

Casa Buna Association

Activity Report 2020



Our story

Beginnings

For more than ten years, a group of volunteers led by Valeriu Nicolae and Hannah Slavik has supported vulnerable children living in the ghetto area of Ferentari, Bucharest.

Although the original aim was to reduce school drop-outs, we soon realized that children need more than help with homework to succeed at school. They also need school supplies, clean clothes and shoes, exercise, healthy meals, medical attention to resolve health problems, and encouragement.

Over time, the number of children involved in our activities increased, and the community of volunteers offering support became bigger and bigger.

In July 2020 this community decided to take legal form, and became Casa Buna ("The Good House").



Our story

Weekends at Casa Buna

Before the pandemic

Before the pandemic, Casa Buna was full of kids each weekend. Laughter and hugs filled the house, and volunteers and kids learned together in each room, in the halls, on the balcony, in the garden, and sometimes even on the stairs! The kitchen was also a center of activity, and after a few hours of learning, everybody enjoyed a hot meal.

On Sundays we gathered 60 kids from 1st to 8th grade, and almost as many volunteers.

On Saturdays, it was kindergarten time. Kids from 3 to 6 years learned letters and numbers, but also basic rules for hygiene and social behavior.

Also on Saturdays, we gathered a group of children who were struggling with reading to build their abilities and confidence with this essential skill.



Our story

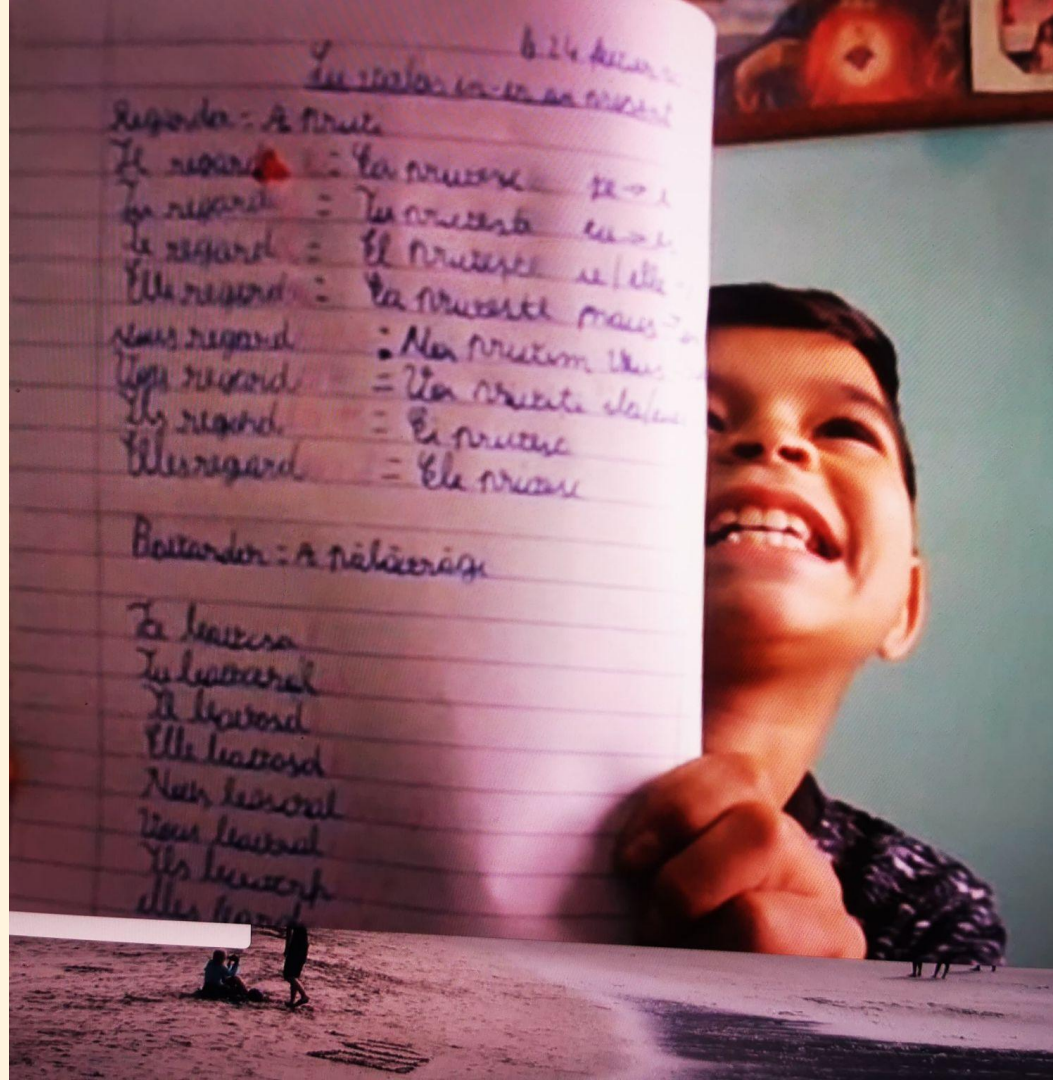
Casa Buna during pandemic

Ferentari

The pandemic pushed our creativity to the limits: we needed to find ways to continue to support our kids as face-to-face meetings were restricted, and as schools closed and eventually moved online.

