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The Wheels of Change Move On - follow up – towards appropriate wheelchair provision, sports and accessibility for mainstream participation of Romanians with disabilities

SPANS 033 – Final Grant Activity Completion Report



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The Wheels of Change Move On follow up – towards appropriate wheelchair provision, sports and accessibility for mainstream participation of Romanians with disabilities

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I. List of Acronyms

BMI	Body Mass Index
DGASPC	County Department of Social Work and Child Protection
HIA	County Health Insurance Agency
IPSCI	International Perspectives on Spinal Cord Injuries
ITF	International Tennis Federation
IWBF	International Wheelchair Basketball Federation
MRF	Motivation Romania Foundation
NAQ	National Authority for Qualifications
NGOs	Non-Governmental (not-for-profit) Organizations
NHIA	National Health Insurance Agency
PC	Project Coordinator
PD	People with Disabilities
PG	Peer Group
PGT	Peer Group Training
PM Team	Project Management Team
PT/OT	Physiotherapist / Occupational Therapist
RT	Regional Team
SCI	Spinal Cord Injury
TOT	Training of Trainers
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WCU	Wheelchair User
WCD	Wheelchair Distribution
WHO	World Health Organization
WSTP	Wheelchair Service Training Package

II. Executive Summary

The goal of the *Wheels of Change Move On follow up – towards appropriate wheelchair provision, sports and accessibility for mainstream participation of Romanians with disabilities* project was to reduce the number of wheelchair users immobilized at home, who leave in isolation, and unable to participate in sports, leisure and culture by providing appropriate mobility equipment and services that enable wheelchair users' social participation. The project developed and enhanced the impact of the previous USAID – financed initiative *Wheels of Change* that increased the regional availability of *appropriate* wheelchair services in Romania via 7 regional teams, by developing a new mobile service called *Mobility Caravans* specially designed to increase outreach to people with disabilities from remote rural areas, who have very limited possibilities to access specialized wheelchair services. Through the *Mobility Caravans*, more than one hundred people with disabilities received mobility equipment tailored to their needs, wheelchair repairs and adaptation services, along with life skills training. Also, participants in the caravans received assessments and recommendations from medical and physical therapy specialists experienced in working with people with disabilities. Services were provided by a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary team including wheelchair technicians, physical therapists, a nurse, and peer group trainers – independent wheelchair users, socially integrated who, by their personal example, motivate and train their peers in order to increase their mobility and independence. During caravans, peer trainers provided training on wheelchair handling techniques, hygiene and personal care to avoid pressure sores and other health conditions associated with mobility disabilities, and counseling for social and vocational integration of people with mobility disabilities.

The project also expanded the positive impact of the independent living training programs developed during the previous two USAID projects, the *Wheels of Change* and the *Wheels of Change Move On*, by organizing such programs for new beneficiaries or in regions that did not benefit from such programs before. Through two active rehabilitation camps organized within the *Wheels of Change Move On follow up* project, Motivation Romania Foundation (MRF) provided opportunities to 31 wheelchair users to experience independent living in wheelchair accessible settings, thus making progress in regaining self-confidence and increased independence and facilitating their social re-integration. During a one-week training program participants practiced transfers to and from the wheelchair and other basic techniques for wheelchair handling, discussed and learned from the peer group trainers about the most important aspects related to health prevention, recovering from a Spinal Cord Injury (SCI), rights of people with disabilities, access to services etc. During camps, a medical team also conducted comprehensive health assessment for wheelchair users focusing on positioning, nutrition and general health. Their role was to educate wheelchair users to adopt a healthy life style in order to prevent serious diseases and to motivate them to become more active and more independent.

The independent living training seminars organized in various regions all over the country that brought together wheelchair users, family members and specialists played a key role in raising awareness among beneficiaries and professionals alike about the appropriate

wheelchair and wheelchair services and the importance of providing the wheelchair together with the appropriate training in order to maximize independence and health of wheelchair users.

Active rehabilitation and independent living training is a unique peer group training (PGT) program provided in Romania only by MRF that involves wheelchair users in training other wheelchair users by sharing from their own experience and acting as mentors and role models for motivating their peers to become independent and socially active. As peer group trainers play a key role in these training programs, a Training of Trainers (TOT) program was organized within the project in order to train more wheelchair users, former beneficiaries of MRF independent living programs, to become PG trainers.

Wheelchair sport is another component of the active rehabilitation program of wheelchair users. The project consolidated previously created wheelchair sport training opportunities by involving new wheelchair athletes in sport activities, initiating new wheelchair sports in Romania, such as wheelchair ski, and by providing advanced training opportunities, through wheelchair sport camps, for athletes selected to participate in competitions at regional or national level. Sport competitions provided excellent opportunities for wheelchair users to demonstrate their skills, either individually or in team games and proved to be effective ways for increasing self-confidence and improving self-esteem. Participants in sport activities go back home with a positive morale and the willingness to overcome their limits in the day-to-day life. 65 wheelchair users participated in wheelchair sport training, wheelchair sport camps, and various demonstrations and competitions organized at local, regional or national level. MRF organized six wheelchair sport camps: five basketball camps and one archery camp, compared to four wheelchair sport camps initially planned. Wheelchair sport events organized in public places play a key role in educating general public about wheelchair users' skills, thus promoting social inclusion.

