



Children in Distress

Annual Report 2023/2024



To cure, sometimes; To help, often; To comfort, always.

Executive Summary

Children in Distress (CID) is a UK-based charity dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable children in Romania. Established in 1990, our mission is to provide comprehensive care and support to children facing severe health challenges, social deprivation and educational disadvantages. Over the past three decades, Children in Distress has become a beacon of hope for countless children and their families, offering a lifeline in times of dire need and empowering them to build better futures.

Our work is driven by a deep commitment to the wellbeing of children, ensuring that they receive the medical care, education and emotional support necessary to thrive despite their circumstances. From its humble beginnings, Children in Distress has grown into a multifaceted organisation, with a range of programmes designed to address the complex and varied needs of the children we serve. The programmes include specialised medical treatments, educational initiatives, social services and community outreach, all tailored to create a holistic support system delivered by our sister charity Copii in Dificultate.

The year 2023 has been a pivotal one for Children in Distress during which we restructured the charity and streamlined the systems and processes to support the delivery of our work across the UK. This has been made possible through the unwavering dedication of our staff, the generosity of our donors and the collaboration with our partners.

This report outlines our activities, achievements and financial performance for the year. Through detailed accounts and data, we aim to provide a transparent and comprehensive overview of our operations and the positive changes we have brought about.

We invite you to read through this report to understand the breadth and depth of our work, to celebrate the successes and to appreciate the collective effort that drives our mission forward. Together, we are making a tangible difference in the lives of vulnerable children, ensuring that they can lead healthier, happier and more fulfilling lives.



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1. Chair's Welcome

Dear Supporters,

Welcome to our Annual Report.

2023 has been a transformative year for Children in Distress (CID). Amidst a comprehensive restructuring, we have successfully strengthened our organisational framework to better support our mission of aiding vulnerable children in Romania. This process has enabled us to refine our operations, ensuring that our efforts are both impactful and sustainable for the future.

Our charity, marks 35 years of important work in 2024 with great pride, having consistently dedicated itself to improving the lives of children facing severe health challenges, poverty, and educational disadvantages. In 2023, we relocated our core operations from Scotland to a new office in York, a strategic move designed to enhance our efficiency and extend our reach and mission be the heart of the charity back to its origins. This transition signifies our commitment to evolving and adapting to better serve our beneficiaries and enforces our commitment to our volunteers.

Throughout the year, Casa Maria has remained a cornerstone of our work, providing a supportive home for children with complex needs. We have expanded our community education outreach, reaching more underserved communities and enriching our educational programmes with new curricula and resources. Our enabling key campaigns have grown from Strength to strength.

These achievements would not have been possible without the dedication of our staff, the generosity of our donors, and the collaboration of our partners. Despite facing numerous challenges, including economic fluctuations and global uncertainties, our resolve to provide comprehensive care has only strengthened. The restructuring has brought fresh perspectives and innovative approaches, enabling us to deliver our key programmes more effectively, under

the professional direction of our Chief Executive and team, and support of a dedicated Board of Trustees.

I take this opportunity to thank each and every member of our Board, our executive management and staff team, and our network of dedicated volunteers both in the UK and in Romania for all the hard work that has gone into and continues to do so in ensuring our year on year growth and success.

As we look to the future, our focus is on sustaining and expanding our impact. We aim to create a scalable and replicable model of care that can be implemented in various regions, thereby extending our reach and effectiveness. Our commitment to the children we serve remains steadfast, and we are excited about the opportunities ahead to further enhance our services.

We deeply appreciate the continuous support from our donors and partners, whose contributions are vital to our success. Together, we are making a significant difference in the lives of vulnerable children, ensuring they have the opportunity to lead healthier, happier lives and a safe and secure future.

Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication to our cause and we look forward to celebrating 35 years with you in 2024.



