

	<p style="text-align: right;">Date : 08/06/2007</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“Best practice in library service for print disabled children”</i></p> <p><b>Library service for print disabled children and youth in Public Library of Koprivnica – an isolated case or a role model for Croatian public libraries?</b></p> <p><b>Dijana Sabolović-Krajina</b> Public Town and County Library “Fran Galović” Koprivnica, CROATIA Zrinski trg 6, 48000 Koprivnica, CROATIA Tel/fax 385 48 622-131 e-mail: dijana.sabolovic-krajina@kc.t-com.hr</p>
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### **Abstracts**

*Library service for the blind and visually impaired persons in Public library of Koprivnica is focused on the needs of print disabled children and youth, enabling them with better access to sources of knowledge, information in general, providing more creative leisure time in the local community.*

*The paper describes assumptions and the main activities in forming such service, as well as the results of the new service use, the case studies of children and youth involved. It also highlights the importance of providing such services in local community and the society in general.*

### **Some facts about Public Library of Koprivnica**

Although Public library of Koprivnica is not one of the largest ones in Croatia, it nevertheless is still well known for its innovative projects and programs, fostering and promoting reading and literacy among its users. The Library acts as a local community cultural and information centre that supports education, lifelong learning and creative leisure time activities under the slogans: “*Literacy for all*” and “*Libraries open to everybody*”.

The Town and County Library Koprivnica covers the area of Koprivnica, a medium-sized Croatian town (population 32 thousand) and Koprivnica-Krizevci County (population 122 thousand). It is situated in the northwestern, industrially most developed part of the country.

The Library has 22 employees in total (14 of them professional staff). The organisational structure includes departments and services for children, adults, science department, reading section, mobile library, purchase and processing, county development service and administrative/technical department. It has 7 thousand registered members (services users 2-3

times more), nearly 100 thousand books, 105 subscriptions to periodicals, 4 thousand non-book materials and 90 thousand visits per year.

The Library is named after a local, nationwide known poet Fran Galovic, who had died young in the First World War, very popular for his dialect-written poetry. The Library is also linked to tradition and the past through the library building, dating back to 19<sup>th</sup> century, completely renovated and refurnished a couple years ago. This was important for implementation of new, modern library functions, as well as for automatised library circulation, for a number of new services, collections and programs, including the library service for the blind and visually impaired.

The most important and most frequent activities are dedicated to children and youth, as reading habits and interests, needed throughout entire life, are created in the youngest age. The program "*Library and town of Koprivnica awarding you with the very first picture book*" aimed at donating picture books to new-born babies and their mothers, in collaboration with town maternity hospital. *Storytelling room* program, with the longest library tradition is aimed at age 4-6 preschool population. For the same children population and their parents we have *computer workshop* to gain their first-hand knowledge of multimedia use through games play. For 7-14 age groups we have very popular *computer playroom*, as well as different *creative workshops*. For older teenagers in secondary schools *creative and communicative workshops* are offered led by their agetates, as well as lectures, panels, and book presentations and literary soirees. Children's department has a corner called "*Reading with you*", aimed at children with dyslexia, their parents and teachers. Beside children's programs, the Public library of Koprivnica also offers interesting programs for adults and even outside the Library building - like its summer program *Reading undersunshades*, as well as in the town park - *Summer book flea market*.

The foundations of the Public library of Koprivnica lie in the slogans "*Library open to everybody*" and "*Library for all*". They reflect basic values based on variety of library funds and materials, quality of services and offered programs, as well as promotion of civil society values. Public library of Koprivnica aims at continuous education of librarians, developing a wide network of quality partnership with individuals, institutions, local community, domestically and abroad. Special attention is being paid to inclusion programs for deprived population (elderly, unemployed, disabled and the handicapped), particularly through collaboration with non-governmental organizations. One of these, years-long collaboration with County association of the blind and visually impaired, laid groundwork for starting off a new service for the blind and visually impaired in the local community.