The qualitative results of the research study on wheelchairs and wheelchair user services conducted by MRF within the previous USAID project the *Wheels of Change Move On* showed that wheelchair users who benefited from appropriate mobility equipment and participated in peer group independent living training programs such as: seminars, active rehabilitation camps, counseling and group support, and wheelchair sport activities gained more self-confidence and were more likely to become independent and socially active. Within the *Wheels of Change Move On follow up* project, MRF organized a conference for disseminating the results of the research study among specialists and stakeholders for raising awareness regarding the need for developing a continuum of community-based services for wheelchair users in order to support their social integration.

Another accomplishment under the *Wheels of Change Move On* project was the creation of the Accessibility Map, www.accessibil.org, a unique tool which provides useful information to wheelchair users about accessible buildings throughout Romania. Based on the level of accessibility, the buildings are rated as fully accessible, partially accessible or inaccessible. Wheelchair users may access the map to get information on accessibility if they intend to attend sports, recreation and cultural activities. The *Wheels of Change Move On follow up* project further developed the Accessibility Map by adding 120 new buildings on the map and

also organized a series of four seminars for educating students, future architects, on accessibility issues. 142 students from Bucharest, Cluj and Timisoara and four professors attended these seminars. This innovative activity addressed the lack of information and specific programs regarding the importance of accessibility, among future professionals involved in building design and construction. Following the accessibility assessments conducted by MRF regional teams so far, 1,415 buildings of public interest are included in the Accessibility Map.

A **network of 16 regional teams** provided appropriate wheelchairs and wheelchair services to people with mobility disabilities throughout the country. MRF regional teams are located in Arges, Bihor, Brasov, Buzau, Cluj, Constanta, Galati, Iasi, Ilfov, Mehedinti, Mures, Neamt, Prahova, Sibiu, Satu-Mare, and Timis, each one providing services in two or more counties.

The results of the *Wheels of Change Move On follow up* project were accomplished, and even exceeded many targets. MRF provided over 850 **appropriate wheelchairs** in various regions throughout the country (compared to an initial target of 500 wheelchairs) and more than **340 people with mobility disabilities participated in independent living training programs and group support activities** (vs. 250 planned). MRF organized 21 PGT seminars compared to 10 seminars initially planned and two active rehabilitation camps according to the plan.

III. Management

a. Staffing, staff training, systems and procedures

The *Wheels of Change Move On follow up* was implemented by the project management team and the staff from the regional teams. The management team consisted of:

- Project Manager
- Peer Group Independent Living Training Coordinator (wheelchair user)
- Wheelchair Accessibility Expert
- Wheelchair Sports Coordinator
- Sustainability Coordinator
- Financial Manager

Regional wheelchair user services teams included Peer Group independent living trainers (people with mobility disabilities), physical therapists, psychologists, wheelchair sport trainers and team coordinators. Drivers also provided logistic support and insured adapted transportation during mobility caravans and wheelchair sport activities. Sixteen regional teams provided wheelchairs and wheelchair user services, six teams were involved in wheelchair sport activities while counseling and group support activities were organized only in four regions. MRF involved volunteers in project activities, whenever needed, especially Peer Group trainers, physical therapists, nurses or drivers.

In terms of developing the human resources capacity in order to increase the quality of wheelchair services provided to project beneficiaries, The *Wheels of Change Move On follow up* benefitted from the previous USAID initiative the *Wheels of Change Move On* and from another USAID project *Access - Accelerating Core Competencies for Effective Wheelchair*

Service and Support, currently implemented by World Vision, through which MRF provided specialized training to regional team staff based on WSTP curricula developed by WHO. These two projects complemented the *Wheels of Change Move On follow up* project activities ensuring the transfer of expertise and organizational experience from the central level to the regional level and a consistent approach within the entire network of regional teams regarding technical, programmatic and financial issues. The comprehensive package of working procedures and tools previously developed was updated or adapted for new activities such as the mobility caravans.

Within the project, MRF also organized regular meetings between the project management team, regional team coordinators, and members of the regional teams. These meetings included training sessions in which participants learned about the project objectives and specific grant requirements, project implementation procedures, communication within the network, and financial procedures. These meetings provided opportunities to share results and best practices among teams and work together for identifying solutions to common problems and challenges they face. Learning through experience sharing proved to be an effective way for improving the performance of the teams. Also, these face-to-face meetings improved cooperation among the project team members. On-site training and support was also offered by MRF experienced staff and adapted according to the needs of the teams.

b. Coordination

The coordination of 16 regional teams and the communication within the network benefitted from the experience of previous USAID financed projects. The consistent tools and working procedures developed within the two projects were updated and adapted to the specific requirements of the current project and proved to be very useful during activity implementation. E-mail communication and meetings via Skype were regularly used to ensure remote coordination and monitoring of day-by-day activities. Monitoring meetings were organized via Skype either with groups of regional teams, or with each separate team, on case by case basis. Coordinators of specific activities also provided the necessary technical assistance to the regional teams.

MRF also organized coordination, evaluation and planning meetings that brought together the project management team and regional team coordinators in order to ensure that project results were achieved and consistent working procedures were implemented by all the teams. In addition to results analysis and activity planning, these coordination meetings offered opportunities for regional teams to share experience and to strengthen their cooperation.

