

GLOBAL LIBRARIES ROMANIA

Monthly Newsletter

August 2008

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- | | |
|---|---|
| Pilot Sites Bring Computer Services to New Communities | 1 |
| PAC Provides New Opportunities for the Visually Impaired | 2 |
| ANBPR Action Plan Developed | 2 |
| Librarians Develop Advocacy Skills | 3 |
| Online Community News Project Wins Community Participation Contest | 4 |
| Librarians Learn New Technology Skills | 4 |



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GLOBAL LIBRARIES PILOT SITES BRING COMPUTER SERVICES TO NEW COMMUNITIES

This spring, 13 libraries in five counties in Romania opened new computing and Internet facilities available to the public. Since the sites opened, IREX and its partners have been learning from the libraries' different experiences how the program can best serve communities when the national program rolls out in 2009.

In Salaj, IREX assisted the county library in equipping a partner local pensioner's association with public access computers. The pensioners are using the new training resources to gain important computer skills, including the ability to communicate with friends and family abroad.

As many Romanians have left the area in search of employment, many local residents are seeking new ways to keep in touch with friends and family. By training local users how to use email, read and access online news, and send pictures over the Internet, these residents can now successfully use new technologies to communicate. As a result of the new facilities, the library staff have

seen such an increase in use that they have decided to hire an additional staff person. With these added resources, the library will move to operating on a full-time basis.

The County Council in Tulcea has shown tremendous support for the county library, one of IREX's pilot sites. The County Council allocated money for the renovation of the library almost immediately after the program was initiated. In addition to remodeling and renovating the library, the council has dedicated funds to hire additional staff for the new facility. The local administration is already starting to take advantage of IREX's assistance to develop and strengthen their community.

IREX is also learning which obstacles must be cleared in order to speed implementation. In Jilava, the procurement process has been delayed. While the local Mayor has made attempts to advance the process—including offers to relocate the computing facilities to a more accessible location and even contribute an additional \$1,400 to upgrade the center from 6 to 8 computers—

administrative delays have meant the new resources have yet to open to the public. To date, none of the authorities responsible has delivered the list of negotiated computer equipment for IREX's review. IREX is responding to these challenges by re-evaluating its procurement process for the national program rollout. The lessons learned in pilot sites like Jilava have resulted in a better understanding of navigating local government issues that will prove vital throughout the national programs. ■



Searching through online newspapers in Salaj

PUBLIC ACCESS COMPUTER CENTER PROVIDES NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

The county branch of the Association for the Visually Impaired officially opened a public access computer center on July 3, 2008, at the association headquarters in Iasi, Romania.

The Iasi branch is the group's regional headquarters and provides members with an inclusive social setting that combines a range of activities and services. The center provided the associa-

tion with eight desktop computers, one scanner, and recording studio equipment.

For the first time, this community of visually impaired are able to scan documents and books and use special software to listen to the text as it is read aloud. The digital recording studio gives the association the opportunity to develop its inventory of audio books. Prior to the opening of the center, members had to hire someone to read to them at selected hours.

Through the Global Libraries planning grant, IREX has helped to provide the necessary hardware and software to best meet the needs of different communities across the country. The provision of equipment and software to the Iasi branch of the Association for the Visually Impaired was arranged in part-



Visually Impaired Association Internet Center - Cutting the Ribbon

nership with the Iasi county library, which is attempting to reach out to a key underserved constituency.

Janet Sawaya, Gates Foundation program officer for Romania, together with IREX Program Director Paul Baran, participated in the inauguration meeting and press conference together with the President of the Association for the Visually Impaired, the Mayor of Iasi, the Iasi county library director, other distinguished guests, association members, and members of the press. ■

“We have a new library now, with printed books, Braille books and audio books ... It's so important for us to have new computers in the association library, because anybody can come in and use them freely, and the new software is very user friendly.”

ANBPR ACTION PLAN DEVELOPED AT STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOP

Representatives of the ANBPR, 13 pilot sites, and IREX staff discussed ANBPR's *Organizational Capacity Assessment* results and began organizational workplanning at IREX's third roundtable discussion on June 23-24, 2008.

The Organizational Capacity Assessment – conducted by a working group composed of the ANBPR president and two vice presidents, county library directors, and two librarians – assessed 29 counties. The assessment focused on the ANBPR's capacity in administration and service provision, as well as the Association's ability to develop and advocate for policy changes.

Over 160 ANBPR members noted an increased need for professional training

and national support of librarians. Additionally, ANBPR members strongly value the association's advocacy for greater services, annual conferences, and publication of professional papers. Overall, the assessment found that the ANBPR is still developing capacity in administration, service provision, and advocacy.

