



knowledge without boundaries

EIFL-PLIP

Improving lives and livelihoods through innovative public library services

Library service builds healthy lifestyles of over-60s Kaunas County Public Library, Lithuania

IMPACT CASE STUDY

The BiblioHealth service uses information and communication technology (ICT) to promote healthy lifestyles for the over 60s. The service –

- Attracted 1,430 people aged over 60 to healthy lifestyle events.
- Increased the number of library users aged over 60 by 217. Over a third of new users had never used a library before.
- Raised visibility of the problems facing the elderly.
- Led to a formal agreement with Kaunas Vytautas Magnus University to work together on future activities.
- Is now profiled on the [European Union Active Aging 2012 website](#) as a commendable initiative.

Decades of negative population growth due to low birth rates and emigration have left Lithuania with a rapidly aging population. The state pension is low and many older people struggle with poor nutrition, stress, loneliness and isolation. Lithuanian public libraries traditionally serve seniors, and the introduction of ICT in libraries means they can offer new services to seniors. According to government statistics (2012), 83% of Lithuanians aged over 65 have never used computers. Older people are therefore missing out on online information about care, support, healthier lifestyles and opportunities for social networking. The Kaunas County Public Library (KCPL) BiblioHealth service tackles these issues by offering free access to the internet and ICT training for the over 60s, and by organizing lectures and demonstrations on healthy activities, for example nutrition, exercise, yoga, meditation and relaxation.

With a grant of US\$15,000 to cover equipment and some operational costs for a year, KCPL bought five computers and launched BiblioHealth in KCPL and three municipal libraries, in Vilkaviškis, Birštonas and Jonava districts.



“The basis of yoga is stretching therefore I don’t get tired, which is extremely important at my age. My life has changed. Now I feel healthier and perkier.” – Mrs Regina, aged 71, who attended the BiblioHealth yoga presentation and who now regularly attends yoga classes.

“I didn’t even know one could find so much information about health online. Not so long ago I was diagnosed with osteoporosis and now I have learned where on the internet I could read more about this disease. This is very important to me.” – Mr Vytautas, a 68-year-old new computer user.



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In less than a year, the service...

- Organized 18 healthy lifestyle events including meditation, relaxation, yoga and exercise classes, and lectures on alternative medicine.
- Teamed up with psychologists from Kaunas Vytautas Magnus University and hosted a conference on Aging and Mental Health, attended by over 170 doctors, nurses, psychologists and social workers, students of elderly care and senior citizens.
- Trained 10 librarians and 21 over-60s to use ICT.
- Created an [online BiblioHealth resource](#) with 82 useful links to health information web portals, e-government health services, clinic and hospital websites, and other organizations promoting healthy lifestyles.
- Partnered with an internet radio station to broadcast programmes on aging and health.

The future

The service will continue. All four public libraries will continue with computer skills and social media training and will keep the BiblioHealth website up to date. KCPL is also seeking partners in the business sector to sponsor healthy activities for the over 60s, and has already found a sponsor for free Nordic walking classes. Through their enthusiasm and energy, KCPL have built strong partnerships – and all the partners want to continue working with the libraries.

The EIFL-PLIP grant was awarded in November 2011. A year later, the library assessed the impact of the service. Information presented here is based on the library's impact assessment. For further information contact Ms Jurga Grikietyte-Cebatavicene - jurga.grikietyte@kvb.lt.

[EIFL](#) (Electronic Information for Libraries) is an international not-for-profit organization dedicated to enabling access to knowledge through libraries in more than 60 developing and transition countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. EIFL's Public Library Innovation Programme (EIFL-PLIP) supports libraries to implement community development projects. Learn more at www.eifl.net/plip. EIFL's Public Library Innovation Programme is supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Public libraries - partners in development

KCPL worked with local government, communities, journalists, health workers, psychologists, yoga instructors, social workers and many others to deliver BiblioHealth. Key partnerships included -

- Kaunas Municipality – invited the library to join campaigns to celebrate World Health Day and the European Year for Active Aging and Solidarity between Generations.
- World Health Organization (Lithuania) and the Foundation for Patient Safety, Innovations and Quality – kept the library up to date with news and information.
- Lithuanian Yoga Association – conducted lectures and helped to find space for classes.
- Psychology Clinic of Kaunas Vytautas Magnus University – led relaxation activities and helped organize the conference on Aging and Mental Health.
- Internet health radio, Sveikatos radijas – broadcast educational programmes and marketed BiblioHealth activities.

“The co-operation with the library greatly enriched daily life of the centre visitors. The opportunity to come over to the library and take part in events helped our elderly visitors to forget the infirmities of the body and soul.” – Irena Žilinskiene, social worker at Kaunas Panemune Nursing Home Day-Care Centre.