Coordination and communication included coordination between the project management team and the regional teams, between activity coordinators and the teams, and among the members of project management team. Due to the numerous teams and the variety of activities, a multi-layer flow of communication was designed in order to ensure proper coordination and avoid overlaps or gaps. Activity coordination was split between the project coordinator and PGT coordinator, each one coordinating specific activities. Also, the Activity managers organized and coordinated specific activities and provided the necessary technical support to the regional teams in their area of expertise.

c. Supervision and monitoring, Technical Assistance

Various monitoring and reporting mechanisms were put in place, in order to ensure that activities are implemented on time and project objectives and results are achieved. A reporting system was developed for monitoring staff activities and progress in project implementation on monthly basis, both at team level and for specific objectives/areas of activity. Specific data on beneficiaries of wheelchairs and wheelchair user services were collected by the regional teams and centralized on regular basis. Meetings with the regional teams were organized via Skype on case by case basis in order to discuss progress of activities, share good practices and challenges faced and identify possible ways to address them. Attendance sheets were kept and evaluation questionnaires were developed and applied for specific activities organized within the project, in order to receive feedback from the beneficiaries. Field visits were conducted by members of project management team for monitoring the activities implemented by the regional teams and for providing technical assistance in order to improve their performance. New regional teams also received on-site technical assistance for organizing their first independent living training programs in their own regions. Annual evaluation and planning meetings were also organized in order to analyze the status of project implementation and indicators achieved by the regional teams and to take the necessary corrective measures for improving their performance.

d. Office, sub-offices and logistic support

All regional teams had appropriate offices that served as regional team headquarters and central service provision location for each region. The teams had telephones, computers and internet connections to facilitate communication with the project management team and among regional teams. Regional teams benefited from the office equipment and vehicles purchased from previous projects and used for conducting home visits and visits to hospitals or rehabilitation centers for offering wheelchair assessments and appropriate mobility equipment and wheelchair services to their beneficiaries.

Logistic support for wheelchair provision, including wheelchair warehouse and wheelchair transportation was provided by MRF headquarters. Financial and accounting services were also provided by the MRF headquarters for the entire network. The project management team located at MRF headquarters in Ilfov County and at the office in Bucharest ensured coordination, logistic support, programmatic and technical assistance.

IV. Program Accomplishments by Results

a. Program implementation approach and methodology

The overall goal of the *Wheels of Change Move On follow up – towards appropriate wheelchair provision, sports and accessibility for mainstream participation of Romanians with disabilities* project was to reduce the number of wheelchair users immobilized at home, who leave in isolation, and unable to participate in sports, leisure and culture by providing appropriate mobility equipment and services that enable wheelchair users' social participation. In order to achieve its goal, the project addressed three major problems: reduced access to appropriate wheelchairs and wheelchair services especially for

people from small towns, remote regions or rural areas, reduced wheelchair sports training capacities and opportunities, and the lack of wheelchair accessibility of mainstream sports, recreation, culture and communities in general. With USAID support, within the *Wheels of change* project, MRF developed a network of regional teams in order to provide *appropriate* mobility equipment and wheelchair services throughout the country. Although, even after the *Wheels of Change* project completion, the network of the regional teams has been continuously expanded to bring services closer to the beneficiaries, access to wheelchairs and wheelchair services is still very limited for people living in smaller towns, rural or remote areas, mainly due to the lack of accessible transportation and very limited financial resources at family and community level.

Therefore, MRF developed an innovative mobile wheelchair service called *Mobility Caravans* specially designed to increase outreach to people with disabilities from remote rural areas. A temporary mobile wheelchair workshop was set up in a remote village with support from local authorities who made the necessary camping space available. The workshop served all people with disabilities from that community and from surrounding areas who received mobility equipment tailored to their needs, wheelchair repairs and adaptation services, along with life skills training. Also, participants in the caravans received assessments and recommendations from medical and physical therapy specialists experienced in working with people with disabilities. Services were provided by a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary team including wheelchair technicians, physical therapists, a nurse, support staff and volunteers, and peer group trainers – independent wheelchair users, socially integrated who, by their personal example, motivated and trained their peers in order to increase their mobility and independence. During caravans, peer trainers provided training on wheelchair handling techniques, hygiene and personal care to avoid pressure sores and other health conditions associated with mobility disabilities, and counseling for social and vocational integration of people with mobility disabilities. Within the *Wheels of Change Move On follow up* project MRF organized five Mobility Caravans for 106 people with mobility disabilities: in Sugag - Alba County, Chirnogeni – Constanta County, Jijila - Tulcea County, Alma - Sibiu County, and Cojocna - Cluj County.



The MRF network of 16 regional teams consisting of peer group trainers (wheelchair users) wheelchair technicians, and physical therapists provided wheelchairs and specialized wheelchair user support services to people with mobility disabilities throughout the country.

These services included assessment, prescription, provision and adaptation of appropriate mobility equipment and peer group training for independent living. MRF regional teams are located in Arges, Bihor, Brasov, Buzau, Cluj, Constanta, Galati, Iasi, Ilfov, Mehedinti, Mures, Neamt, Prahova, Sibiu, Timis, and Satu-Mare counties covering all regions across the country, each team providing services in two or more counties. They identify people with mobility disabilities in their respective regions who need mobility equipment and wheelchair user services, and provide them appropriate wheelchairs and wheelchair user services. The team members were trained to carry out their activities in a manner that ensures quality of services and the respect for beneficiaries' rights, based on the wheelchair service training package (WSTP) developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). In order to create a referral network for indentifying beneficiaries, regional teams established relationships with key institutions and organizations in their regions, such as: The County Departments for Social Work and Child Protection, social workers from the town halls in rural or urban areas, NGOs, community centers for people with disabilities, hospitals, or rehabilitation centers. Each regional team conducted regular home visits or visits to rehabilitation centers, community centers and hospitals and provided assessments and prescriptions of appropriate, personalized mobility equipment, and support for obtaining subsidized or free of charge wheelchairs through the public Health Insurance Agencies (HIA) or from private donors, respectively. Donated wheelchairs were received from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter – Day Saints from US and from Agape Foundation from Sweden. Regional teams also provided individual training on how to use the mobility equipment.

