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MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN LIFE

**The EU investing in people through
the European Social Fund**

European Commission

Directorate-General for Employment,
Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

Unit A.1

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Making a difference in life

Personal stories from the European Social Fund

The European Union – what does it really do for us? The European Social Fund is one answer to the question. It invests in people: some 10 million of them every year throughout the 27 EU Member States. The impact is often felt at a personal level, and the 54 stories in this book show how the ESF is making a real difference to real people's lives.

The ESF was set up in 1957 and today accounts for about 10% of the EU budget. This money is spent on a wide range of individual projects across the EU, formulated nationally and locally to meet the specific needs of people in differing situations.

It reflects the far-sighted understanding of the EU's founders, more than half a century ago, that building unity between nations depends on more than treaties and trade deals. The ESF is a practical demonstration of solidarity between Member States and communities, enabling European citizens to adapt to the new challenges that have evolved over the years. It implements the shared values of European society, based on fair treatment and a decent quality of life for everyone. In practice this means access to employment, healthcare, housing and education, as well as care and support for the more vulnerable members of society.

If the ESF's top priority is getting people into work, this does not mean just any old work. The projects it funds help people to find the right job: a job they can grow into and maintain. Projects are there to offer the retraining and back-up that can help get people back into work, and ease the

pressure on families and communities. It is also the EU's main tool for helping people to adapt to restructuring, and it addresses the challenges they face when they take advantage of their right to move between Member States. EU economic growth can only be built on the combined efforts and strengths of its 500 million inhabitants.

The key principle underlying the ESF is empowerment: helping people to help themselves, make their own choices and realise their own ambitions. This book tells the stories of 54 individuals who have taken up the opportunities offered by ESF-funded initiatives.

What all the stories have in common is that they are tales of people who have resolved to do better for themselves or refused to give up in the face of obstacles; of setbacks; sometimes indeed of the most harrowing hardship. They have all reacted to improve their situation, or to get back on track. But they have needed that helping hand; that extra bit of support; that added confidence that ESF projects can offer.

The interviews focus on women and men, on every age group from teenagers to pensioners, in urban and rural communities, in every country of the European Union. They feature ambitious entrepreneurs with an idea to sell, parents juggling work and childrearing, people fighting to overcome mental or physical disabilities, and others wanting to integrate into societies they are not familiar with.

They demonstrate how the opportunity of work, however modest, can literally be a life-saver for individuals who might otherwise have lost the chance of a decent exist-

ence. They show how people benefit from helping one another: carer and cared-for. Support is not a one-way process but a mutual gain. And they illustrate that it is never too late in life to learn, and that people of all ages and abilities can acquire confidence from the new skills that education and training offer.

Every case is different, and more and more often the assistance offered through these projects is tailored to meet specific, individual needs. Results suggest that this is the most appropriate and successful way to turn people's lives around.

The interviewees have been ready to share some of the most intimate details of their lives, and in many cases made it clear that they did so because they believed their stories would help other people who found themselves confronted by similar difficulties. A particularly moving example is that of Georgia Chrisikopoulou in Corfu, Greece, who has fought her way through multiple hardships to the beginning of a normal life and relationship with the son she lost.

The comments that run through the stories like a thread demonstrate that the ESF really does make a difference. "The project has helped me so much I would like everyone in Sweden to know more about it," says Anne-Lie Thuveesson in Håssleholm.

"It taught me I could do anything. Whatever I want is possible if I put my mind to it," declares Messurme Pissareva in Estonia. For Zsolt Korcz in Hungary and Andreas Apatzidis in Cyprus, the projects have wrought "miracles". And many others confirm they would not be "where they are today" without the support from the ESF.

These stories are also testimony to the energy and commitment of project leaders and organisers, often able to identify the potential in others in a way that society in general does not. They are people who refuse to give up on those around them, and who frequently have a vision of a more inclusive society in which everyone has the opportunity to realise his or her potential. The projects, and the individuals they support, represent small but concrete steps towards this goal. "Running through the training is the message that people can succeed," explains Henrik Johannesson, in Denmark.

And as Per Larsson, from Sweden, puts it: "It shows people do have the power inside if they have the chance to develop it."

The examples illustrate that the EU still has some way to go to achieve true social cohesion. The conditions in which people live and the benefits they enjoy can vary from one region to another. Since the 1980s, the ESF has targeted funds towards the less well-off regions of Europe, with the aim of closing the gap between rich and poor. What is clear is that people's aspirations to improve their own lives, and above all

those of their children, are shared across frontiers and cultures.

Hearing and transmitting these stories has been a privilege and an inspiration for all those involved in this book. We hope that you will find it equally moving and inspiring to read them, and that you will conclude that the ESF really is 'Making a Difference in Life'.

Young people

Growing into the right job



Pots of vivid chrysanthemums – crimson, gold, rust and cream – line the pavement outside *Le Jardinnet*, a garden centre on the outskirts of Reims in northern France. *Audrey Libres* welcomes customers, takes orders, makes up bouquets, and attends to the plants in the greenhouses next door.

The 21-year-old has been working at *Le Jardinnet* for three years, and it suits her well. *"Sometimes it's hard work and the hours can be long. But we have a good atmosphere among colleagues. I would like to stay here."* Audrey says she has long wanted a career in floristry, and with some support from training co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, she is now heading in the right direction. But it has not been very easy.

Audrey was born in Sedan, in the French Ardennes, and her love of natural things dates back to her childhood in that beautiful, wild and hilly region in the north-east of the country. *"When I was little I was often out in the fields with my father. We used to go out and collect mushrooms. My dad used to push me in the wheelbarrow – I was always dirty!"*

Strong character

But her parents split up when she was nine years old, and she moved to Reims with her mother, who then remarried. Her grandfather was a strong uniting force who helped keep the family – Audrey and her two sisters – together. But when he died in 2001 things got much more difficult.

"I suffered a lot at that time. My father came to collect me every second weekend, but my stepfather wanted to act as a father, and I didn't want that. I didn't get on with him at all," she recalls. *"I had a strong character and I talked back. I regret it now. With age, I understand what he wanted to do. He wanted to help us."*

At the same time, her education was not going well. *"I didn't like school,"* she admits. *"I like moving, and spending all day long sitting on a chair listening to a teacher felt like wasting time. I wanted to start work but my mother wanted me to go on studying."* She left school at 17, after completing just three years of secondary education, and without qualifications. *"I don't regret it,"* she insists.

“Everyone around me encouraged me and told me not to give up. It was the School of Second Chance that gave me a fresh opportunity, and I thank them with all my heart.”

A year later, in the wake of more conflict, Audrey packed her things and left the family home. She went to live with her long-term boyfriend, Nicolas, and his family, and for a while she lost contact with both her parents.

A second chance

Audrey tried out various work options, for instance in the clothing trade. *“But I didn’t like it,”* she explains. *“I always wanted to be a florist.”* Eventually she secured a two-month trial in a flower shop. But at the end of that period the owner no longer needed her, and she was once more without work. *“It’s true that at the time I was quite depressed. But everyone around me encouraged me and told me not to give up. It was the School of Second Chance that gave me a fresh opportunity, and I thank them with all my heart.”*

In November 2004, Audrey started the school, part of the French *Centre de Formation d’Apprentis* (CFA) of Châlons, in Champagne. She stayed until September 2005, when she signed up for an apprenticeship at *Le Jardin*. The School of Second Chance is designed to help young people under 25 to enter the workforce. They take part in ongoing education to improve their skills in French, maths, and communication and information technology, as well as workshops on job-seeking. At the same time, they have work experience that helps them to discover, or confirm, their professional ambitions. The school helped Audrey to find an enterprise that would offer the apprenticeship she wanted.

For two years, as well as working at the garden centre, she undertook training to pass the *Certificat d’Aptitude Professionnel* (CAP) in floristry. She obtained this in June 2007, and decided to go on studying for a diploma in nursery gardening (BEP). The school continues to monitor her progress.

She spends one week every month in Nancy, in the Vosges region of France, studying for the diploma. She needs to be successful in her exams in order to stay on at *Le Jardin*, and that means a regular commitment. Nancy is too far away for her to commute each day so she has to travel at the weekend and stay in a hotel.

Learning on the job

At the nursery, she enjoys the seasonal nature of the work. All Saints’ Day and Christmas are especially busy times, with orders coming in and arrangements to be made up, which may mean working extra hours to meet the demand. The garden centre, which offers a wide range of goods including garden equipment and accessories and artificial flower decorations, opens six-and-a-half days a week, including Sunday mornings. The staff work shifts, with a day’s rest during the week. Sometimes Audrey also goes with her employer to pick up new flower supplies, near the Belgian border.

Does it require a special talent to achieve just the right combination of colours and blooms for a perfect bouquet? Audrey is modest. *“You have to learn about the colours and how to vary them,”* she admits. *“It’s a question of taste – some are more beautiful than others. When I started, my bouquets were not the ‘top,’ and now I can see the difference.”*

Her personal life has also settled down. She and Nicolas now share a comfortable ground-floor flat with two curious kittens, Chicane and Castrol. It’s too early to think about marriage, though. Both of them are young, and Nicolas has yet to find a job. *“We need to be more secure,”* says Audrey, cautiously. She has resumed contact with her mother, and with her father, who lives about an hour’s drive from Reims. *“My situation is much more stable now, and I feel confident about the future. I really want to have a florist’s shop of my own. That’s my dream.”*

Benoit Maujean, the owner of *Le Jardin*, has kept a fatherly eye on Audrey’s progress over the years. *“She has gained a lot of experience and now it’s up to her,”* he says. *“She can go much further if she wants to. Now she has to fly with her own wings.”*



The challenge of earning a living



"I tried to study at school, but I just couldn't manage it," says Bruno De Almeida Aveiro earnestly. Now 18, he remembers starting to have learning difficulties in class when he was only seven or eight. "I lost concentration very easily, and the teacher suggested I should go to a special school."

Bruno lives with his family in the quiet village of Bissen in northern Luxembourg. His mother Benilde is a cleaner, his father Jorge works for a local firm specialising in metal construction materials. His older brother Hugo, 22, is an industrial engineer for a well-known tyre company.

Despite his problems with formal learning, Bruno mastered an impressive array of languages while he was growing up. His parents moved to Luxembourg from Portugal just before he was born, and they speak Portuguese at home. At primary school, the two brothers learnt Luxembourgish, picking up French and German as they got older. Now Hugo admits that between the two of them, they often communicate in an almost private language made up of words plucked from different tongues – nigh incomprehensible to outsiders. But as children, the language issue meant that neither of their parents were able to assist when they had questions in class.

Extra support

To help him overcome his problems, Bruno transferred to the *Centre d'Integration Scolaire*, where, with small classes and expert teachers he received extra help. Then, when he was in his early teens, he was offered the opportunity to spend one day a week at the Liewenshaff project in Merscheid, a scheme co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. It helps young people with special problems or no formal qualifications to improve their social, academic and professional skills, and to integrate fully into society. Two years later, in 2006, Bruno started to attend the project full time.

He enjoyed the new approach at Liewenshaff. It offers five vocational training modules: cooking, agriculture, horticulture, iron working and industrial cleaning. Selecting cleaning, Bruno discovered a real interest in working with the machines and learning to use the right products. *"I can concentrate on the things that interest me, and I learn quickly,"* he explains, *"and yet at other times I can't*

"Since I was little, I have never thought about working. My family always helped me, and I expected everything to be easy. But life's not like that."

concentrate at all." Indeed, when it comes to his favourite pastime, playing video games, he says he has no problem focusing on the on-screen adventures.

Starting a job

In 2008, the project helped Bruno to secure work experience with the local authority in Bissen itself. As part of the small municipal parks and gardens team, he is based at the depot just two minutes' walk from home. His state-funded salary is 80% of the minimum wage, and his three-month contract is twice-renewable. He and his colleagues are responsible for cleaning and caring for Bissen's public gardens and recreational spaces. The work varies with the seasons: collecting leaves in the autumn, helping to decorate the nativity scene in the town's main church at Christmas, and preparing beds and planting flowers in the spring. He has learnt more since starting the job and enjoys the variety. *"I prefer to work than to study,"* he admits.

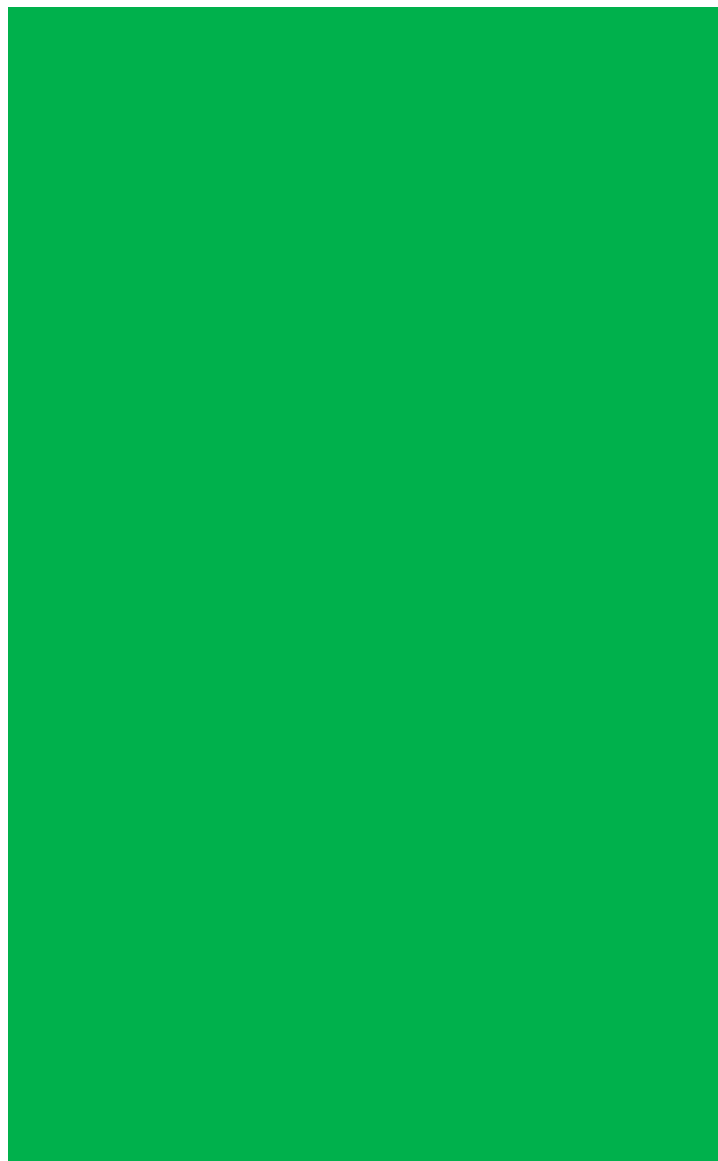
His social worker at Liewenshaff continues to support him, and he goes back there frequently to lend a hand with events such as concerts and social activities. *"Sometimes I help in the kitchen, sometimes with the cleaning,"* he explains. *"I know the people there."* After his nine months' work experience he can return to the centre if he still needs help to find permanent employment. Ideally, he would like to keep the job he has now, but he realises that may be difficult. The number of municipal staff is dictated by the size of the community, and he will have to wait for a vacancy to arise.

Preparation for life

Bruno's practical skills have also come in handy at home. Father and sons have spent ten years renovating their house from top to bottom. *"It's still chaotic,"* admits Bruno. *"It's been hard, and we're still working on it."* He is also studying to obtain his driver's licence. That will open more doors, enabling him to drive the trucks and diggers, road gritters and sweepers that are lined up in Bissen's municipal garage.

But he doesn't reflect too much on the future. *"I never thought about what I wanted to do in life, but at Liewenshaff I began to ask myself the question. I realised that I had to find a job, but I didn't*

know what. Since I was little, I have never thought about working. My family always helped me, and I expected everything to be easy. But life's not like that. At school, I wasn't advancing, and if it weren't for Liewenshaff I would not have been able to get a job at all," he points out. *"It showed me how life is, and that in life you have to work. I'm happy here. I'll have to see how things go."*



Fitness for life



It is September in South Dublin, Ireland. *Sheena Matthews* arrives early at the leisure centre where she works.

She's a tutor on a course training young people as gym instructors, sports coaches, and preparing them for other activity-based careers. First up is a classroom-based lesson teaching anatomy, then straight into leading a 40-minute step-aerobics class, followed by an equally demanding session on spinning bikes. It is all in a morning's work for the 27-year-old.

It looks tiring, but Sheena is full of energy and enthusiasm as she talks about her job. *"I really like teaching. It's great to see the students transforming their lives by becoming more active,"* she says. The course she teaches, *Spoirt Teic*, is a local training initiative provided by FAS (Ireland's National Training and Employment Authority) and co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund.

"The course gives students the means to get a job in a leisure centre and an international qualification as a sports coach or fitness instructor," says Sheena. The programme can be tailored to suit the students' preferences. *"We try to get them experience in what they want to get into, whether it's sports coaching, gym instruction or teaching dance. My aim is to get people into jobs. And to help them get what they want out of life. I see new students come in shy and then watch them transform. It really builds their self confidence and communication skills."* The training has a high success rate, she adds. *"About 90% get jobs in sports, leisure or activities."*

If Sheena is an enthusiastic ambassador for the course, she has a good reason – a few years ago she was a student herself. The nine-month course *"totally turned my life around"*, she declares. *"I remember the situation I was in before,"* she explains. *"I left school when I was 14 or 15. I had no idea what I wanted to do. I never had any direction or goals."*

A single mother

She took on different kinds of employment, including waitressing, cleaning, and working in a market. *"I went from job to job,"* she says, *"bad job to bad job. And yet I was always a good worker. They wanted to promote me, but I knew I didn't want to do that job for ever, so I would always leave."* Then she became pregnant at 18.

