

## CHILDAID FUNDING APPLICATION

**TITLE:** GIVE 1,300 THERAPY SESSIONS TO DISABLED CHILDREN IN MOLDOVA  
**COUNTRY:** MOLDOVA, EASTERN EUROPE  
**FOCUS:** CHILD HEALTH INTERVENTIONS, CHANGING ATTITUDES

**SUMMARY:** This project proposal sets out a funding request for the work of ChildAid in Moldova. The project will fund a therapist to perform 1,300 sessions across a year. This will contribute to the free, vital therapies the Tony Hawks Centre offers to over 600 children each year, all with physical disabilities. It will also contribute towards changing systemic attitudes towards vulnerable children with disabilities and additional needs, within government, civil society organisations and the wider community.



**ABOUT CHILDAID:** Our mission is to help disadvantaged children in Eastern Europe turn their lives around, through the creation of long-term partnerships with local organisations.

Our support of key projects helps showcase that children can thrive away from institutions and integrated within the local community. **Our vision is that, in the longer term, local and national authorities will be persuaded to adopt this approach themselves.**

Established over 40 years ago, ChildAid is proud and honoured to continue to bring physical, material, and psycho-social support, to the following groups across four distinct sectors

Families in crisis	Children living with disabilities	Orphans and social orphans*	Children living in conflict zones
<p><b>ABANDONMENT</b> preventing families breaking down and/or supporting those who have been abandoned</p>		<p><b>EDUCATION &amp; PLAY</b> giving children a voice and a childhood</p>	
<p><b>HEALTHCARE</b> transforming lives and transforming attitudes to disability through direct action</p>		<p><b>VULNERABILITY</b> finding resilience in adversity through creating firm foundations for children, young people and families living in precarious conditions</p>	

\*where living parents may be in rehabilitation care or in prison.

**CONTEXT & NEED:** Moldova is Europe's poorest country, situated between Ukraine and Romania in the most easterly part of the continent.

*"Despite recent progress, Moldova remains one of the poorest countries in Europe... Moldova's economy remains vulnerable to corruption, political uncertainty, and Russian political and economic pressure."* Source: CIA World Fact Book

In the not too distant past, most children born with a disability in former Soviet Union countries, would have been hidden from society in state run orphanages. Often not much better than prisons, these institutions made headline news showing how children were (at best) just managed and contained; rather than being loved and cared for.



ChildAid is privileged to have seen some transformations in attitudes and action towards children; particularly those with disabilities and additional needs. Today, disabled children can be seen playing in parks, with many attending mainstream education centres alongside their peers. This is thanks, in no small part, to ChildAid partner organisations who fought hard over many years, for the rights of disabled children to be enshrined in law through the national courts.

**There are positive glimpses of change, but much remains to be achieved, which remains a challenge given the continued economic and cultural context:**

- **Basic free health care provision is limited to emergency assistance only. All other care (including medication) has to be paid for, including under-the-counter payments.**
- **The quality of facilities for children in care remains very poor and is not considered a high priority for government spending.**
- **Children with disabilities and additional needs continue to be on the receiving end of negative stereotyping and stigma within the government and wider community.**

However, we remain focused on achieving our goals, to help change attitudes, government policy and the funding of programmes that will bring change to the lives of some of the most vulnerable children in Moldova.

## The Tony Hawks Centre:

ChildAid has been partnering with THCCentru in Chisinau, Moldova since 2000 when the British comedian Tony Hawks funded the setting up of the centre to support chronically ill children from socially vulnerable families.

Tony travelled to Moldova to write a comedy book, but what started out as a comic adventure, very quickly brought to his attention the bleakness, corruption and scale of despair that half a century of communist rule and proceeding government corruption has brought. Everyday Tony witnessed another example of poverty and hardship that was the norm for most Moldovans; particularly as the safety net of any kind of social welfare had vanished.

Soviet teaching had previously seen such children as almost sub-human and unlovable, with many transitioning as adults from so-called 'state care' into a life of crime or prostitution. Thanks to our partners, orphans, who used to be placed in state programmes until their 16<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, are now increasingly being fostered, or have access to one of our local partner programmes, whilst they continue to be in state care.