MRF involve wheelchair users in all its activities; they are peer trainers and role models for project beneficiaries. Peer trainers play a key role in motivating wheelchair users to come out of isolation, and become more independent and socially active. Peer group training (PGT) is a unique concept implemented in Romania only by MRF that involves wheelchair users in training other wheelchair users in: wheelchair handling skills for greater mobility and independence, hygiene and personal care to avoid pressure sores and other health conditions associated with mobility disabilities, emotional issues and sexuality, counseling for social and vocational integration, or wheelchair sports. Peer group (PG) independent living training programs consisted of one or two-day PGT seminars and one-week active rehabilitation camps, organized in various regions all over the country. Four regional teams: Ilfov, Sibiu, Prahova and Timis also organized counseling and group support activities for wheelchair users in order to help them overcome barriers and strengthen their social ties. These activities are conducted by PGT trainers and psychologists and have a significant impact on wheelchair users' morale, increasing their self-trust and self-esteem, improving communication with their families and their peers and thus facilitating their social reintegration. This activity helped beneficiaries to overcome emotional barriers in their social integration process.

Group support activities completed the range of services offered by MRF to wheelchair users as part of the training for independent living. As a development of group support activity MRF organized a workshop in order to encourage self-representation of wheelchair users and train them on how to advocate for their rights. 11 wheelchair users participated in this workshop which included a personal development session and an advocacy training session. The group managed to learn from the experience of others, to encourage and develop a sense

of social inclusion, of community contribution and connection. They also discussed about problems faced by wheelchair users, their rights according to the existing legislation and the main steps that need to be taken in order to find a solution to the problem and get the necessary support in order to promote it to the authorities. During the advocacy session participants agreed that the lack of accessibility of public buildings and spaces is a major constraint against participation of wheelchair users in the community life and a top priority for any future advocacy campaign to be developed at local or national level. The purpose of the workshop was to encourage and support wheelchair users to organize themselves in order to have a voice in advocating for their rights. A TOT program was organized within the project through which 12 active wheelchair users were trained to become PG trainers.



The PG independent living training seminars organized in various regions all over the country brought together wheelchair users, family members and specialists and played a key role in raising awareness among beneficiaries and professionals alike about the appropriate wheelchair and wheelchair services and the importance of providing the wheelchair together with the appropriate training in order to maximize independence and health of wheelchair users. During one-day or two-day seminars wheelchair users observed basic wheelchair skills demonstrations, have the occasion to practice these skills and to discuss with the peer group trainers about the most important aspects related to health care, people with disabilities' rights, access to services etc. Within the project, priority was given to regions that did not benefit from such programs before.

Active rehabilitation camps proved to have an immediate impact on the lives of participants, because they are given the opportunity to experience independent living in wheelchair accessible settings, thus regaining self-confidence and hope that they will be able to achieve more independence with adequate support from specialized services and peers groups.

During a one-week intensive training program participants learn and practice wheelchair handling techniques, learn from peer group trainers about the most important aspects related to health care, recovering from a SCI, the rights of people with disabilities and access to specialized services for wheelchair users. The camps also provide opportunities for interaction with other people who are not family members, motivating people with mobility disabilities to get out of their isolation and try to rebuild their social connections. Beneficiaries appreciated a lot their exposure to activities that they could not even imagine that a wheelchair user can do, such as swimming, dancing, practicing sports or other outdoor activities. They highly appreciated the opportunity to learn and practice key techniques on how to handle the wheelchair, and considered that the progress made during the camp would make their day-by-day life much easier. These techniques refer to: transfers to and from the wheelchair, overcoming small obstacles, or handling the wheelchair on the ramp. But even more important than the mobility independence that participants gain during the camp, is the impact on their morale and the improving of the self-confidence.

Comprehensive health assessments for wheelchair users focusing on positioning, nutrition and general health, developed within the *Wheels of Change Move On* project, continued to be conducted during the camps by a multidisciplinary team including an orthopedist, a rehabilitation doctor, a nutritionist and a physical therapist. The results of the health assessments conducted so far showed that most participants were overweight with obesity tendencies, did not have healthy diet habits, and did not practice regular physical activity. Also, signs of depression were observed and of family (over)dependence. Health specialists who conducted health assessments educated wheelchair users to adopt a healthy life style in order to prevent serious diseases and motivated them to become more active and more independent. Based on the results of the screening process, each wheelchair user received a personalized diet, basic information on nutrition and hydration and they were instructed how to have a healthy life-style.

A Conference for 100 specialists and stakeholders was organized to disseminate the results of the research study developed within the *Wheels of Change Move On* project regarding wheelchairs and services for wheelchair users in Romania and also presented the main findings of WHO IPSCI Report. The purpose of the conference was to raise awareness among participants about the need for developing integrated community-based services for wheelchair users in order to support their social integration.

