

1) Title of the case

The Living Library

2) General description of the organisation and/or project

Enova is a provincial advisory organ operating in the fields of emancipation and integration. Enova strives for an inclusive society in which all citizens, regardless of age, sex, or ethnicity, are able to participate fully. Enova believes that diversity enriches communities and endeavours to empower disadvantaged groups so that they are in a position to take responsibility for their own lives and futures.

Enova is an organization that serves governmental organisations, social welfare institutions, non-profit and commercial organisations and individual citizens in the province of Drenthe. Enova provides advice and initiates and develops new projects, tools and methods to further the emancipation and integration of various groups in society. To this end, the project Living Library was developed.

3) The main content of the case

The Living Library is an integration and anti-discrimination project designed to foster understanding between diverse groups of people by reducing prejudices and stereotypes. The Living Library offers its “visitors” a neutral meeting place, encouraging open dialogue on a personal level between people who may not usually come into contact with one another.

The Living Library can be implemented in a number of ways: in various places and for various target groups. In the original set-up, a mobile library bus was used as a meeting place during festivals and public events. In the same way that one would ordinarily lend a book from the library in order to enrichen one’s knowledge about a particular subject, or indeed just for fun, visitors are encouraged to “lend” one or more “living books” for a chat and a discussion. For this purpose, a diverse group of people are available in the bus to be “loaned” to visitors.

Using stickers and sandwichboards which showcase the most popular prejudices (e.g. dumb blonds, corrupt politicians etc), visitors are encouraged to interact with Living Library volunteers and to put their prejudices to the test. The project covers all types of prejudices and stereotypes and aims to engage people in stimulating and positive discussions.

The project is intentionally designed to encourage face-to-face dialogue, rather than structured debate organised on more formal lines. In this way the project is accessible to all sorts of visitors at all different levels. No expert knowledge is required on specialist subjects in order to engage in conversation with project participants. Personal storytelling encourages visitors to the Living Library and their discussion partners to focus on the people behind the stories, rather than on general prejudices and stereotypes. However, the informal nature of the discussions and the personal approach paves the way for visitors to broach more serious issues and generalisations then become the topic of conversation.

In this way the Living Library stimulates dialogue between individuals on topics which directly concern those involved or which are of concern to the wider public. The public does not normally have the opportunity to pose certain questions, or indeed, may not dare to simply approach someone in the street in order to do so. Many individuals may not even be aware that they possess certain prejudices

or that they use stereotypes and make generalisations. This project raises individual conscience levels on these topics in a manner that is positive and stimulating.

4) The reasons behind the case

The project addresses some of the underlying causes of discrimination, namely prejudices and stereotypes. Throughout Europe, and in particular due to recent events involving terrorism, there is growing intolerance of particular groups within society. Social contact between groups has duly suffered, leading to an increase in tension between migrants and Dutch people especially. This project reinstates contact between groups in an informal manner, avoiding formal debate and structures.

Enough possibilities exist for those who are interested to participate in conferences and to debate on social issues. However, in such formal contexts, there is little time for personal contact and the end result is often different sides putting their arguments forward for one case or another. Additionally, such debates may not reach the general public, focusing as they often do, on specialist audiences.

The Living Library addresses this balance. Participants are actively approached and encouraged to engage in dialogue, without prior preparation. In this way the project maintains a spontaneous character and builds on the natural curiosity of the Dutch public.

Initial preparatory work began in October / November 2004, and the first implementation date was in May 2005, coinciding with the Liberation Day celebrations.

5) The actors behind the case

Initiator:

The project was initiated by Kim Tsai, who works part-time for Enova, as well as running her own consultancy and advice bureau.

Funding:

The project was for the most part funded by a provincial anti-discrimination organisation (Anti-discriminatie bureau Drenthe). A contribution was also received from a Dutch foundation which encourages inter-religious dialogue (Stichting Kerk en Wereld) and sponsorship was also received from a commercial company (NAM).