## **On implementation of the library service for the blind and visually impaired**

### **Project approach**

Last year's (2006) implemented library service for the blind and visually impaired supposed to be a model for other interested public libraries in Croatia. Namely, there are only a few public libraries in Croatia offering some kind of services for print-disabled persons, mainly based on Internet access.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This means that the blind in Croatia, if they want to satisfy their need for books, are mostly oriented at Croatian library for the blind in Zagreb, the capital city; although computers and special software enable access to audio books and audio information needed, the equipment is so expensive that only a few can purchase these individually.

In order to facilitate an easier access to library resources (to books and information) for the blind and visually impaired in the local community, Public Library of Koprivnica and County Association for the Blind applied for and received grant funding from the European Union. The project was entitled “Library service for the blind and visually impaired in Koprivnica-Krizevci County”.<sup>2</sup>

We need to stress out that the library service for the blind and visually impaired at our Public library of Koprivnica actually resulted from a project, librarians’ initiative and their teamwork with the County association of the blind, not from a nationwide strategy for libraries.<sup>3</sup> Three month-work on joint program drafting was recognized for its importance, comprehensive impact and multiplication potentials locally and nationwide in competing for a demanding EU tender - CARDS 2002 program «Delivery of social services in non-profit sector” (in social care, healthcare, non-institutional education and family protection»).

The project approach to this new service in Koprivnica library contributed to serious approach to setting goals and aims, careful identification of target users, systematic activities, even distribution of responsibilities, raising awareness on risk and potential results. Through collaboration with a non-governmental organization, this service provided integration into the existing library offer, yet easily followed and monitored at *conceptual and practical level*.<sup>4</sup>

### **Needs for implementation of a library service for the blind and visually impaired**

The need for introducing this new library service in Koprivnica and Koprivnica County is based on indicators showing over 200 blind and some 2000 visually impaired in the town of Koprivnica and the county Koprivnica-Krizevci. Due to their handicap, in their local community they are unable to use library resources for their education, information, lifelong learning and leisure (books, CD-ROMs, technical equipment – computers, Internet access, etc.).

Previous collaboration between the Library and the Association of the blind, as well as polling its members showed that print disabled children, youth and adults have these needs in the local community, using a public library for everyday activity in the local community and society in general, coming over to the Library, contacting librarians and their interaction with other library users, acquiring professional assistance from librarians, and active participation in education-animation programs.

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<sup>2</sup> The Project applicant was County association of the blind and the Project partner was Public library „Fran Galović“ Koprivnica. Total budget for the Project was EUR 76.145,88 (EU- share EUR 68.264,78 and the Library, as Partner, EUR 7.881,10). The Project was one of the ten best programs awarded out of 113 project, that applied for grants from The European Union.

<sup>3</sup> At the moment, there is no national strategy in Croatia which would “include a nationwide network of all libraries and special institutions, specialized in providing services to people who cannot read black print” (Libraries for the blind in computer age: guidelines for development of departments and services /editors Rosemary Kavanagh and Beatrice Christensen Skoeld. Zagreb : Hrvatsko knjižničarsko društvo (CROATIAN READING ASSOCIATION), 2006, p. 26).

<sup>4</sup> On conceptual level, this has been integrated into existing *mission, vision and values* of the Library; on practical level, the service has been integrated into existing library offer and organizational structure into all departments (children’s , adults, science dept., newspapers/periodicals reading room), into the library’s electronic catalog (access via the library’s homepage <http://www.knjiznica-koprivnica.hr>), into organizational culture, including library rules (rights and responsibilities of users, loan rules), service distribution via mobile library and intelibrary loan (town libraries of Križevci and Đurđevac).