Anne-Marie Martin FCMI
Chair
Children in Distress

2. Message from the Chief Executive Officer

Dear Supporters,

2023 has been a year of significant growth and impact for Children in Distress. Despite the challenges, we have continued to expand our work to ensure we can reach more children who need our support. Our dedicated team of staff, volunteers and partners has worked tirelessly to ensure that the activities we undertake in the UK ensure every child we support in Romania receives the care and attention they deserve.

In the face of numerous obstacles, including economic instability and unforeseen global events, our commitment to the children has never wavered. We have adapted our strategies and leveraged our resources to provide not just immediate relief, but also long-term support and opportunities for the children and families we serve.

This year, we have introduced several new working practices as we transitioned the core work of the charity from the registered office in Scotland to our new corresponding office in York. A restructuring of the charity personnel has brought about growth through fresh approaches to delivering our key pillars of work in Romania. Casa Maria continues to be at the centre of our work, supporting the health, education and wellbeing of our children. The community education support clinics have expanded their services, offering more comprehensive care and reaching communities that were previously underserved. Educational programmes have been enhanced with new curricula and resources ensuring that children receive quality education. Finally, our psychosocial support initiatives have been bolstered to address the mental and emotional wellbeing of children.

We are grateful for the unwavering support from our donors without whom our work would not be possible. Your generosity has enabled us to not only sustain but also amplify our efforts. The

stories of transformation and hope we hear from those we serve are a testament to the powerful impact of your contributions.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to our mission and are excited about the opportunities to further enhance our services. We are exploring new partnerships and collaborations that will allow us to extend our reach and effectiveness further. Our goal is to create a sustainable and scalable model of care that can be replicated in different regions ultimately transforming the lives of children on a global scale.

Thank you for your continued support. Your belief in our mission inspires us to strive for excellence and to push the boundaries of what we can achieve. We look forward to sharing more successes with you in the coming year and to continuing this journey together.

With deepest gratitude,



Simon Errington
Chief Executive Officer
Children in Distress

3. Our Mission and Vision

Mission:

To provide holistic care to children in Romania who are suffering from severe health conditions, poverty and social exclusion.

Our mission is rooted in the belief that every child deserves a chance at a healthy and happy life irrespective of the challenges they face. We are dedicated to delivering comprehensive care that addresses the multifaceted needs of vulnerable children. This means offering not just immediate medical assistance, but also long-term support that encompasses education, emotional well-being and social inclusion.

Our approach to holistic care involves providing the following through Copii in Dificultate:

Medical Support: Providing specialised treatments and ongoing medical care to children with severe health conditions, ensuring they receive the best possible healthcare regardless of their financial situation.

Educational Opportunities: Offering educational programmes and resources to children who are deprived of quality education, helping them to achieve academic success and unlock their potential.

Social Services: Addressing the social and emotional needs of children by providing counselling, social activities and support networks that help them integrate into society and build self-confidence.

Community Engagement: Working closely with local communities to create supportive environments that nurture the growth and development of children, as well as advocating for policies that protect their rights and well-being.

Through these efforts, we strive to create a nurturing environment where children can overcome their hardships and flourish.

Vision:

A world where every child, regardless of their circumstances, can thrive and reach their full potential.

Our vision is an ambitious one, but it reflects our unwavering commitment to the children we serve. We envision a future where every child, no matter their background or the obstacles they face, has the chance to grow up healthy, educated and empowered. In this ideal world, children are free from the constraints of poverty, illness and social exclusion and can pursue their dreams and aspirations.

Key elements of our vision include:

Equality: Ensuring that all children have equal access to healthcare, education and social support; breaking down the barriers that prevent them from succeeding.

Empowerment: Equipping children with the tools and resources they need to become self-reliant, confident and capable of shaping their own futures.

Sustainability: Building sustainable programmes that provide long-term solutions to the challenges faced by children thereby ensuring that our impact continues to grow and evolve with the needs of the community.