Another major objective of the *Wheels of Change* project was to consolidate and develop regular wheelchair sports training capacities and opportunities for increasing independence and facilitating social integration of people with mobility disabilities. This activity helped mainstream wheelchair sports in Romania by consolidating previously created sport training opportunities that made ongoing sports trainings available locally to wheelchair users. Wheelchair sport activities included on-going wheelchair sport training: wheelchair basketball, archery and tennis, and introduced for the first time in Romania wheelchair ski. Sports instructors from six regional teams organized weekly wheelchair sports. Wheelchair athletes also participated in national or regional sport competitions, wheelchair sport demonstrations and sport camps. Sport competitions provide excellent opportunities for

wheelchair users to demonstrate their skills, either individually or in team games and proved to be effective ways for increasing self-confidence and improving self-esteem.

Despite the legal requirements regarding accessibility, wheelchair users in Romania still face an inaccessible society where public transportation, schools, universities, sports, leisure and cultural venues, and most public institutions are inaccessible. Sports, culture and leisure remain out of reach for most of them. In this context, the third objective of the *Wheels of Change Move On follow up* project was to raise awareness on the lack of accessibility via the Accessibility Map, and educate future architects on accessibility issues. The Accessibility Map developed by MRF within the previous *Wheels of Change Move On* project is a public web site www.accessibil.org which provides information to wheelchair users about the level of accessibility of public interest buildings throughout Romania. Based on an auditing system previously developed by MRF, buildings are divided in three categories: accessible, partial accessible or inaccessible to wheelchair users. The objective of the *Wheels of Change Move On follow up* project was to maintain and further develop the Accessibility Map.

Three workshops were also organized in universities in order to raise awareness and educate future architects on the importance of accessibility from the practical perspective of a wheelchair user. During these workshops, students learned what accessibility means, received information about the accessibility map, and were involved in practical exercises such as the design of accessible facilities to wheelchair users. The design was then “tested” by a wheelchair user who provided its feedback regarding accessibility.

MRF also organized an *Introductory Workshop in the Audit System of Accessibility for Wheelchair Users*. Students and professors from the Architecture Faculty in Timisoara and from the Office for Students with Disabilities within Babes Bolyai University in Cluj attended the accessibility workshop and learned how to assess building accessibility based on the audit system developed by MRF. They applied what they learned by observing and analyzing concrete spaces in Bucharest, with different levels of accessibility. Through cooperation with *Light into Europe*, a NGO specialized in services for people with visual or hearing impairments the seminar also raised awareness among participants about the need for ensuring accessibility for people with other types of disabilities as well. A wheelchair user and a visually impaired person with a guide dog participated in practical demonstrations during workshop. Direct participation of people with disabilities in these workshops proved to have a great impact on students who learned how the lack of accessibility affects people’s life and became aware of the importance of designing accessible buildings. This approach proved successful in sending out the message about the need for improving accessibility in a larger context of creating a friendly environment and an equal access for all members of the community, regardless of the type of disability. The accessibility activities fostered an enabling environment where wheelchair users could access sports, leisure and cultural activities, and other mainstream programs.

b. Project activities and results achieved

I. Objectives

#1. Strengthen the provision of appropriate wheelchairs together with the necessary wheelchair user services especially peer group independent living training, in order to maximize health and independence of 500 wheelchair users. Out of these, but not limited to wheelchair recipients, 250 beneficiaries will participate in independent living training programs and group support activities that foster social participation.

#2. Consolidate and develop on-going wheelchair sports training opportunities for 60 wheelchair users, including wheelchair basketball, archery and tennis. Wheelchair sport training opportunities will be expanded in one more region, 6 regions offering opportunities for regular wheelchair sport training and participation in wheelchair sport competitions at regional or national level.

#3. Raise awareness and educate 80 future specialists on accessibility issues and stimulate wheelchair accessibility via the Accessibility Map as *the necessary condition* for wheelchair users' participation in sports, recreation and culture.

II. Main Activities and Results Achieved

Objective #1 Strengthen the provision of appropriate wheelchairs together with the necessary wheelchair user services especially peer group independent living training, in order to maximize health and independence of 500 wheelchair users.

Activities

- 1.1 Peer Group active rehabilitation and health assessment camps
- 1.2 Peer Group independent living training seminars
- 1.3 Appropriate wheelchair provision for 500 Romanians with mobility disabilities
- 1.4. Ongoing wheelchair user support group for 80 users via 4 regional teams
- 1.5 TOT seminar for Peer Group instructors
- 1.6 Conference for promoting the Sociological study of wheelchair impact, and the results of WHO International Perspectives on Spinal Cord Injuries (IPSCI) Report
- 1.7 Organize a caravan of mobile wheelchair user services in order to bring services closer to the beneficiaries from smaller towns, rural or remote areas.

Main Outcomes	Targets	Results	Comments
1.1 Two active rehabilitation camps organized	2 30 WCUs	2 31 WCUs	on target
1.2 PGT seminars	10 100 WCUs	21 228 WCUs	above the target
1.3 Appropriate wheelchair provision for WCUs	500	866	above the target
1.4 Counseling and WCUs support groups	80	86	above the target

1.5 TOT seminar for Peer Group instructors	12	12	accomplished
1.6 Conference for promoting the Sociological study of wheelchair impact, and the results of WHO (IPSCI) Report	100	100	accomplished
1.7 Organize caravans of mobile wheelchair user services	4 80	5 106	above the target

Objective #2. Consolidate and develop regular wheelchair sports training capacities and opportunities.