Main partners:

Various other organisations cooperated in the project, including the provincial coordination point for mobile libraries, various welfare organisations and festival organisers.

Despite initial plans to carry out the project only in the province of Drenthe, due to the enormous success of the project, the Living Library was also implemented in other parts of The Netherlands. Originally the project was intended to be implemented during 4 large public festivals. Again, due to its popularity and the results obtained, more festival dates could be honoured.

The Living Library also proved to be adaptable to different circumstances and to different target groups. This meant that later on the project could be adapted and employed as a dialogue method in other contexts. To this end, co-operation was sought from various welfare institutions for youth projects, with public libraries, with rotary clubs, with local organisations for community events, etc.

Volunteers:

In total, approximately 50 volunteers were involved in the implementation of the project at various times and in varying numbers. At any one time, 10 to 15 volunteers participated in the Living Library. Their functions varied between discussion partner, logistical and organisational assistance, sandwich board carrier (engaged in actively stimulating public to participate in the project) and general coordination.

A diverse range of volunteers is desirable (diversity in age, sex, ethnic background, cultural background, educational level, work experience etc). Volunteers did not receive specific training in communication or discussion techniques. This was a conscious decision, in order to maintain the natural and informal character of the project. Where possible, the Living Library worked with local volunteers, in order to avoid the idea of a “travelling circus”.

Volunteers were actively involved in all stages of the project and in particular in evaluations and in proposing and implementing solutions to improve the Living Library. They gained an ownership of the project, sharing in the results and successes.

6) The process leading to success

The process:

End 2004/Begin 2005:	Concept development and planning
Feb/Mar 2005:	Recruitment of volunteers via different local organisations. Mainly done by telephone and small-scale information meetings. Preparation of communication plan.
April 2005 to end:	PR and media campagne
May 2005/Mar 2006:	Implementation project (the Living Library was implemented during festivals and other events – see results hereunder).
Throughout:	Evaluation of implementation with volunteers and other parties. Action points implemented at following event.
Begin 2006:	Final evaluation and final report drawn up, including press file of media coverage.

Implementation:***Concept development:***

The concept was developed based on the simple idea that the best way to reduce prejudices is to get people together in order for them to make personal contact with one another in a neutral environment. Whilst one person, the project leader, had already come up with the basic concept (i.e. creation of a Living Library where the “public” can “lend out” other members of the public in an easily accessible space – a mobile library), the exact organisation of the project still had to be worked out. A number of meetings were organised with different parties, including a professional communication and PR company, in order to brainstorm on the approach.

4th Quality Conference

4/7

The project leader was an essential factor in ensuring that the approach to anti-discrimination remained light-hearted, accessible to all and positive throughout.

PR & Media Campagne:

The use of professional communication instruments and a well thought out media campagne were absolutely crucial to the success of this project. A media-friendly campagne was launched, with the goal of informing as many people as possible about the aims of the project and of course to encourage as many people as possible to participate by visiting the Living Library. The project leader chose for a staggered media campagne, in line with the fact that the implementation dates were not consecutive and at times several weeks apart.

In addition, a special newspaper was created, introducing the project and some of the participants, plus the main aims. The format, content and style all blended in with the total approach: positive, professional, light-hearted (use of cartoons), but with a serious message. The newspaper was distributed locally to more than 80,000 households and distribution was timed to coincide with the implementation dates. Sponsorship was used to cover the costs.

Participants:

Volunteers were mainly recruited from local organisations (multicultural organisations), migrant organisations, educational institutions, welfare organisations, and via word of mouth. In the first instance volunteers were invited to attend information meetings and could then sign up to participate. In order to encourage a wide variety of volunteers from all walks of life, all ages and all ethnic backgrounds, there were no specific criteria to assess whether somebody could or could not participate. An essential aspect in the recruitment of volunteers was clear information about the project aims and the role of volunteers (schedules were drawn up to show who should be doing what, where and when), clarity about expectations (i.e. all volunteers were expected to help with publicity, setting up of the locations, catering, tidying up etc) and acceptance of the overall approach. This latter implied that volunteers should not have extreme views which they would later try to impose on the public. Volunteers had to be clear about the fact that their role was one of partner in an open dialogue, in which listening played an essential part.

