Social Inclusion Programme through Access to New Technologies in Neighbourhoods.

Context

Sant Andreu de la Barca is a 5.5 km² city located 20 km south east of Barcelona, in Bajo Llobregat County, with a population of 27,489 people (January 1st 2011).

Owing to the modest size of our city, Sant Andreu de la Barca City Council constitutes an important platform which addresses most current global issues and which citizens can access directly with great ease. In this way, the Council is very committed to improving living conditions, above all among underprivileged populations, and works transversally from different areas and departments to foster citizen participation, social cohesion and social integration, again especially in vulnerable groups, in order to prevent social exclusion among the disabled, migrants, underprivileged families, unemployed, school drop-outs, battered women, older people, etc.

New technologies become especially relevant in this context; they have become a source of inequalities and forms of exclusion at work, school, in relationships, information, among those who have not been able to incorporate them in their lives (most importantly women, older people and unskilled workers). This is what is currently known as the digital gap.

Providing vulnerable groups with better access to technologies adapted to their needs and reality, is therefore a way of fighting against new forms of social exclusion which nowadays are considered an important determinant of health and a door to most services, including health.

Rationale

Sant Andreu Municipality has a number of significant social characteristics which have led to the creation of this programme:

- It is a particularly “young” municipality – the average age is 5.6 years younger than in the rest of the province.

- Almost 40% of the population was not born in Sant Andreu de la Barca. Foreign migrants make up 11.42% of the population. This means diversity management, coexistence, and social cohesion actions are particularly important.
- The average per capita income and education level in Sant Andreu is lower than in the rest of the County and Catalonia.

- Children’s socio-educational needs, including the use of computers as a fundamental tool, have led to a significant demand for help with homework of children in socio-economically and culturally vulnerable groups. These children are often left alone and need company.

- Women, especially senior citizens in our municipality are very much aware of their need to integrate new information and communication technologies in their lives, as a tool for personal and social development.

- The population over 65 - on May 24th 2011, this figure stood at 3,287, 11.96% of the total population - requires specific activities which allow them to stay socially and mentally active and connected to their current environment.

For the above-mentioned reasons, “social inclusion through access to new technologies in neighbourhoods” aims to focus on the promotion of access to new information and communication technologies among vulnerable groups, taking into account existing resources and population needs.

DESCRIPTION

The programme contemplates the creation and dynamization of a network of open-access computer rooms for specific population groups in neighbourhoods (older people, adolescents, women, migrants and the unemployed).

The global project was launched in 2008, although on some occasions several of the activities had been carried out previously. “Open computer rooms” in neighbourhoods offer free services and free access, and have created a resource network which allows the above-mentioned population groups and the general public to access new technologies.

These classrooms are stocked with computer products, telematics and multimedia, dynamised by a specialised instructor who offers users support when possible problems arise as a result of the use of this material.

In order to make this successful and take full advantage of the space, it has been necessary to establish specific derivation channels, a specific access system and coordinate the following social partners: Social Services, Equality Policies, Youth, Public Health, Citizen Participation, Economic Development, Older People’s Home, Socio-Cultural Associations in the city.

Currently we have special computer rooms for children, adolescents, young adults, senior citizens, women and the unemployed.
1.- CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

- **“S@bark” open classroom location:** Situated in the socio-cultural resource centre (municipal facilities where different projects address socio-educational, educational and preventive issues).

- **Target Population/Actions:**
  
  o **Children and adolescents** in Sant Andreu de la Barca, who can voluntarily access this classroom, either directly or through “Study Space”, where they can do their homework guided by a specialised instructor. In addition, monthly training programmes and workshops complement activities which are developed in these open classrooms.
  
  Groups are of a maximum of 10, sorted by age (6 to 12 and 12 to 16/18). The same children are not supposed to use the services more than 3 times a week, or more than 90 minutes a day, although those who do not have access to new technologies at home are given priority.

- **Open from** Monday to Friday: Mondays to Thursdays from 1800 to 1900h and Fridays from 1700 to 2000h.

- **Social Partners involved:** This activity requires the Department of Social Services, schools and families to coordinate.

2.- YOUTH

- **Classroom Location:** “Young Space” is situated in the Aigüestoses cultural centre. These are Council facilities which include a library, the municipal radio station and “Young Space”, which offers young people information, advice and help with any other issues.

  This open classroom has WIFI, 20 computers reserved for workshops and courses, and an open-access area with 8 computers and Internet access.

- **Target Population/Actions:**
  
  o **Young people aged 16 to 29 in Sant Andreu de la Barca** who can access the classroom without inscribing.

We are dealing with a sector of the population which has grown up with new technologies and which has fully integrated them into their lives, having been offered technology-related activities, both for training and for communication and social relations.
In 2008, the municipal Department of Youth started to organise interactive activities which focussed on technology as a communication medium and information exchange. The Department of Youth has joined a number of social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Fotolog), and has its own webpage www.santandreujove.cat, providing extensive information and opportunities to voice opinions and concerns.

Office automation workshops are organised and directed by instructors. Participants learn how to use Access, Excel, free software, and specialised programmes which young people use for leisure and work.

- **Opening hours:** Mondays to Fridays from 1600 to 2030h and Thursday mornings.