## **Aims and targets of the library service for the blind and visually impaired**

Having noticed these needs, targets to be achieved through a new library service have been set. The general aim is equal involvement (inclusion) of the blind and visually impaired into the local community and society in general. More specific aims are the following: to create prerequisites for quality education and information for the blind and visually impaired in the local community, children and youth primarily; to enable them with easier access to knowledge and information, using resources and services of the local library; by doing this, to increase their chances for successful education, gaining professional qualifications, equal involvement in the job market and an independent life; to decrease or completely eliminate a need for their families and the society to take care for them; to create a better life quality for the blind and visually impaired and the whole community.

## **Activities in introduction of a new library service for the blind/visually impaired**

During service implementation, our key activities were focused on the following:

- *Education of library staff* (consulting professional literature, study visits to libraries/organizations, domestic and foreign; internal communication/information flow for gradual implementation of the service);
- *Purchase of library materials* (tactile picture books, audio books, large print publications);
- *Purchase/installation of special equipment* (computers with speech processor unit and screen reader/voice, Braille type and printer, electronic enhancement/magnifying glass for standard black print, a transporter for the handicapped/immovable users);
- *Informing the users* on new service kickoff, library materials loan, help/aid in technical equipment use;
- *Education-animation programs* for the blind and visually impaired users (workshops, lectures, books/literary soirees, round table discussions);
- *Promotion* of the Project and the service (communication with public media, drafting a logo and promotional materials: leaflets, bookmarkers, linen bags with logo, catalogs and listings of all materials for the blind/visually impaired at Koprivnica library, introducing the service at promotional event held 19 June 2006, organizing a symposium.
- *Service evaluation* (internal and external audit).

## **Results**

In the first 6 months, all prerequisites to start a new library service were created. The library staff members have upgraded their knowledge and skills in two dimensions. Primarily, all 14 staff members are now educated and feel competent and confident to work with the blind and visually impaired persons. Working with project beneficiaries improved their understanding of specific needs of the blind and visually impaired. On the other hand, this project enabled them to develop and grow professionally, adding a completely new dimension of library services to their professional life, including specialized and scarce knowledge on using the special library materials and technical equipment.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In their own education for the new service, Koprivnica's librarians visited Croatian library for the blind in Zagreb and Croatian Association's of the Blind, the umbrella organization of the associations of the blind, two other public libraries in Croatia (Zagreb and Karlovac), which provide computer/Internet services for the blind, Croatian association of the deaf-blind "Dodir/Touch", which provides technical equipment and rehabilitation programs to its users, as well as "Mala kuca/Little house" – Daily center for work therapy and rehabilitation of children with multiple handicaps in Zagreb. After completed education in Croatia, Koprivnica's librarians (5 of them) visited 5 study case public libraries in Denmark and Danish library for the blind. Education was on benchmarking basis,

In the first phase of implementation, the special library reading materials and technical equipment were purchased; a collection of 365 library units were acquired, cataloged and offered to the project users; special library reading materials were distributed on the following way:

**Children's department** (194 units of all types of library materials): 56 titles (81 units) of audio books for elementary school students; titles representing classics of world and national literature with focus on obligatory school reading materials; 54 titles (99 units) of tactile story books for the youngest population of the blind and visually impaired library members; 14 tactile educational toys.

**Adult department and Scientific department:** 92 titles of audio books representing some of the world and national classics; 27 titles of scientific audio books covering social/humanistic and natural sciences.<sup>6</sup>

From the list of needed technical equipment for the blind/visually impaired users, **electronic enhancer/magnifying glass** was purchased (stand-alone and a PC add-on). A stand-alone enhancer/magnifying glass is installed in newspapers/periodical reading room, so that the visually impaired can use this rich library offer too. A computer with electronic enhancer add-on is placed in Scientific department,; visually impaired can use this aid to read any black print newspaper/periodical off the PC screen, enabling them to write notes on the screen too; for the blind, a **PC with speech processor unit, screen reader, Braille type and printer** are offered. This computer equipment is also set at the Scientific department, so that the blind can use it for reading/writing school homework, job applications, essays, or surf the Internet. When there is no blind/visually impaired user, the PC is at disposal for the sighted users. For the use of audio books for the blind and visually impaired, **MP3 CD players** with tape recorders and headphones for each department/section of the Library have been acquired. As the building is not entirely accessible for the handicapped, a **transporter** for the blind/visually impaired with additional handicap- hardly movable or totally immovable has been purchased, so that they can use all library services to the fullest, too.

