

Summary Report on “R-O Mediere”

Romanian American Sustainable Partnership (RASP)

World Learning/USAID

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Partnership

In April 2003, an exciting partnership began between the Community Mediation and Safety Center (CMSC) in Iasi, Romania and the International Victim Offender Mediation Association (VOMA) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S. At that time, CMSC and VOMA were jointly awarded funding by RASP, World Learning/USAID for a 4-month project, “R-O Mediere.”

Project Overview

The overall purpose of the project is the development of the mediation capacity in Romania through the introduction of new services, increased public awareness and the introduction of legislation on mediation. The two major goals of the project are:

- 1) Establish a network of three conflict resolution centers in the northeastern Moldavian region of Romania with teams of mediators to resolve family and community conflicts
- 2) Strengthen conflict mediation services in Romania through building local NGO capacity, increasing public awareness on the need for mediation services, and creating new mediation legislation

Training

From May through July, VOMA provided 20 days of training and consultation. Six courses were offered in mediation and related areas, plus additional days of independent study.

- ◆ Victim Offender Mediation/Restorative Group Conferencing (VOM/RGC)
- ◆ Training of Trainers in VOM/RGC – Level 1
- ◆ Training of Trainers in VOM/RGC – Level 2
- ◆ Basic Mediation – Level 1
- ◆ Basic Mediation – Level 2
- ◆ Workplace/Commercial Mediation & Supervision

A total of 55 people were trained, including probation officers, social workers, attorneys, youth workers and other NGO professionals. Barbara E. Raye (Center for Policy, Planning and Performance), Annie Warner Roberts (Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking, University of Minnesota, School of Social Work) and Susan Wiese (Coulee Region Mediation and Restorative Justice) were the training team, and Cornel Loghin, CMSC program coordinator, was the translator.

Media Campaign

An exciting media and public awareness campaign was launched on July 16, 2003. The purpose is to enhance general knowledge of alternative methods for conflict resolution on a national scale in Romania. At the launch were representatives from the U.S. Embassy, USAID/World Learning/RASP; Parliament; the criminal justice system, mediation centers and the national press. VOMA's representatives, Barbara Raye and Annie Warner Roberts, were interviewed for national television and newspapers.

This initial media event featured the premier screening of a new video promotional clip on mediation. Based upon a Romanian folk tale about shepherds and their flocks, the video cleverly illustrates the need for and advantages of mediation, an alternative method of conflict resolution. It appears the video will be a smash hit; when the video ended, the audience broke into spontaneous applause. In the future, the video will be presented on five national and local television channels. At least two million people will be reached.

Notably, the video carries a C-N designation in Romania – the Audiovisual National Council's national scale broadcast approval, which means the material is recognized as having a significant social interest. On behalf of the partnership, CMSC is seeking to gain rights for the video. CMSC and VOMA would like to distribute the video internationally – to members and others – as well as have a U.S. premier screening at the 20th annual VOMA conference in Nashville, TN, in early November 2003.

Legislation

In order to introduce, promote and sustain ADR and mediation into the Romanian environment, it is very important to develop mediation legislation. CMSC has established a team to review existing legislation from English speaking countries, the European Union and Romania. The Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking provided a copy of their recent publication: "Legislative Statutes on VOM: A National [U.S.] Review."

Resources and In-kind Contributions

As required under the terms of the grant, significant amounts of in-kind time and resources were contributed to the project. In addition to VOMA's in-kind, both the Center for Policy, Planning and Performance and the Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking donated resources. Other specific contributions from the Center for RJ&P included:

- ◆ Complete set of six VOM/Conferencing/RJ videos converted to PAL format
- ◆ National RJ Training Institute materials
- ◆ "12 Steps to Personal Peacemaking" booklets
- ◆ "The Impact of RJ Conferencing: A Review of 63 Empirical Studies in 5 Countries"

Romanian – American Pen Pal Partners (RAPPP)