After the project was implemented a couple of times, it became clear which persons could be employed in which roles. Whereas local people were recruited each time as volunteers to be “lent out”, it proved essential to use a number of seasoned volunteers who took over various roles, such as logistical coordinator, people manager etc. They could then guide and assist local people at local events.

Volunteers received an allowance for their work.

Financing:

+/- 35,000 euros:	Stichting Anti-discriminatie bureau Drenthe (anti-discrimination foundation Drenthe)
5,000 euros:	Stichting Kerk en Wereld (Foundation Church and World)
1,000 euros:	NAM
8,000 euros:	Sponsorship in return for advertising space in own locally distributed Newspaper

Critical success factors are:

1. A good project leader
2. Positive approach
3. Professional communication tools and PR campagne
4. Diverse group of volunteers – with a number of regular volunteers with assigned roles
5. Simplicity of the method

7) Results indicating the success

As such a project had not been carried out in the Netherlands before the initial targets were largely based on what the project leader believed could be achieved with the given resources (financial and people). The original project plan included 4 implementation dates with an expectation that some 200 visitors would visit the Living Library in total. It was estimated that due to media coverage and the distribution of a project newspaper, approximately 200,000 people would in some way read or hear about the Living Library.

The actual results have far exceeded all expectations:

1. The project has been implemented on more than 20 occasions.
2. There have been more than 1500 visitors to the Living Library.
3. The Living Library has not only been implemented during festivals and events, but also in public libraries, as a tool in youth projects, during markets and fairs, and during conferences and symposiums.
4. The Living Library has indirectly reached more than a million Dutch households through coverage in national and regional newspapers, national television, national and regional radio, specialist magazines and internet.
5. The project has encouraged people from all walks of life, from students to politicians, to enter into dialogue with one another via weblogs and other media, on prejudices and stereotypes.
6. More than 50 volunteers have participated in the project and in so doing have widened their own networks. As a result, several volunteers have gone on to do more structural volunteer work and have made remarkable steps in their personal development.
7. The Living Library was nominated as one of the best integration projects in the Netherlands.
8. The Living Library volunteers were nominated for a prize for local volunteers in Drenthe and won a free training in communication skills.
9. Discussions are ongoing with national organisations (including the Dutch Council for Refugees) in order to agree on a national strategy whereby the method can be easily transferred to other users.

8) The main obstacles of the case

1. Due to its rapid success, there were more requests to carry out the project than were possible (financial constraints and insufficient volunteers at times). Also to avoid placing too large a burden on the project leader, it is advisable to try to appoint responsible volunteers early on in the development of the project, who can take over the practical implementation tasks. Depending on the available budget, this could be an employed project assistant.
2. The choice of a mobile library was extremely popular and fitted perfectly with the concept. However, this created some planning constraints, due to the fact that the mobile library was also at times in use in its normal function. Other options were: using a different setting, or a different kind of bus. However, the set-up is important – tables and chairs where people can sit face to face.
3. Volunteers need to be clearly briefed about what is expected of them and their knowledge of the local language must be sufficient for them to be able to engage in meaningful dialogue (especially important in the case of migrants).
4. If carrying out the project during festivals, think carefully about location. If it is a music festival, remember that in the Living Library people need to be able to talk to one another. Loud music is therefore distracting. Similarly, the type of festival will also to some extent determine the kind of public you can expect. Vary therefore the volunteers accordingly.
5. Check the rules and regulations in advance about what can and cannot be paid to volunteers. Make arrangements and set up volunteer contracts accordingly. This will avoid problems later on.

