

Association for Community Relations, Romania

Cultivating the charitable impulse countrywide



Annual swim-a-thons like this in Cluj, Romania, offer competitive fun while raising vital monetary support for community foundations across Romania.



The many years needed by Romania to transition from decades of communism to a modern-day democracy have helped influence the country's more long-term approach to philanthropy work.

“We have learned to celebrate incremental changes in attitudes and behavior about giving instead of expecting one dramatic transformation,” said Alina Porumb, the community foundation's program director at the Association for Community Relations (ACR) in Cluj-Napoca, a northern Romanian city. “In the last years, however, the rhythm of change in Romanian philanthropy has picked up, and what was only hope five years ago is now reality.”

In 2001 — a dozen years after the country started shifting to a market economy, including privatizing state-owned enterprises — ACR was established with a mission to promote and develop philanthropy in Romania. Since then, it has become a national leader in developing community foundations as vehicles for local giving and societal change.

ACR staff is enthusiastic about innovative fundraising initiatives that people are using in their communities to meet local needs, says Porumb, with community foundations serving as platforms for sharing and showcasing these initiatives to inspire others.

Philanthropic behavior becomes more rooted in everyday community life, she says, as honorees at weddings and birthday parties ask friends and families to make donations to local causes or the nearest community foundation in lieu of gifts. Similarly, people use sporting events, such as swim-a-thons and soccer matches, as fundraising opportunities to collect pledges and donations for community foundations and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

“At these events, people see they can make a big impact in their community when their small amounts are added together,” Porumb said. “It is wonderful because these ideas

were totally organic, emerging from the community itself.”

Donations have helped fund a variety of projects, including equipping a village kindergarten with educational toys, providing house repairs for people in need and supporting art programs for children with visual and hearing impairments.

ACR currently promotes both individual and corporate giving, although its earlier activities focused more on encouraging corporate giving to NGOs, Porumb says. While corporate giving continues to have a high rate of involvement from employees and clients, ACR has expanded its work to inspire and engage individual donors.

In addition to interacting with donors directly, ACR partners with other groups, such as the United Way Foundation Romania, to create stronger tax incentives for donations given by individuals and businesses in Romania.



■ Community foundations improve the lives of children by funding groups like the Club for Alternative Education in Bucharest.

Today, ACR’s philanthropy programs focus on the following:

- developing young grantmakers through YouthBank groups nationwide;
- building individual giving initiatives, including a national program allowing citizens to designate specific NGOs as recipients of a small portion of their tax money;
- encouraging people to pool funds to generate a greater local impact through Donor Circles;
- promoting a platform that connects NGOs with banks and mobile phone operators so people can easily make technology-based donations; and
- establishing community foundations throughout the country.

With Mott’s help, there are now 12 community foundations nationwide. These grantmaking institutions are spreading because they incorporate an inclusive style of decisionmaking that involves residents in all aspects of community projects — vastly different from how things were done under the former communist system, Porumb says.

However, she says, much public education is still needed because the community foundation concept was previously unknown in Romania. Whether making donations or providing input on local projects, residents appreciate the transparency associated with community foundations, Porumb says.

“Donors are involved in deciding what to fund and then invited to visit or otherwise learn about the completed projects,” she said. “This is accountability. It is closing the circle of giving.”

ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY RELATIONS (ACR) Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Mott grants through 2012: \$1.55 million

Highlight: With strong local leadership and support from ACR and its donors and partners, 12 community foundations have been established in Romania in the past six years. Today, 35 percent of Romanians have access to a community foundation. Collectively, these institutions have pooled and invested about \$825,000, mostly from local donors, in more than 100 resident-identified causes.

In their own words: “The enthusiasm and creativity of community foundations is inspiring positive responses from the local people, who are ready to act to improve their own lives and communities.”

– Program Director Alina Porumb
ACR Community Foundation

Web site: <http://arcromania.ro>



Community foundations engage young people with YouthBank-funded projects like this in Iasi, Romania, where students cleaned and painted murals in a derelict pedestrian tunnel.