



knowledge without boundaries

Creative minds create job opportunities

Public Library Braka Miladinovci

Radovis, Macedonia

March 2011



Computer skills training in the Public Library Braka Miladinovci.

This case study is based on information provided by the Public Library Braka Miladinovci in March 2011. EIFL-PLIP has edited the study for the Public Library Innovation Programme (PLIP) replication process.

SUMMARY

INNOVATIVE IDEA

Building job seeking skills and confidence through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) training, and providing an information service for the unemployed.

THE PROJECT

Creative minds create job opportunities reaches out to unemployed people in the municipalities of Radovis and Konce in southeastern Macedonia. The service especially targets unemployed women who lack motivation and confidence to seek jobs, and who cannot afford training. It works at different levels: it builds motivation and confidence; it provides ICT training so that the unemployed have a much-needed skill to offer; it teaches people how to write a CV, how to fill in job application forms and how to conduct themselves and answer questions during a job interview.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The service has trained 67 people. Of these 31 (46%) have successfully found jobs.

**КРЕАТИВНИ УМОВИ СОЗДАВААТ
МОЖНОСТИ ЗА РАБОТА
CREATIVE MINDS CREATE
JOB OPPORTUNITIES**

„Вредите онолку
колку знаеме“

Проблема????? нема работа...
да учеме за да создаваме
можности за работа.
Вложуваме во знаење,
вложуваме во надежни идници.
Мојот клуч е:
Секое можност, секој ден
испробати ги да станеш
извореден

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Promotional poster for *Creative minds create job opportunities* service

CASE STUDY – CREATIVE MINDS CREATE JOB OPPORTUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

Radovis is a town of about 28,250 people. It is located in southeastern Macedonia, at the foot of Mount Plackovicaon. According to municipal statistics, about 20% of the population in Radovis and the nearby village of Konce are unemployed. Over 38% of all unemployed are women, and almost 50% are people aged 20-40.

Unemployment in the municipality is a result of slow and inadequate economic development, lack of a qualified workforce and lack of a proactive entrepreneurial approach by young people. The situation in Radovis and Konce mirrors the bigger picture: unemployment in Macedonia is 35%.

Creation of new job opportunities is the main priority of the strategic plan for 2007-2011 of the two municipalities of Radovis and Konce. The Public Library Braka Miladinovci serves both municipalities – a total community of about 32,000 people. As a citizens' service available to all, the library is able to help address the burning issue of unemployment.

Established in 1957, the library modernized in 2006, and is now a multi-functional community-based centre with excellent access to written and electronic information. The library provides traditional library services (borrowing of books/journals/newspapers), access to the Internet through six computers for public usage, scanning and printing documents, photocopying, and organizing cultural and social events. In cooperation with the municipality and local institutions, private companies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the library organizes workshops, language courses, and round tables on important local issues, as well as exhibitions and presentations.

The library has only four employees, and a small space (340 sq. m), but is well-known among libraries in Macedonia for being innovative. Keys to its success are: creating space that is functional, attractive and suited to the needs of users; modern communication technology, and innovative services. Encouraging reading and literacy from an early age and teaching self-search information methods for school and university students working on assignments are all part of the daily work of staff in the library.

The library offers a friendly environment for all age groups, and has access for people living with disability. It proudly lives up to the motto, 'Friendly Libraries for All Citizens'.

The new service, *Creative minds create job opportunities* fits well into this environment, and further extends our services.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Needs assessment

The library conducted a survey of unemployed library members aged between 18 and 40. The results showed that lack of basic computer skills and lack of money to pay for training courses were two of the main reasons why young people are not competitive in the employment market. In addition, the formal education system does not give young people the knowledge and skills needed to be innovative, or to present their potential in a positive light when applying for a job.

Goals and objectives

Creative minds create job opportunities is an extension of the library's services. It aims to expand participation of socially excluded groups in lifelong learning through:

- Building and strengthening IT skills of unemployed young people;
- Improving young people's skills in recognizing job opportunities and presenting their potential by using technology, for example, designing CVs on computer and using online application systems.
- Encouraging proactive approaches to searching for jobs and creating job opportunities.
- Encouraging active participation of women and minorities.