The second step of new service implementation was all about informing the users on start-up of this new service, library materials loan, help with technical equipment, users education, education-animation programs for print disabled children, youth and adults (workshops, lectures, book/literary soirees, round table discussions).

During both phases, intensive promotional activities for the service in general have been undertaken, including communication with public media, drafting a logo, promotional materials, leaflets, bookmarkers, linen bags with logo, listing of all materials for the blind/visually impaired

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learning from others, and by comparison to own positions, own advantages and disadvantages, in efforts to achieve optimum for systematic application of the new service into Koprivnica's Public library.

<sup>6</sup> The collection of books in Braille is rather small, consisting of 2 titles. It is due to extremely high prices (20-50 times more expensive than audio books) and long production periods (one month on average, compared to 2-3 days for audio books). In addition, books in Braille are produced in a large format taking lots of physical space, thus representing an obstacle for the library. Finally, 70% of the blind population in Koprivnica-Krizevci County are older persons from rural areas uneducated in reading Braille. This is why Library of Koprivnica opted for audio books. However, the long-term issue of literacy (including reading, writing and ICT skills) of blind persons remains a systematic problem, although beyond the scope of this project. The issue should nonetheless be taken into account in future procurement of library materials for the blind and in likely replications of the model elsewhere in Croatia.

at Koprivnica library, service introduction at promotional event and organization of a symposium<sup>7</sup>.

### **Library service for the blind/visually impaired and its users**

In the course of planning this library service for the blind and visually impaired, a target group of direct users has been defined (the blind, visually impaired, as well as blind/visually impaired with multiple handicaps) and indirect users (their family members, their companions, the sighted children, youth and adults). From the early planning phase, a focus was on print disabled children and youth, disregarding the fact that during implementation we had only 8 of them joined in and applied for the service (Table 1.)

From the start, it was obvious that this service would focus on a small number of users, who are nevertheless an inseparable part of local community, with rights to appropriate library services.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1. Registered blind and visually impaired library users in 2006**

<b>USER CATEGORY</b>	<b>ADULTS</b>	<b>CHILDREN</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
DIRECT USERS (Association of the Blind members)	29	8	37
INDIRECT USERS (others)	2	12	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>51</b>

### **Library visits and loans**

The number of library visits and library unit loans from the start confirmed significant interest in this service for the blind and visually impaired (Table 2.). Throughout implementation process and/or 6 month-service use, 209 user visits, loans and/or special equipment use have been registered.

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<sup>7</sup> The round table panel "Library availability to everyone – library departments, services and computer equipment for the blind, visually impaired and deaf-blind: how to reach sources of information in local community" was held in collaboration with Croatian association of librarians/its committee for users with special needs. The round table was held at « Fran Galović » Public library Koprivnica on 6 November, 2006. The round table gathered 73 participants from Croatia, Austria, Slovenia and Sweden, with 11 presentations on topics related to the library and educational services to blind and visually impaired persons. Presentation and demonstration of library service for the blind/visually impaired at Koprivnica's Public library was held for Croatia's and Slovenia's librarians on 7 November, 2006, with Koprivnica's librarians giving lectures and presentations.