"My aim is to get people into jobs. And to help them get what they want out of life. I see new students come in shy and then watch them transform."

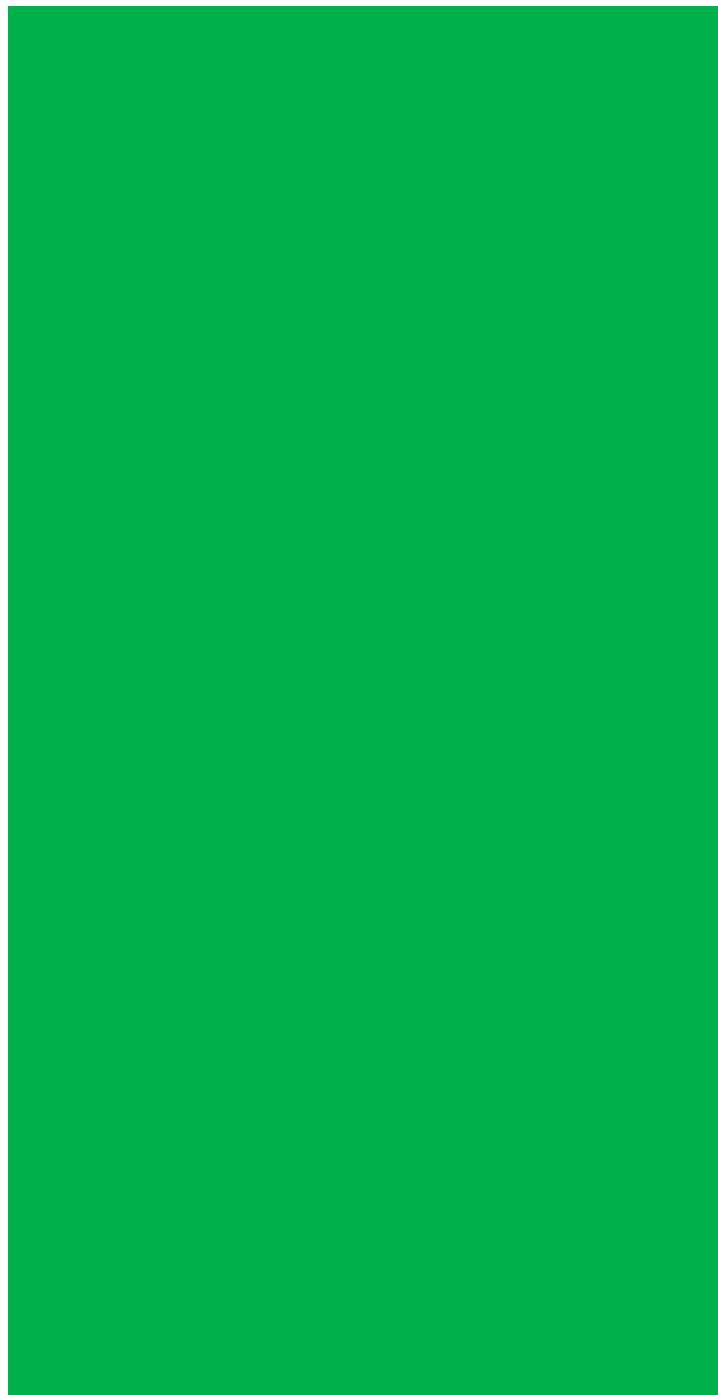
"I was happy at the time, but now I think I was a little too young. Having a baby is a lot of responsibility at that age," she points out. As a single mother, Sheena became reliant on welfare payments to support herself and her baby, Megan. It was hard personally as well as financially – she put on weight and suffered from post-natal depression. "About a year after Megan was born I decided to do something to change my situation. I didn't want her to look at me as nothing," says Sheena. "I wanted to set an example."

Exercising and professional guidance proved to be the big turning point. *"I joined a gym and I did a personal development course."* She lost weight and her confidence grew. *"It made me realise that there was more out there for me. I remember going to an aerobics class and seeing the instructor. She looked great and she seemed so together. I said to myself 'I want to do her job'."* When Sheena asked the instructor for advice, she told her about the *Spoirt Teic* course.

Gaining confidence

Sheena enrolled, and at once began to feel the benefits. *"The first time I spoke in front of a class I was shaking and nervous. But as the months went by I became much more confident. Now I really enjoy being up in front of the students."* After graduating, she worked in gyms and as a dance instructor, before getting a job at the South Tallaght leisure centre where the courses are based. She was initially working as a gym and dance teacher, but knew that she really wanted to be a tutor on the course. She began covering for other tutors. *"I used to work 11 days in a row. I used to be so tired, but I really wanted to get a job as a tutor. I wasn't going to give up."*

Sheena's experiences have taught her that she can change her life. *"I've learnt how to set goals and go after them."* She has more plans for the future. *"My next step would be to go to medical school," she says. "I know I can do it. Even if it takes a long time to do it, I'll stick with it."*



Eastern promise



Porto in Portugal has been a centre of international commerce for centuries and **Bruno Teixeira** is continuing his hometown's tradition. The young entrepreneur set up a consultancy business called Trading EuroPacific in early 2008 to help Portuguese and Asian companies work together.

He helps firms to find the distributors, suppliers and agents they need in Asia to access new markets and reduce their costs. *"The cultural differences between the EU and Asia make it difficult for companies to get access to each other's markets,"* says the 29-year-old. *"I decided to set up a business to bridge both continents."* His company, Trading Europe Pacific (TEP consulting) works with Portuguese companies that want to sell to Asian markets and vice-versa, or else find manufacturers and control quality of production. He works with a network across seven Asian countries – Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines: *"We cover 50% of the world population."*

He spotted the niche for his business in 2006 whilst doing a work placement in the Portuguese Embassy in Jakarta in Indonesia as part of the *Network Contacto* training programme, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund.

Vital experience

The programme, provided by the Portuguese Institute for Foreign Trade (ICEP), consisted of three months of initial training in the Department of Commerce in Portugal, followed by six months in Indonesia. During his time there, Bruno prepared a report on the Indonesian market and helped Portuguese companies to penetrate the market.

The experience has proved vital to Bruno in the work he now does. *"The placement was very good for contacts,"* he says. *"I met decision-makers and influential people. I found out more about the region and the opportunities in the Indonesian market for European companies."*

"Even before I went to Indonesia I was thinking of starting a business in Asia," adds Bruno. *"As a child I was always fascinated by the area. I loved to read about the culture, wildlife, everything,"* he explains. He learnt more about the business potential of Asia whilst studying economics and marketing at university. *"Asia contains almost 50%*

"There are plenty of opportunities in Asia, but it's very hard for companies to get into Asian markets. They need someone who can give them support and advice."

of the world's population. It is the factory of the world and provides much of the raw material," he says.

After returning from his stint in Indonesia, he worked in the marketing department of a telecommunications company. However, he had always wanted to run his own company and, together with a partner he had met in Indonesia, he began to plan how to use their knowledge of Asian markets and local contacts to start a business.

Trading EuroPacific was established in January 2008. *"We started to make plans about a year before that."*

Accessing opportunities

Although it is early days, Bruno says that the reception has been positive so far and business is doing well. The only major problem he has had so far is his age. *"When people think of a consultant for big companies they are not expecting a young person to come and give them advice," he says. "It takes a while to convince them. After I show my knowledge and connections they are impressed, but in the beginning it's difficult."* He now counts several large companies as clients and has a network of partners in Asian countries. *"We're looking to develop long-term relationships with [Portuguese companies] and supervise their markets in Asia."*

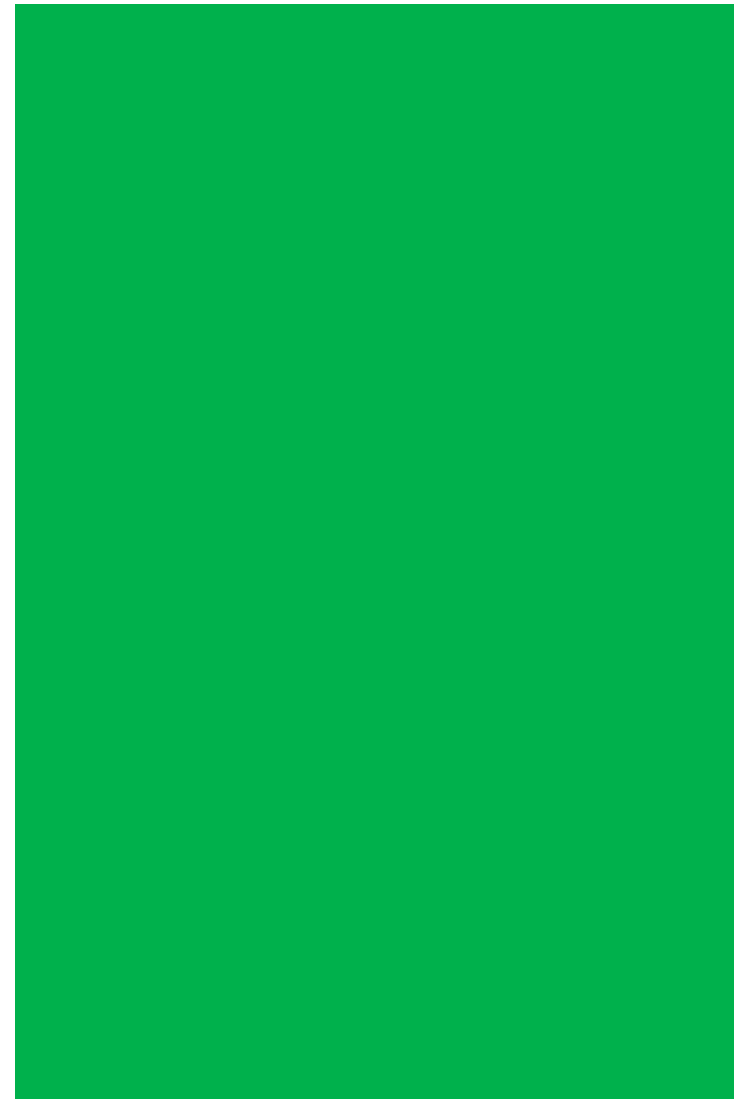
Bruno gives an example of one of his clients – a Portuguese textile manufacturer. *"The company cannot produce all the accessories it needs here. We're connecting it with Asian companies with specific know-how and production capacity," he says. "This will enable it to diversify their range of products."* Another company he works with is a Portuguese manufacturer of large-scale metal-working machines. He is helping it to find companies to sell products to. *"There are plenty of opportunities in Asia, but it's very hard for companies to get into Asian markets," he says. "They need someone who can give them support and advice."*

Planning ahead

For the future, he aims to expand his operations to other European countries. *"I'd like to open an office in Barcelona. Spain would be the first step."* He is also trying to enter India and has had enquir-

ies from Brazilian and Mexican companies wanting to do business in Asia. However, he wants to get the business firmly established before expansion. *"We want to wait until we're stronger in Portugal before we move to other countries. It's a step-by-step process."*

His other wish is to have a bit more free time. *"I'm working really hard at the moment. My weekends tend to disappear," he adds. "I'd like to be able to play more sports, spend time with my girlfriend and in nature."*



A healthy venture



It's lunchtime and *Zdravá Jídelna Spirála* – 'the Healthy Spiral' – in České Budějovice in the Czech Republic is busy. There is a diverse crowd in the small café – from workers and students popping in for a quick bite, to pensioners and parents with children who are settled in for longer: sharing tables, chatting and playing. They come for freshly cooked, daily specials – plates of curried vegetables and rice; bowls of thick soup; falafels; and a range of home-made cakes.

Radmila Petroušková, who opened the café with a friend in early 2008, explains their philosophy. *"We specialise in vegetarian and health foods,"* she says. *"We try to use organic and bio-foods as much as possible and avoid preservatives, too much salt or spices. There's also gluten-free options and dishes for people with allergies."* The café sometimes sells fish, but not meat. *"And we try to use fair trade products where possible. It's important for us to be as ethical as possible,"* she adds. The approach appears popular and they have already built up a regular clientele. *"The reaction has been good so far,"* continues the 26-year-old. *"It's a really friendly atmosphere."*

For Radmila, both running her own business and the catering industry are new. She worked as a model from the age of 16, travelling around the world to appear in fashion shows and photo shoots. *"It was a great experience,"* she says. *"I saw the world and got paid for it."* However, at the age of 23, she felt her catwalk days were done and she wanted a more settled life. She took a job as a hotel receptionist back in her hometown, but after three years in that role she became dissatisfied. *"It was the same every day. I wanted a new challenge,"* she says.

She began to think about opening a café specialising in health foods, together with a friend with experience working as a chef. *"We both like to lead healthy lifestyles and thought the idea had big potential,"* she says. *"We thought there would be a demand for it in this town. There isn't anywhere else like this here."*

*"I'm really glad I made the decision.
Now I'm my own boss and I enjoy it a lot."*

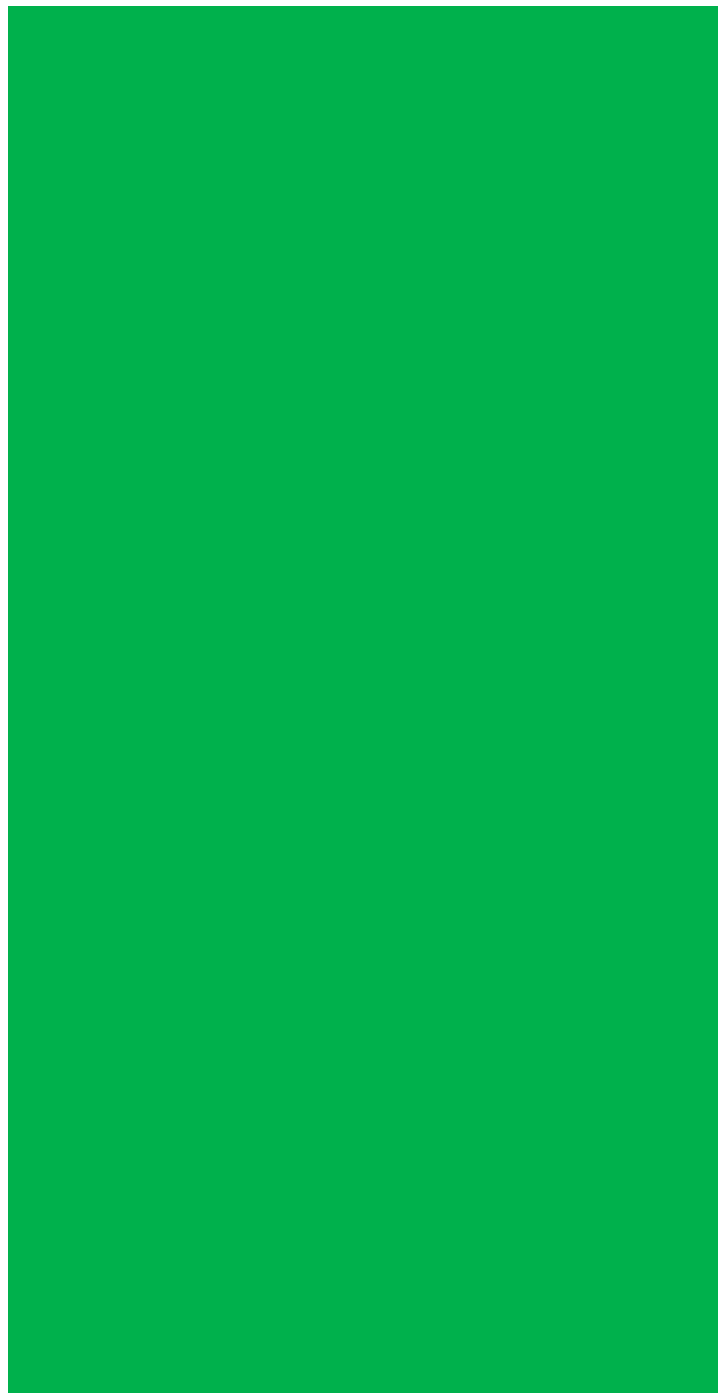
Useful advice

A programme of support for young entrepreneurs, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, helped them get their idea off the ground. Experts advised them on how to set up the café and develop a viable business plan to present to the bank. *"Neither of us had any experience in setting up a business," she says. "So the consultants helped us a lot with the finances and administration. They sent us to the right people."*

With a bank loan secured and, after a year of planning, the café opened for business in early 2008. *"At the start I didn't realise how much work running the business would be. There's a big difference between being an employee and being self-employed."* While Radmila organises the administration of the business, the paper work and accounts, her partner is in charge of the food. *"Though I'm learning more about cooking all the time," she says.*

So far the venture is proving successful and the young entrepreneurs are enjoying the experience. And they have plans to grow the business in the future. *"We want to enlarge the premises so we can fit more people in," she continues. "We want to hire more staff. We are trying to find another cook."* They also have plans to expand the other services that they offer, such as meals for local primary schools, and to create a 'healthy fast food' window attached to the café. *"Ultimately we'd like to expand to other cities too," she says. "But that's a way off at the moment. We'll take it one step at a time."*

"I'm really glad I made the decision," concludes Radmila. "Now I'm my own boss and I enjoy it a lot."