CMSC and VOMA are committed to sustaining the partnership into the future. One major component is the Romanian – American Pen Pal Partners (RAPPP) initiative. Envisioned as a key follow-up to the Training of Trainers, as well as a way to expand the

partnership within the RJ field, RAPP will pair up practitioners from both countries for one-to-one partnerships to foster reciprocal dialogue. During the pilot one-year period, we expect the cross-cultural exchange will be mutually beneficial, as partners will share ideas, issues and innovations with each other – practitioner-to-practitioner and program-to-program. A call for interested practitioners to apply will be circulated through VOMA's Announcement email to all VOMA members. Practitioners from the Training of Trainers course in Romania have already applied for a U.S. partner, specifying areas of interest and expertise.

Future Partnership Projects

CMSC and VOMA are in the process of developing an international project for the field of conflict resolution, initially proposed by three countries – Romania, U.S. and Kenya. A fundraising strategy is also being designed. Details of the project will be available by December 31, 2003.

Additionally, VOMA will provide technical assistance and consulting as the mediation centers in Romania develop a national association [ACRRO or ADRRO or other]. VOMA will link CMSC with NAFCM, ACR and the Conflict Network Canada for additional consultation.

Appendix

Background on Romania

"Romania suffers from years of isolation and is lagging behind many of its regional neighbors in opening new ways of doing business. In particular, this can be seen in the slow evolution of Romanian civil society. The capacity of Romanian civil society remains weak, social alliances are fractured, and the long-term institutional capacity of the non-profit sector, including NGOs, is largely undeveloped and unsustainable. Furthermore, there are specific implications beyond civil society that are delaying both economic and social sector development.

There is direct linkage between the depth and number of exchanges and partnerships between Romania and the United States and the more rapid integration of Romania into Western structures, values and practices. At the same time, many American groups and individuals (including many Romanian-Americans) continue to show a great deal of interest in Romania since the fall of Ceausescu in 1989. There are more than one hundred U.S. voluntary initiatives currently assisting Romania's children, many of which have existed for five years or longer. Such interest should be encouraged and channeled into significant "investments" in Romania in the form of experience sharing, skills transfer and other important contributions.

U.S. not-for-profit organizations, including PVOs, have proven themselves to be efficient conduits for USAID funding to local partners and help extend USAID's support to a broader spectrum of Romanian beneficiaries. USAID's experience in supporting partnerships has demonstrated the effectiveness of this vehicle in developing the capacity

of local partners through skills transference, mentoring, hands-on experience and on-the-job training. Partnerships with U.S. PVOs and other not-for-profit organizations can improve the organizational capacity, financial viability, service delivery and advocacy skills of Romanian partners. In addition, effective partnerships have proven to be flexible, responsive mechanisms that often develop into relationships that endure beyond the limits of USAID funding and thus contribute to sustainability.

CMSC and Mediation

“Since 2001, CMSC has been the only specialized Romanian agency offering mediation services. It has served more than 100 clients from the city and county of Iasi. Unfortunately, no legislative framework currently exists in Romania to regulate and encourage the use of alternative conflict resolution services. This results in using slower and more expensive processes, i.e., the court system, to resolve common community and family disputes, or more complex disputes such as commercial and workplace litigations. Creation of a network of community mediation centers near NGOs and governmental institutions is necessary as a means to resolve community disputes and standardize approaches. While there exist a number of NGOs attempting to serve a community mediation function, many have differing approaches to the type of conflicts and disputes they address. A more standardized approach is needed.

Initial cases resolved in the communities will provide the committee working to the draft of new mediation law a sufficient number of Romanian test case litigations to compare with American cases. This will allow the committee to propose realistic measures for the design of the new law. Public awareness of the availability of mediation services is also lacking, as companies (state-owned or private) and individuals still rely heavily on the court system for mediating disputes. A well-functioning network of NGOs specializing in mediation services will facilitate more rapid resolution of common disputes and free the courts to focus on the most difficult-to-resolve cases. Greater public awareness is also necessary for creation of a permanent community referral system.” In order to accomplish the goals the following activities will be implemented and sustained by the partnership between CMSC and VOMA.”