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO Manifesto for Public Libraries /quoted: 2006-12-19/. Accessible on: <http://dzs.ffzg/text/UNESCOv-manifest-za-narodne-knjiznice.htm>

**Table 2. Special library material loan for the blind and visually impaired**

	CHILDREN	ADULTS	TOTAL
Audio books on CD-ROMs	29	82	111
Audio books on audio-cassettes	15	125	140
Books and brochures on the blind/by the blind authors	3	33	36
Enlarged print	1	0	1
Tactile picture books	57	0	57
Tactile toys	8	0	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>353</b>

**Equipment use**

From the purchased special equipment for the blind and visually impaired, in the monitored period users mostly used electronic reading enhancer, PC with speech processor unit, screen reader, Braille type and print. Due to the users' expressed needs, it was fully justifiable to purchase equipment for the blind and visually impaired, enabling them with education, information and communication over the Internet. Apart from the Library equipment, users at their disposal also have an electronic enhancer for reading, installed at the premises of the Association of the blind, their permanent and frequently used equipment in Association's daily activities. Moreover, this aid helped some Association members for the first time to read on their own after many years – something, that due to their visual impairment was previously impossible without this specific technical help.

**Education-animation programs<sup>9</sup>**

In the second part of implementation, particularly appealing to library service users were education and animation, promoting use of the new service. Some 400 participations of the blind, visually impaired and the sighted took part in a promotional event and 12 animation programs (workshops, lectures, book/literary soirees), as well as a professional symposium (round table panel).

In the period June-December 2006 12 education-animation workshops were performed for all age groups and all categories of the blind/visually impaired users of this library service:

- for preschool children and their parents (age 5-7)
- for children and low grade of elementary school (age 7-14)
- for secondary school youth (age 15–18)
- for adult blind and visually impaired persons
- for parents and professionals, working with the blind/visually impaired (librarians, health care professionals – ophthalmologists, nurses, kindergarten and school teachers).

<sup>9</sup> Petrić, Danijela ; Vugrinec, Ljiljana. Nabava i korištenje knjižnične građe i tehničke opreme za slijepce i slabovidne korisnike u knjižnici i čitaonici «Fran Galović» (Purchase and use of library material and technical equipment for the blind and visually impaired persons in Public library “Fran Galovic”) (article in print)

All user programs had an integration approach, which means that most workshops had equal participation from both, the sighted and the visually impaired, individuals. The workshops affirmed inclusion of the blind and visually impaired into the society, particularly integration of children with visual problems; workshops aimed at motivating adult blind/visually impaired persons to take a more active role in their own information, education, change in professional qualifications/skills; encouraged them for an overall betterment of quality of their life, fulfilling their needs and interests, making own choices; supported them in aspirations to keep their own moral values and goals; the workshops were held by the Project collaborators, experts from institutions specialized in rehabilitation and education of the blind and visually impaired.

### **Preschool children workshops**

The workshops included 4 preschool children.

**Vanesa** was born in 2000; she lives in Koprivnica; blindness struck in her first year of life; she has multiple handicaps, mental and motor impairment; does not walk; does not speak; living with parents as the only child; educated at local kindergarten for disabled children; although incapable of proactive role in activities, enjoys being surrounded with people; unless she feels attention and focus of people around her, she becomes restless and protests with crying.

**Marko** was born in 1999; he lives in a nearby village of Djelekovec with his parents and a disabled kid sister (6 months old), who was born blind, due to mother's pregnancy complications. Marko was born with 4% vision; he has light motor impairment; he is educated at regular local kindergarten; communicative; vividly responding to activities with other children; at the Library, his parents loan audio-books on CDROM for him; he enjoys storytelling and fairytales.

**Aleksandra** was born in 2000; she lives in the village of Prnjavor; has a cataract, with 5% vision; withdrawn; when relaxed, responding well; has a year older brother; goes to regular, local kindergarten in the neighbouring village; occasional visits to the Library storytelling program; on those occasions, she interacts and participates with other, sighted children; loans tactile picture books.

**Hendrik** was born in 1999; lives in the village Hlebine; has 2% vision; born prematurely at 5,5 months; has motor and mental impairment; attends local kindergarten for handicapped children; has difficulties to follow work with other children; socialization welcome; loans tactile toys and picture books, audio stories and fairytales on CD-ROM.

**Martina** was born in 2001; lives in the village of Djelekovec; has 4% vision; very communicative, loves to talk, very likable; goes to regular kindergarten in her village; loans picture books, audio books on CD-ROM from the Library; particularly fond of fairytales; on suggestion from neighbourhood peers, loans children novels.