Channelling youth and energy



After just a few years in the workforce, as a commercial representative and later as a marketing agent, *Yann Lelievre* had a pretty clear idea of where he wanted to go. *"I saw friends and colleagues moving up in the world, based on good ideas and a lot of hard work,"* he says, *"and I wanted to do something too, to make something of myself."*

Yann is an avid outdoor sportsman who rollerblades to work and climbs rock faces at the weekend. His energy seems unquenchable, *"but without a solid business plan in hand,"* he says, *"my dream of starting an outdoor sporting goods shop was slipping through my fingers."*

The fact that he was just 27 years old did not seem to bother Yann, but for others, like Clermont-Ferrand's local lending institutions, his youth and inexperience seemed to count against him. *"It was hard for me to get a bank to take me seriously,"* he explains. *"I had already carried out my own market study, but I wasn't quite sure how to present my ideas, how to make an impression."*

Clermont-Ferrand's *Espace Info Jeune*, partly funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, helps young people get training, find work, activities and housing, or start a project. *"I understand the need for rules and regulations,"* Yann says, *"but the hoops you have to jump through to get a business started can be mind-boggling. Espace Info Jeune helped me to understand the system and create a professional business plan. It was a real boost, allowing me to convince the banks but also to bring important suppliers on-board. Without it, I wouldn't be where I am today."*

Green sports

Yann's *Espace* shop sells a variety of high-quality clothing, shoes and equipment for climbing and mountaineering, rollerblading and skateboarding, and a range of other 'green' outdoor sports (no motorised sports). He is proud of his business' environmental credentials, an issue close to his heart. *"We don't cater to polluters,"* he insists. *"We sell only the most durable products, observe strict rules for sorting waste, and the shop itself is equipped with the most energy-efficient lighting system."*

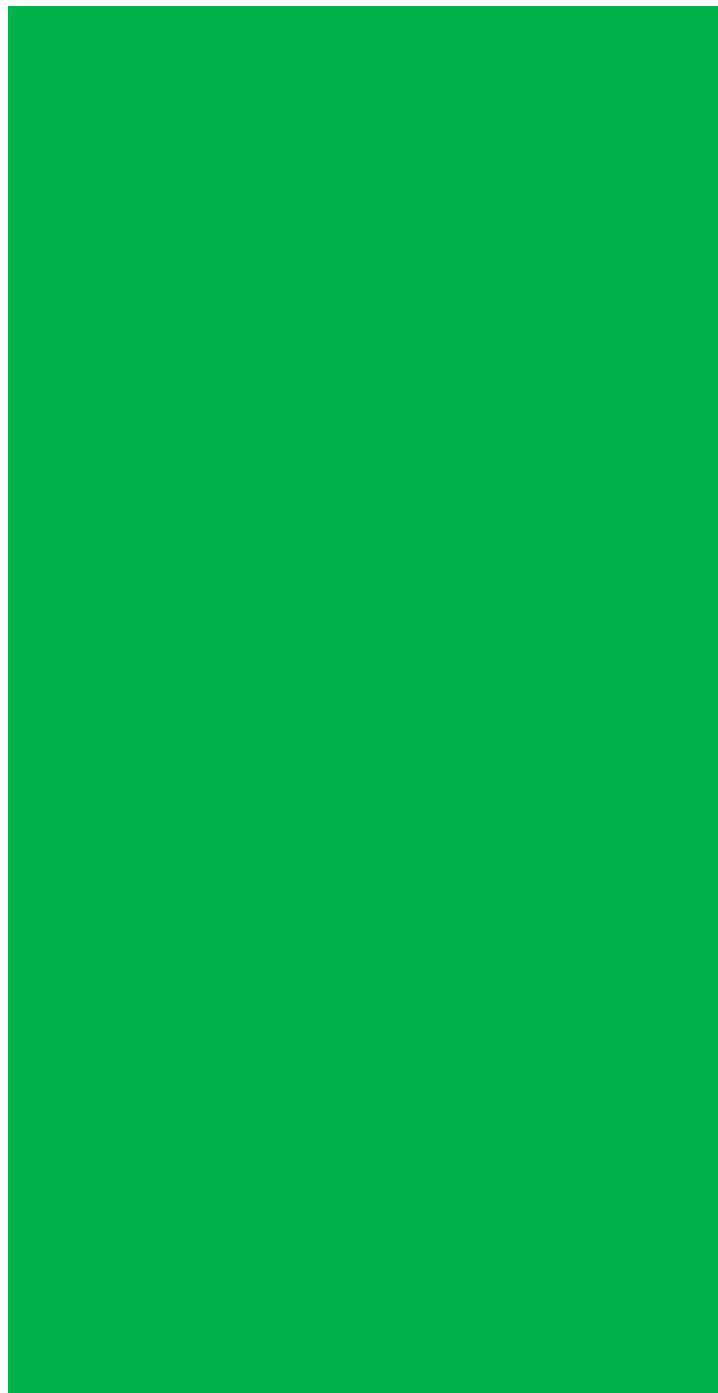
"This experience has changed me. It's given me a great deal of confidence. I know how things work now, and I know I can build on my success if I set my mind to it."

The shop has continued to expand since its establishment in 2002. *"We've just moved into a larger space. Today, I employ one part-time and two full-time workers, and this is something I'm especially happy about. We've got a great team here. We're always learning about new products and technologies and we provide the best possible advice to our clients,"* he enthuses.

Building on success

Yann's dynamism and energy would be hard to repress even in the most hostile of business environments. *"I like speed, being on the go, getting people and things moving. That's exciting!"* But in a relaxed moment, after the shop doors are closed, he takes time to reflect. *"At the core I think I was someone who lacked self-belief,"* he admits. *"This experience has changed me. It's given me a great deal of confidence. I know how things work now, and I know I can build on my success if I set my mind to it."*

"I can't say right now where I'll be in two, five or ten years, but I do know one thing – I'm not stopping here. I'm going to be moving forward, looking at bigger and better opportunities, and I'll bring new colleagues, partners and associates along with me."





**Equality between
women and men**

Women go to work while the older generation has fun



In the little Cyprus village of Augorou, near Famagusta, stands a well-kept, century-old house. It has been newly renovated, with cheerful blue shutters, stone floor and traditional plaited wood ceiling. On a wall in the bright, airy entrance room, the message 'Welcome to the Club 2007' is picked out in lacework. Around a table, a group of elderly men and women – their faces weathered by years of work in the Mediterranean sun – smile and joke with one another as they thread large, round beads onto strings.

This is the heart of Augorou's *Never Home Alone* programme, launched in January 2007 and co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. Its aim is to help women in the local community to work more easily by providing support and entertainment for the ageing parents they might otherwise have to stay at home to look after.

Stress and long hours

Koulla Aggelou is one of the 15 women who benefits directly. She has two children and works every weekday morning as a cleaner in the village, while her 71-year-old mother Fotini goes to the 'club'. *"Before the scheme started, life was very difficult,"* she explains. *"I didn't have any time for myself, and sometimes not even for my family. I was always stressed and in a hurry."* She used to clean apartments in the nearby tourist resort of Ayia Napa, sometimes leaving home by bus at 6am in the morning, working 12-hour shifts, or coming home at 11 o'clock at night. *"Sometimes it was so tiring I thought about quitting the job,"* she admits. But the family needed her income. Her husband Angellos worked as a builder before finding a job in a local restaurant. *"If I didn't work, things would have been hard,"* says Koulla.

The programme's impact naturally extends to other son and daughters in the 15 families. The parents – the oldest is 88 – go to the centre every weekday morning. *"The main purpose of the programme is not to take care of the old people, but to enable women to work,"* confirms Andri Christoforou, who runs the club. *"It gives them the time they need to look after themselves, and their families."* They can also obtain advice on employment opportunities.

But even if the parents are not the prime target group, the enjoyment they get at the centre is plain to see. Each morning is

“Before the scheme started, life was very difficult. I was always stressed and in a hurry.”

taken up with activities such as knitting, painting and jewellery-making. Sometimes they make their own coffee or cakes, jam and macaroni. *“It’s like a home from home,”* explains Andri. Three times a week, specialists – physiotherapists and doctors – are on hand to offer treatment sessions, and outings are arranged to exhibitions and museums. Since Augorou is a small village, most of the elderly people, including Fotini, are able to walk to the centre by themselves. But if the care team notices that someone is absent, a member calls to see how they are, and whether they need picking up. In the early afternoon, after a home-cooked lunch, the little group of pensioners makes its stately way home.

Good company

“It’s a really good programme, and the old people have fun,” declares Koulla. *“It’s the first time we have had anything like this in the village. My mother used to worry because she knew I was stressed. Now she enjoys the activities, and we all feel better.”*

“It’s good company and a pleasant way to pass the time,” nods Fotini, who has survived treatment for breast cancer. *“The girls who run the club are really nice. I meet people of my own age and we tell stories of the old days. If I didn’t come here I would have to stay at home. And I’m pleased that my daughter is able to work more easily,”*

So close is the feeling between Koulla and Fotini, it is perhaps surprising to know that their true relationship is step-mother and daughter. Koulla’s real mother died when she was less than a year old, leaving her father Costas with eight young children. She was just four when Fotini married her father and took on the daunting task of raising the family. *“My step-mother brought me up like her own,”* says Koulla gratefully. *“I see her every day, and we can’t do without each other.”*

Having the time

Koulla works from 7.30 am to 1pm, five days a week. This means she can walk her 11-year-old twins Simeos and Fotini to school in the village, and meet them at the school gates at 2.30 pm. They often call in at her parents’ house on the way home. She has time to prepare their lunch, help them with their homework, and su-

pervise their out-of-school activities: dancing and English lessons. *“Before the programme started, I used to go to my mother’s to help her whenever I was free, and time was always an issue,”* she explains. *“Sometimes I used to have to stay with her in the morning and work in the afternoon, but now I have time for the children.”*

Each week, Koulla cleans five different houses in Augorou. Christina Kaoulla, in her 80s, with nine children and many grandchildren, is one of the neighbours she has been helping for two years, and who welcomes her visits. For Koulla, the extra income is just one reason for working. *“We’re friends, and we have fun,”* she explains as she tidies pots of geraniums on Christina’s terrace. *“It’s not only for the money.”*



Playtime at the office



Stephan Wittich has been working at the University of Vienna for 12 years. As an assistant professor of international law, he has a time-consuming schedule, with both regular teaching duties and research projects.

When he and his wife Isabel, who also works at the university, had their first daughter Marie, four years ago, his life got even busier. Isabel took the year off immediately after her birth and then Stephan took the following 12 months. *"I stopped teaching,"* he says. *"The priority was to look after Marie. But it wasn't really time off; I still had lots of work to do."*

Starting work on his post-doctoral thesis, which deals with procedures in international courts, he had to find a way to combine long hours of research with his new parental responsibilities. *"As an academic, I have the advantage of being flexible in my work. But, on the other hand, it is really important to have a calm place to be able to concentrate with no distractions,"* he continues.

Finding a solution

Stephan was able to make use of a nursery facility run by the university for its students and staff. *"It was only possible for me to get any work done at all because of the crèche,"* he says.

The *Children's office* project, which was started in 2002 with co-funding from the European Union through the European Social Fund, aims to provide affordable and flexible childcare. *"A regular crèche was not really an option. We probably could not have afforded it,"* says Stephan. Professional carers and facilities are available for toddlers and children of up to 12 years old during each weekday. Meanwhile, the parents have access to a quiet study room equipped with computers and reading desks so that they can get on with their work while still being on hand for their children. Stephan says the advantages over a regular crèche include being able to book at short notice and for periods of time as short as a few hours at a time.

With parenthood often a reason for changing, delaying or dropping out of studies or a career in academia, the university decided to help staff and students to reconcile their studies and their fam-

"I could only continue with my research because of the nursery. It meant that I managed to work on my thesis and take care of my daughter."

ily lives and make university more child-friendly. The coordinators estimate that around 11% of the students at universities in Vienna, around 11,500 people, have childcare obligations, and up to 50% of staff.

For Stephan, the benefits were clear. *"It really helped, I could only continue with my research because of the nursery. It meant that I managed to work on my thesis and take care of my daughter. It also helped to get Marie familiar with other children and adults from a young age,"* he adds. *"She had no problem adapting when she started kindergarten."*

Flying nanny service

Daniela Finzi, in the third year of her PhD studies in German literature and cultural studies, is another parent who uses the nursery for her two-year-old twins. *"I've been using the nursery since the girls were four months old,"* she says. *"It's perfect for me and I prefer to work here because I can really get stuff done here. At home there are always distractions."*

The office also offers other facilities, supplying a 'flying nanny' childcare service during university events, co-ordinating a pool of babysitters, and providing advice and information to parents. Another initiative that Stephan is involved in is the 'children's university', where the teaching staff introduce children to their subjects during two-week summer courses. *"It's a teaser for them to learn about university and get them thinking about the areas they would like to study later on,"* he explains.



Building a unique tourist business



Riikka-Leena Lappalainen's day starts early with a dip in the lake outside her house – even in the middle of December when the air temperature is down to -4°C and the ice is 10cm thick. *"I do this every day," she says. "It's a great way to wake up."*

Living deep in the countryside in the Pohjois Savo region of Finland, Riikka-Leena has a feel for nature that goes beyond her daily bathing ritual. She runs a small hotel and tourism business on the shores of the lake with her husband Reijo who grew up here on his family's farm. *"The lake is very silent, very peaceful," she says. "When we were younger, we dreamed of opening up a tourism business here."*

That dream has now become a reality, with guests overtaking cattle and crops as the primary income from the family land. Tourists come to enjoy the wild surroundings and do a range of nature-based activities, including snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, dog sledding, hunting, fishing, swimming and sailing.

The couple first opened some holiday cottages in the early 1990s. With few other provisions for tourists in the surrounding area, it proved popular and the business grew steadily. In 2001, they built a smoked sauna – a traditional type of sauna that is relatively unusual – and it brought even more people in. *"After that, we had groups arriving in buses. It gave us the idea to expand. There were more people wanting to hire the cottages and sauna than we could take."* Team building and activities for business have become an important part of the business.

In 2004, Riikka-Leena made the decision to leave her full-time job of 20 years as an accountant in public administration and devote all her energies to the family business. They began work on the main hotel building, which now forms the hub of the business, and started to rent out other cottages. There are seven guest rooms and a large room for dining and events, plus several cottages. In summer there is accommodation for up to 40 people and around 30 in winter.

Taking the plunge

Giving up her secure employment was a big step, so Riikka-Leena decided to take some training to help her make the switch. She took part in an international project, co-funded by the European

"I'm very happy that I left my secure job to concentrate on my own business. It's great to be my own boss."

Union through the European Social Fund, for women entrepreneurs working in all business sectors.

With participants from France, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Spain and Finland, she visited small tourism businesses in other countries and gained new ideas for the business. *"I learned a lot of little things. One of the trips to a countryside business in Italy was a big inspiration,"* she says. *"I saw the passion and pride in the businesses there. That's generally missing in Finland."*

"I learnt the value of the personal touch," adds Riikka-Leena, who considers this a crucial factor in the success of the business. The visits to other countries gave her inspiration for her own enterprise and encouraged the couple to make it even more personal. It enabled her to meet new contacts and presented new opportunities for the business.

"We went on a visit to Lapland, we had a meal and I noticed the plates were very unusual. I contacted the local designer who had made them and we got him to design a special range of crockery just for us here." A local specialist made all the fabrics in the hotel and outfits that the staff wear, with an individual twist on traditional Finnish designs. In addition, they sell handicrafts made by local craftspeople and artists, as well as local delicacies. *"All the little touches add up to the unique experience we want to give our guests."*

Looking to the future

Although it has not been all plain sailing, Riikka-Leena is sure she made the right decision. *"Of course there have been difficult moments – we had to take out a big loan. It made us think about the responsibility and the consequences of failure. But I'm very happy that I left my secure job to concentrate on my own business,"* she says. *"I feel very good that this is my life and it's great to be my own boss."*

The business now involves all three of the couple's grown-up children – Sanna-Riikka, 29, Esa-Mikko, 27, and Juho-Pekka, 23. *"I'm very proud that they are all part of the business now. It has really grown in recent years,"* reflects Riikka-Leena. And she hopes their involvement continues. *"In the future, we want to take our hands off and let the younger generation add their new ideas. The clients are becoming younger so we need to keep in tune with them."*

A woman in the driving seat



For journalist *Beata Szozda*, starting a new business in Poznań, Poland, seemed like an uphill struggle. While she received lots of encouragement from friends and family, potential investors were not interested in funding an online service proposed by someone with no experience in business – especially an online publication for women about cars.

“I was always interested in automobiles,” Beata recalls. “From primary school onwards, most of my friends were boys and they always talked about cars, so I naturally joined in. I remember once on a family vacation my father started telling me about all the different models of cars. When I came back home, I could recount all the names of the car manufacturers and models to my friends.”

She became interested in journalism after she achieved second place in the 2003 Miss Poland beauty contest. A reporter called her about a year after the contest ended to find out if she had received the prize and the support the organiser had promised. Beata’s negative response sparked off a series of national stories about problems with the contest. Soon afterward she received job offers from a number of media outlets.

