



knowledge without boundaries

EIFL-PLIP

Improving lives and livelihoods through innovative public library services

Library service helps homeless people find work Zagreb City Libraries, Croatia

IMPACT CASE STUDY

The library established an information and communication technology (ICT) training programme, linked to job-seeking training and psychosocial support, in Zagreb's biggest homeless shelter, Kosnica. The programme –

- Helped 22 homeless people get permanent, part-time or temporary jobs.
- Encouraged a second homeless shelter to introduce ICT training for job-seekers.
- Inspired Zagreb's Law Faculty to establish a free legal clinic for the homeless.
- Won new funding support from Zagreb City Council.
- Built a strong partnership of organizations and individuals now working together to improve the lives of homeless people.

Until 2011, homeless people were not legally recognized in Croatia. The Social Welfare Act of 2011 was the first law to acknowledge the existence of homeless people. It came at a time when more people were losing jobs as a result of the global financial crisis, and homelessness was increasing. Reasons for homelessness are diverse – insolvency, divorce, troubled childhoods, addiction and psychological and physical problems – and homeless people need special attention. Zagreb City Libraries (ZCL), a network of public libraries that serves Zagreb and Zagreb County, works with this complex group to increase their employability and build their self-image.



“No surrender! I continually spent time on the computers that the library installed in the shelter, and searched for a job online. I have found permanent employment”. – Dubravko Bernfest, resident of a homeless shelter for four years.

The library decided to provide training in Kosnica shelter so that homeless people would not have to spend money travelling to the library, and because some felt more comfortable learning in the shelter. With a grant of US\$15,000 from EIFL-PLIP to cover equipment and some operational costs for one year, the library installed four computers and a printer in the shelter. ICT courses include using the internet to look for work and applying for jobs online. Social workers provide motivation and psychosocial support. The library also created a resource centre in the shelter, with books and magazines. Now the resource centre is staffed by homeless people, and homeless people are also able to provide ICT training.



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“The greatest success of this programme is that we have seen improvements in the self-confidence of our clients. Most homeless people are stigmatized, which negatively influences their self-confidence and blocks their progress.”
- Danijela Vidic, social worker, Kosnica shelter.

In just one year, the library...

- Trained 63 people in ICT skills – more than 15% of all registered homeless in Zagreb.
- Trained 10 volunteers to provide ICT and job-seeking training for the homeless.
- Organized a conference on homelessness, bringing together local authorities, social workers, psychologists, shelter managers, volunteers and librarians.
- Created a service website where homeless people publish stories and articles. The website attracted over 8,200 visitors.

The future

The programme – the first of its kind in Croatia – will be absorbed into the library’s services. It attracted extensive media attention, including guest appearances on prime-time TV, bringing in many offers of support. Despite overall budget cuts, as a result of financial downturn, Zagreb City Council was so impressed with the programme that they donated US\$1,700, which the library is using for marketing. The programme has achieved its goal of improving the life chances and building the self-image of one of the city’s most complex socially excluded groups. Success and strong partnerships mean a secure future.

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 service manager Ms Sanja Bunic at sanja.bunic@kgz.hr or Ms Jana Maras at janja.maras@kgz.hr.

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

The library worked with several government and non-government partners –

- Rehabilitation Centre for Stress and Trauma organizes job-seeking support workshops.
 - Shelters Kosnica and Caritas, the Street Companion Association, the volunteer group Hold Your Head Up and the Social Welfare Centre of Zagreb motivate homeless people to take part.
 - The Legal Clinic of Zagreb Law Faculty provides free legal help for the homeless in Zagreb and in other towns.
 - Zagreb Volunteer Centre mobilized and managed volunteers – and donated two computers to the Caritas shelter to start an ICT training programme.
- The partners’ motto – ‘Let’s carry on!’

“As policy-makers working with socially vulnerable groups, we were positively surprised to see a cultural institution – the library – showing such sensitivity and ability in improving the lives of homeless people!” - Romana Galic, City of Zagreb Office of Social Protection and Persons with Disabilities.