### **«Let's play with tactile toys and picture books»**

In this workshop participated 10 preschool children - 4 of them blind and visually impaired and 6 sighted children from a local kindergarten.

The workshop was led by two special therapists from "Mala kuca" (Small house) Zagreb, a children rehabilitation institution, known for its successful methods and unconventional approach to handicapped children. The basic aim of this workshop was to introduce tactile picture books and tactile toys to children. The Library acquired these for mapping, learning through play and first - time reading for the blind and visually impaired children. It targeted the sighted preschool children, in order to sensitize them to the needs of their blind/visually impaired peers, but the ultimate goal was to encourage social integration of the blind and visually impaired children into the society, through joint play and company with the sighted children.

The workshop increased children's interest for play with tactile picture books and tactile toys. The educators taught children skills needed for tactile books use – i.e. browsing, touching, recognition of different textures and shapes, their naming them etc. Further, the sighted children played blindfolded and used a white cane for walking, which gave them an opportunity to "see" what it feels to be blind, so they could understand better their blind little friends. Finally, the joint play of the blind and the sighted



children gave a new quality in children's relations, "arming" them all with knowledge, better understanding and teaching them a lot more about each others.

#### «How to shape your own toy» and «Let's play with eco toys»

Workshop leaders, special educators from «Vinko Bek» Education center for the blind from Zagreb, showed everyone how to make eco toys, adjusted to the blind and visually impaired children, from easily accessible and ecologically-friendly materials. In this way, the blind and visually impaired children can be involved in the play with the sighted children, developing their tactile and mental abilities and their communication with the sighted population.

#### Workshops for teenagers

The workshops had five teenagers – three visually impaired (elementary school higher grades) and two blind 2<sup>nd</sup> grade highschool girls.

**Valentina Sara** was born in 1995; visually impaired from birth; has 20% vision; lives in the town of Krizevci, second-biggest in the county; student of 6<sup>th</sup> grade regular elementary school; lives with parents and an older sister; withdrawn, introvert and shy; speaks little; very creative in painting and visual arts workshops in general; loans plenty of audio books, mostly novels; a Harry Potter fan, has read all published sequels.

**Ivan** was born in 1994; has 30% vision; lives in the village of Veliki Raven; regular elementary school 7-grader; has an older brother; obsessed with computers; withdrawn, shy, when encouraged has a better communication; loans audio-books, fond of adventure novels; Harry Potter is his most favorite book character.

**Matija** was born in 1993; has 20% vision; regular elementary school 8-grader; active in sports, athletics in particular; very communicative, an entertainer in a group; popular among his peers; loans books on animals, required school reading in audio books; fond of "The Anne Frank Diary" book.

**Iva** was born in 1989; blind since birth; regular secondary school 2<sup>nd</sup> grader; future occupation- personal administrator; has an older brother and a kid sister; the most communicative in the blind youth group; cheerful personality, always ready for a company, fun and games; popular in school, many friends among the sighted population as well; library card since year 2000; loves audio-books; loans mostly required reading and novels for teenage population; Adrian Mole is her favorite book character; reads Braille, skillful with computers; plans to enroll in Zagreb university Law school; attends a music school.

**Ana** was born in 1989; born blind; has two brothers; enrolled in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of the "Vinko Bek" secondary school for the blind in Zagreb, for a professional telephone operator; withdrawn, introvert, unobtrusive; skillful with a PC; enjoys reading books in Braille; attends music school; Library card since 2003; loans audio-books on cassette tapes, mostly novels for teenage population.