Activities

2.1 Ongoing local sports trainings for 60 wheelchair users in six regions; participation in various sport competitions at regional or national level

2.2. Wheelchair sport camps organized

Results achieved:

Main Outcomes	Targets	Results	Comments
2.1 Ongoing local sports trainings for 60 wheelchair users in six regions; participation in various wheelchair sport competitions at regional or national level	60 4	65 4	On target Creation of a new wheelchair basketball team - not accomplished
2.2 Wheelchair sport camps organized	4 32	5 62	Above the target

Objective #3. Raise awareness and educate future specialists on accessibility issues

Activities

3.1 Wheelchair accessibility assessments and recommendations for public utility buildings

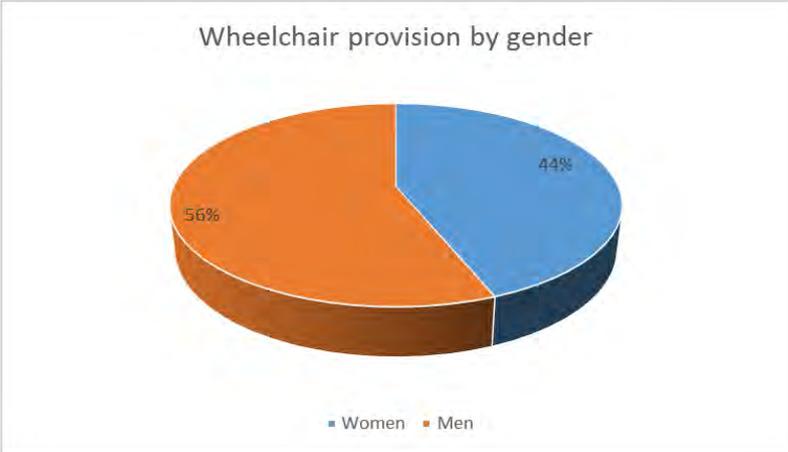
3.2 Organize accessibility workshops for 80 students from architecture or civil engineering faculties

Main Outcomes	Targets	Results	Comments
3.1 Wheelchair accessibility assessments	120	120	On target
3.2 Organize accessibility workshops for 80 students	80	142	Above the target

886 wheelchairs provided by the regional teams:

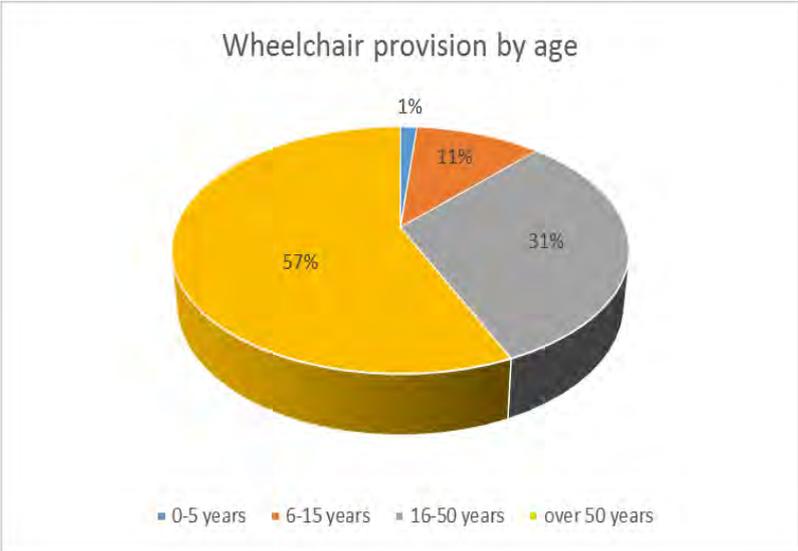
Wheelchair provision by gender

Women	377	44%
Men	489	56%
Total	866	100%



Wheelchair provision by age

0-5 years	12	1%
6-15 years	92	11%
16-50 years	271	31%
over 50 years	491	57%
Total	866	100%



Results achieved:

Conclusions:

- The development of the new mobile wheelchair service called *Mobility Caravans* brought the MRF services closer to our beneficiaries, thus serving one of the most vulnerable groups, people with disabilities who live in remote rural areas where wheelchair services and other basic social services lack almost completely. Almost 100 people with mobility disabilities received appropriate mobility equipment and wheelchair services together with key information and training that help them get out of isolation.
- More than 860 wheelchair users received appropriate wheelchairs. Out of these, more than 350 participated in independent living training programs and group support activities that helped them increase their independence and rebuild their social connections.

- Peer group training seminars and active rehabilitation camps provided opportunities to wheelchair users to experience independent living in wheelchair accessible settings, thus making progress in regaining self-confidence and independence and facilitating their social reintegration.
- Active rehabilitation camps organized within the *Wheels of Change Move On follow up* project financed by USAID are among the very few opportunities available to wheelchair users for getting out of isolation and participating in social and recreational activities. Camps are especially appreciated for the wheelchair handling techniques that participants can learn and practice, specific medical information, and for the opportunities of sharing information and learning from the experience of wheelchair users who face similar problems. Beneficiaries' testimonies reveal that even more important is the impact on their morale: they make new friends, regain self-confidence and the hope that they can live an independent life and reintegrate in the society.
- Counseling and group support activities for wheelchair users helped most participants to have a more positive attitude and increased self-esteem, changed the way they interact with family members and significantly improved their communication skills. Despite the initial reluctance of most wheelchair users to enroll in counseling activities, in the end this activity was highly appreciated by participants due to the immediate impact on rebuilding their social links.
- Wheelchair sport is a key component of the active rehabilitation program of wheelchair users. Sport activities implemented within the project were excellent opportunities to demonstrate wheelchair users' abilities and effective ways for increasing their self-confidence and improving their self-esteem. Wheelchair sport events organized in public places also educated the general public about wheelchair users' skills, thus promoting social inclusion.
- The *Look at abilities forget incapacity* Conference raised awareness among 100 specialists and stakeholders at national and regional level about the importance of appropriate wheelchair and wheelchair user services for maximizing health and independence of wheelchair users. The results of WHO IPSCI report disseminated at the conference made participants aware of the need to develop a continuum of specific services in order to motivate people with SCI to become independent and support their social inclusion.
- The Accessibility Map continued to be developed to provide information to wheelchair users about the level of accessibility in public interest buildings and to be used as an advocacy tool for improving accessibility, a necessary condition for wheelchair users' participation in sports, recreation and culture. The workshops on accessibility issues for students in architecture also raised awareness on the importance of accessibility among future specialists in building design.