In pursuit of this vision, we are driven by hope, compassion and the belief that together we can create a world where every child can thrive and reach their full potential.



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4. Programmes and Activities

Casa Maria

To provide a family environment with specialist care for children with complex needs.

Outcomes

- A safe home for 12 children with specialist care
- Continued therapies to help children with mobility, nutritional needs and education
- A centre of specialist care for children with complex disabilities

Community Education Outreach

Our Community Education Outreach programme for students at risk of school dropout from disadvantaged rural areas is designed with a clear purpose: to break down barriers to education and ensure that children from socio-economically disadvantaged families can complete their compulsory schooling.

Outcomes

- Through a range of activities, we strive to support these children in their academic endeavours and provide them with essential protective skills and habits for both physical and emotional wellbeing.
- Recognising the importance of health education, we provide informative sessions covering various aspects of health, including hygiene, self-care and nutrition.
- Our programme targets children from families facing unemployment, unstable employment and financial hardship, where low educational levels and other challenges may further exacerbate the risk of school dropout.



Zarnesti Pineview Retreat Lodge

Our vision for the future is to create a respite space that will encourage social integration of children and young people of mixed abilities whilst providing rest for the children with complex disabilities, parents and carers.

Outcomes

- Work continues on the process of obtaining preliminary authorisations for construction.
- Partial electrical connection approval has been obtained. A coexistence study has been commissioned to an authorised company in order to obtain the final approval.



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5. Achievements and Impact

Healthcare

A family home offering support for children with complex neurological, physical and emotional needs.

Education

Provided care to over 4,000 children from disadvantaged communities.

Emotional Support

Delivered support services to over 100 children and organised several community events.



6. Financial Overview

Total Income: £555,286

Donations & Legacies: £390,199

Trading Income: £161,063

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7. Volunteer Contributions

Our volunteers are the backbone of our organisation. Their dedication and selfless contributions are the driving force behind our ability to support and uplift vulnerable children in Romania. In 2023, over 40 volunteers generously donated more than 10,000 hours of their time and talents, playing an indispensable role in the success of our programmes, activities and in our retail shops.

Volunteers have been instrumental in a wide range of areas, including:

Shoebox Campaign: Our Shoebox Campaign has continued to sit at the heart of our communities, with greater engagement than ever before and we are looking forward to developing and expanding our ambitions for this important initiative.

Retail Shops: The volunteers in our retail shops provide unwavering support for the success of the stores and the revenue generated to deliver our services in Romania.

We are profoundly grateful for the time, energy, and passion our volunteers contribute. Their generosity and spirit of service embody the core values of Children in Distress and inspire us to continue striving towards our mission.



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8. Challenges and Future Goals

Challenges:

In 2023, several key obstacles have significantly impacted our operations:

Funding Constraints: Ensuring consistent funding remains a significant challenge. While we are fortunate to have a dedicated base of donors, fluctuations in economic conditions, donor fatigue and increased competition for charitable donations can make it difficult to secure the necessary resources. This unpredictability affects our ability to plan long-term and expand our programmes.

Regulatory Challenges: Navigating the regulatory landscape in both the UK and Romania can be complex and time-consuming.

Changes in laws and policies related to healthcare, education and non-profit operations can introduce new hurdles that require significant administrative effort and adaptation.

Volunteer Recruitment and Retention: While our volunteers are indispensable, recruiting and retaining committed individuals can be challenging. Many potential volunteers face their own constraints that can affect their ability to contribute consistently.

Technological Adaptation: Keeping pace with technological advancements is essential for efficient operations and effective service delivery. However, implementing new technologies requires investment and training, which can be difficult to manage alongside our other financial constraints.



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8. Challenges and Future Goals

Future Goals

Despite these challenges, we are steadfast in our commitment to our mission and optimistic about the future. Our goals for the coming years are focused on enhancing our impact and ensuring sustainable growth:

Expand Funding Sources: To address funding constraints, we aim to diversify our revenue streams. This includes pursuing grants from foundations, forging partnerships with corporate sponsors and launching new fundraising campaigns. We will also explore innovative funding models, such as social enterprise initiatives, that can generate ongoing income.