#### «Reading in a different way»

This workshop had an integration character, aimed at the blind and visually impaired children of senior elementary, and secondary school population. The workshop is organized in attractive, seminal manner to draw attention of the sighted population, too. The aims were the following:

- To introduce the blind and visually impaired teenagers to possibilities of Library's special service for them, and bring attention to the books, materials and equipment available at the Library for learning, study and entertainment as well;
- To help them of specific approach to reading of the blind and visually impaired, on special media;

- To sensitize the sighted teenage population to problems of the visually impaired peers;
- To help these two teenage groups (the sighted and the blind/visually impaired) keep each others company, make friends, and help both groups to upgrade their social skills;

The workshop leaders - special educators from “Vinko Bek” Education center of the blind in Zagreb – explained how required, school obliged reading for visually impaired children should be in digest-abridged forms, editions, selected chapters, etc. It is needed to bear in mind that they need help from their sighted peers, too, not just from teachers and family members only. In order to provide an opportunity for the sighted children to see different visual acuities and problems arising from visual impairment, these workshop participants had an opportunity to try out special glasses that simulate different visual impairment levels.

### **Visual arts workshop**

The workshop leader - special educator/art teacher from “Vinko Bek” Education center of the blind in Zagreb – showed how the blind can be successful and creative in painting. Punching or «drawing» on the foil surface makes shapes and contours palpable in the foil. The workshop participants tried this technique themselves, drawing leaves. Some interesting and original artworks were created, later displayed in the Library windows. This workshop also had integration character, so the sighted students from local elementary schools participated with their eyes blindfolded, to feel art creation the way that the visually impaired do.

### **«How the young can communicate better in everyday life»**

The emphasis was on development of communication skills, both in the blind/visually impaired teenagers, as well as in the sighted young persons, particularly in their mutual communication. Here the workshop leader applied a number of fun and stimulative exercises and practices (activities in pairs or in a smaller group) motivating the young to talk and express their feelings and emotions, helping out a better quality interrelations. In this way the workshop promoted a better understanding and getting to know children's blind and visually impaired peers and vice versa.

### **Joint workshops for teenagers and adults «Special materials and how to use them» and «Special technical equipment and its use»**

These workshops had the main goal of bringing the Library’s special materials and technical equipment closer to potential users and all others involved in their care and education. Experts from Croatian library for the blind and Croatian Association of the blind gave interesting lectures and presentations. Both workshops excited a great interest in participants, providing a detailed overview of complete special materials and equipment in the Library, available to users and serving as a good opportunity for closer immediate contacts between the members of Croatian library for the blind and Croatian Association of the blind.

The participants were given a detailed overview of the Croatian library for the blind and its work, and the facts on scarce and expensive production of books for the blind in Croatia. The Library has some 2200 books in Braille and 2300 audio books. All participants agreed that the next vital step in the Library's growth is transition to production of Daisy format audio books, today's European Union and EU's Union of the blind (EBU) main standard. Daisy format advantages are unmistakable, as this format consolidates and includes both written and oral types of electronic books, thus enabling end users, readers, to listening to the book's content and at the same time following its written form on computer screen, a Braille type or a voice synthesizer. Besides, it provides search by title, subtitle, particular sentences or chapters, very similar to

reading a standard book, as it enables a reader with fast access to exact part of publication he/she is interested in.

### **Workshops for parents and experts «How to use tactile toys and picture books»**

The workshop is aimed at learning possibilities and ways of using tactile picture books and tactile toys, specially designed and manufactured to serve special needs of the blind or visually impaired children, who have to rely on their hearing and sense of touch in understanding the world around them. Participants were the parents of the blind/visually impaired children, as well as librarians, education and health experts who work with such children. Workshop was led by special therapists from “Mala kuća” Zagreb, an institution for children with special needs. They emphasized that apart from games, play and learning about objects around us, their properties and distinctive features, tactile picture books are needed to bring written word to children with impaired vision. As in the sighted children, it is done with leafing through books, perusing and turning pages, 'looking' at the picture books and listening and re-telling the stories, previously told by adults. Not only it gives preparation for learning ABCs, letters and first-time reading, the use of tactile picture books in the blind and visually impaired children is an important step for further reading and writing in Braille – letter for the blind. To help sighted adults feel the world of the blind children, the adult sighted participants were blindfolded. Some of the parents (and an ophthalmologist) were deeply shaken, as they, for the very first time, themselves felt some of the obstacles the blind children meet daily in life.

