest in the EU, however, the figure for 2015 is apparently down to 4%, reflected in poor health outcomes: Romania has the highest infant mortality rate in the EU.

In housing, the number of units of social housing available and planned between now and 2020 is radically below the level of need. In Bucharest alone, there is a waiting list of 10,000 persons, compared to a highly optimistic estimate that 4,000 units will be built. The waiting list, however, does not reflect an estimated additional 10,000 persons who have not bothered to apply or who have given up.

In social services, Romania spends about 0.6% of GDP. These services aim to help people who need it most. Romania spends only about one quarter of the EU average on such services. The results, which reflect a combination of austerity and decentralisation, are truly grim in many places. The County Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection, municipalities and NGO providers, do not have sufficient funds to finance adequate social

services. Although the law requires every municipality to establish public social assistance services (SPAS), many smaller municipalities in rural areas do not offer such services.

National accreditation standards for the providers of social services are extremely difficult to obtain, with only the more professional organisations able to obtain authorisation. The majority of county council and local authority services are not accredited, but whilst a blind eye is turned to those services, NGO run services are penalised.

Government disbursed EU funding is difficult to obtain and if successful, can involve a large amount of bureaucracy and long delays in receiving funding payments, meaning that some projects fail.

Local:

There is a chronic lack of affordable housing, particularly social housing, and little support for housing supplements. Proprietors are reluctant to rent their properties to single mother-led families with small children. Proprietors are reluctant to enter into formal and legally enforceable rental contracts which are a prerequisite for local authority housing supplements.

Many adult beneficiaries are outside of the national health system because they are not in employment and thus unable to make their health insurance contributions although children and young people under 18 years are entitled to free health care.

There is a chronic shortage of emergency shelters with many shelters open only during the colder months. Maternal centres and other NGOs generally provide short-term accommodation and shelter. Support offered tends to be restricted and again is on an interim basis.

Local authority bureaucracy is alarming and involves long waiting periods. Beneficiaries can only apply for local authority social services if their national identification card shows a local connection to the authority being asked for help.

There is a huge vacuum in the number and quality of services on offer, either by the local authorities or the NGO sector which places a huge burden on existing services that are already overwhelmed.

Huge NGO competition for raising funds amongst the local business community, with local companies, generally not willing to provide financial support. Fundraising is a large concern for the NGO sector, with grants and corporate funding going to the larger, more established organisations like Save the Children, Red Cross, etc.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the programme is primarily, but not exclusively, through project beneficiary input, such as regular (anonymous and voluntary) surveys, monthly house meetings, resident meetings and exit interviews. Beneficiaries are asked to provide feedback about their experience in the programme, including which services and rules were helpful or not, and their general recommendations for programme improvement. This information is used to revise, add or eliminate programme components such as individual services or specific policies. The benefit of such methods is the encouragement of beneficiary involvement and the opportunity for women to voice praise or concerns about the programme.

Exit interviews gather participant input about the programme and allows for a more complete picture of beneficiaries' experiences by including questions about possible gaps in services and a beneficiary's feelings about her experiences while in the programme. Beside the quarterly beneficiaries' surveys, Casa Ioana conducts a community survey among all its external stakeholders. This survey asks the programme partners to provide feedback about their experience working with, and referring to, the transitional housing programme and ideas for improvement. Information gathered from these surveys is shared with all stakeholders, including beneficiaries, funders, partners, volunteers, staff, management and

Board of Administration.

Monthly staff meetings as well as quarterly volunteers' meetings are conducted to generate information about the programme's effectiveness as a method evaluation. Staff and volunteers are given time to express any concerns or suggestions for improvement. Moreover, Casa Ioana holds monthly beneficiary meetings, where a member of staff attends to answer questions from beneficiaries and take notes about their level of satisfaction with the programme.

The second category of evaluation - evaluation of the participant – is conducted through case management meetings and Casa Ioana's Outcomes Star. The star has been developed as a way of measuring change in our beneficiaries. It is designed as a beneficiary focused system, capable of tracking change in a beneficiary as they move through the programme. The Star will track changes in a beneficiary's abilities in the areas of personal responsibility, living skills, social networks, substance abuse, physical and mental health, meaningful use of time and accommodation skills. The information gathered during these meetings will be used for examining beneficiaries' goals, and their progress towards reaching that goal.