By 2007, Beata was taking a Bachelor of Arts programme in international relations in Poznań. She was also the host of a weekly 15-minute programme reviewing automobiles for a local television station and presented a shopping show for another. She had just switched to television after working for three years for *Gazeta Poznań*, where she was responsible for producing the newspaper’s motoring section and for a weekly advice column for women about cars.

Turning a passion into a business

It was while doing the TV programme on cars that Beata came up with the idea of creating her own motoring publication specifically designed for women. Beata investigated whether she could turn her idea into a viable business. She found a survey by a research company which indicated that nearly half of all cars sold in Poland are bought by women, either personally or by influencing the decision of their husbands.

“I had been a motoring journalist for a few years and I could not find any information about cars that specifically addressed the needs of

"My job is my passion. I do not get much sleep because there is so much work to do."

women," she says. *"I did not want to focus on the automotive industry only. The idea was for a portal about women and for women. I wanted to develop a publication that gives a lot of practical advice for women on the everyday uses of a car."*

Her family and colleagues at the television station encouraged her to pursue her dream, but she ran into a roadblock often faced by young entrepreneurs – finding investors who would be willing to risk their money on a venture. Then a colleague from the television station mentioned that Poznań's science and technology park and the Adam Mickiewicz University Foundation were holding a contest targeting young entrepreneurs with the best ideas for a new business. The contest was due to end the next day.

"I put in the application five minutes before the contest closed," Beata recalls. "It was 16 March, my birthday."

Beata was one of the applicants chosen by the foundation to take part in the contest's business training programme, which was co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. From March to June 2007, Beata received training on how to prepare a business plan, information about accounting and Poland's legal and tax requirements, along with advice on seeking investment funding.

At the end of the programme, Beata had completed her business plan which was then assessed by a commission of experts. They decided her business plan was viable enough to receive start-up funding from the EU. She used the money to launch Autopolki.pl, Poland's first automotive information portal for women, in August 2008. She now works full time running the business and expanding the portal. The hours are long, but Beata is living her dream.

"My job is my passion," she says. "I do not get much sleep because there is so much work to do. Most days I only get to sleep at 3am."

Room for expansion

The site is supported through advertising. In addition to reviews of cars and driving tips, Autopolki.pl also offers women readers the opportunity to take cars out for road tests through an agreement Beata has with local car dealers. The women then submit

their reviews of the cars to Autopolki.pl. Beata does a fair amount of the reviews herself, and often travels a lot outside Poland to test drive cars and pick up information at automotive exhibitions.

The site has also expanded to offer day-long driver training courses for women at a disused airfield just outside Poznań. A driver-training company conducts the courses, offering participants who want to upgrade their skills a discount through Autopolki.pl. About 20 women participated in a recent training session, where they learned how to control their cars on wet and icy roads.

Beata's vision does not stop there. For her, the portal is a launch pad for a bigger business that would generate enough revenue to enable her to start hiring journalists and other staff. She wants to make a map of repair shops in Poland that women can trust to do a good job and charge a fair price. She wants to create an online shop that sells accessories for cars. Beata has also received offers from potential investors to expand the site outside Poland.

"While I was working for someone else I could not achieve my full potential as I wanted to," she says. "I cherish this independence as an entrepreneur. I value this freedom to create and run a business."

To a departing visitor, Beata says: *"Szerokiej drogi!"* The phrase translates as *"Have a wide road"*, a traditional way in Poland of wishing someone a safe drive home.



A better work/life balance



Water is a big issue in the Friesland region of the Netherlands, where much of the land is reclaimed and sits below sea level. This means that *Gerard Jansen's* job as a lawyer for the regional water board is a busy one.

"There are always conflicts of interests," says the 53-year-old. *"Farmers for instance may want higher water levels, but the general public doesn't. We have to find the balance."*

"Sometimes the companies don't want to spend the money [to comply with legal regulations] and it ends in court," he adds. When conflicts like this come up, Gerard is the man who deals with it. He has worked for the board since 1993 and acts as a legal adviser to the enforcement and licensing department.

His department has a number of roles – checking surface water meets legal standards, ensuring that sea defences are maintained and sea levels are correct, that companies and landowners comply with regulations and, finally, taking action when they do not. This means that he deals with *"all phases of the legal process"*.

Although Gerard likes his job, a few years ago he began to want greater flexibility in his schedule. With two young sons, Rik and Nico, and an hour-long daily car journey from his home in Drachten to Leeuwarden, the rigid working hours were taking a toll. He also began to have difficulties concentrating in his office. *"We moved a few years ago to a new open plan office. It's very noisy."*

Working from home

In 2006 he started to take part in *e-papa* – a project co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund to help male employees work from home. The scheme allows for more flexible hours and cuts down on travelling. He is now based at home for part of the week, enabling him to take the boys to school, have lunch with them, help with their schoolwork and even fit in some housework.

“Teleworking has helped me find a better balance between my work and family life. Before, I only saw the boys in the evening.”

“Teleworking has helped me find a better balance between my work and family life,” he says, adding that it takes the pressure off his wife who works part time as a geriatric nurse in a nearby hospital. *“Before, I only saw the boys in the evening. Now I get to do different things with them.”*

The more flexible arrangement has also improved his work and productivity. *“If you’re working at home you don’t have to stop and leave at 5pm – you can finish what you started at your own pace. You can come back to it later on.”*

How the scheme works

The scheme makes it easier for organisations to put flexible working arrangements in place. It increases awareness of the benefits of teleworking for employers and regularly assesses how employees are adapting to teleworking, flagging up potential issues early on. Gerard took part in the project for two years, during which time he responded to questionnaires about how it was working out.

Through the scheme, the water board has realised the benefits of teleworking and now actively promotes it among employees. *“As a modern employer you need to provide opportunities for more flexible working,”* explains Gjil de Jong, who is Gerard’s line manager. She teleworks herself, and estimates that about a quarter of the employees in her department now have similar arrangements. *“It definitely helps improve the balance between work and family life,”* she says.

Gjil believes it is important to have a clear agreement about what is expected from both sides – in terms of being available or reporting work done – and simple procedures. *“We also make sure that we have a regular meeting the day after teleworking to catch up on what’s happened,”* she adds.

Gerard, for one, is a sound advocate of the more flexible arrangements. *“It’s a big help,”* he says. *“Next year, I’m going to increase the number of days I work from home.”*



The future in her own hands



Katarína Vargová was a successful businesswoman running her own small company in the textiles sector in Bratislava, Slovakia, when she interrupted her career to raise her newborn son. But what started as a short pause turned into a longer break. After three years at home, she was ready to get back to work, but like many women who have taken time off to raise children, she found it a tough task.

"I had basically lost touch with the outside world," she says. "I needed to get back into circulation. And I needed a new challenge." The question was what to do. "I knew that whatever I did now, with a young child to look after, I would be balancing a number of responsibilities."

Getting back into the swing

A special training course for women returning to the workforce after extended maternity leave, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, helped Katarína sharpen her skills and find new ways to express her talents and ambition.

One of the biggest obstacles after being away from work for a long period is regaining confidence, a challenge faced by many women after maternity leave. The training course therefore included modules specifically aimed at building self-confidence and assertiveness.

The course also put her in touch with people in the business community. *"I knew I wanted to do something related to the arts," she says. "The training programme helped me find people with similar interests."*

Looking back, moving forward

Through the training programme, Katarína met the owner of *Ateliér Keramiky Rena*, a small workshop that offers ceramics lessons in the suburbs of Bratislava. Katarína has now taken over the running of the workshop while the owner spends time abroad. Katarína teaches students the art of clay modelling and she creates her own sculptures, which she sells in a local gallery.

"I knew that whatever I did now, with a young child to look after, I would be balancing a number of responsibilities."

Her current activities, she says, take her back to where she wanted to be in the first place. *"I studied at a school of fine arts,"* says Katarína, *"and I really wanted to return to that. I knew that my future work would have to include a strong artistic element. And that's why I'm so happy I found out about the ceramics workshop."*

"Here at the atelier, we give people a chance to express themselves," she says; *"to get their hands dirty, to unwind and feel free. Working with clay can be a very profound and therapeutic experience for some people, and the truth is I get lots of energy, myself, from my students."*

Many thanks

Katarína says she has found the right balance in her life. She starts early, gets her son off to kindergarten, and then begins her day at the workshop. *"Some days I give lessons, but other days I just work on my own stuff. Then I'm back to pick up my son in the afternoon."*

The training course, she says, gave her the confidence she needed to revive her career, and to strike out in a new direction, providing a helping hand that she is very thankful for. *"The ESF programme helped me to refresh my skills in management and marketing, and to develop myself as an artist. It was just the kind of boost I needed."*





**Disadvantaged
people**

Georgia's story



"I think that talking about my life will help other people," says Georgia Chrisikopoulou simply. "I used to be very negative. I would not accept that I was ill and I didn't want to ask for help. I still know people who won't take the doctors seriously."

As a result of mental illness, Georgia, 36, has spent years in and out of hospital in her native Corfu, Greece. But since 2006, a far-sighted rehabilitation scheme has helped her move out of residential care into her own flat, and to start work. It is run by the New Horizons Cooperative, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund.

The cooperative is based in the heart of Corfu town, in a building where it also runs a café, its terrace shaded by orange trees. Students read and drink coffee at the tables. Casual customers might not glance twice at the tongue-in-cheek name of the establishment: *Lunatico*. And they might be unaware that the elegant buildings surrounding it – their iron gates thrown open – were the former Corfu secure mental hospital, the oldest in Greece, now converted into university departments.

Onset of illness

Georgia is part of a team of gardeners tending the surrounding flower beds and lawns, all dressed in grey overalls and caps. Her story is one of hardship and courage. The eldest of three children, Georgia remembers her parents treating her harshly. *"I was too young to understand if I was doing something naughty,"* she says. *"I was shown no love until I was much older."* At 12, she began to lose her hair, and was diagnosed with psychiatric problems. By 17, she was pregnant, and attempted suicide. Despite her parents' opposition, she left school, got married, and went to live with her husband's parents. But the marriage was not a happy one. The couple started to drink heavily and take drugs, and he became violent.

By the age of 24, Georgia was seriously ill. *"I started hearing voices, and I thought I was cursed. I imagined that the television was speaking to me, and that I had telepathic abilities. I could not tolerate my child, and took everything out on him and my family – I was fighting with everyone. I wanted to kill myself."*

Finally, she went back to her mother and father, and from that time on, relations improved. *"In the end, it was my parents who saved me,"* she acknowledges. She started, unwillingly at first, to take medica-

"I love everything about the job. It has changed my life completely. I have always enjoyed gardening – I like being close to nature."

tion, but tells how she still heard her husband's voice in her head, threatening her. She left Corfu and went travelling, ending up in Stuttgart where she worked in bars and clubs. *"It was more nightmare than night work,"* she recalls bitterly. She suffered from eating disorders and got into debt. Exhausted, she returned home. But as her condition worsened she still refused to believe she was sick.

Accepting help

In 2002, she was admitted to a psychiatric hospital, but her husband came to take her out. *"He was being quite nice in the beginning,"* she recalls, *"but he soon returned to his old ways."* In 2005, Georgia finally realised that she could not get better on her own. Two events played a crucial role: her younger brother Prokopis was killed in an accident, and on Christmas Eve, her father died of a heart attack. Georgia resolved to find a healthier life.

She returned to hospital, and a year later transferred to the rehabilitation programme. For six months she lived in a hostel at Thinalion. And in October 2006 she was well enough to move to a protected flat with another patient, Corinna Mouzakiti. She also started to work for the cooperative's gardening and environmental team.

"I love everything about the job, especially the planting. It has changed my life completely," she says. *"I have always enjoyed gardening – I like being close to nature. In the evening when I'm watching television I miss it. I would rather be working."* Yet she has to be careful. *"Hot weather gives me trouble in my head,"* she admits. She has to stop and take a break. The team leaders understand this and avoid giving her the toughest tasks. *"Georgia is very proud, and she tries hard,"* says her social worker Helena Moshat. A team of professionals monitors her progress, and she can call for round-the-clock help from her own doctor.

Cooperative approach

New Horizons has 70 employees, including 45 patients who work alongside the other staff. As well as the café and the environmental team, they run a cleaning service, a car park and a restaurant and bar named *Dusk*, in Corfu town. Set up in 2005, the cooperative has grown from ten people to 183 voting members, 98 of them patients. The governing board always includes at least two former inmates.

The environmental team has a contract with the local authority. Dimitris Vlachos, the team supervisor, is proud of the fact that it offers a professional and competitive service. *"Our customers are very happy with the work,"* he confirms. *"We teach our staff to do a good job."* All the workers have training – to handle the power tools, for instance – and wear full safety protection. Georgia starts every morning at 8 am, sometimes travelling by minibus with her workmates to more distant locations. She earns €500 a month for four or five mornings a week, plus the support she gets through the health services, while the flat she shares is rent-free.

"We don't tell clients that some of our workers are patients," explains Thanasis Papavlasopoulos, a social economy expert who helped to set up the cooperative. *"We don't want any of them stigmatised, and you would find it difficult to tell who the people with problems are. Ten of them are already completely autonomous. You can see the difference the ESF project has made in four years,"* he adds. *"In 1997, there were 350 inmates in the hospital from all over the island. Now there are only 15 beds, for absolute emergencies. It's real progress. Re-integration is the most important thing, and our main aim is to give people an opportunity to work and enable them to be independent."*

An ongoing fight

Georgia herself has started to take up some of her old hobbies. She loves to cook and do embroidery, and used to paint and write music. *"I always loved music. I once wanted to be a dancer,"* she notes wistfully. She regularly visits her mother, brother and sister, and is close to her sister's two children.

She still has a daily battle to keep her life on track: she depends on medication three times a day. A few months ago her condition suddenly worsened again. *"I felt very angry. I was screaming,"* she explains. *"I went to the doctor and asked for help, and we spent a month fighting to stop me going backwards... and it really is a fight."*

What keeps her going? *"My character, as well as having a child,"* she replies. *"And I have a good family. I didn't want to hurt them."* Her son Antonis now lives in Athens with his father. They talk twice a week on the phone, but Georgia says their relationship would be better if he were not so far away. She is determined to get well enough to have a home of her own where her son can join her once again.

Disability is no handicap to work



Andrzej Lubowiecki used to work in the shipyards in the town of Gdynia, part of the urban area of Gdansk, on Poland's Baltic coast. In their heyday, the historic shipyards provided jobs for some 20,000 people. Now only about 3,000 workers remain.

Nonetheless, for 12 years Andrzej had a well-paid and secure job first as a carpenter, and then as a painter. Until, in 2001, mounting pain forced him to undergo a hip-replacement operation in a local hospital. But the surgery went wrong, a nerve was cut by mistake, he says, and instead of becoming more mobile again he could only walk with the aid of crutches. He was unable to return to work, and after 180 days his employer dismissed him.

With only manual skills at his disposal and jobs in short supply, Andrzej resigned himself to living on disablement benefits. He couldn't afford the cost of retraining. *"I didn't think I would ever find work, because of my disability,"* he explains. He was unemployed for five years, until the day he noticed a poster on a bus advertising work opportunities for 'partially disabled' people. *"I went straight to the job centre and registered as unemployed. Two days later they told me about the training scheme."* In June 2006, he enrolled on a four-day course co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, tailored to the needs of disabled people, and offering advice on job-seeking, compiling a CV and applying for work. The local authority, one of the partners, provided a minibus to pick him up from home each day.

Determination pays off

"After the course it took me just one day to find a job," declares Andrzej proudly. *"At the interview, I showed them I really wanted it."* A local security firm took him on and trained him to use a computer. He works in the central office, with a staff of six, responsible for monitoring operations around the Gdansk area, collecting data, and if necessary alerting the police to security breaches. He is on duty for 24 hours at a time, followed by 48 hours off, including weekends and holidays, with every third weekend off. *"In the beginning, I got very sleepy in the middle of the night, but now I am used to it,"* he says, although he still has problems getting to sleep when his shift finishes. Since his pay is low, he retains his disablement benefit.

"The course has given me confidence that, despite my disability, I know what I need to do to get a job."

Andrzej's wife Ania is a kindergarten teacher, and leaves home at 6am. *"At first, not working was great,"* he recalls. *"Ania would make me a list of jobs. I used to go shopping and then sit down and have a beer."* But as time wore on, he began to feel the strain, both financial and psychological. Fortunately, they had bought their flat in a housing scheme, with a loan from the shipyard, just before his operation. Until that time, the family lived in one room at Ania's parents' place. *"But the worst part about being unemployed was when everybody went on holiday in the summer, and the boys had to stay at home because we had no money,"* he explains. Now he has a regular income, they are able to plan a holiday in the mountains.

