

Bulgaria: “Elderly people now online: School in the afternoon project”



Organization implementing the project

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Context

The political changes that have taken place since 1989, the transition to market economy and the restructuring of the Bulgarian economy alongside with the economic crisis have led to a big migration in the Bulgarian society. Many, mostly young people moved to bigger cities looking for work, and almost 10 per cent of the population left the country to live, work or study abroad. This process has led to a breakdown in the communication between generations and the growing need of the elderly people to be able to communicate with their children and relatives who live and/or work or study away in the country or abroad. The poor economic status of the elderly has identified the need for some cheaper or free options to stay in touch with their children and grandchildren using new technology and tools like Skype.

Action

Retired elderly people from the village of Patalenitsa, District of Pazardjik, Bulgaria, returned to school to learn how to work with the internet-based communication programme Skype. The ‘School in the afternoon’ project has been implemented with the assistance of the Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation (WCIF).

The idea came simultaneously both from the retired elderly and from the school board.

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The programme Skype conversation in real time (Children train grandparents to use Skype) was focused on computer literacy and use of Skype. It envisaged 2 weeks training in the local school computer lab. The programme was developed by a team of pedagogues, including the school director Nikola Kolev, who guide the training process.

The trainers themselves are children and the appointed 'senior trainers' who are young teenagers from the computer studies class led by their trainer Yuliana Peeva.

Outcomes and impact

This was the second 'wave' of retired elderly trainees after 10 elderly completed the computer literacy course last year. The Intergenerational Learning initiative has become increasingly popular, thanks to the local senior club, where the enrollment takes place.

The second 'wave' in 2011 was successfully completed by 9 older people, the eldest one being 69 years old.

The certificates were given out at a special awarding ceremony.

The training proved that the computer helps older people to overcome their loneliness; that the elderly have a need to use modern computer technology, and, last but not least, that the school teachers and children can help them.

On the whole, this intergenerational learning environment on one hand allowed the school children trainers to share their knowledge and skills acquired, and on the other hand helped the retired elderly trainees to acquire some competence and skills to communicate with the young, as well as to build positive attitude to new technology and innovations, and to continuously improve their knowledge and skills.

Quotes and photos

The communication via Skype has several advantages, the first of them is that it is free and can last for hours, but the best part is that unlike the telephone conversation, they can see each other with the help of the computer camera and this was said by the trainees themselves.

The idea is very good because at the other end the children-trainers learn how to explain what they know better and pass their knowledge in a more understandable way, but also, according to their teacher Yuliana Peeva, they have the chance to practice/rehearse/revise what they have already learnt in the computer training classes at school. This also helps children to learn how to be more diligent and patient.

A video material can be found at: <http://www.vbox7.com/play:fb40624d>