c. Follow up and sustainability of program

The entire network of 16 regional teams has continued to provide wheelchairs and wheelchair services after the completion of the project. The teams were sustained by MRF from its own resources generated through fund-raising from private donors or its income generating unit (Motivation LLC). MRF will continue to receive and then provide wheelchair donations from private donors such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and Agape Foundation and will also attract contributions from the national Government for subsidized wheelchairs through the NHIA accreditation system, in order to ensure funding for the necessary mobility equipment to wheelchair users who cannot afford to buy a wheelchair or to cover the entire cost of a more efficient equipment.

The mobility caravans, group support activities and active rehabilitation camps will continue with funding from European Economic Area (EEA) grants through two different projects: Mobility and Independent Life for Youth with Disabilities and Access to Education Services and Communities for Children and Adult Wheelchair Users. However, selection criteria will be more restrictive, as only youth between 16 and 29 years old are eligible to participate in caravans and camps, while group support activities will be conducted only in Bucharest-Ilfov region. MRF will also continue to provide independent living training programs within *ACCESS - Accelerating Core Competencies for Effective Wheelchair Service and Support*, financed by USAID through World Vision.

Ongoing local wheelchair sports trainings and participation in competitions will be supported financially through the sponsorship attracted from local authorities, sports apparel and other companies at the regional level. Several local wheelchair sport associations were set up in order to be able to attract financial resources from their communities. MRF will help them maintain current partnerships or initiate new partnerships especially with the schools, for getting free access to sport venues and for organizing wheelchair sport training or competitions. Wheelchair athletes trained within the project will continue to participate in public wheelchair sport demonstrations including the ones organized within ACCESS project financed by USAID through World Vision.

Some of the PG trainers who participated in TOT training will volunteer their time and will continue to provide counseling and support for independent living to wheelchair users in their communities either individually, or by participating in PGT programs organized by MRF in their respective regions.

d. Summary of indicators

Activity	Indicator	Target	Achieved	% Achieved
1. Strengthen the provision of appropriate wheelchairs together with the necessary wheelchair user services	1.1 Two active rehabilitation camps organized	30 WCUs	31 WCUs	100%
	1.2 PGT seminars	10	21	157%
		100 WCUs	228 WCUs	228%
	1.3 Appropriate wheelchair provision for WCUs	500	866	173%
	1.4 Counseling and WCUs support groups	80	86	108%
	1.5 TOT seminar for Peer Group instructors	12 WCUs	12 WCUs	100%
	1.6 Conference for promoting the Sociological study of wheelchair impact, and the results of WHO (IPSCI) Report	100	100	100%
1.7 Organize caravans of mobile wheelchair user services	4	5	125%	
	80	106	133%	
2. Consolidate and develop regular wheelchair sports training capacities and opportunities	2.1 Ongoing local sports trainings for 60 wheelchair users; participation in various wheelchair sport competitions	60	65	108%
		4	5	125%
2.2 Wheelchair sport camps organized	4	5	125%	
	32	62	194%	
3. Raise awareness and educate future specialists on accessibility issues	3.1 Wheelchair accessibility assessments	120	120	100%
	3.2 Organize accessibility workshops for 80 students	80	142	178%

V. Problems Encountered and Solutions

The lack of accessible buildings for wheelchair users and the lack of adapted transportation were major constraints faced by MRF during the implementation of project activities.

Wheelchair sport events, group support activities, camps and training seminars for wheelchair users were particularly affected, as accessible facilities for wheelchair users are very scarce and the number of accessible hotel rooms is reduced. To the extent possible, MRF used its own camp location in Varatec for organizing such events, but this was suitable only for beneficiaries from the North East region and surrounding areas, while for the other regions, due to the big distances MRF had to identify another camp location closer to wheelchair users' homes.

Ensuring transportation from home to the sports or group support locations was a difficult task, as MRF transportation capacity is limited, local public and even private transportation are generally not accessible and very few beneficiaries have their own vehicles. In order to solve this problem, to the extent possible, our teams tried to group beneficiaries who have a vehicle with the ones who do not have access to transportation so they could come together to project activities. The athletes that owned a car used their own vehicles to participate in sport activities, but their cars are old and could not be used on longer distances. The most challenging situation was in Bucharest where distances are longer than in other cities and there were greater transportation needs. In order to address this problem, MRF allocated a driver to ensure adapted transportation for participants in project activities including group support and sports activities organized in or outside Bucharest. Also, for ensuring the transportation of the wheelchair users to active rehabilitation camps or sport camps, MRF used its own adapted vans from MRF headquarters in Buda, but this required additional costs and time resources.