A typical day for Andrzej, when he is not at work, involves waking their two sons, Karol, 16, and Przemek, 14, preparing their breakfast and seeing them off to school. He has always enjoyed cooking, and used to swap recipes with Ania's friends. *"Wild mushroom soup with noodles is my speciality,"* says Andrzej, who gathers his own mushrooms in the countryside and enjoys fishing. He also decorated their home and built fitted cupboards. *"I've always been adaptable – I can do everything around the house. 'A man is an animal that will learn anything!'"*

Back to normal

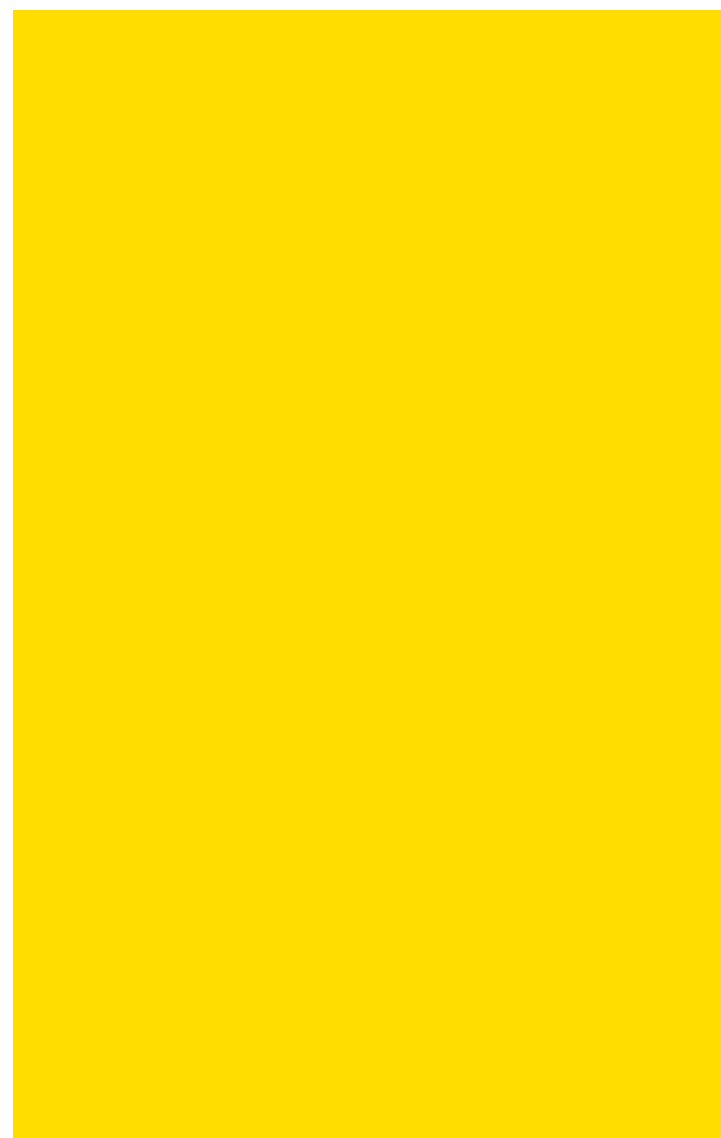
Andrzej says he feels *"100% better"* with a job. *"It's logical that being out of work doesn't make you feel good,"* he points out. *"Some people just get drunk, but I'm not like that. The course has given me confidence that, despite my disability, I know what I need to do to get a job."*

"In the beginning I was happy to have a 'househusband,'" adds Ania. *"But I started to realise that Andrzej was quite stressed. When he had to go out and meet people he wasn't comfortable at all. Now everything is back to normal, and we share the chores at home."*

"It was a successful project," confirms course coordinator Anna Dabrowska from the Fundacja Gospodarcza training centre. *"We are running similar initiatives for people with disabilities all the time, offering vocational training or advice on setting up their own company. That is very popular now, because they can get a grant from the EU."*

Andrzej would also like to start his own business, repainting shipping containers. He is pursuing compensation through the courts

for the operation that left him handicapped, and is still bitter about it. But in July 2008, a replacement operation on his other hip was successful, and now he can get around with just a stick. He knows he is better off than many others. *"Disabled people in Poland are generally not employed,"* he says. *"It's difficult for them to get about, and companies don't want to take them on. But here, the city is trying to improve facilities."*



A recipe for success



It is a weekday lunchtime, and every table at the *Ízlelő* ('Titbit') restaurant, in the town of Szekszárd in Hungary, is occupied. Along one wall of the bright, cheerful room, a wooden climbing frame and pile of toys is proof of the place's 'family-friendly' approach. But as well as mothers with young children, the varied clientele includes couples, older people and local office workers.

In the busy kitchen, 33-year-old *Éva Gyulai* helps to prepare the dishes. *"I just love working in this place every day, there are so many different things to do, and I have always enjoyed cooking,"* she exclaims. *"All the staff get on well with each other. It's genuine teamwork."* For Éva, this means understanding her colleagues by lip-reading – she has been almost totally deaf since birth, when a medical error and an overdose of oxygen permanently damaged her hearing. Seven of the restaurant staff have disabilities, and came to work at *Ízlelő* thanks to a local training project co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. The Blue Bird Foundation, established in 1997 with the aim of promoting a society offering opportunities and choices for all individuals, launched the *LIFT Likeliness – Integration – Full employment – Training* project in June 2006, and has helped 36 unemployed young people with low educational levels and disabilities to acquire new skills to enable them to find work.

Bad work, low pay

Born in Szekszárd, Éva attended a special residential school for deaf people in Budapest until she was 16. There she learnt to lip-read, before returning to her home town to complete her school certificate. But getting a decent job was not easy. She started doing unskilled piecework, sewing nappies in a factory. *"We were paid for the items we completed and the rate was very low,"* she remembers. *"So I was working constantly – my back and my head were aching all the time. It was really boring."*

Before long, Éva met and married her husband Zoltán, who works for a local printing firm, and the young couple moved in with his parents. When their two sons, Ákos, ten, and Balázs, seven, were born, she was glad to take maternity leave to look after them. Balázs has asthma and eyesight problems that have required two operations already, and held him back a year. But when both boys were ready to start school, Éva was eager to look for a different kind of job.

There are people with disabilities all over Hungary who would like to work in a place like this. The idea should be copied."

A new beginning

She heard from another mother about the LIFT project, and signed up as one of 16 people on the catering course (a further 20 learned building skills). The training lasted for a year, and during that time she received a salary from the project budget. In September 2007, she qualified as a cook and got a job at the family-friendly restaurant – which the Foundation also runs – together with six of her colleagues who do the cooking, washing up and waiting at table. *"I was lucky. I love cooking,"* explains Éva, who learnt from her mother-in-law, an expert chef. *"Our kids are always hungry, so my hobby is my work."* Sweets are her speciality: she likes to cook pancakes, as well as strudels and cheesecake.

The Ízlelő kitchen prepares up to 140 meals each day, 40% of them for takeaway customers. The head chef and dietician together select healthy menus that will appeal to young people. The restaurant already supplies lunches for the Foundation's own family daycare centre, and plans to expand to cater for a local primary school. Ákos likes to eat there when his parents take him. *"It's delicious,"* he confirms enthusiastically as he finishes off second helpings of soup. *"It's better than my school canteen."*

And other customers agree that the restaurant offers good quality and reasonable prices. *"The people who work here are always smiling, and they know everybody by name,"* remarks Judit Botos, who eats regularly at Ízlelő.

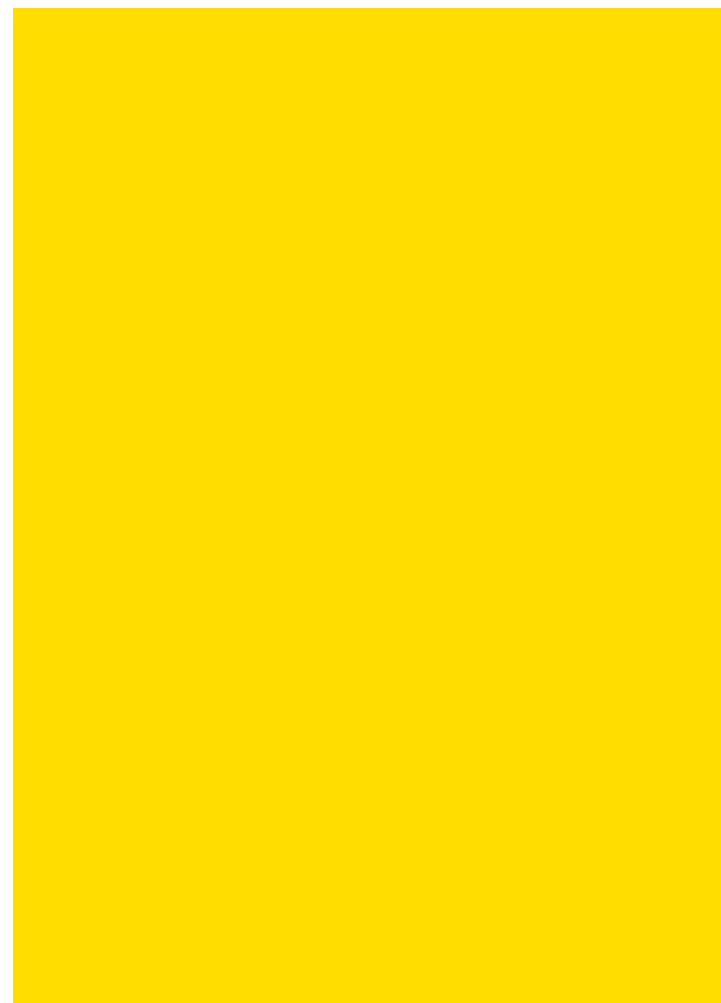
"Our aim is to help families with small children, and people with disabilities, and the restaurant combines both objectives," explains Andrea Mészáros, Managing Director of the Blue Bird Foundation. *"We expected it to be self-sufficient in three years, but by the end of the first year we were already making a profit."*

The taste of freedom

With a reliable second income, Éva and Zoltán have been able to realise their dream of buying a home of their own. *"The space was not big enough at Zoltán's parents' and we wanted a change,"* explains Éva. *"There was no garden and nowhere for the children to play. When we got home there was nothing to do but sit and watch TV."* They moved into their house outside Szekszárd in December

2008, relishing the challenge of renovating the property. The good-sized garden has vines and fruit trees. Zoltán is looking forward to learning about wine-making, while Éva's priority is growing apples to make her own apple pies, and planting flowers. *"I love gardening,"* she says. *"Outside the town we have fresh air and a feeling of freedom."* She is also studying to obtain a driver's licence.

Éva feels fortunate to have found the Ízlelő restaurant. *"There are people with disabilities all over Hungary who would like to work in a place like this,"* she points out. *"The idea should be copied. We wouldn't mind – we would be really happy!"*



Extending a hand to the blind



"I'm not sure I would like to be able to see. Being blind is part of who I am."

Blinded as a baby due to a tragic medical error, **Sarmite Gromska** has no memory of vision. Today, she finds it difficult even to imagine the experience. *"I was born prematurely, at about seven months, and then was placed in an incubator. That caused me to go blind. It was an accident, nothing more. "People don't always understand me when I say I wouldn't like to see. If I could see I would lose a part of my identity. Being blind defines who I am," she adds.*

Sarmite says her blindness also gives her a more 'truthful' vision of the world. *"Appearance isn't everything," she explains. "I think I 'see' more clearly than the sighted. Most people pay attention to what they see with their eyes, but I see people's souls. I see their 'voice gestures', their intonations, and I feel how they touch me."*

Living with her parents and two brothers in Riga, Sarmite is an inspiring example of how far one can get with determination and support. She spent her early years at a special boarding school for the blind, where she learned to read and write in Braille. Continuing her studies at the university, she distinguished herself as a student and was awarded a grant. She also has musical talent and played saxophone in a youth band. Although Sarmite still plays occasionally, she says she is leaving music for the moment to concentrate on university.

Study materials

Sarmite needs specialised equipment in order to study, and she is extremely proficient at writing with either a 'slate' or with a special Braille typewriter, as well as a computer fitted with voice-recognition software.

To get all her university course materials translated into Braille, she depends on the Latvian Library for the Blind. However, as Gunta Bite, the head of the library's Braille Department, explains, *"Braille transcription is prohibitively expensive. "We can only do this work in-house thanks to European Union funding, which helped us to set up our Braille department."* The aim of the project was to provide blind and visually impaired people with a variety of services and materials, ultimately helping them to integrate into society and the labour market and to live more independent lives.

"The Braille library has made a big difference in my life and, I know, in the lives of other blind people."

The EU, through the European Social Fund, made it possible for the library to acquire equipment and training so that it could start to print books and other documents for the blind. Braille readers from across Latvia now have access to a whole new range of reading materials, free of charge. And they can request specific texts when they have the need.

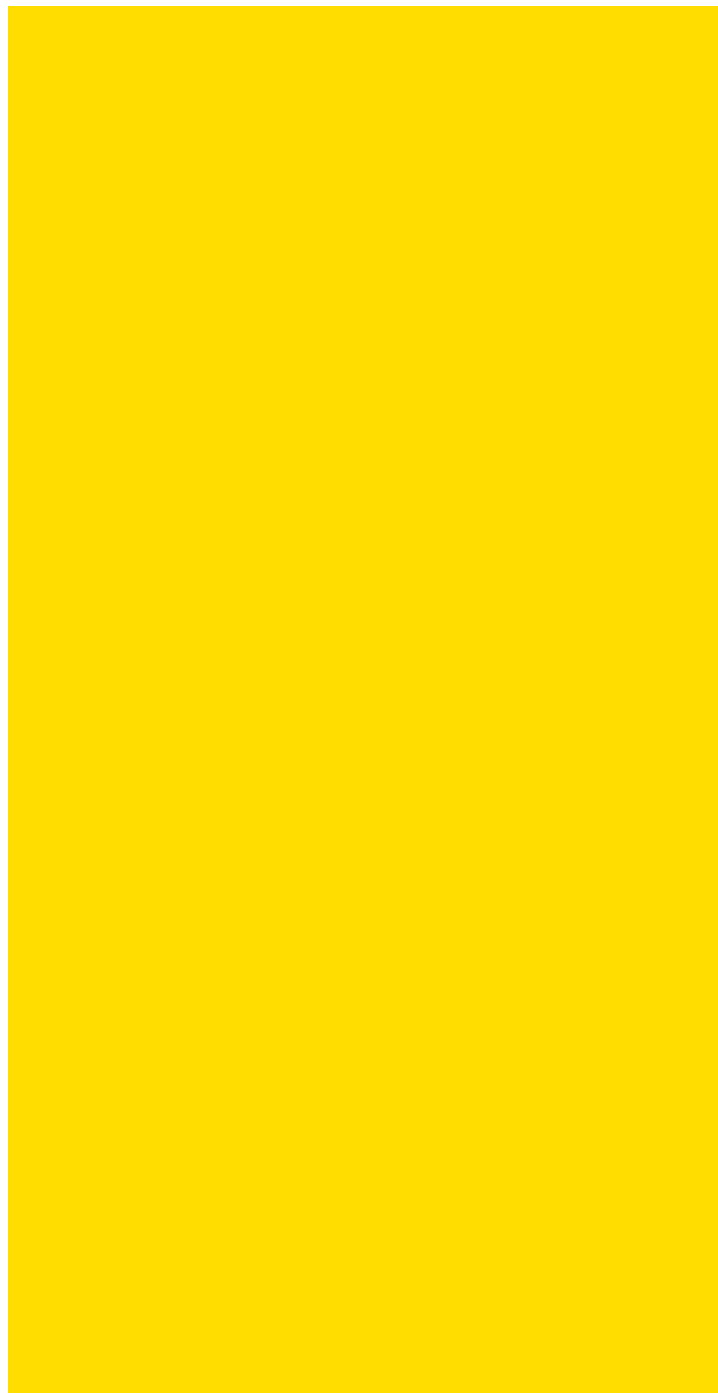
Today, the department also employs blind and visually impaired people to work in the preparation of texts. *"It was working for the library one summer that convinced me I wanted to be a Braille editor,"* explains Sarmite, a career she is now working towards at university.

Learning to be independent

For most of her life, Sarmite has been completely dependent on her parents. Indeed, the story of Madame Gromska, Sarmite's mother, is a case study in itself in courage, determination and life-long devotion to her child.

But she knows that one day she'll be alone and will have to stand on her own feet. *"Yes, I was nervous about starting university,"* she says. *"It was a major step to take, both on an academic level and on a personal level. I'm still very dependent on other people and especially my family, but I have to learn to be strong and to survive."*

"The Braille library has made a big difference in my life and, I know, in the lives of other blind people. I've definitely gained a lot from the ESF project. Being able to print out all the materials I need for my studies means I can continue the process of growing, moving forward and becoming a productive member of society."



Enjoying the country life



Growing up on a small farm in the rural Prekmurje region in northwest Slovenia, *Andrej Lovrencec* has deep roots in the countryside. *"I like this region very much, I belong here. I couldn't imagine living in a city,"* says the 22-year-old. *"I would perhaps move within the area, but I don't think I'd move somewhere completely different."*

At home with his mother and father, he grows various crops including wheat, grapes, fruit, and potatoes, and rears goats, cows and bulls. Though small-scale, the farm provides food for the family and animals with some excess produce to sell.

Andrej had learning difficulties at school and often had to take time off due to mental health problems. He began having spells of severe headaches, vomiting and impaired vision from a young age and when he was 12 he started to suffer from depression.

"School was difficult. I had problems learning but also with my classmates. It was just little things but it bothered me." In 2002, when Andrej was in the seventh grade he became really sick and he didn't go back for a year. At the age of 15 he was registered as disabled and though he eventually finished his basic education in 2004, afterwards he found he had limited job options. Stuck at home all day, he felt bored and isolated. *"I was at home, waiting for something to happen. I didn't know what to do, where to go and I didn't have any money."*

In 2008, he began to turn his life around by taking a training course. It involved a three-month mentoring programme run by a local organisation, Mosaic, which employs and supports socially vulnerable groups, especially people with disabilities. There are four areas of activities – agriculture, organic food production, eco-tourism and building restoration.