- **Social Partners involved:** Departments of Youth and Social Services.

### 3.- SENIOR CITIZENS:

**Classroom location:** In the Casal Municipal de Abuelos (day centre), the essential meeting-point where senior citizens carry out socio-cultural activities and play games in order to make their lives healthier and more active.

- **Target Population/Actions:**
  - **Senior Citizens in Sant Andreu de la Barca.**

    The municipal day-centre El Casal has an open classroom with 8 computers and offers a programme of free quarterly courses taught by a specialised instructor.

    The courses are:
    - For people with no computer skills
    - About Internet: tools such as e-mail, search engines, social networks
    - Specific workshops: digital photography, wordprocessing, etc. …

    These computer courses are complemented with talks and courses concerning healthy ageing topics.

- **Opening hours:** Two days a week – Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1800 to 1900h.

- **Social Partners Involved:** Departments of Social Services, Older People and Public Health.
4.- WOMEN:

- **Classroom locations:** “S@bark” Open Classroom in the socio-cultural resource centre and the Open Classroom in Aigüestoses cultural centre.
  
  o **Target Population/Actions:** Women in Sant Andreu de la Barca.

The project, which began in 2008, offers morning and afternoon courses and workshops which include:

  o Introduction to new technologies and specific computer applications (e-women Project).
  o Use of Internet (“Log on, women!”);
  o Designing a web portal, creating a virtual network, and advanced courses (Networking Women, Women Citizens of Bajo Llobregat).

These activities are complemented with talks and conferences about women and new technologies, which encourage women to participate and provide a meeting-point where they can discuss their interests and queries regarding topics such as “Women are on the Web”.

- **Social Partners Involved:** Social Services, Citizen Participation, Economic Development, Municipal IT Department and Women’s Associations.

5.- UNEMPLOYED

- **Classroom locations:** “Escoles Velles” open classroom. “Escoles Velles” are municipal facilities located in the “Occupation and Training Service of the Council Department for Economic Development”, which provides training and has a placement and employment unit.

- **Target Population/Actions:**
  
  o **Unemployed Men and Women** in Sant Andreu de la Barca (the unemployment rate in 2010 was 12.3%).

The Escoles Velles computer room is fully equipped with 16 computers and with updated technical equipment.

With regard to information and communication technology and office automation, the main course of action is the professional training courses for the unemployed. 7 courses (1,050 teaching hours) were delivered from 2008 to 2010.

The ABCDigital action was implemented in 2010, mainly for career guidance users – job seekers with digital literacy needs such as how to write a successful CV or look for work on the Internet.
As well as this, two days a week the computer room is used as an open classroom so that those who are actively looking for work through the “Job Club” have free Internet access.

- **Social Partners Involved:** Social Services, Economic Development, Citizen Participation, Economic Promotion, Municipal IT Department.

**ACHIEVEMENTS**

The achievements of the different activities have been measured by means of different indicators such as participation and satisfaction. The level of coordination and involvement of all the social partners has also been assessed.

- **Participation**
  
  - **Children and adolescents:** 120 children and adolescents have participated since 2008, with an average increase of 20% every year.
  
  - **Young people:** By May this year 5,261 users had visited the youth webpage and approximately 50 young people had taken part in the workshops. On May 24th, 2011 there were a total of 3,906 young people aged between 16 and 29 in Sant Andreu – 14.21% of the total population.
  
  - **Older People:** 80 senior citizens have participated since 2005.
  
  - **Women:** 255 women have participated since 2008. The participation rate has increased by 25% every year
  
  - **Unemployed:** From 2008 to 2010, 112 people completed a basic computer course, 60 people did digital literacy courses, and 4,601 used the “Work Club” open classroom.

- **Level of satisfaction:** Global satisfaction surveys have assessed all these activities very positively, especially the dynamics and contents of training courses and the creation of information networks and links among participants. The results of the surveys showed that users would have liked the courses and workshops to last longer.

- **Level of coordination and involvement** The level of coordination among municipal areas and departments has been very satisfactory: relations and coordination has been good. There has also been a good level of collaboration with other associations and institutions.

The progressive increase in participation and demand since the launch of these activities, together with users’ high level of satisfaction and the good results and coordination of execution and follow-up, are all success indicators. The availability of sufficient space and resources has also contributed to the adequate accomplishment of activities.
CONCLUSIONS

- The use of IT in public places not only reduces the digital gap but also helps to create a sense of social inclusion through knowledge of and participation in social networks, for example.

- A lack of IT skills or access to computers generates inequalities and forms of exclusion in different aspects of people’s lives. Some of the most affected are women, older people and those with low education levels.

- The search for information through new technologies and the capacity to assess the quality of this information, affects people’s attitude to health and facilitates access to the health network.

- This programme has helped to raise self-esteem, owing to the fact that participants now feel capable of using new digital tools.

- The successful implementation of the Healthy Cities Project requires innovating actions which address aspects of health and living conditions, and identify them as new determinants of health. Comprehensive health programmes must be delivered according to the principles of citizen participation and with the use of multisectoral strategies.

- Cities are key platforms when it comes to making changes to lifestyles. They are capable of resolving current global issues in a comprehensive and sustainable way.