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Press Release

**Horia Brenciu, Andreea Esca, Ethan Hawke, and Margareta Paslaru
join forces in this year's "Școala te face mare" campaign**

Today **Asociația Ovidiu Rom** launched the second phase of its *five year* public awareness campaign, "Școala te face mare". The campaign was started in 2009 to encourage and assist poor parents in getting their children in school at an early age. According to Ovidiu Rom's executive director, Maria Gheorghiu, "Early childhood is the single most important period for brain development. If a child is not properly challenged by age four or five, they will never catch up to their better prepared peers. Kindergarten is the foundation for school success."

Ethan Hawke's TV spot for the campaign was filmed on a playground in a disadvantaged district of Paris, one block from where he is currently making a movie with Kristen Scott Thomas. Ethan encourages poor parents to send their children to kindergarten so they can reach their full potential.

The other public service announcements were shot on Strada Pangarati, a Bucharest street where the residents live in third world conditions without running water or sanitation services. Three years ago, at the request of the school principal, Mrs. Carmen Crudu, Ovidiu Rom began recruiting young children on Strada Pangarati for kindergarten and school. That first year **Ovidiu Rom recruited 43 previously unschooled children between the ages of 3 and 9 on this one city block** and helped register them for kindergarten and school. Today over 90% of these children are in kindergarten or school.

In one TV spot **Horia Brenciu** is shown on his bicycle giving a boy a ride to school. In another, **Andreea Esca** picks up a little girl from her home and takes her to kindergarten. **Margareta Paslaru** teaches a group of children on the street the song she made famous, "Veronica".

"We are trying to bring home the fact that *Fiecare copil în școală este responsabilitatea fiecăruia dintre noi* (Every child in school is everyone's responsibility)" says Leslie Hawke, the president of Ovidiu Rom. "It is easy to blame poor, uneducated parents for not sending their children to school at an early age. But that doesn't solve the problem. Encouraging and helping them do so – that makes the crucial difference!"

Endorsed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, the purpose of "Școala te face mare" is to increase kindergarten and primary school attendance of impoverished children and to make early education a top priority on the public agenda.

"That there are not 'enough places' in the current kindergarten buildings is not an acceptable excuse for depriving children of early education. Put up temporary structures, use empty buildings, conduct classes in the afternoon as well as in the morning -- do whatever it takes to get every child in kindergarten," says Ms. Hawke. "It is an investment in the future of the country. In fact, early education is the single most important investment we can make."

For the second year, award-winning filmmaker **Cristian Mungiu** donated his time and enormous talent to direct the four different TV spots that emphasize the importance of early education – for ALL children.

Last year's public service announcements ran a total of **7,000 times** on 25 TV channels. The new TV spots featuring **Horia Brenciu, Andreea Esca, Margareta Paslaru** and **Ethan Hawke** will be aired starting today on the major TV channels.

The campaign once again received enormous pro bono support from **Saatchi&Saatchi, Zenith Media**, and **Chainsaw** and **Castel Film** and **Kodak** provided the equipment and film for the production. **Euroanswer** is providing the call center services and a phone line, **021 308 20 35**, for people to request information and report problems they face in sending their children to kindergarten and school.

Ovidiu Rom's mission is to promote self-sufficiency among the poorest members of Romanian society. In 2001 Leslie Hawke and Maria Gheorghiu started a group of programs in Bacau to help families in extreme poverty become better equipped to support themselves. They established Asociația Ovidiu Rom in 2004 and expanded the programs to Bucharest. In 2006, Ovidiu Rom embarked on a national initiative, ***Fiecare Copil in Scoala***, to get every child in Romania in school at an early age and on the path toward high school graduation.

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