Identification of new wheelchair users willing to engage in regular sports activities proved to be a challenge for all regional teams. Although MRF has a large database of wheelchair users, only a few of them have the physical capacity or a good health condition for practicing a sport on a regular basis. Another constraint is that active wheelchair users who are the most suitable for sports activities usually have jobs and family responsibilities and they have little spare time to allocate for these activities. The sports training schedule often overlaps with their job schedule. Reduced interest in practicing sports is a cultural issue, too, as in Romania, the general population is also not very interested in practicing regular sports activities and unlike in other countries, even the education system does not encourage very much sports activities.

Due to the reduced number of wheelchair users willing to play basketball on regular basis and the constraints of the team sports that require the presence of a minimum number of participants at each training, the efforts of setting up a new basketball team in Cluj area have not been successful, this being the only target that MRF did not meet within the project. As an alternative, MRF organized an additional wheelchair basketball training camp and invited to the sport camps wheelchair basketball players identified in Cluj or in other regions where the number of players was insufficient for creating a local team. The advantage of sport camps is the possibility to bring together athletes from different regions and to do a more intensive training. The downside is that due to longer distances to the camp venues and lack of accessible transportation, not all the members of the local basketball teams can participate in a camp. Another area of development for wheelchair sport was the diversification of wheelchair sport activities by including individual sports as well, such as archery, tennis, cycling using hand bikes, athletics or skiing. The advantage of individual sports is that there is no need for a minimum number of wheelchair athletes in the same location. Individual sports to be successful in attracting more wheelchair users in general and more women wheelchair users towards practicing sports, thus facilitating their social inclusion.

A major barrier for many wheelchair users, especially the ones in rural areas is the limited access to specialized medical services. People with mobility disabilities have to travel long distances in order to get a medical recommendation for a wheelchair and many of them cannot afford to travel as the public transportation is not accessible and prices for the private transportation are prohibitive. We tried to solve some of these problems through wheelchair donations. However, the number of donated wheelchairs is limited and they are not suitable to all beneficiaries.

Recruiting appropriate participants for the TOT training for PG trainers proved to be also challenging. Although most of the wheelchair users selected by the regional teams are independent and active, they do not necessarily have the mentoring and communication skills necessary for motivating their peers to get out of isolation and become more independent. These skills could be acquired in time, through practice. Whenever possible, MRF regional teams will involve the trainees in their PGT activities, so they have the opportunity to practice what they learned during the TOT, under the guidance of the more experienced PG trainers. Identifying women wheelchair users willing to become PG trainers also proved to be difficult, as women are generally more involved in household activities and therefore more reluctant to spend many days away from their homes. Only one woman wheelchair user participated in the TOT program.

VI. Financial Position

The Project Budget (USAID funded portion) for the *Wheels of Change Move On follow up* was **\$348,762**.

The table below presents Budgeted Expenses compared to the actual cumulative USAID funded project expenditures (by major categories).

Budget Categories	Budgeted Expenses	Actual Expenditures
Personnel	\$131,853	\$128,744
Fringe benefits	\$36,613	\$30,240
Consultants	\$17,674	\$13,549
Travel & Transportation	\$27,300	\$22,176
Equipment	\$6,000	\$5,487
Other Direct Costs	\$38,672	\$34,139
Program Activities	\$90,650	\$112,274
Totals	\$348,762	\$346,609

The expenditures under Fringe Benefits line were lower than initially budgeted due to a reduction of social contributions approved by the Romanian Government beginning on July 1, 2014. Also, the significant depreciation of RON (Romanian currency) against the US Dollar (USD) decreased the costs in USD. The Consultants line budget was under spent as some regional teams began group support and counseling activities later than initially planned, due to the overlap of the beginning of the project with the summer holidays period. However, the number of wheelchair users who benefitted from this activity met the planned target. Due to the decrease of the fuel price and the RON depreciation against USD, the transportation costs for home visits to wheelchair users were much lower than initially budgeted, thus the Travel

and Transportation budget line was also significantly under spent. Also, due to the lack of accessibility of public transportation, regional teams used almost exclusively their own vehicles, most of the costs budgeted for train, bus or taxi being saved. The RON/USD exchange rate also influenced the other direct costs that were lower than initially budgeted. On the Program Activities line, the costs increased compared to the initial budget because the number of wheelchair users who received wheelchairs and wheelchair services and participated in independent living training significantly exceeded the initial project targets. Additional costs were necessary for wheelchair provision and adaptation and to organize additional activities including one more mobility caravan in a remote rural area, one more wheelchair sport camp or 11 PGT independent living seminars for more than 100 wheelchair users.

The amount (in USD) of interest earned during project implementation years. No interest was earned during project implementation

VII. Documentation of Shared Learning

A key subject of the *Look at abilities forget incapacity* Conference organized within the *Wheels of Change Move On follow up* was the dissemination of the results of the research study on wheelchairs and wheelchair user services conducted by MRF in the previous *Wheels of Change Move On* project - financed by USAID. The study called *Life in a wheelchair from isolation to participation* took a close look at the impact of mobility equipment and services, as perceived and expressed by the wheelchair users themselves. The study raised awareness among specialists regarding the need for developing a continuum of community-based services for wheelchair users in order to support their social integration. Based on the findings of the study, MRF also developed wheelchair service provision together with independent living training programs within the project .

VIII. Recommendations to World Learning for improvements of the grant management process

MRF has no recommendations to make.