

Braşov County County Library Helps Communities Access Resources

After a long period in which professional communication was limited among public librarians in Brasov County, the *George Bariţiu* County Library has used opportunities presented by the Global Libraries program to connect libraries to their communities and begin offering new services.

Braşov

County Librarian Claudia Popescu took the initiative to transfer her knowledge to local libraries within her county after attending a Training of Trainers on Library Services Development in July. Popescu created a “support-cell” for smaller libraries in the county. Together with two other librarians from the county library, she encouraged smaller libraries to organize their ideas and write project proposals for the Community Participation Contest (CPC). The libraries’ enthusiasm and effort paid off—two of their projects were selected as winners of the monthly competition. **EDUCERO** (Program for Education of Roma Citizens), proposed by the Municipal Library in Săcele, won the August CPC, and **“The Carpathian Delta,”** proposed by the Commune Library in Dumbraviţa, won in September.

In addition to these specific projects, Popescu has also seen other changes in the way the County Library operates. Different libraries are now communicating more opening and sharing ideas for future project

proposals. The county library now publishes internal newsletters to keep its member libraries up to date on current news and information. Librarians are now drawing on the resources of their peers. “Though the library had previously collaborated with different partners, after being involved in writ-



Braşov County Librarian Claudia Popescu advises local librarians on how to plan and implement new services.

ing and implementing the two winning projects, the quality of this relationship is higher. They now look up to us and ask for our services more often than before,” said Popescu.

These changes have come at an appropriate time. As Global Libraries begins a national program this winter, the librarians will be well positioned to take advantage of new resources. There is already discussion of organizing a training module for the librarians in the county who are interested in further developing their proposal writing and project management skills. ■

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Librarians Hone Advocacy Skills, Prepare for Expanded Community Role

At a recent workshop in Buzau, librarians met to build on their advocacy skills and prepare for new opportunities through the national program. Participants at the October 28 workshop had the opportunity to present on their own advocacy and library management techniques, discuss best practices, and make improvements to their plans.

Across Romania, IREX has established 12 pilot site Public Access Computer (PAC) facilities over the last year. While IREX has used the experience of these pilot site libraries to test approaches to management and training, local librarians have also benefited from the experience by developing new advocacy and library service skills. Taking stock of these efforts comes at an important juncture as IREX prepares to begin the national program, "Biblionet," early next year.

To help librarians think innovatively about developing an advocacy plan, representatives from the Salaj County Library—one of IREX's pilot site partners—presented on how they successfully implemented an advocacy plan that was developed during a previous training. In Salaj County, a Community Participation Contest (CPC) winner designed and set up a new branch library in the county hospital for public use. Responding to the training, Hune-

doara County librarian Daniel Oprean remarked that, "the workshop provided an opportunity to learn about new library services ... we have a new vision about what we can do so that our patrons are satisfied with our services."

The workshop also provided a refresher session on the advocacy process and action plan components. Participants were drawn into advocacy planning and encouraged to develop action plans covering three topics: continuing education for librarians, local funding for internet access and computer equipment, and support for resources for additional library personnel. In order to make sure that these plans were transformed into concrete activities after the session, the groups embedded the action plans into an annual calendar they developed for their own libraries.

These calendars are a simple step that libraries can take to better manage their human and financial resources, prioritize activities, and promote those activities to their communities.

As a follow up to earlier advocacy training sessions held in July and August, the event helped librarians refocus after a year of planning and pilot site activities and gear up for the new opportunities of the national program. ■



Librarians discuss advocacy activities and discuss how to integrate those plans into an annual calendar.

Online Discussion Informs National Program Website

Biblioteca.ro, IREX's program website, recently brought together online users to evaluate the current website and transition to a new design for the national program. In order to evaluate the current site, IREX created a working group during roundtable sessions over the last year, initiated online forum discussions, analyzed web usage statistics, and solicited user opinions and suggestions. IREX also developed an email survey for all forum users and received responses from over 20% of those contacted.

Since the *Biblioteca* website was launched in March, it has registered 260 members and received over 850 unique visitors each month. The pro-

gram website has been the central platform through which the Global Libraries program's stakeholders, partners, and broader community has accessed relevant information on progress made during the planning grant.

WWW.BIBLIOTECA.RO

It has been instrumental in providing a practical platform where librarians can network with one another and share ideas on topics related to specific program objectives and more general library and community concerns.

Looking toward to the national program, survey respondents agreed

that the site's central objective should be "to explain the way in which a public library can benefit from the assistance of Global Libraries program."

Users also agreed that the site's content should focus on providing information to Romanian libraries about the program and the requirements for participation in the program. Respondents also tended to see the website as a valuable platform for distributing training materials, best practices, and information on library service development.

IREX has now received a web design proposal from a local firm and is working to incorporate these suggestions into the new design. ■

Florica Pop Discusses Pilot Site Experiences with IREX

Florica Pop is the manager of the Salaj County Library I.S. Badescu. The county recently set up PAC facilities in branch libraries throughout the region and was selected for a Community Participation Contest (CPC) award to place a branch library and PAC facility in the local hospital for public access. IREX staff recently interviewed Pop about her experience as a pilot site librarian, recent training sessions, and expectations for the national program.

IREX: What was the biggest challenge when setting up the pilot site PACs in Salaj County? What would you recommend those who want to set up Public Access Computers?

FP: For Salaj County, the pilot program provided an opportunity to start something we had been considering for a long time. Maybe that's why the process did not seem too difficult. Instead, we were honored we had the opportunity to prove that, with community participation and a motivated team, success is guaranteed.