6. When carrying out the project for the first time, make a rough schedule for the volunteers which indicates what they should be doing. Give volunteers responsibility for different tasks, and make sure everybody knows what is expected of them. Appoint someone other than the project leader as co-ordinator.
7. In the financial planning do not forget items such as lunch for the volunteers. Fortunately we thought up cheap solutions, such as the appointment of a catering coordinator who was responsible for purchasing food and drinks and for making up lunch boxes for everybody.
8. Think beforehand about what you would "charge" an organisation who wants you to implement the project especially for them. This avoids ad-hoc decision-making at the last minute. We decided that where possible we would ask for the financial allowance for volunteers, plus travel and food costs, and where applicable the costs for hiring the mobile library.
9. It was at times difficult to find a balance between the available volunteers and their skills. Whilst it is not desirable to "train" all the volunteers in discussion techniques, basic information and tips on general communication strategies would be extremely useful in the early stages.
10. Ensure that information is clear. This is essential for non-native speakers. At times and especially when not working with the regular group of volunteers, it was difficult to get the project aims and methods across to non-native speakers of Dutch. This does not mean that such people should be excluded from taking part. On the contrary, by taking the time to explain things properly, such volunteers were able to participate fully and were often the most "requested" volunteers.
11. Listen carefully to the experiences of the volunteers and visitors. Evaluate each time that the project has been implemented. Write down tips about what works and what doesn't work and put them into practice the next time. Don't be afraid to experiment. Even if you've only got a few volunteers, you can still get people engaged in good discussions if your volunteers know how to approach the public and stimulate them in a positive way.
12. When working with volunteers outside Drenthe who had been briefed by a local welfare organisation (due to lack of time of project leader), it was clear that those volunteers were mainly interested in the allowance and were also not willing to undertake basic tasks such as serving coffee and tea. After a short introduction to the project by the project leader before implementation, the project leader decided to ask those volunteers to leave. The lesson learnt is to make sure that the pre-information is delivered by those directly concerned with the project and that volunteers are filtered out in the beginning stage, to avoid problems during implementation.
13. On only one occasion did there appear to be tension during a discussion between participants and public. The tension was dispersed by the regular "coordinator" who also had the task of observing the proceedings, making sure that people wanting information were taken care of etc. In this case, she joined the conversation and managed to reintroduce the positive approach. Such incidents can be avoided by ensuring that discussions are carried out in small groups and by making sure that the groups are diverse. Thus, volunteers with example a muslim background, should not all be together in discussion with only one member of the public. This can be threatening. And vice-versa.

9) Main sources of inspiration behind the case

The project leader read an article about a library in Denmark that allowed library visitors to choose from 10 different people, in order to have one-to-one conversations. This was the main inspiration for developing the Living Library. The project idea was then further adapted to make it more accessible to the public (not everyone visits the library) and to make it more spontaneous (visitors do not get much time to prepare their stories and/or arguments, because for the most part they are approached on the spot by volunteers).

A further source of inspiration was the desire to tackle a difficult subject in a different way. A lot of antidiscrimination projects tend to appoint blame in one direction or another. The project leader was in this case challenged to develop a project around acceptance rather than blame. This led to a

more inclusive approach in which the public were not sidelined for having prejudices or for using stereotypes, because both are normal. However, they were made more aware of their prejudices and of how they can in turn affect behaviour and may lead to discrimination.

10) The most important lesson learned

The implementation of the Living Library has brought many lessons with it:

1. Use a positive approach with humour. This creates inclusiveness and harnesses goodwill.
2. Think about communication and PR tools carefully and use professional tools and instruments.
3. Good preparation and information to both volunteers and visitors is essential. In the case of volunteers, a basic workshop on communication skills is desirable. This increases their effectiveness and also their own self-confidence when dealing with the public.
4. A good project manager is essential.
5. Evaluate regularly and learn from the evaluations by implementing what you have learnt.
6. Know the context and target group and try to tailor the project accordingly.
7. Listen to the volunteers and visitors and do not be afraid to delegate tasks and responsibilities. In this way you create ownership of the project.
8. Make a professional communication plan and target the media carefully. Employ a professional writer to write your press releases.
9. Be creative and experiment with new contexts and groups.