Partnerships

Creative minds create job opportunities is a partnership between the library and two NGOs: Civil Creative Centre (CREA) and Women's Action, an association for improving the status of women in Macedonia. Strong partnerships were also developed with the Local Government Office for Economic Development, the Employment Agency and the business sector.

Target group

The library targets unemployed people aged 18 to 40, and who are registered as unemployed with the State Employment Agency. In all, the service aimed to train 60 people during the year, but because of the way in which trainees were assessed and training was structured, we trained 67 people.

Training and selection of trainees

Training was divided into three parts – computer skills, job seeking skills and job application skills. Each person's skills in these three areas were assessed, and trainees only attended the sessions where they needed to learn. In this way, the library was able to accommodate additional trainees.

Online information service: a website to link jobseekers and employers

Working with its partners, the library has created a website for the unemployed where local businesses and organizations can advertise and where the unemployed can find ideas and opportunities. The service enables employers to upload online application forms, and job seekers can apply online.

The website and the opportunities it advertises are open to all unemployed, whether they have attended training or not, and including those who are not registered with the State Employment Agency.

'I have used the library since I was little, and I think the library is one of the best places in town, where something is always happening – lectures, workshops, courses, promotion of books and exhibitions. But with the development of services for the unemployed, helping unemployed people overcome the challenges of digital language and learn new computer skills, I think the library reached the top of its creativity.'

– Frosina Doninovska, jobseeker and trainee.

IMPLEMENTATION

There were three main phases of Implementation.

Phase 1 – Equipment and preparation

Buying and installing computers, and setting up a wireless Internet connection. The library also bought books for IT training and for job seekers.

Phase 2 – Promotion

Informing users about the new service included preparing and distributing promotional materials – posters, fliers, bookmarks and notebooks – and advertising through the mass media and partner organizations.

Phase 3 – Selection of participants and training

The training curriculum and materials were prepared by the librarians and local experts. Training started from September 2010. The first course covered basic computer skills: Microsoft Windows, Microsoft Word and using the Internet. Our aim in offering this training first was to motivate the unemployed to take an active part in developing professional skills that could improve the quality of their lives. The training included 67 people (51 women and 16 men) divided into 4 groups.

On completion of the basic computer skills course, trainees attended two-day training sessions on how to find a job. How to Find a Job Part 1 (two days) covered how to take a proactive approach to seeking jobs and creating work; how to write a CV and cover letter; and careful assessment of job adverts.

Trainees were then given a one or two-week break from training to apply their new skills. How to Find a Job Part 2 focused on how to prepare for interviews, techniques for increasing confidence for a job interview and for presentation, for example, body language and answering questions. Part 2 also included how to search for work online and finding opportunities for self-employment.



Creative minds create job opportunities – trainees in action.

Trainees were selected and invited by the library, working with the municipality and other partners. All trainees were registered as unemployed with the State Employment Agency.

Other activities

Other important activities included working with partners to create the jobseekers' website, and evaluation and assessment of the impact of the new service.

STRATEGIES, TACTICS AND TOOLS

Creating attractive space and using new technology

At present, in Macedonia, communities struggling with job losses and high unemployment are increasingly turning to libraries for help and information. Despite reduced resources, libraries must constantly find new and cheaper ways of helping people. Creating an attractive and positive space and especially installing new technology are ways of attracting and helping people.

Technology

The library enriched its existing ICT capacity through buying 13 laptop computers, a multi-function printer and a WI-FI network for the job creation service.

The service also includes an online service for the unemployed – a special web page, which also benefits employers. It offers:

- Fast, easy and free access to information for the unemployed;
- Electronic submission of job applications;
- Reduction in response time, and
- Email notification of receipt of applications and other correspondence.

Partnerships and open communication

The library worked in partnership with other NGO and government agencies to increase capacity, coordinate support for the unemployed and share, knowledge, experience and resources.

The main reason for the success of the partnerships was open communication between the partners. By working together, the partners were able to build on each others' strengths and to increase support for the unemployed.

