



knowledge without boundaries

# EIFL-PLIP

Improving lives and livelihoods through innovative public library services

## E-books app motivates teenagers to read

### Valmiera Public Library, Latvia

IMPACT CASE STUDY

Valmiera Public Library's 'Read and Get Followers' project uses digital technology to motivate teenagers to read. The project -

- Introduced teenagers to e-reading: for over half of the teenagers who took part in the project, this was their first experience of reading e-books.
- Piloted 'social reading' - a new concept in Latvia and the Latvian library sector - by partnering with a software development agency to create an application (app) for tablet computers and smart phones that enables young readers to create their own e-book libraries, to build networks of followers, to chat with their friends and to share opinions about books online.
- Changed the library's approach to working with young people: for the first time, the library involved teenagers in co-creating a library service.
- Increased numbers of children and youth coming to the library by 8%.



First-time e-readers: over half of the teenagers who took part in the project had never read an e-book before.

*"Now, since I can read on my smart phone, I do it more often. When I have a free minute, for example, during breaks in the school programme, I can access my bookshelf and read." - Gustav Mazins, project participant*

Concerned that poor reading skills would limit young Latvians' chances in life, librarians at Valmeira Public Library conducted research into their reading habits. Their survey of over 260 youth aged from 12 to 15 found that 21% of boys and 5% of girls did not read at all. The main reasons given for not reading were lack of interest and a preference for activities like meeting friends and communicating on social media.

The findings presented an idea for a new service. With a small grant (up to US\$20,000) from the EIFL Public Library Innovation Programme (EIFL-PLIP), the library consulted with the software developers, Fastr Books, to develop a social reading app for teenagers. Fastr Books also provided access to an e-books collection (around 12,000 titles in seven languages, including Latvian). The librarians selected and trained 15 teenagers - 'reading ambassadors'

- to promote reading with their friends. The reading ambassadors learnt leadership, public speaking, organizational and technology skills training. 'Read and get Followers' was ready to launch. In just one year -

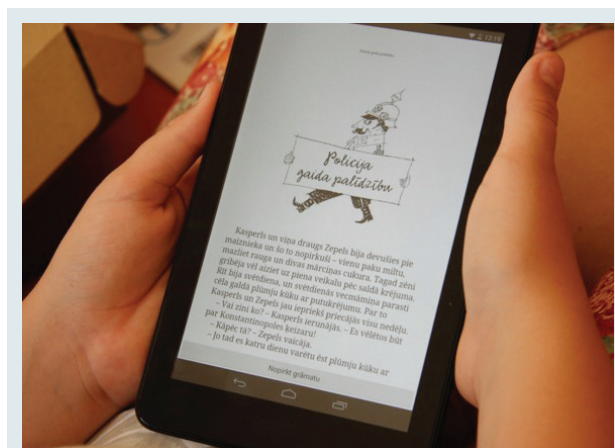
- The 15 reading ambassadors worked with librarians and software developers to refine the social reading app to make it more user-friendly for teenagers.

- Librarians engaged reading ambassadors and teachers and students of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences to design a new reading space for youth - the Future Reading Room. In this dynamic space, children and youth have free access to technology including an interactive wall, tablet computers, e-books, video cameras, gaming software and Oculus Rift virtual reality glasses.

- The library organized a series of 'Library in Your Pocket' classes on e-reading, reaching 450 teenagers from local schools.

- With new skills and confidence, the reading ambassadors' initiated and led summer holiday activities in the Future Reading Room.

- To promote social reading to the broader community, the library launched a special show, 'Readers of Vidzeme', on the popular Vidzeme TV station that reaches an audience of over 200,000 people.



Teenagers had access to 12,000 titles in seven languages, including Latvian, on the library's tablet computers.

*“Reading on the tablet is more stylish. I like to interact electronically to keep up with other readers’ habits and recommendations.”*  
- Tina Jancevska, reading ambassador, aged 12.

## The future

The pilot project sparked discussion, engaging the Latvian National Library, Culture Information System Centre, public libraries, Fastr Books and publishers on the need for an e-book lending service in Latvian libraries. The library's future plans include continuing with the 'The Library in Your Pocket' training, and buying more tablet computers for the Future Reading Room. The reading ambassadors have begun setting up a new group of young volunteers to consult with the library about future youth services - and librarians are committed to continue consulting with teenagers. The partnership with Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences is to expand, and librarians will work with students to create local content for the Future Reading Room, that includes an interactive game 'Find yourself in Valmiera' to help young people get to know Valmiera, its history and people better.

The EIFL-PLIP grant was awarded in May 2014. A year later, the library assessed the impact of the service. Information presented here is based on the library's impact assessment. For further information, contact Valmiera Head of the Children's Department at Valmiera Public Library, Ilze Karsa: [ilze.karsa@valmiera.lv](mailto:ilze.karsa@valmiera.lv).

EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) works with libraries to enable access to knowledge in developing and transition economy countries in Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe and Latin America. The EIFL Public Library Innovation Programme (EIFL-PLIP) supports libraries to implement community development projects. The EIFL Public Library Innovation Programme is supported by a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.