

# IT Competence upgrading at the library

## **Ethnic minorities and information technology at Gellerup and Hasle libraries in the western part of Aarhus.**

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### **How can public libraries promote information, education and cultural activities for ethnic minorities through the use of, among other things, information resources including multimedia and the Internet?**

#### **IT Competence Upgrading – an integration project at Aarhus Public Libraries**

IT Competence Upgrading is an integration project funded by Aarhus Public Libraries and the Urban-programme, which is an integration programme subsidised by the EU and Aarhus Municipality. Gellerup-Hasle-Herredsvang has been designated as Urban-area in the period 2002 – 2007 ([www.urbanbydel.dk](http://www.urbanbydel.dk)).

The aim of the project is to disseminate knowledge of IT and to increase citizen involvement in the Urban area through free, measurable and tangible IT activities. The project will run for 18 months, starting May 2003. The project will comprise IT-courses: PC-training, IT-guides (lessons in how to teach others), digital administration for staff, Internet introductions, inspirational meetings and the founding of one or two new IT-associations. 2-3 new co-operating projects will be linked to IT Competence Upgrading. Finally, the project must be self-supporting by means of volunteers by 31 October 2004.

#### **Empowerment as method – to share in the project**

The target group of the project is the citizens in the Urban area that do not have access to a computer at home. There is a special focus on ethnic women and other groups that do not have the time or the resources to acquire basic knowledge of IT.

Using the Empowerment method, the project has succeeded in involving citizens in a process pertaining to themselves. The key is awareness and respect. The citizens' needs and wishes are the focal point and at the same time the efforts of citizens/users are strengthened from the very beginning through involvement in the various activities. This increases the sense of ownership in the different initiatives. From the word go, co-determination and independent organisation of the activities have been the policy. The staff of the project acts as dynamos ensuring that the needs are uncovered and the activities carried out.

As a produce of IT Competence Upgrading, the Association of IT-guides was founded in June 2004.

#### **Achieved goals – general empowerment and IT skills for local citizens**

Apart from the basic IT skills, the citizens have acquired basic competences in independent organisation of events and democratic participation in the local community through, among other things, the founding of new IT-associations including the Association of IT-guides.

An IT-guide is part of a team of volunteers with knowledge of IT, who trains other citizens in the Urban area and conducts IT-courses. All IT-guides have participated in an intensive course teaching them to pass on their knowledge of IT to others. Prerequisites for participation in the course are a

sound knowledge of computers and the Internet and the ability to accept new challenges with an open mind. (See <http://www.aakb.dk/sw207.asp>).

Furthermore, IT as a neutral topic has been an excellent common ground for the cultural meeting of different ethnicities and networks. The project has, moreover, created a space for more energy and positive thinking, especially with regard to realising hopes and dreams, qualifying for the labour market and preparing digital instructional materials. Along with the projected acquirement of IT-skills there have been many added bonuses in the project through the synergy with concurrent co-operations.

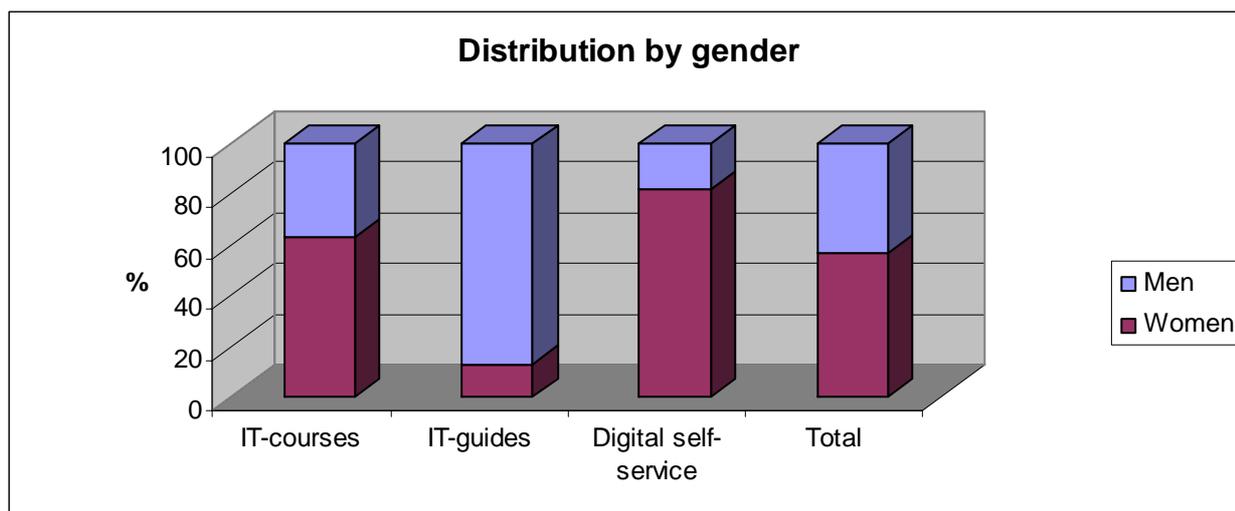
Tangibly, the project has until now resulted in 2 permanent and 3 temporary jobs plus 2 newly founded groups working to create their own projects, associations and co-operation with other projects and public institutions.

The table shows the measurable and tangible IT-activities achieved by the project:

Table: Tangible activities: May 2003 – October 2004

Activities	Participants	Women	Men
IT-courses (32 hours)	165	104	61
Digital self-service (11 hours)	11	9	2
IT-guide courses (24 hours)	31	4	27
Internet introductions	290	Mixed	Mixed
7 meetings of IT-inspiration	908	Mixed	Mixed
<b>Total</b>	<b>1405</b>		

Distribution by gender: May 2003 – October 2004



### Best practice

It is important to strive for a better distribution of the economical means to realise new initiatives in order to consider all partners in the community. Based on experiences gained from the short time IT

Competence Upgrading has been running, I would like to end with some recommendations, which might be useful in promoting integration in other places or areas:

- Create ownership and awareness in regard to various activities/projects in the community
- Use diversity as a strength
- Openness and obligingness from the local authorities as well as other established local resources in regard to knowledge sharing, network, contacts, facilities and new ideas
- Appreciate and involve key persons from the community in connection with the implementation of new initiatives
- Recognition ensures visibility of human resources
- Create cross-cultural meeting places focused on activities aimed at all citizens in the community
- Broad co-operation – across ethnicity and local initiatives in the area
- Changing image through the media – ensure involvement from the media, the politicians and the local authorities to promote new initiatives in a positive way
- Focus on simplicity, visual description and innovativeness in order to avoid linguistic barriers and misunderstandings
- Flexibility in preparing the work and tasks based on the individual needs and wishes of the persons involved
- No single truth exists – there is always a multitude of truths.

For more information about the project, contact the author of this article at Gellerup Library.