Digi-Hub for the Elderly People

FINLAND

Enhancing the accessibility, use and quality of information and communication technologies (ICT) in rural areas

Location
Suodenniemi

Programming period
2014 – 2020

Priority
P6 – Social inclusion and local development

Measure
M7 – Basic services and village renewal

Funding (EUR)
Total budget 27 100
EAFRD 7 481.38
National/Regional 10 331.45
Private 9 287.17

Project duration
2017 – 2018

Project promoter
Suodenniemi Association

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A small, remote rural community of around 1 300 inhabitants in Finland launched a Digi-Hub for the elderly.

Summary

Digitalisation and online services are considered a way of improving services in general in sparsely populated rural areas. The Suodenniemi Association that supports local development in a remote village in the Tampere region had the idea to establish a digital hub and advisory point in a village library.

The hub helps elderly people to benefit from digitalisation and quickly emerging new online services related to health, banking, shopping and social relations, among others.

Results

The IT professional has been able to assist around three people per day

Many private companies, such banks, pharmacies and software suppliers, which have closed down their physical service points in Suodenniemi have been very committed to playing a part in the project, through their e-services.

Lessons & Recommendations

❑ The biggest challenge is how to reach the more passive target groups, who don't use social media and whose digital presence is quite weak.

❑ One central success of the project has been the local IT professional who was available for the hub position. The users trust him and can talk about very personal issues with him.

❑ Many customers have expressed a wish for the service to continue after the project support ends. Linking it with the existing public library services appears to be the most feasible option.

Context

Finland is the most sparsely populated country of the EU, having an average of only 17 inhabitants per square kilometre. It is very challenging to organise the delivery of rural services under such conditions. At the same time the rural population is ageing rapidly. Computer and other digital device literacy is becoming a more and more important skill for citizens, but it is a challenge to ensure that no one is left behind.

Finland is currently renewing its digital infrastructure strategy at the government level, aiming to ensure a data transfer speed of 100Mb/s, by using a combination of broadband (glass fibre) network and the new, emerging 5G wireless network. However, efficient digitalisation depends on three parallel and equally important processes: i) construction of digital infrastructure; ii) supply of digital services; and iii) people's ability to use the infrastructure and services. Experience has shown that where the infrastructure works the services will follow. Often the weakest link in the chain is people's ability to adopt new services and technologies, which is especially true of elderly people.

Objectives

Suodenniemi is a small, remote rural community of around 1 300 inhabitants in the Tampere region. The Suodenniemi Association launched the Digi-Hub for the Elderly project with support from the local LEADER LAG in 2017. In this context, the project aims to:

- Improve the computer and other digital device literacy of Suodenniemi residents, especially the elderly;

- Help develop and adopt new digital services in a community that has suffered from depopulation and many public and private services being closed down; and

- Improve the library services and multi-use of the public space.

Activities

The Digi-Hub was established in the Suodenniemi public library during the summer 2017. The new service was marketed through Suodenniemi Association channels which include social media, pensioners' associations and newspaper articles. An IT professional was hired to assist with everyday IT problems from digital cameras to smart phones. The hub is open two days a week: on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9am and 3pm. In addition the project has organised thematic info events on mobile payments, e-security and e-health systems, etc.

The project has been also very active in the media and raised public discussion on the accessibility of digital services among the elderly people – see for example Farmi Magazine. At a national level the hub joined the SeniorSurf network of advisory centres.

Main results

Since the project launch the IT professional has been able to assist some three customers per day. The cases vary from simple train ticket bookings to complicated and time-consuming software installations and updates. After only one year the majority of elderly people living in Suodenniemi were using the service. Customers more than 90 years old have shown to be still willing and motivated to learn new things.

Many private companies that have closed down their physical service points in Suodenniemi have been also very committed to taking part in the project, through their e-services. These include banks, pharmacies and software suppliers.

The public discussion and media attention has created a positive attitude towards digitalisation in Suodenniemi. Many Digi-Hub customers have already seen that digitalisation can even improve the accessibility and quality of rural services.

Key lessons

At the beginning of the project the association didn't have a clear picture of the demand for the digital advisory services – so the hundreds of customers have been the biggest positive surprise. Yet there are hundreds of elderly people who have not found the service. The biggest challenge is now is finding a way of reaching this more passive part of the target group, who don't use social media and whose digital presence is probably quite weak.

One central success of the project was the local IT professional who was available for the Hub position. The customers trust him and can talk about very personal issues with him.

Many customers expressed a wish for the service continue after the project support ends. Linking it with the existing public library services appear to be the most feasible option.

Additional sources of information

www.seniorsurf.fi/opastuspaikat/

www.lehtiluukku.fi/lue/farmi-2-2018/176713.html

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