Responding to the assessment results, the ANBPR agreed to devise strategies to better communicate with its members, collaborate with other national or local stakeholders to explore common goals, design new library services and improve existing ones, market the ANBPR and its mission, highlight the Association's activities and better promote its achievements, and improve the

organization's internal statutes to include actual activities and objectives.

The Global Libraries program seeks to collaborate with the ANBPR to develop their institutional capacity for the purpose of long-term program sustainability. By working directly with the Association, IREX hopes to begin transferring programmatic responsibilities to the ANBPR gradually over the course of the national program.

Attendees included key members of the ANBPR as well as representatives of the Salaj and Hunedoara county libraries. The workshop was facilitated by IREX's Impact Assessment Specialist Marcel Chiranov and Project Director Paul Baran. ■

LIBRARIANS DEVELOP ADVOCACY SKILLS AT IREX TRAINING SEMINAR

Twenty librarians, representing all five pilot site county libraries, have increased their skills in conducting well-planned and methodological advocacy campaigns as a result of a training seminar conducted by IREX from July 14-16. Concrete advocacy themes designed to foster local and national support were at the forefront of the event.

In the first session, librarians and library managers learned how to create a well-defined mission statement. IREX has observed that many libraries lack a coherent vision, and need assistance in producing a goal-oriented plan. This training focused on developing a library vision highlighting the library as resource open to the general public and designed to serve the needs of the community. By developing this library vision, librarians are better able to market the library to the community.

Librarians also developed skills to better identify their main target audience, locate secondary groups of importance, improve communication and generate media support for planned advocacy campaigns. A group workshop on improving the status of librarians within the community discussed the cultural and legal issues limiting the effectiveness of local librarians in advocating for greater community resources.

During the three-day training, county library managers also noted their own priorities for improving Romania's library system—most com-



Teammates work on their advocacy plans at training

monly the need for stronger funding mechanisms and sustainability. Presently, most county libraries are located in properties that do not legally belong to the library. The building facilities are often owned by the county council or the city hall and the library is assigned rooms or a select space in municipal offices.

To provide solutions to these problems, the group was briefed on the successful approach taken in the town of Hunedoara. The Hunedoara county council has allocated funds to build a new structure dedicated solely to the library. The librarians in attendance from Hunedoara explained how they built personal connections with the local bureaucracy and engaged in networking to gain approval for the new facility.

Finally, IREX's trainers offered participants a framework for developing an advocacy message. A separate session on working with the media was helped librarians develop knowledge and improve confidence when working with the press. ■

We have to prioritize [issues] and gather a team to work on them, and then start planning. For us, advocacy is a new term and more difficult to define, therefore we welcome the support and guidance of the IREX specialists to help us be successful in this attempt."

Mariana Marian,
Salaj County Library



ONLINE COMMUNITY NEWS PROJECT WINS COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION CONTEST

The Sândomic community public library's proposal, "Online Journal with Community Involvement," has won the July community participation contest (CPC) award. The CPC awards have been established by IREX to reward local technology initiatives with clear impact potential.

In a large town like Sândomic, finding the right solution for community development is a big challenge. While new technologies are more easily accessible for local development, older residents—including town leaders—often have difficulty understanding these new opportunities.

A newfound interest in connecting to the Internet spurred their desire for an online journal. In the past year, around 500 Sândomic households

have obtained an internet connection, a figure representing over 22 percent of the total population of 7,000.

This CPC grant will enable the community to develop an online journal of community events, based on information provided by the local publication. The publication has been issued in print format for the past four years through the efforts of nine volunteers, supported by the local administration.

This new online news service will help older members of the community become familiar with new technologies and younger members become more involved in the community. To ensure broad participation, an IT training component will give citizens the opportunity to play a more active role in the

publication of the online newsletter.

The online version of *Sândomic Views* will mirror community issues and become a tool for communication between the local public administration and citizens, reflecting local cultural life and issues relevant to the community. ■

"We feel honored and grateful that our problems have been so well received. Your support highly motivates us, and though we are conscious that the hard work is only now beginning all team members are anxious to start!"

Csilla Lazar, volunteer

LIBRARIANS LEARN NEW TECHNOLOGY SKILLS

Sixteen librarians attended a course in library services development taught by Mrs. Hermina Anghelescu held July 21-25. The lectures covered topics critical to library development, including trends in library services, online library services, libraries as a strategic institutions, modern public

library services and the evaluation of websites to meet visitor needs. The participants presented successful projects from public libraries, and then were grouped in teams to learn how to create subject-oriented user content guides.

IREX staff discussed potential components of the

program's national implementation phase and future opportunities. As a result, participants volunteered to spread the word to their colleagues and partners.

The participants formed a professional group that now communicates actively online at biblioteca.ro, continuing to share ideas about library development in a discussion forum. ■



"Everything we learned during those five days is going to be useful in our daily work ... All [the] information we received was well structured and logically presented."

Lia Sabau, American Corner librarian, Maramures County

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