

...IN BULGARIA

Computer Clubs for Children Project in Pleven

It has been a year since the computer room for children project in Pleven was established. The computer room project originated from the 1999 Pleven Initiative workshop. It was started by Mrs. Stella Krasteva, a teacher at Ivan Vazov Comprehensive School, and targeted children who had lost a parent. With the support of donors, she organized various activities for these children, such as competitions and picnics, and trained them in basic computer skills.

In August 2001, Dr. Daniel Levine, director of the Children's Help Net Foundation (CHNF) visited the school and discussed with the school authorities the possibility of providing computers to the room. As a result, the computer room was established in October 2001 with computers donated by CHNF. The school provided the room, computer training for the children, and access to the Internet, and over 60 underprivileged children identified by the school psychologist were included in computer training classes.

Mrs. Malina Petzova, the school psychologist, has expanded the list of children eligible to take these classes. As of September 2002, all children in the first grade are eligible. At the end of the first term, all the children from the target group will be assessed using a psychometric test comparing the results before and after taking computer classes during the first term. Initial results show that computer classes are the children's favorite ones.

The headmaster, Mr. Dimitar Mitev, remarked, "After these computers were donated in 2001, we were able to persuade other donors to bring in more computers. Now we are proud to have three computer rooms in our school and can provide training for all our students - over 1,600 children aged 7-18 years old."



Computer Room at Ivan Vazov Comprehensive School

Extension of a Rouse Initiative Project

Several projects, developed as a result of the 1999 Rouse Initiative workshop, aimed to find out more about patients' attitudes toward their health problems and health services, provide patients with more information on the types of assistance they can expect from social institutions, and organize art therapy for those with psychiatric problems.

The experience Dr. Plamen Panayotov got from projects in his capacity as local coordinator of PSBH® projects and through active participation in other health-related projects, gave life to a new project supported by the European Commission. This project, *Organizing Occupational Therapy and Self-Support for Psychiatric Patients*, was implemented at the Regional Dispensary of Mental Diseases in Rouse, in collaboration with the Solutions Center and the Entrepreneur Center.

Dr. Panayotov and his colleagues organized patients with mental disorders (such as schizophrenia, mood disorders, epilepsy, and mental retardation) into two groups. Six of them (some with different degrees of training in art schools) were included in an art therapy group, and 50 patients were involved in occupational therapy, making angular brackets. The aim of the project was to encourage patients to use their skills to improve the clinical picture of their disease by improving their communication skills and their quality of life.

The patients' daily work took two to four hours. A

- rehabilitation nurse, a therapist, and a clinical consultant monitored patients' psychiatric and somatic status.
- Painting materials for the art group were provided by the Solutions Center, and the Dispensary provided rooms, meals, and transportation for the patients.
- Regular meetings were organized at the Patients' Club, during which future plans for the project were discussed.
- The patients visited two monasteries and attended the International Folklore Festival in Veliko Turnovo. Artists well known to the public in Rouse, Todor Filipov, Lachezar Stanev, and Desislav Michailov, participated in an art exhibition on August 16, 2002, which supported the patients' works. As a result, a jury selected 56 of the patients' paintings, of which 18 were sold, and \$1,000 was divided among the patients. After selling part of the angular brackets, the patients made a total of \$1,600.
- Compared to the previous year, re-hospitalization rates were reduced by 58.3%, and there was only one compulsory admission compared to three during the previous year.

- In the future, the patients will be organized into several groups to carry out diverse activities: planting trees, bushes, and flowers; grass cutting; sewing; furniture making; and creating art objects. Financing is needed, so if you are aware of any opportunities, please contact the Solutions Center, Rouse, at the following e-mail address: plamenp@acvilon.com.

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