We started by installing computers and internet routers in Ferentari and then we mobilized the volunteers for online tutoring. We reunited volunteer-child pairs that had worked together in person each weekend; we found new tutors for the kids who remained; and we searched for useful apps and resources. Many of these volunteer-child pairs are still learning together, months into the pandemic.

Moving our activities online was a real challenge, especially until the kids got used to using apps like Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom, and Facebook Messenger. But we did not give up. On the contrary, many volunteer-child pairs worked together daily. Perhaps the biggest challenge and sweetest victory was connecting our preschool children with online volunteers.



Our story

Casa Buna during the pandemic

Arges county

In May 2020 we arrived on the scene in 7 villages in Arges county.

Our volunteers prepared 100 computers which we distributed to vulnerable families in Nucșoara and Lerești communes.

This was followed by an adjustment period when the kids befriended our volunteers who offered to tutor them online and learned to use the IT equipment we had installed.

During the summer, many of these volunteer-child relationships were strengthened and the children mastered using computers for learning together with their volunteers.

All this hard work meant that when school re-opened online, the kids were well-prepared for the transition.



Casa Buna Association

—
2020

In numbers



In 2020 we extended our reach

Moving our activities online gave us the opportunity to reach more children. For many of them, without our assistance the shift to online school would have led to missing classes and eventually dropping out.

We started with installing computers and IT equipment, but soon extended our help to basic clothing and shoes, school supplies, food, and also medical and emotional support.



Bucharest

For more than 10 years

we have been present in Ferentari and Jilava



Arges County

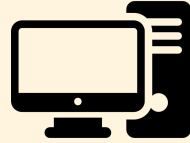
Since May 2020

we have been present in Campulung, Leresti, Voinesti, Pojorata, Nucsoara, Sboghitesti, and Slatina

An unexpected visitor

In the homes in Ferentari and in Arges county, computers were installed on small tables, behind the door, near the tv, or in improvised nooks in the small rooms.

For many of the kids, this was their first time to use a computer. We started with the basics: how to use the mouse and keyboard, how to connect to the internet. Then we moved on to how to open Zoom or Skype to meet their volunteer tutors.



**~350 computers
and laptops**

were installed in
the children's
homes in 2020



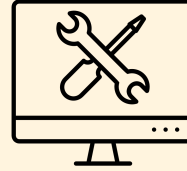
**~ 500 auxiliary
devices
(keyboards,
mouses, headsets,
webcams, wifi
adaptors)**

helped the children
to connect to their
volunteers

We learned how to use technology

Through the kids' experiences, we remembered our own first encounters with technology. From holding a mouse in our hand for the first time and following the little arrow on the screen, to connecting to the internet, activating a hotspot, and calling someone on Skype.

The kids learned fast due to the non-stop technical support of our fabulous IT team. The team was always there to help them remotely or locally to change or repair broken equipment. Nonetheless, it was a long journey!



~500 hours

were spent locally fixing equipment and building stronger connections with the families



~750 IT help requests

were solved by our trustworthy technicians: Pavlo and Lulu



In 2020 we grew

2020 was a tough year for everybody. But for us, it was a year when, like fairytale characters going through challenges, we grew stronger.

The magic word is: **volunteers!**

Around **400 volunteers** contribute regularly to Casa Buna activities, from tutoring to cooking to providing medical services. Without their perseverance and dedication, Casa Buna could not have grown to what it is today.

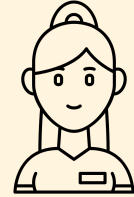
Our community has gathered and grown with a common ideal: helping children in disadvantaged communities and giving them equal opportunities for education.



from **62 children**
studying weekly
with us in March

to **239 children** in
December

and we are still
growing



From **73 volunteer
tutors** in March

to **242 volunteer
tutors** in December

And we are still
growing

We studied more

This year we accumulated **7,979** hours of online educational activities with our kids.

We went through all of the school subjects: reading, writing, Romanian, mathematics, English, and even biology, physics, and chemistry.

Through one-to-one tutoring, we managed to narrow the educational gap between each child's abilities and their grade level, and to build confidence in their ability to learn.



In Ferentari, each child was tutored

2 hours per week, before the pandemic

5 hours per week at the start of the pandemic (before online school opened)

2 hours per week from autumn 2020

Total: 4,942 hours



In Arges County, each child was tutored

0 hours per week, before the pandemic

2 hours or more per week during the pandemic

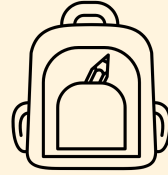
Total: 3,037 hours

We equipped the children for school

In September we prepared backpacks fully equipped with school supplies. This year we doubled the number of backpacks compared to 2019 to ensure a good start of the school year for each of our kids.