A full-time job

The *on-the-job* training programme is a nationwide effort that started in 2004 and is co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. It is aimed at people who may have difficulty getting into work including people with disabilities, young people with few qualifications and long-term unemployed.

"I've met new people and I learn something new every day. And I now have financial independence."

After the programme, Andrej was offered a full-time position. He works in a small team doing a variety of tasks in agriculture or food production. It is ideal for Andrej, combining a supportive and friendly environment with a working area he is knowledgeable and enthusiastic about. *"I like working here because I like farming,"* he says.

"The work is really interesting, whether it is out on the land, or inside." Being an agricultural business, employees work whenever needed, depending on the seasons and crops. *"Sometimes we work seven days a week,"* he adds. For Andrej, with his farm upbringing, this type of regime is second nature. *"I don't mind the long hours. And it's great because my co-workers are also my friends."*

Personal skills

It is evident that he is really enjoying working life, his self-confidence has grown and he has become much more independent. *"I've met new people and I learn something new every day,"* he says. *"And I now have financial independence."* The regular income has enabled him to buy his own car, which helps him get around and adds to his improved social life.

His parents have noticed a big difference. *"He's much happier and livelier now. He hangs out with friends – he didn't do that so much before,"* says his mother.

Mateja Kaljevič, adviser from regional employment service that helps to organise the work placements, has also noticed a change. *"Andrej is 100% different after doing the programme. At the start, he came in with his mother and she would speak for him. He was afraid of everything and had no confidence. Now he is one of the most confident participants we've had."*

Assessing the improvement in his life that getting into the workforce has brought, Andrej says: *"I'm really satisfied now. It's the first time that I've got what I've wanted. I don't have any big plans for the future. But if everything stays as it is that is just as well. We have a saying: going slow will take you far."*

Learning to live with pain



Otilia Marques was just 22 when she left her home in Ansião, Portugal, to join her sister and brother-in-law in Luxembourg. Like many Europeans, she moved to a new country in the hope of finding work and making a new life.

"It was difficult at first," she remembers. *"I had a job in a factory, but I was never taught French. I had to learn it all at work."* As one of seven brothers and sisters, she had been used to having people around her when she needed help.

Then, in 1975, she married her husband Manuel Augusto in Portugal. The following year he joined her in Luxembourg, where he now works for a building materials supplier. At the same time, Otilia started a new job as a cleaner for the post and telecoms company P&T. With the birth of their daughter Alexandra three years later, things seemed set fine for the future.

Pride in her work

But Otilia was barely into her 30s when she became conscious of the rheumatic pain in her back, which grew more intense when she suffered a slipped disc. *"For more than 20 years, I have suffered from pain that has made it difficult for me to work, and with age it gets worse. But I still try to do my best,"* she says modestly. As a cleaner in the company changing and washroom area, she takes obvious pride in the shining mirrors and spotless tiles. Her tasks include scrubbing out showers, climbing ladders to dust lockers, carrying buckets full of water and emptying rubbish sacks..... it's hard physical work. *"Sometimes you can make the wrong movement and it hurts even more,"* she explains. *"But there's no-one else to do it, so I have to manage."* And when the technicians come back from laying telecom cables in muddy trenches, especially in the winter, there is plenty to clean up.

So in September 2007, the company offered Otilia time off to attend a two-days-a-week training course over five weeks, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, to help her manage the pain. By coincidence, her daughter Alexandra was by then working for the *Service de Santé au Travail Multisectoriel* (STM – the government department responsible for health in different labour sectors) which organised the course, and she encouraged her mother to take up the opportunity.

"I have learnt how to control my movements so I have less backache at work each day, and even at home."

Otilia found out how the back works, the risks of damage, and what to do to protect it. The trainers demonstrated exercises to build up her leg muscles, relaxation techniques to avoid strain, and even the right diet to improve her general health and strength. She discovered how to lift loads correctly, and move safely to avoid pain. *"Thanks to the course, I know now that I have to get down on my knees – I can't bend down, for example – and I take care not to fill the rubbish bags too full. I have learnt how to control my movements so I have less backache at work each day, and even at home. The training helped me because it explained what to expect."* There were even psychologists on hand to talk through participants' problems.

An early start

Located on the outskirts of Luxembourg city, the telecoms headquarters where Otilia works is an angular, red-brick building on a spacious site surrounded by lawns and trees. This means that she can drive to work each day and park on company premises. *"Although I don't live far away, it helps me to come by car, also because I start very early – at 6 o'clock in the morning."*

For Otilia, daily life is a question of controlling the pain and reducing it to a manageable level. She refused surgery when she found it offered only a 20% chance of success. Instead, she has regular massage sessions, and once a year undergoes intensive therapy in the local spa town of Mondorf-les-Bains. She tries to avoid pain-killing drugs. *"I have treatment to try and stop the arthritis developing any further, because once that happens there's nothing to be done,"* she explains.

With Manuel, she lives in a bright, well-kept house with white walls, polished wood furniture and tiled floors. Red geraniums decorate the window sills, and here and there pieces of decorated pottery or other souvenirs evoke the colours of their native Portugal. Now Otilia is well enough to be able to enjoy taking a walk with their friendly six-year-old Labrador, Bell.

Keeping going

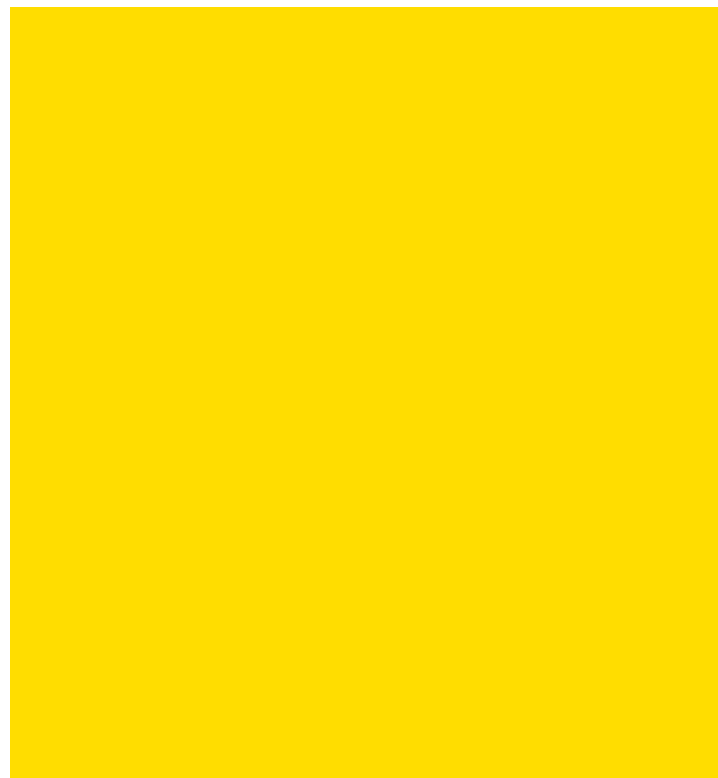
She hopes to be able to continue working until she reaches retirement age. *"We'll see how long it can go on,"* she says philosophically.

"It will take courage. I still feel pain, and sometimes I'm a bit depressed. It varies with the weather – when it rains it gets worse. But one has to try to keep going. You can't always complain. You have to live with it."

Nadine Sadler, from P&T's health and social affairs service, says about 20 staff members a year undertake the back-pain training. *"It really works,"* she says. *"I hope it will help Otilia to lengthen her working life."*

"It was a very useful course," confirms Fatima Tomaz, who leads the team of 14 cleaning ladies in the building. *"I have followed it myself, and I learned a lot."*

In pride of place on the wall of Otilia's living room is a framed certificate, congratulating her on the progress she made on the training course, and encouraging her to put the lessons she learned into practice. It says a lot about how important that experience has been for her.



Older workers

Gearing up to a new career



"I could have spent the rest of my life on unemployment or pre-retirement benefits, but I didn't want that," declares Jane Grøne defiantly. "I was determined to get a job, and I did it on my own, not because the employment services said I had to. It was my own initiative. But the training was crucial, because you can't do this job unless you have passed the test and got the driver's licence."

Whether behind the wheel of her yellow, single-decker bus, or chatting with her workmates at City Trafik, one of the two main bus companies in Aalborg on the windswept coast of Jutland in Denmark, Jane seems completely at ease. Yet in early 2007, already in her mid-fifties, she was unemployed and had no formal qualifications to help her into work. When she spotted an advertisement for trainee bus drivers in her local paper, she was tempted to respond – she enjoyed driving and it sounded interesting. But she hesitated. Would she be able to handle a large vehicle? And could she cope with the responsibility of her passengers' safety? *"At first I thought it might be difficult because of my age,"* she admits.

A week later, Jane noticed the same advert. *"It seemed like fate,"* she recalls. *"I thought to myself: If other people can do it, why can't I? I might as well try and see how it works out. I can always back out later if necessary."*

So she went ahead and, in November 2007, got a place on the *Job Competence* programme run by the local vocational training centre AMU Nordjylland (ArbejdsMarkedsUddannelser – LabourMarketEducation), an educational project co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. The bus drivers' course included both theory and practice, with several different modules covering health and safety, first aid, handling money, ergonomics, and how to assist disabled passengers.

Jane is full of praise for the training she received. *"The teachers made it fun and interesting. They were very professional. Even if some of the things we had to learn were quite boring, I personally didn't feel bored at any stage."*

Promise of a job

In the meantime she started looking for a vacancy, and City Trafik offered her a place starting in February 2008. But there was a problem, because although she was due to complete the training by that date, she felt she did not have enough practical experience. *"I was nervous, because the company had promised me a job, and all the other new drivers were ready*

“It gives you a lot of confidence when you take the diploma and get a good job with good colleagues. You feel better about yourself.”

to start.” She was afraid she would lose her opportunity, but the company kept its word. *“As we say in Denmark, maybe it was because of my blue eyes,”* laughs Jane mischievously. She spent two months taking extra driving lessons, and by April was ready to take up her post.

“I’m really happy I got my bus driver’s licence,” she adds. *“It gives you a lot of confidence when you take the diploma and get a good job with good colleagues. You feel better about yourself.”*

“Running through the training is the message that people can succeed,” confirms Henrik Johannesson, head of transport and logistics at AMU. *“We see a lot of people in their 50s, often because they have lost their job and want to start a new career.”*

Taking responsibility

Jane comes from Hjørring in the north of Denmark. When she was 15 she moved to Aalborg, where her parents opened a café. But a short time later her mother died, and as the oldest of six children, she was soon busy looking after her three brothers and two sisters, and helping with her father’s business. She had little time to study and pass exams, so she left school without qualifications.

Married in her 20s, she had three children. Jane and her husband ran a small office equipment business, and she acted as receptionist and secretary. But when her husband died in 1997 she had to sell up the business and look for other work. *“I was nearly 50, and I had to decide what I wanted to do. I was looking and looking,”* she recalls. She found a job as a health care worker, and had completed a year of vocational training to obtain the extra qualifications she needed for promotion, when a road accident left her with a back injury, making it impossible to do the lifting or heavy work essential to the job. Jane spent about a year, first on sick leave, then on unemployment benefits, before she resolved this was not the way she wanted to live.

Jane’s children are now grown up and independent. Her older son lives in Copenhagen, but her daughter and younger son live nearby, and she particularly looks forward to the time she spends looking after her two-year-old grandson, Mathias.

She works 37 hours a week, normally spread over six days, with shifts that start as early as 4am and end as late as 1.30am. Every

morning she arrives at the depot to be told which route she will be covering that day. There are 170 drivers working out of the City Trafik depot, 22 of them women.

Conflict management

Thanks to her job, Jane has got to know her city much better. The narrow streets of Aalborg’s old centre, with its neat, pastel-painted houses, are not the easiest place to navigate a large vehicle. But Jane takes pride in driving smoothly and carefully so that her passengers have a safe and comfortable ride. You have to stop at the lights anyway, she points out. What’s the point of trying to rush? She enjoys the social contact with her regular passengers, and they, in turn, show their appreciation: *“They give me presents: chocolates and bottles of wine...!”*

On the other hand, violence against transport workers is a constant source of concern, with two people arrested for knife attacks on bus drivers a year or so ago. Conflict management was one of the course topics, and Jane says her worst problem so far has been an unruly group at a bus stop. Remembering her training, she swiftly closed the door and drove on. The buses now have alarms connected to the local police.

“I am very happy in my work,” concludes Jane. *“I am happy with my colleagues, and with my boss. Everybody is treated well, and we help each other. It’s like one big family, and nobody is left out. I am going to stay here until I die!”* she jokes. She has good reason to expect a lengthy and satisfying career: as long as the drivers renew their medical certificates every five years, retirement age is flexible. City Trafik’s oldest bus driver is 72 years of age.

“I really enjoy coming to work, even at 4am,” she says. *“I am never sorry to be working.”*



Retraining for the modern workforce



There are three things that are important for *Milan Nedbal*, from the Kromeriz region of the Czech Republic: *“Family, health and work,”* says the 53-year-old. However, when the factory he worked at closed down in October 2006, he wondered if he had lost one of these mainstays of his life forever.

Milan has worked steadily throughout his adult life. After studying at the university for textile machinery in Liberec, he worked in the textile industry for 27 years, going from the shop floor to become the general manager of a local factory. *“I worked my way through the ranks,”* he says. *“As a plant manager, I was in overall charge of all aspects of the production. I organised the material for production, all the preparation, as well as managing the employees.”*

The Czech textile industry began declining in the 1990s. So when the plant he worked at finally went bankrupt, there were few opportunities left in that sector. *“Being made redundant was a bad feeling,”* he says. *“And it was made worse by the stress of looking for a new job.”*

He started searching for work immediately, but had little luck initially. *“I sent my CV to over 140 companies,”* he continues. *“But I kept getting the same response – Thank you for your interest in our organisation, but we regret to inform you that we have no suitable opportunities at the moment...”*

Not only was it difficult to find any jobs related to his experience, but he also found that the senior position that he held previously was a barrier. *“It worked as a negative thing. When companies heard I had been a plant manager they wouldn’t look at me for lower positions,”* he says. *“They were afraid I would want to be giving all the orders.”* However, he kept on sending more job applications. *“I had to go on. It was very important,”* he says. *“I’m an optimistic person. But it does begin to play on your confidence. I wondered if I would ever get back into work.”*

Up to date with new technologies

Milan realised that his skills might need updating to find a job in the modern workforce. He started a course of retraining offered by the local labour office in January 2007. The project was prepared and organised by the non-profit *Knihovna Kromerizska* library, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. It consisted primarily of computer and IT literacy training,

"The training was really practical and my computer skills improved a lot... I feel much more secure now."

learning how to use hardware and software, internet searching, creating and preparing a variety of computer documents; as well as communication skills and environmental education.

"Before the course, I had limited knowledge of how to use computers," he says. "I only started to use them at the end of my previous career. But the training was really practical and my computer skills improved a lot."

It also helped to hone other abilities vital to gaining employment, such as writing application letters and CVs, dressing for interviews and communicating better with people. *"Above all, it helped me to gain self confidence. I noticed a difference in my interpersonal skills,"* adds Milan.

In the summer of 2007, the efforts paid off and his job search ended when he secured a position with a local manufacturing firm. His newly improved skills were vital. *"A high degree of computer literacy was a pre-requisite for the job. And the firm isn't scared of hiring older staff."* The company, Chropyňská Strojírna, specialises in the robotic arms that do the welding in car manufacturing, along with other products such as the moulds for plastic pressing machines making items such as car bumpers.

Communication skills

He works in the co-operation department. *"My job is to secure the production of different parts of the supply chain from sub-contractors,"* he says. *"We don't have the capacity to do everything on our own."* Coupled with his wealth of experience in manufacturing, computer skills are essential to his new position. His work involves making enquiries and selecting suppliers, preparing orders and documentation of technical specifications and arranging logistics for delivery of various parts. For this he uses project management and engineering software. *"The communication and coordination is all done by computer. I would have difficulties without computer skills."*

"It's completely different from my old role. Before, I was always working internally. Now I need to communicate externally with other companies and organise the entire supply chain," he adds.

Getting back into employment has made a big difference to his quality of life. *"I feel much more secure now. I don't think so much about the future, I'm happy with what I'm doing at the moment,"* he says. He enjoys gardening and spending time with his family. *"However, I don't have so much free time,"* he admits *"I work a lot."* And for a man who values work as highly as Milan, that is a good thing.



The true value of experience



"There's a feeling that once you get older, employers don't need you any more. We have the ability, but we're just too old and too expensive."

If there's a hint of bitterness in 55-year-old **Roswitha Kerbel's** voice, it is easy to understand. For a woman with a wide range of qualifications, who has spent much of her life pursuing a high-powered career in publishing, suddenly finding yourself unemployable when you know you want to work is deeply frustrating. In her early 50s, she spent four years hunting for a job in Vienna, Austria, without a suitable offer. *"I got a lot of refusals,"* she recalls. *"I got very discouraged. You start to feel old and worthless."*

Finally, her job centre suggested she should contact *Initiative 50*, a scheme co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund and designed to put older workers in touch with employers who recognise their value. In January 2008 they asked her to send her CV to *Licht ins Dunkel* (Light in the Darkness), a popular Vienna-based charity organisation that works with Austrian TV and celebrities to raise money for needy families. The organisation called her to interview, and within an hour Roswitha was offered a job.