The library helped with logistics and space, and provided free access to ICT; staff of the two NGOs (CREA and Women In Action) joined the project team in planning and implementing the project, and volunteers – young people studying informatics – helped to conduct computer skills training. The Employment Agency and the Office of Economic Development contributed by informing the unemployed about the library's service and helping select trainees.

Shared vision and common goals

All actors involved in the project believed in developing and strengthening the library for the benefit of the community – and they all focused on that goal, and put their energy into achieving it. They also recognized the need of unemployed for skills, motivation and other support.

Using local expertise

The project included consultants and trainers who gave clear guidance and support for implementation. Trainers designed and prepared the manuals. They knew the content well and this improved the quality of the training. Evidence of this can be seen in the trainees' results.

Use of volunteers

A large number of volunteers came forward to offer help. They included students studying computer science, and volunteers from other organizations wanting to develop project management skills.

Ongoing communication and promotion

Throughout all phases of implementation, we continued to publicize the service through the most widely read national print media, and advertised on local radio. We also put information on the library website, and used blogs and other social networking

tools. Direct contact with users and enthusiasm of library staff also promoted the service and attracted new members to the library. We consistently documented the project, and used the Internet to inform the public about results.

BENEFITS

Primary beneficiaries were unemployed people, especially women. We trained 67 people – of these 31 (46%) have found jobs. Feedback from the trainees has been positive:

‘The exercise was excellent, I felt like I was really attending a job interview, which is a great experience for me and which raises my self-confidence for future job interviews.’

– Trainee feedback

‘Now I realize that the things I emphasized in my CV previously were not important at all. I am also amazed at how many things about myself I can tell other people, and until now I was not aware of it!’

– Trainee feedback

.Secondary beneficiaries include:

- The service has increased popularity and extended the reach of the Public Library Braka Miladinovci.
- Employers – businesses and institutions that have new ways of reaching unemployed people and potential employees with new skills.
- Partner organizations, CREA and Women In Action, and the local self-governments (municipalities) in Radovis and Konce.
- Youth and women’s organizations are able to refer their members to the service.

The new service led to significant changes in the way the library operates, in addition to our traditional services, we now provide a service that is directly related to a specific need of the citizens of the two municipalities. Library staff have learnt new skills – especially training skills – and we have upgraded our technology and learnt new technological skills.

SUCSESSES AND CHALLENGES

Initially, the library planned to purchase 10 laptops. But through a rigorous tendering process involving seven companies, we managed to purchase 13 for the same price.

There were some technical delays in setting up the website, but these are being solved by a new website service provider.

The training courses initially did not include training in navigation of the new website for the unemployed. When the project team realized that such training would help jobseekers and also market the website, they designed and implemented a website navigation course.

LESSONS LEARNED

Here we list a few of the most relevant lessons learnt, so that we – and others – may avoid mistakes in future.

Attractive space

The library can connect with the community better if it offers diverse services and develops a strategy that for long-term changes in people's behavior. To become part of regular community activities, the library must provide attractive, useful and comfortable space. Our library has excellent conditions for work and this was one of the reasons why we were able to implement the new service for jobseekers successfully. When evaluating the training, jobseekers confirmed this.

Skilled librarians

Librarians can learn a lot through direct contact with users, but they are still not sufficiently trained to work with specialized user groups. Providing new services for particular groups without training can be stressful, and a burden for librarians. Therefore we think that it is extremely important to train librarians and to motivate them to work with special user groups

It was also important for us to structure the team well, and appoint a strong coordinator who is aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the team. Good service management and decision-making skills are extremely important.

Partnerships worked well

We worked with local government, the employment agency and later, with the business sector. This meant we were able to work in multi-discipline teams and combine knowledge, skills and resources when we needed to solve problems. The other stakeholders came to understand the importance of the library in lifelong learning and social integration.

SUSTAINABILITY

The library and its partners in government, local government, business and the NGO sector will continue to work together to provide the new service beyond the EIFL-PLIP support phase, and to ensure the website is updated and used.

** At the time of writing this case study, the library had applied for support from the ERSTE Foundation, and had been shortlisted.*