### **Evaluation**<sup>10</sup>

The focus group, with the blind and visually impaired service beneficiaries, upon project finalization indicated that the users of new services are very satisfied with delivery of the overall service, the quality of the workshops and presentations, the trainers and particularly with the assistance that the library staff is providing all this. It highly corresponds with the results of analysis of evaluation questionnaires.<sup>11</sup>

Younger users indicated two important needs that literature collection meets – the need to fulfill obligatory school reading tasks and the need to access sources of information and knowledge. These needs were met with the use of specially procured audio books for school reading assignments and by reading literature with scientific and expert contents. Young blind and visually impaired library members also emphasized the benefits of a more creative use of their leisure time, that now can be fulfilled with listening to good fiction or SF works and participating in education and animation activities. Those enrolled in regular elementary schools reported a positive change of attitudes and better understanding of their teachers and fellow students, whose involvement in the project activities helped them realize how limited the possibilities of partially sighted or blind children are.

### **Conclusion**

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<sup>10</sup> Miosic-Lisjak, Nives ; Kekez, Ana. Final external evaluation report of the project Library Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Koprivnica- Krizevci County : Grant Scheme: CARDS 2002 Social service delivery in the Non-profit sector. Prepared by MAP Savjetovanja d.o.o. January 30, 2006

<sup>11</sup> The only limiting factor for complete consideration of user's preferences was the limited offer on the market, but this project has opened possibility for increasing number of titles audio books offered by the Croatian Association of Blind Persons. Commercial offer is very poor, because there is no significant interest to use audio books in Croatia in this moment.

Implementation of the service for the blind and visually impaired at Public library of Koprivnica presents an innovative approach to social inclusion and empowerment of a marginalized group in the community. It has a great potential to serve as a role model to other local communities in Croatia. This project has received much attention from other public libraries and cultural and educational institutions in Croatia, indicating that a likely application of the same model should follow at least in some large Croatian cities, i.e. Rijeka, Sibenik, Osijek and Zadar. A continuous promotion of this innovative model has resulted in already expressed interest of public libraries abroad.<sup>12</sup>

A potential obstacle to the model replication is low capacity of many other associations of the blind in Croatia to effectively manage community development projects, additionally burdened with somewhat inert and old-fashioned, hierarchical leadership practices, rather than teamwork approach. At public libraries, the main obstacle is insufficient funding, even for standard services like purchase of books, but also inertness in finding alternative funding for new services, or additional knowledge on project strategic planning. It is very evident that Croatian librarianship lacks an overall library strategy, which would stimulate planned systematic nationwide services for the blind and visually impaired, or the handicapped in general, into public libraries. However, a unique policy for invalid persons on national level is in place.<sup>13</sup>

As for the Public library of Koprivnica and during the service for blind and visually impaired implementation, the basis for sustainability and replication of the model has been set. Library staff is educated for the delivery of the services, library materials and special equipment are now an integral part of the library, continuously offered to the blind and visually impaired members of the Library. All staff members are eager to continue working with this group and educate themselves further. The project has managed to mobilize local support from the public and business sector and foster a sense of community ownership, which strongly predicts the sustainability of project results, as well as activities. The library in Koprivnica hopes to become the Croatian education center for library services for people with disabilities in the long-term, open to professionals from home and abroad, too.

Perhaps the most valuable achievement of the new service for the blind and visually impaired at Public library of Koprivnica is the practice, showing how to use existing infrastructure and resources of a public library and its position as a center of all information, culture and multimedia focus of the Town Koprivnica and the County Koprivnica-Krizevci. This helps the local community increase the quality of social services for print disabled persons, especially children and adults. It also shows how to take care of their educational and social needs, in order to help the visually impaired be included on equal terms in life of the local community.

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