Dedicated to books

Roswitha was born in Graz in Austria, but at the age of six she moved to Stuttgart in Germany, where she grew up and studied. She qualified in librarianship before obtaining extra skills in economics and information technology and moving into publishing.

"I have always concentrated on my career. I love books," she explains, pointing to the rows of volumes which line her sitting room walls from floor to ceiling. *"I held senior posts in marketing with some major publishing companies. I used to work 60 to 70 hours a week, and did a lot of travelling, with responsibility for organising book fairs and launches. It was a very hard job."*

When her first marriage ended in divorce, she moved back to Austria in 1993, where she met her second husband Michael Estl. Roswitha felt the time had come for a change in her life. *"My first marriage broke down because I was so busy in my job,"* she recalls. *"I was away from home for too long and it was too tiring. I didn't want the same thing to happen again."*

"I like working very much, and I'm glad to be able to earn my own income because I like to be financially independent."

A house in the country

Roswitha and Michael married in 2000. They bought a house in the village of Königstetten, on the edge of the beautiful Vienna Woods outside the Austrian capital. Eating breakfast on their terrace, they look out over their garden to rolling hills and fields of vivid yellow rape. Michael works at home as a computer programmer, in the company of the couple's two enormous dogs, Benny and Teddy, and cats Mimi and Pepper.

At that time, Roswitha also needed flexibility to care for her elderly father – every two or three weeks she travelled back to Stuttgart where her parents still lived – and for her mother-in-law in Vienna. She gave up her job in publishing and started to look around for a new career direction. The garden seemed to hold the key: *"I have always loved gardening, but I had no idea about plants,"* she says. She took a one-year training course in landscape gardening, followed by employment in the Vienna Woods nature park. She was responsible for planning events and excursions for groups of visitors, as well as accounting and administration, but the post did not last. *"I would have loved to get a permanent job, but I was too old."*

Roswitha says she started to become aware of the age discrimination problem some 10 years ago. She puts it down to the higher cost of social insurance that employers pay for older staff. *"There's a lot of pressure, because there are not that many jobs on the market, so companies offer work to the cheaper staff,"* she argues.

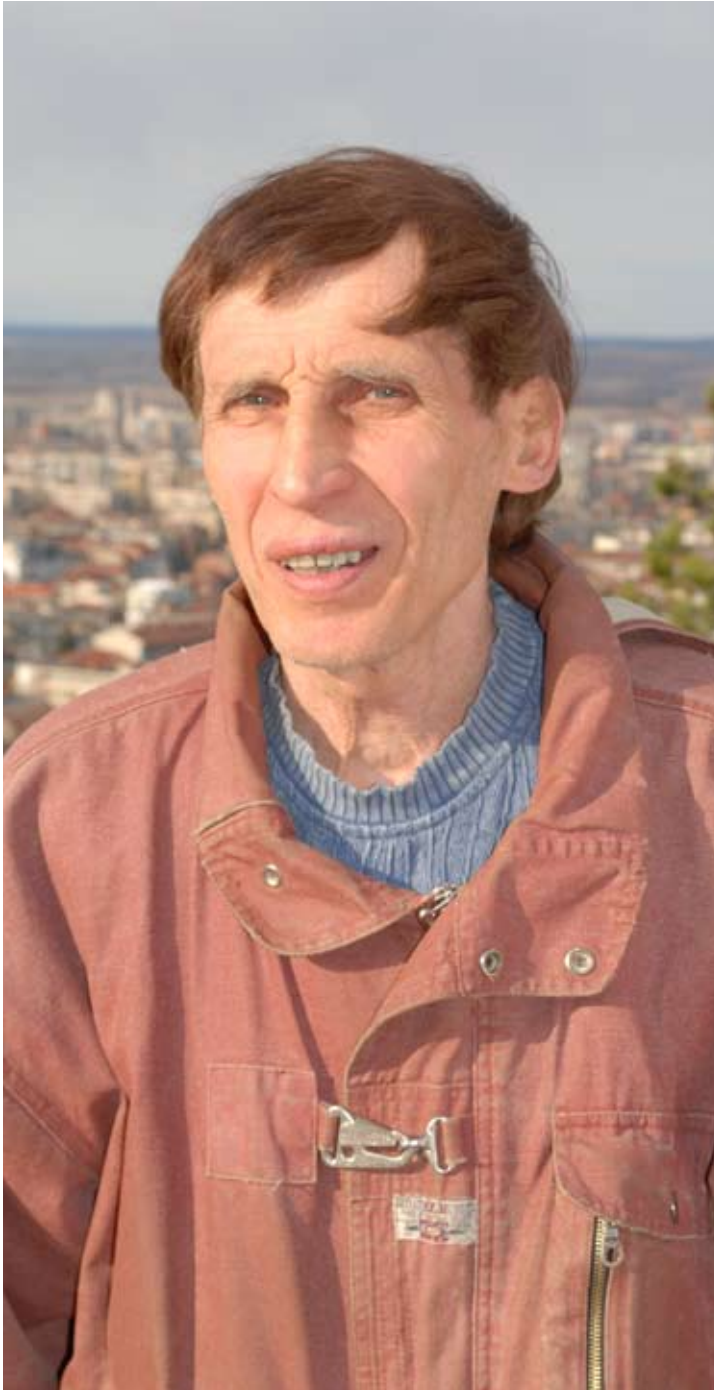
Financial independence

Yet *Initiative 50* has given Roswitha another new start. She has been working full-time for *Licht ins Dunkel* since February 2008. The scheme pays participants' salaries for the first three months, giving employers an additional incentive to hire. She admits that office administration is not her 'dream' job, and it could be more interesting. *"But at my age I don't want to have all that responsibility any more,"* she explains. *"I want to take life easier. It's a difficult situation, and I appreciate the opportunity to have a job again. I'm not a typical housewife. I like working very much, and I enjoy being with my colleagues. And I'm glad to be able to earn my own income because I like to be financially independent."*

"Initiative 50 is a very good scheme because it helps older people to find suitable jobs, and that's not easy. Now I have time for my garden, my husband and my dogs. I don't want the stress I had before. The project has helped me to achieve that."



Social solidarity gives new hope



Tsvetan Ivanov's philosophy of life is very clear: "Helping each other makes us all stronger," he says. "Looking after number one is not a policy I agree with."

Tsvetan worked for 25 years in the local chemical fertiliser plant in Vratsa, north-western Bulgaria, where he supervised safety procedures, before qualifying for early retirement in 2000. He soon decided that he wanted to do something active to help other people in his community. Vratsa is a picturesque town known for its spectacular rock climbing cliffs and caves. But many young families move away to find work, sometimes leaving elderly parents or disabled relatives comparatively isolated.

In 2008 he heard about the project *Through Social Services, for Decent Living*, run by a local NGO *Most* (bridge), and co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. It trains and hires retired and unemployed people to act as social assistants, providing daily support to 40 people living in their own homes, but unable to manage by themselves and needing long-term care.

After a brief training period, covering first aid, counselling skills and dealing with emergencies, Tsvetan was offered a contract and given responsibility for two clients: 87-year-old Nicola Kotsev, and Emil Ginev, a former architect who suffered a leg amputation following a car crash. He visits them every day, helping to keep their homes clean and do their shopping. He may be needed to help with doctors' visits, or do routine administrative jobs like paying utility bills. At lunchtime he collects their meals from the social services canteen, which prepares 200-300 meals a day for people on social welfare. Sometimes he takes Nicola out in his wheelchair, or otherwise just sits with him and keeps him company.

A passion for learning

He has developed a strong personal attachment to his two charges. "Nicola is full of spirit and very alert. He feels a lot better when I talk to him," says Tsvetan. "He needs medication following a stroke. But he has all his senses and he refuses to give up. The most interesting aspect of the job is getting a psychological insight into how people cope with hardship. What I like is that I learn things, and the more I learn, the more I can do to help people. You get to understand how they feel about many issues, like ageing and even death."

"Through this project I give people hope. I can see that they are willing to go on living and not give up."

He first volunteered as a social assistant for an earlier project, funded by the United Nations throughout Bulgaria, covering 210 people in the Vratsa region.

Tsvetan has always been an independent thinker, with a wide range of interests. A chemistry graduate, he spent 15 years after university working in the construction trade and helping to restore icons and murals in the famous Cherepish Monastery, near Vratsa. At one time he was "addicted" to solving the Rubik Cube puzzle – he still has several of the most difficult versions on his shelves. When he discovered the internet, it too became a passion. "I had to force myself to go out," he admits. In 2007 he published his first book, expounding his own philosophical theory of *The Tetralectics of Nature*.

It reflects his interest in all aspects of the natural world. As he works on his computer, one or two of the six cats he has rescued from the streets curl up on his lap or cling to his shoulders. "When you treat animals well, they start to trust you, just like people," he explains. Plants fill the window of the modest living room which doubles as a bedroom. His personal library fills the small flat, with perhaps 6,000 volumes on a multiplicity of topics. "I've read them all," claims Tsvetan proudly. He belongs to a local philosophy society, and has published some 150 articles.

Mutual affection

Seventy-seven-year-old Velika Mamkova is another beneficiary of the *Decent Living* initiative. She is housebound on crutches, following surgery and a broken leg. Her two sons have families of their own and have moved away – one to work in Italy. "The help is very important. There are things I cannot do for myself and I would not be able to cope without it," she says. "If a problem comes up, I know I can always phone, 24 hours a day." She also relies on the human contact – having someone to talk to each day – and has developed a close relationship with her carer, Maryika Mitova.

The affection is mutual. "She's like a mother to me," confesses Maryika, who is also employed by the *Decent Living* scheme. The social assistants work six hours a day and receive a salary from the project budget. But as a pensioner himself, Tsvetan pays no tax and is entitled to free health care, which in turn saves money for

the project. The role of the 10 social assistants is to support the 10 full-time care workers employed by the local authority.

His contract lasts for a year – the duration of the scheme. He hopes it can be renewed, saying it would be a pleasure to continue the work. "Through this project I give people hope. I can see that they are willing to go on living and not give up. It gives me an extra income so that I can live a decent life, and in turn I can help others to live decently. Since I have been talking to Nicola he has become more hopeful and has tried to start walking again. It's cheered him up. So while it's been useful for me, I have been useful to him as well."



New skills and a sense of community



Born in a small village near Vilnius in the 1930s, *Aldona Mikalauskiene* has witnessed first-hand some of Europe's greatest upheavals, from the atrocities of the Second World War to difficulties and conflict under Soviet rule, to eventual independence for her small nation of Lithuania. Through it all she has maintained a strong character and a sense of duty to her fellow citizens.

"Today we have many new freedoms," she says. "Freedom to run businesses and to improve ourselves, to criticise and speak freely about our government, but we also have an obligation to use our freedoms and our talents to help each other. We are all one people, one society."

From humble beginnings...

A farmer's daughter from rural Ukmergė, Aldona went to school, was married and widowed, and then took up her studies again, distinguishing herself as an older student at university. Now a qualified accountant, she heads her own accountancy firm in the Lithuanian capital, training and employing young people, and helping a range of clients to succeed during tough financial times. *"I have spent the major part of my career working with upcoming professionals," she says. "I provide apprenticeships and have trained numerous successful accountants."*

Her clients are many and varied, from Chinese restaurants and car mechanics to women's and children's organisations, to big companies and manufacturers. *"I enjoy my job and I find it particularly satisfying to see my group helping others to succeed – whether small businesses, service providers or corporations making money for our economy," she says. "And why should I stop now? I have been around for a while, but I lead an active life and I think I still have something to contribute."*

Still in good form

"The work of accountancy always comes back to numbers," Aldona explains, "and that means specialised knowledge and the right tools."

A unique programme of IT training for older people, organised by the senior citizens' group LPS Bociiai and co-funded by the EU through the European Social Fund, helped Aldona make fuller use

“The work of accountancy always comes back to numbers, and that means specialised knowledge and the right tools.”

of modern information technologies for her business, improving her skills and bringing her up to speed on the latest computer equipment, programmes and networking services.

“I spend a good part of my day out and about,” she says, “meeting clients, collecting and delivering documents and presentations and selling our services to prospective customers.” Then it’s back to the office where she collates and analyses results and figures.

“When I started out, we used those old-time adding machines, you know, with that big lever that swings down and goes ‘cha-ching’. We thought they were quite handy. My, how things have changed! There are so many new tools and technologies that can be extremely useful in accountancy.

“The computer courses allowed me to develop new skills and ultimately to do my work more efficiently,” she says. “The lessons were a real help.”



Back on the job



Born in 1949, *George Mifsud* has seen some changes in his time. As a young man growing up in Malta, he learned welding, carpentry and other skills that gave him a good start in his professional life. Later, he apprenticed in taxidermy, a craft he practised actively for 20 years.

A lifelong hunter and musician, George's varied interests have kept him on the move, criss-crossing his archipelago home. Never straying much farther afield, he has only ever been to Italy and distant Switzerland outside of his native Malta. *"This is a small country but there is plenty to do. We Maltese don't like to go too far. There is a lot of history here. We like to take care of our islands and keep them beautiful,"* he explains.

And that's exactly what George does in his new position as landscape worker. *"I've done a lot of different jobs,"* he continues. *"Before this I ran a snack bar for the tourists. I did that for 11 years. Then, when we shut it down, I don't know, I was kind of played out. I needed to find something to do. I was unemployed."*

Refresher courses

George saw a report on television about new European Union funding for people out of work, so he made a few phone calls and signed himself up for the *Training and Employment Exposure Scheme* (TEES). Co-funded by the EU through the European Social fund, TEES helps people over 40 who want to get back into the workforce.

"I had done welding and electrical work in my younger days," he says, *"something I'd always enjoyed, but my ability had gone pretty rusty. This TEES got me into some free refresher courses. I did plumbing, carpentry, welding and electricity. It was a lot of fun and I met a lot of good people. We did a full six months of training."*

After polishing up his old skills, George was put in contact with a landscaping consortium doing jobs across Malta, and he is now back in full-time employment. He works with a team of men who roam the Maltese landscape maintaining and repairing transport infrastructure such as central reservations on motorways, installing lighting and drainage systems, and generally keeping things tidy.

"I work outside and I get a lot of satisfaction in my job. We move from one end of the country to the other,"

"I work outside and I get a lot of satisfaction in my job. We move from one end of the country to the other," he boasts, keeping in mind that the entire EU Member State encompasses a modest 316 square kilometres of surface area.

In the evenings, George plays guitar in a local country rock band, another passion he's pursued since his early youth. Recognised by people in the street and in smart hotel lobbies, George is a bit of a local institution, and with a little help from his friends he's shown how a person in his later years can still make a difference.

"This programme gave me a chance to do something new," he says. *"I feel like I'm starting over, I'm back in the game."*





Entrepreneurship

Mentoring puts hovercraft on the right track



"I thought that setting up a business offering hovercraft rides was such a good idea that people would be running to visit us, but it wasn't true. Fortunately, the mentoring programme gave me the support I needed, because I learned about marketing, and without that the company wouldn't exist."

Peeter Tarmet lives in Saku, in the lush countryside outside the Estonian capital, Tallinn, and now runs the country's only leisure hovercraft entertainment. In 2007, he decided he no longer wanted to spend his life making furniture, as he had done since leaving university eight years earlier. *"I wanted to do something new. Before, I always worked alone, in a dusty room. I didn't see daylight very often and I needed a bit of fresh air,"* he explains. *"If you are by yourself, everything is your own responsibility, and if you are sick there is no business any more."*

Peeter hit upon his big idea while watching the Discovery Channel on TV. *"It showed small hovercraft that can travel on both land and water. I thought: 'We don't have that in Estonia.' I wanted to do something new."*

It was a bold step. Peeter and his wife Birgit have two young children, Ken, 12, and Kendra, 10. With each hovercraft costing €16,000, they had to take out a loan to cover the purchase. *"Up until then it was just talk, we weren't risking anything. But when we went to sign for the loan it was a break point. We had to take a decision and we couldn't go back."* With his business partner Kallmer Kallasmaa, Peeter invested in three small craft, and within months they had launched their rides, aimed at tourists and local people alike.

Questions and answers

But it was not all plain sailing. *"People didn't know about us,"* explains Peeter. *"With a new thing, it takes time."* He found he wasn't getting the clients he hoped for. *"We thought: what are we doing wrong? Why is it not working? There were lots of questions."*

To find the answers, Peeter turned to Enterprise Estonia's *Mentoring Programme*, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. Initially, he wanted to know more about leadership, financial management, and marketing. But a meeting

"Maybe I have discovered a new person in me who likes to talk. Each time I do a presentation it gets better."

with potential mentors convinced him that marketing was key. *"What's the point of being a better leader or managing money well if you can't sell anything?"* he points out.

His chosen mentor, Kadi Elmente, is a marketing expert in the town of Pärnu, and she showed him how to make presentations and choose the right outlets for publicity. *"Everybody offers you advertising, but it's not cheap, and if it doesn't work you are losing money,"* he explains. Before long, he had secured a deal with Estonia's biggest travel agency, Estravel.

"It was very good for me to get this education, because when I made furniture I didn't need any selling or marketing skills. I had more buyers than I needed." Indeed, Peeter feels he has found his vocation: visiting and making presentations to clients, promoting his new business. *"I am no longer working alone,"* he says with satisfaction. *"It's a new thing for me, and I like this job very much. I meet people and can communicate with them. Maybe I have discovered a new person in me who likes to talk. Each time I do a presentation it gets better."*

Plans for expansion

The partners plan to launch a website to attract international visitors, eventually offering their services in six languages: Estonian, English, French, German, Russian and Finnish. Some 25-35% of business currently comes from outside Estonia.