Our experience as a pilot site is that this is a unique opportunity for libraries to be modernized and staffed by a full-time librarian. We are also working to demonstrate the importance of libraries to local governments. The program also provides training for librarians, which is their chance to prove how useful they are to the community and be part of a very large professional network made up of librarians from all over Romania. Free internet access facilitates can help address the knowledge gap between rural and urban communities. At the same time, it allows libraries to provide a more diverse range of services to their patrons.

As pilot sites, we have experienced all these benefits and we are great supporters of the program, because we want other librarians to share these opportunities. County libraries cannot afford to fall behind; they have to be aware of their responsibility to the commune libraries. One methodological coordinator is no longer enough—we need computer specialists, librarians with expertise in writing projects and applications and the availability to work long hours. Good managers must think

about what human resources they have in the library and hire more staff if needed.

IREX: What was your experience, as a pilot site librarian, of the role of county libraries as a coordinator of activities in rural libraries?



"Libraries are constantly changing and, if we don't cope with the change, we will no longer be the same engines of development our community is used to seeing in us."

-Florica Pop

FP: We were one big family here in Salaj. The county library, the library in Cehu Silvaniei, and the one in Bobota—everybody did what they were supposed to do and found the best solutions along the way. The county library was represented whenever necessary and worked to motivate local libraries to stay involved. When the PACs were officially opened, we realized how much each community appreciated the new services and the efforts of all who contributed including librarians, government representatives, IREX, and other NGOs.

IREX: How were the training sessions during the GLR planning grant seen by librarians in your county?

FP: The training sessions were very rewarding both for librarians and for each library. They acquired knowledge, learned how to work in teams, searched for ideas, promoted achievements, participated actively and felt like important parts of a network. They now recognize the extraordinary experiences they shared and the positive competition and friendship that connect them. By taking part in training sessions and keeping in touch with the trainers and other trainees, each librarian will become a better professional, one respected by the community and local government.

The librarians from Salaj illustrate this point. During the advocacy training course in July, the Salaj group presented their experience of advocating to the manager of the Salaj Emergency Hospital to open a branch of the county library in the hospital. The target groups of this branch were both inside the hospital—patients, medical staff—and outside—the neighboring community. Our advocacy plan resulted in a project for the Community Participation Contest, which we won in July. On October 1, we opened that new branch. Now we have a modern library with two computers with Internet access and the hospital has a new website. We are determined to share this practice with our colleagues and help others win this competition.

IREX: As a member of the Working Group in ANBPR, what are your expectations of the GL national program and the association's involvement in the program?

FP: I have actually developed a list of expectations for our association, in relation to the program and beyond:

- We should value each of our members and give them credit for what they do well;
- We should provide stronger support to rural libraries;
- We should explain the program benefits and opportunities to the

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IREX is an international nonprofit organization providing leadership and innovative programs to improve the quality of education, strengthen independent media, and foster pluralistic civil society development. Founded in 1968, IREX works in more than 50 countries.

- CPC Update -

October CPC Winner: "The Carpathian Delta"

Project Summary: This project, proposed by the Dumbravita Commune Library, will increase awareness of the Carpathian Delta area's environmental importance and encourage sustainable local development. Home to over 200 species of birds, the area has been declared a Nature 2000 Site as an internationally important wetland. The project will create a brand for the area, build networks among local small business owners, and cultivate the region's ecotourism potential. ■

Past CPC Winner Update: EDUCERO, a project of the Săcele municipal library organized its first public information meeting on civic participation and rights. The goal of the project is to reach out to local Roma community members with relevant access to information and services. The meeting brought together Roma community leaders, representatives of the local administration, teachers, and community members to discuss Roma rights, including citizen rights and the right to schooling. Because of the interest in this project, similar informational meetings are now being planned for the future. ■

Florica Pop Interview

Continued from page 3

local governments, and then show them what their involvement means. Without it, we may not achieve what we want. Each mayor and local council want to prove to their voters that they did something remarkable in the community, so we should persuade them that a PAC is exactly what they need and they can have a development tool without much effort;

- We should communicate better amongst ourselves, especially when we encounter challenges. It's possible that somebody else has already solved a similar problem and can share the solution;
- We should understand that competition is good as long as it's positive.

I also think that each county library manager should visit all public libraries in their county, in order to increase their credibility with the local authorities. We have the IREX team to rely on, as professionals and friends, and they have proven that they can implement a successful program already. We have an opportunity to learn, and then take over our tasks, in order to ensure program sustainability. ■

At Fourth Roundtable, Pilot Site Librarians Review a Year of Success

On October 29, librarians from Global Libraries' 12 pilot sites gathered to mark the successes of the past year. Roundtable participants discussed program successes, best practices, new services, and day-to-day management techniques.

Pilot site librarians made presentations about the new activities developed within their libraries and elaborated on how new PAC facilities have changed the perception of libraries among the general public. The Salaj Pensioners Association presented on new library services they had created. The Iasi Visually Impaired Association then led a discussion on



Sulina librarian Ilinca Mihaila presents on how libraries can implement new services and engage volunteers.

volunteering and the Sulina library presented on labor market research and job applications. Additional presentations were made by the Hunedoara County Library, Bucharest Metropolitan Library, Scanteia commune library, the Sădoveanu branch of Iasi County Library, and Belcești's commune libraries.

By holding the roundtable in conjunction with the ANBPR conference, these library presentations were a useful tool to

publicize Global Libraries ahead of the national program. Mirecea Crisan noted how the roundtable helped to create new professional networks. "I met many other librarians through my colleagues and we built strong professional relationships. I think that we are all now a team of professionals." ■