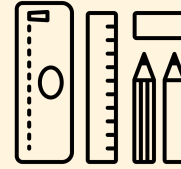
Younger children were thrilled to receive colored pencils, felt pens, coloured paper, watercolours, and brushes as well as notebooks, pens, and pencils.

The older kids received notebooks, pencil cases, stylish pens and pencils, and even tools for the much-feared geometry class!



165 backpacks

stuffed full of supplies were delivered to the kids on time for the school year



8,025 school supplies (notebooks, pens, pencils, pencil cases, art supplies, and more)

were packed into new backpacks for the children





We equipped the children for cold weather

To get to school throughout the year, kids need more than just school supplies. In November we prepared and distributed sets of warm **winter clothing** to our children:

- snow boots
- warm, waterproof winter jackets
- fleece sweaters and thermal underwear
- warm socks
- gloves, scarves, and hats



1,008 winter clothing items

kept our kids warm throughout the winter



144 pairs of warm, waterproof boots

protected the tiny toes of our kids' feet during the cold months



We distributed food

The pandemic affected the financial situation of our families in Ferentari. Many parents lost their jobs, and their ability to provide for their families was reduced.

We started to distribute food which was kindly donated by various sponsors to ensure that the basic needs of our children were met, along with educational needs.



Over 3000 meals

were distributed to
the families in
Ferentari



**J'ai Bistro, Lăptaria cu
Caimac, Miez,
L'Univers de Nicolai,
IKEA and the Banca
pentru Alimente**

were some of the
superheroes who
provided many
delicious meals



We continued assisting families to maintain their living conditions

Most of the families in Ferentari have just 10 square meters to live, sleep, cook, eat, and bathe.

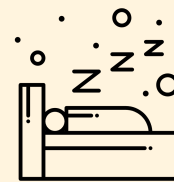
Through the help of generous donors, we collected and distributed necessary appliances and furniture to ensure clean clothing, safe food storage and preparation, and warm places to sleep.

Together with online tutoring, study corners for the kids also started to appear in these small living spaces.



**Over 100
appliances
(washing machines,
refrigerators,
stoves)**

reached the
children's homes



**Over 100 pieces of
furniture
(especially beds
and mattresses)**

reached the
children's homes

We continued offering medical help

Around 20 doctors supported us to resolve medical cases in 2020

The pandemic restricted our medical activities and in 2020 we had to reduce the number of ophthalmological and dental checkups and treatments. We did our best to ensure treatment for the most urgent cases.

We also started an online group of doctors and medical professionals who advise us on medical problems encountered by the families.



98 dental and orthodontic consultations

took place in 2020



34 kids

benefitted from dental and orthodontic treatment



11 eye check-ups and 1 eye surgery

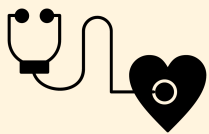
took place in 2020



6 children

received brand-new glasses

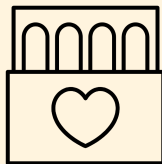




**With the help of Inima
Copiilor Association**

80 children

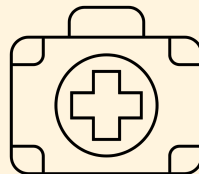
received a general
check-up from a team of
cardiologists from Marie
Curie children's hospital



**With the help of PeStop
Association**

monthly

we distributed menstrual
hygiene products to
teenagers and mothers in
our community



**Guided by a volunteer
pediatrician**

**50 kits with basic
medications**

were prepared and
delivered to the families
of our children in
Nucșoara, where access
to medical services is
limited

And in December, Santa came too

Remote-control cars, footballs and football equipment, LOL dolls, colorful hair accessories, games, and more were all carefully packed and delivered to children in Arges county and Ferentari.

This was a reward for their hard work and dedication to school and online tutoring.



**210 gifts packed
especially for each
individual child**

brought Christmas
joy into their homes



We are surrounded by wonderful people

❤️ **Thank you for supporting us!**

We are a community with a huge heart, which makes everything possible.

Volunteers giving their time, donors contributing resources, and sponsors providing funds: your generosity helps every day to build the “good house”, brick by brick.



774 individual donors

were with us during the past year, making all of our activities possible



86 companies

offered their support and trust that together we can do more and better

Meet our team



Alexandra Popa



Anca Graiter



Anca Sandu



Anca Sandu



Corina Olteanu



Elena Tanase



Eliza Traistaru



Hannah Slavik



Ioana Georgescu



Iuliana Hamciuc



Raluca Toma

Casa Buna in numbers

Special thanks to our trustworthy IT guys



Lucian Cojocaru
aka Lulu



Victor Pavloschi
aka Pavlo, Paulo, or Pablo



Valeriu Nicolae
aka "The Volunteer"



Thank you!