***“There have been efforts over the last decade to improve healthcare services for children in Moldova. However, the reality for children with disabilities is that they are still at risk of being removed from their family or abandoned and locked away in an institution.”***

Martin Wilcox, Director, ChildAid

## **CONTEXT & APPROACH:**

If we want to bring about a sustainable long-term change, we need to model the transformation that is possible in the lives of vulnerable children and their integration within communities – and to showcase this change to government, stakeholders and the wider community. **Key to the success of this strategy is having the right staff in situations of responsibility, with the ability to work in the current environment, professional and compassionate in their understanding of caring for children with complex needs, and dedicated to bring this change over the longer term.**



*“The shortage of health care providers is one of the biggest challenges for Moldova; and we have also seen a massive exodus of medical specialists. Our Centre is affected by these trends, so we need to educate and retain our own young specialists.... However, the Centre is not just a ‘project’ (that might be concerned with a single clear, well-defined problem and a few solutions). In contrast THCCentru is a complex structure that has been providing medico/social services to children with chronic diseases for more than 17 years.”*

**Dr Diana Covalciuc, Director, THCCentru**

Our approach is to get alongside families, children and young people and provide them with practical and emotional support to flourish and make the most of their potential in society. This includes partnering with a number of community-based projects in each country, to meet the physical, emotional and developmental needs. **The outcomes we see are an advance in vocational and mainstream education, a reduction in levels of poverty, and an improvement in health and social integration.**



**CHILDREN'S HEALTHCARE CENTRE PROJECT:** The aim of the THCCentru is to provide medical, educational and social care for chronically ill children from socially vulnerable families. It is one of just a few paediatric healthcare centres in Moldova.



Beginning in a small two-bedroom apartment at the turn of the millennium, Dr Diana Covalciuc established a dedicated team of fully qualified paediatric therapists with specialisms in supporting children with cerebral palsy. The centre was so successful that the in very cramped operating conditions prompted an appeal to raise money for a purpose built Health Centre that would enhance the rehabilitation care; which opened in 2014.

What is so successful about the Centre's approach is that it combines rehabilitation *and* parental education, which promotes a child's integration into society.

**CHANGE FOR GOOD:** The vision of the Children's Healthcare Centre is to community attitudes, contribute towards positive changes in government policy, and to bring lasting change to the lives of children and their families... one step at a time:



Although statutory resources are almost non-existent, this move for whole-person therapy for children with disabilities is finally influencing a major shift in the Government's recognition of multi-disciplinary rehabilitation.

As a result, the National Health Insurance Company (CNAM), an autonomous organization with responsibility for health insurance, was founded.

**The THCCentru was the first Moldovan NGO to receive such government funding.**

## MARIN'S STORY



**Marin was born with cerebral palsy in 2001. With the stigma associated with a child having a disability, he faced a future of being 'put away and forgotten'.**

**After his birth, and partly due to her son's disability, Marin's mother went into deep depression. Thankfully her family supported her and helped Marin get rehabilitation.** Marin is now 15 years old and has attended the THCCentru since he was 7 years old. He has received a combination of physio, massage, speech and occupational therapy. The family has also been helped with material aid which has included clothing, medicines, special shoes for Marin and even short holiday breaks to the seaside. With a second partnership that ChildAid has with a Moldovan organisation, Speranta, Marin has also been able to attend school where he has flourished, especially with English, mathematics and history.



Learning to walk has been very painful for Marin, but he has persevered and succeeded, even if life continues to be hard for him. Since the new THCCentru opened in 2014, he has really benefitted from using the new hydrotherapy pool. The hydrotherapy pool has enabled his muscles to relax and be strengthened, making a significant step in the physical development for him and others with similar disabilities.



At the opening of the new Centre, Marin walked in wearing his school uniform. This led to many 'happy tears being shed', as ten years ago this scenario would have been impossible. Marin

wouldn't have had access to any rehabilitation, meaning he wouldn't have been able to walk. And secondly, Marin would not have been able to go to school, due to the 'put away and forgotten' mentality. Due to ChildAid and the Centre, Marin has a healthy future where he can continue to flourish and contribute to Moldovan society.



**Note: The top two left photographs are of Marin. The other pictures are of children being supported at the Centre.**

### **FUNDING REQUEST:**

The Tony Hawks Centre employs 9 fully trained physiotherapists who treat over 600 children a year in 12,000 therapy sessions. Each child receives a mean average of 20 sessions a year. This varies depending on the child's condition and therapy programme.

The salary of a physiotherapist in Moldova is 74,195 leu (£3,330/ \$4386). By funding this for a year, the therapist can perform 6 sessions a day, the equivalent to 1,332 sessions per year (over 222 working days.) This would make a substantial difference to the lives of many children.