Optimise Operational Efficiency: To combat rising operational costs, we will focus on optimising our processes and improving cost-efficiency. This includes negotiating better rates for supplies, leveraging bulk purchasing agreements and exploring alternative suppliers. We also plan to invest in staff training to enhance skills and productivity.

Strengthen Regulatory Compliance: We will enhance our regulatory compliance capabilities by investing in robust administrative systems and training our staff on new and existing regulations. This will ensure that we remain compliant and can swiftly adapt to any changes in the legal landscape.

Enhance Volunteer Programmes: To improve volunteer recruitment and retention, we will develop more comprehensive support and training programmes. This includes offering flexible volunteering options, providing regular feedback and recognition, and creating opportunities for personal and professional development.

Leverage Technology: Embracing technology will be a key focus. We plan to implement advanced data management systems to better track our impact, streamline our operations and improve communication with stakeholders.

Expand Programme Reach: We aim to extend our programmes to more regions within Romania through Copii in Dificultate as well as exploring the building of partnerships with other local organisations and communities.

We believe that with strategic planning, innovative thinking, and the continued support of our donors and volunteers, we can overcome the challenges we face and make a lasting impact on the lives of children in need.



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9. How You Can Help

There are several ways you can make a meaningful difference in the lives of these children:

Donating:

Your financial support is crucial.

Donations are the lifeblood of our organisation, enabling us to provide essential services and care for children who need our support. Your contributions help us cover the costs of medical treatments, educational programmes, social services and operational expenses. Whether it's a one-time gift or a recurring donation, every contribution counts and directly impacts the lives of the children we serve.

One-Time Donations: A single contribution can go a long way in providing immediate relief and support. Your donation can help fund a specific project, purchase necessary supplies, or support a child's medical treatment.

Monthly Giving: Monthly donors provide us with a reliable stream of income allowing us to plan and sustain our programmes more effectively. Regular donations also help ensure that children receive continuous care and support.

Legacy Giving: Legacy gifts through wills or estate plans provide long-term support and help us build a sustainable future for our programmes.

Volunteering:

Join our team of dedicated volunteers.

Volunteers are at the heart of our organisation, bringing passion, skills, and a personal touch to our programs. By volunteering your time, you can make a direct and lasting impact on the lives of children.

Administrative Volunteers: Support our behind-the-scenes efforts by helping with administrative tasks, fundraising events and community outreach. Your organisational skills can enhance our efficiency and effectiveness.

Retail Volunteers: Support our store managers to provide a local community outlet to sell donated items which in turn provides the opportunity for us to support more children.

Partnering:

Collaborate with us to expand our reach and impact.

Partnerships with businesses, foundations and other organisations are vital to our mission. By working together, we can amplify our efforts and extend our services to more children.

Corporate Partnerships: Companies can support our efforts through financial contributions, in-kind donations or employee volunteer programs. Corporate partnerships help us access additional resources and expertise, enhancing our ability to serve children.

Foundation Grants: Foundations can provide critical funding for specific projects or ongoing programmes. Grant support enables us to undertake large-scale initiatives and achieve significant impact.

Community Organisations: Local groups and organisations can collaborate with us on community-based projects, helping to identify and address the unique needs of children in different regions.

Your involvement, whether through donating, volunteering, or partnering, is invaluable to us. We invite you to be part of our mission and join us in making a lasting impact.

Thank you for your support and dedication to improving the lives of vulnerable children.

Visit our website at www.childrenindistress.org to learn more.

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10. Contact Information



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Thank you for your support and dedication to our cause.

This report was prepared by Children in Distress.

For any inquiries or further information, please contact us at

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Registered Charity Number: SC039383

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