"In the future we have big plans," he announces. The next step is a bus specially fitted with sauna and catering services. The existing site already incorporates facilities for archery, and a seminar room. The aim is to provide an all-in package so that at the end of the day visitors have somewhere warm to relax, enjoy a sauna, a drink or a meal, and even get a ride home.

"We want to improve the quality of our services and make our clients comfortable, because if they are comfortable they will come back," Peeter explains. Eventually, he hopes to construct a permanent site offering conference and catering facilities and a range of leisure and entertainment activities. *"Without the specialised knowledge I gained through the mentoring programme,"* he muses, *"I don't think I would be where I am today."*

Generating green energy



The tiny 17th chapel at Lagness, near Chichester on the south coast of England, looks over rolling hills, wide pastures and distant horizons. It now houses four comfortable double bedrooms with en suite bathrooms. *Sandra Barnes-Keywood* and her husband Charles have lovingly restored the former ruin as the centrepiece of the bed and breakfast business they opened eight years ago.

Little did they know then that a training programme co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund would set Sandra on the road to becoming an award-winning pioneer in 'green tourism' and a recognised "*maker and shaker*" in promoting environmental business practices.

Sandra was born in west London. But she always loved the country life, and set her heart on moving to Chichester. This part of West Sussex is known as an area of outstanding natural beauty. The windswept river estuary at nearby Pagham harbour – a haven for wild birds – and the hills of the South Downs, are favourite destinations for ramblers and nature lovers.

With a Higher National Diploma (HND) qualification in hotel catering and management, Sandra bought a run-down public house and turned it into a restaurant. However, after the couple's daughter Jasmine was born 16 years ago, the long hours proved too hard to combine with childcare, and they sold up. "*When Jasmine was about eight I decided I really wanted to get back into the hospitality business,*" recalls Sandra, and a B&B seemed a flexible solution.

A story to tell

As a qualified restaurateur, she was sceptical about the value of further training. But then an outbreak of foot and mouth disease among cattle in the UK left many small, rural businesses struggling. With ESF support, Tourism South East launched its Rural Welcome scheme and in 2004 Sandra signed up. "*I was really surprised,*" she admits. "*I realised you never stop learning in life.*" It showed her that while she was already running the B&B on environmental lines, she wasn't getting the message across to her visitors, and that highlighting her green ideals could make a huge difference. "*I had a story to tell, but no-one was hearing it,*" she says.

The course gave Sandra the boost she needed. When Jasmine was born she had been quite ill, suffering from high blood pressure,

"That training changed my career. I never looked back. Now I have got the tools to do what I want to do and I feel confident."

and undergoing a caesarean birth without anaesthetic. Afterwards she spent three months in hospital recovering from post-traumatic stress, and gained a lot of weight. So getting back to running a business was a challenge. *"You lose confidence as a mum,"* she explains. *"But that training changed my career. I never looked back. Now I have got the tools to do what I want to do and I feel confident. I don't feel like that little housewife who gave up work. It has helped me to get my life back on track."*

"We are completely involved in the environment," continues Sandra. *"We believe that green tourism is a philosophy, not a product."* She grows her own fruit, to put in guests' rooms or make jams for breakfast. She buys organic produce from local farm shops, and makes her own natural cleaning materials. She encourages guests not to waste power or water, cutting the laundering of towels by 43%. All 'grey' wastewater is recycled for the garden. Solar panels heat the water, and 'light tubes' funnel daylight into windowless bathrooms.

Sandra also tries to *"give something back"* to the local community, by mentoring underachieving 16-year-olds and coaching local university students. Her Green Tourism Payback Scheme has raised money for cycle racks in Pagham Harbour, and to repair hides for bird-watchers. Charles now combines his blacksmith's business, creating wrought iron furniture and fittings, with environmental auditing, inspecting hotels around the country.

Independent testimony

Sandra's work has won her wide recognition. Old Chapel Forge has a gold rating from the Green Tourism Business Scheme, *the UK's leading sustainable tourism certification programme*. *"That gave me credibility, because I had been independently assessed. I became a business champion for the UK, helping others to get accredited. But I realised the advice on offer was outdated, so I wrote my own training programme."* Now, through her Green Training Company (<http://www.thegreentrainingcompany.co.uk/>) she assists regional departments and tourist organisations around Britain. Among a series of awards, Sandra and Charles won a Green Apple Award for architecture in 2006, for their environmentally friendly chapel renovation, Arun Business of the Year Award in 2007, and the Sussex Sustainable Business Award in 2007-8.

Sandra is now an enthusiastic advocate of training, and has taken further courses. Networking is just one of the benefits. *"You can get isolated in the B&B business,"* she points out. *"That's what's nice about going round the country and talking to people. You pick up tips from one another."* Last year the Old Chapel Forge notched up an 89% occupancy rate, compared with an average of 54% in the region generally.

"I have been on a long journey. When I first did green tourism here, most people thought it was really cranky. They were afraid they were just going to get muesli for breakfast or something!" she laughs, adding that market research shows visitors actually expect higher all-round standards from green accommodation.

Her guests clearly appreciate Sandra's philosophy. John and Eunice Yates from Gloucester in the west of England found the Old Chapel Forge on the internet. *"We thought: 'this is just us,'"* says Eunice. *"We haven't wanted for anything."*

"The Rural Welcome project was very successful," confirms Sue Gill, from Tourism South East. The organisers hoped to reach 485 small businesses, and ended up with 622. More than 350 participants went on to further training. *"It was something they needed,"* she concludes.



'Bee' is for business



Before he participated in a training course for budding business owners, *Normunds Zeps* was an unemployed mechanic with an interest in bees and a taste for honey. *"Bees fly and collect nectar within a three-kilometre radius,"* he explains. *"They need sufficient land, a clean environment and they need care."*

Normunds lives in a small flat in Kalupe in rural Latvia with his wife and two sons, but the farm is 76km away in a place called Grugules. *"My mother lives in that area now,"* he says. *"It's where my family got some land when the old collective farms were privatised."* Following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1990-91, Latvia decided to bring back the small family farm. Previously state-owned collective farms were divided into parcels and citizens received credits that could be used to purchase the land.

Normunds graduated from Viski agricultural college as a machinery mechanic. *"But life down here is a day-to-day struggle,"* he says, *"and it can be very difficult to find a decent job, even when you have qualifications. Most of the time, I just stayed home and took care of the boys while my wife went to work. But I was also passionate about my beekeeping. I would have called it a hobby, really, but then I thought maybe I could develop it into a business."*

More than a hobby

Showing real initiative, Normunds decided to take part in a project co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. *"I wanted to change my situation,"* he says. *"I knew I had to learn more about business. This programme was offering a free training course on how to run a small enterprise, so I decided to go for it."*

The ESF supports families with children who want to start businesses. In the Latvian Daugavpils district where Normunds lives, an area still struggling to overcome decades of Soviet rule, a project was launched to develop know-how in business and self-employment start-up. Course topics included developing and implementing a solid business plan.

"Basically, it was everything you need to know about starting a business," says Normunds, *"and it was all free, even the study materials. Once I'd finished the course, I registered myself as a small business owner and went back to work."*

"I start my day at around 6 am," he says, "I have a cup of coffee and a bite to eat and then it's an hour by car to my bees." Normunds moves cross-country, traversing some of the most beautiful landscape in southern Latvia. "This area is quite historic," he says. "There are a lot of tales to tell about this land."

Normunds looks after 28 bee 'families', following a routine that involves tending a wide swath of territory around the hives. *"I cut the grass while the bees are sleeping, and I generally look after the territory. I come here three days a week. The other two days I stay at home with my boys."*

A hive of activity

Apart from the honey-makers, the Zeps farm is a one-man bee-hive of activity. Normunds starts early and stays late. He is working to restore some historic buildings on the property, cutting timber for a new roof for a stone barn. He also raises vegetables for family and friends in temporary hothouses he built himself. His wife and kids drop by to lend a hand when possible, but he still works largely on his own.

"We use no chemicals here," he boasts. "The bees exploit several species of flowers in this area, moving from one to another across the day and across the seasons. We are delivering a very natural and healthy product."

Normunds now considers himself a fully fledged beekeeper, producing a tonne of high-grade honey per year, and he's working hard to expand his business. *"I've got a long way to go before calling myself a successful businessman," he admits. "Providing for my family is still a struggle, but the EU has given me a good start."*

"There is no question about it – when I started getting down to business I realised how useful the training course really was. Quite frankly, my life wasn't going anywhere, and this experience helped me to think in practical terms. Today we are still struggling, life remains hard, but we are making a real go of it. As far as I'm concerned, you have to keep moving forward. Has the training I received made a difference in my life? Yes, it's made a difference in all of our lives."

Staying safe, down on the farm



*"The farm is a marvellous place for kids. You have the machines and the animals, but these things also represent potential dangers." So says **Gaetane Anselme**, who runs a small farm with her family in the hamlet of Nevraumont in rural Belgium.*

Gaetane married into her husband's farm in 1986 and quickly learned the tricks of the trade. Working together, the Anselmes produce fresh milk and eggs and raise pigs. They also organise educational visits for children, offering them the opportunity to learn about farm life, and get involved in looking after the animals.

"We have a lot of animals," says Gaetane. "We have all kinds of fowl – chickens, ducks and geese, and we have the cows, the pigs... The kids love it and they learn a lot. We show children how a farm works. We also teach them horseback riding and they learn a little bit about the history of the area, about farming practices and rural heritage. It's really a full experience that we think brings them closer to their roots."

The Anselmes welcome children of all ages to their 'educational farm'. *"They come from the local area and from far-off cities like Brussels and Antwerp, and from different countries," says Gaetane. "We've worked with school kids and other groups, individuals, children with disabilities, and even future primary school teachers."*

Animals are unpredictable

Making sure everyone is safe is an obvious priority, she says, but working day-in and day-out in the same environment makes it easy to lose sight of potential risks. *"Our guests can stay for just one day or can spend several days. We have a variety of lodgings for our guests. Even families can join us. There is a lot to think about when you have people on the premises that might not be familiar with the farm environment. We have a lot of tools and machinery about, and the animals, though domesticated, can be unpredictable."*

Gaetane wanted to be sure she was doing everything possible to guarantee the safety of the children staying at the farm. *"We are all so used to the farm," she says, "I'm sure there are a lot of things I was not thinking about or noticing – potential dangers."* So, in July 2007,

"Today I really believe we are all safer: myself and my family, and the children and other visitors who stay with us."

she decided to ask for help. The *Preventagri* programme, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, sent a team of inspectors, free of charge, to cast a fresh eye over the farm, and suggest how best to avoid accidents.

Spotting hazards

Through *Preventagri*, the European Social Fund provides counselling and training aimed at minimising work-related safety and health risks. On demand, a team of inspectors comes to examine farm facilities, to check on security issues and draw attention to potential hazards. They can then inform farmers on the measures they need to take to prevent accidents. The project also offers safety-related conferences and training courses.

"The inspection team came and stayed for a full day," Gaetane explains. *"They really examined everything, things I wouldn't have thought of, like where you store tools, farm implements, buckets and even toys, or choosing the right animals for demonstrations."*

She says one of the kids' favourite activities is learning how to milk a cow. *"Our cows know us well and are relaxed and at ease when we're around, but some of them can get nervous with strangers and especially small children. The inspectors drew our attention to this kind of thing."*

"I would say this initiative has helped us to deliver the best service and the safest experience for our young guests," says Gaetane. *"Yes, I found it very helpful. Thanks to the programme, the way we see the farm environment has changed, and today I really believe we are all safer: myself and my family, and the children and other visitors who stay with us."*

A construction business needs firm foundations



"I worked hard to create my own business from nothing. However, when I almost lost everything, I realised I needed to make some big changes," says José Salmerón Guindos.

The 47-year-old heads a fast growing medium-sized business, Grupo Salmerón, specialising in metalworking and building products and services. As he eats breakfast by the swimming pool at his country villa, José looks every bit the successful businessman.

However, his path to success has not always been a smooth one. He grew up in the wildly beautiful region near Sierra Nevada. The son of small-scale farmers, his early life was hard. *"When I was a child, everything we had on our plate or in our house came from the land or the animals on it,"* he says, *"We didn't even have electricity until I was 15."*

Although his parents wanted him to continue with farming, José had other ideas. *"I saw that my parents did not evolve. I wanted to try a different way of living and earning money."* He left school at 14 with no formal qualifications. However, being hard working and adaptable, he turned his hand to many types of works – on the land, in the military, with animals and in construction. Eventually, he discovered he had an aptitude for metal work and learnt how to weld.

In 1983, with money borrowed from friends and relatives, he started his own factory making car trailers and building fixtures. Initially he operated from a tiny 20m² premises and, together with wife Concepción, ran all aspects of the business. However, in the early years progress was haphazard. *"We didn't really run it as a business. To tell the truth, we didn't even really know what a business was,"* remembers José. *"It was often hit or miss."* The business took over their lives as they adopted a hands-on role in all operations. *"I used to think I could do everything myself,"* he says.

Turning point

Then crisis hit. They lost their biggest client and the company was on the edge of bankruptcy. After having invested so much of himself in the business, José fell into a deep depression. *"For about one and a half years, activity in the business fell to virtually nothing,"* he says.

"I've learned that the most important thing in a business is the people. I'm really proud of the team we've built."

He went to see a psychologist and things began to turn around – both personally and professionally. The therapist suggested that business training could change how José ran the company and relieve the pressure. So he took a course for entrepreneurs co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund and run by EOI Business School. The course gives entrepreneurs counselling and training on how to improve their companies and expand their markets, by bringing in innovative practices and improved networking.

He was an enthusiastic learner. *"My initial course was supposed to be 500 hours. I think I must have done about 1000,"* he laughs. *"I used to chase my teachers down the hallways after classes asking questions."*

The training changed how he thought about business. *"I learned that it is not enough to be good at one job to run a company. You may be the best worker, but it doesn't mean you will be the best manager. You need training to lead a company,"* he says. José applied what he learned on the course to his business and transformed the way it operated, bringing in specialist staff and new processes. *"I was able to put into practice what I was learning,"* he says. *"I saw the results immediately."*

Transformation

The business has now diversified and is growing fast. In the last seven to eight years, the staff has doubled to over 70 full-time workers. Since 2005 there have been four divisions to the group – dealing with the manufacture of trailers and small decorative metal items; real estate and property management; larger scale engineering projects such as the frameworks for shopping centres or factories; and a distributor for aluminium items such as garage doors, frames or handrails.

Annual revenues of the company are now around €10 million and plans exist to double the factory in the next three years. However, he insists that money is not the main motivation. *"My main objective is doing things well and I hope that other companies can learn from my experiences and apply my methods."*

After his positive experiences José is now evangelical about training and it has become core to the company. Supporting the community and region where he has lived his whole life is another priority. *"We prefer to hire people from the local area. If they have basic training they can learn more in-house and become involved in the business."*

"I've learned that the most important thing in a business is the people. I'm really proud of the team we've built. Together we are prepared for the future ... whatever it brings," he says. *"I've got what I couldn't have dreamt about. I couldn't dream about it because I did not know it existed."*



Building a rural future



Fruit growing has been the mainstay of the rural parts of Drambovită County in eastern Romania for generations. The geographic features of the region – the soil, climate and rainfall – are ideal for this type of farming. However the economic conditions are not so favourable.

Many young people from the area are abandoning the country life and moving to cities and towns. But *Florin Istrate* is one local bucking this trend. He is proud of the region where he has lived all his life and is working hard to improve the situation for himself and others.

The son of small-scale fruit farmers, he learned how to work the land from a young age. *“Fruit growing has been the most important thing in this area for generations. It was natural for me to continue this work,”* says the 39-year-old. *“This is one of the few areas where fruit growing is still developing. We are bringing in new techniques and I want to be part of this development.”*

When he eventually took over his family’s farm, he bought more land and planted more orchards – mainly apples and some pear trees. *“We currently produce around 70 tonnes of apples per year,”* he says, adding that he wants to expand further in future.

But farming on its own is not enough to provide a living for him, his wife and 10-year-old son. He has used his knowledge and experience in the sector to become an agricultural insurance assessor. *“When insurance brokers sell policies to farmers, I check that everything is correct,”* he says. *“You need to have specialist knowledge of farming and local contacts.”*

Taking the initiative

Florin also plays a leading role in the regional and national farmers’ unions, and is Vice President of the national Romanian agricultural trade federation, AGROSTAR. He is involved in many activities which are trying to develop the regions and help small farmers create viable livelihoods for themselves. *“I want to convince people not to leave. I tell them how to develop their businesses,”* he says.

"This is one of the few areas where fruit growing is still developing. We are bringing in new techniques and I want to be part of this development."

"I'm working to gather together farmers who sell the same produce to work in co-operatives," he continues. "At the moment, our production is big but we don't have the right conditions to store and package fruit. I want to improve this."

In recent years, Florin has been visiting other areas in Europe. "We are running a project with partners from Galicia Region in Spain," he says. "We have seen how they run their businesses there and are organising training to spread this knowledge." Topics they look at are storage, packaging and negotiating with supermarkets. "I saw that our natural conditions are perhaps better than Spain, but we can't use them. We have problems with our infrastructure – for example the road networks," he explains.

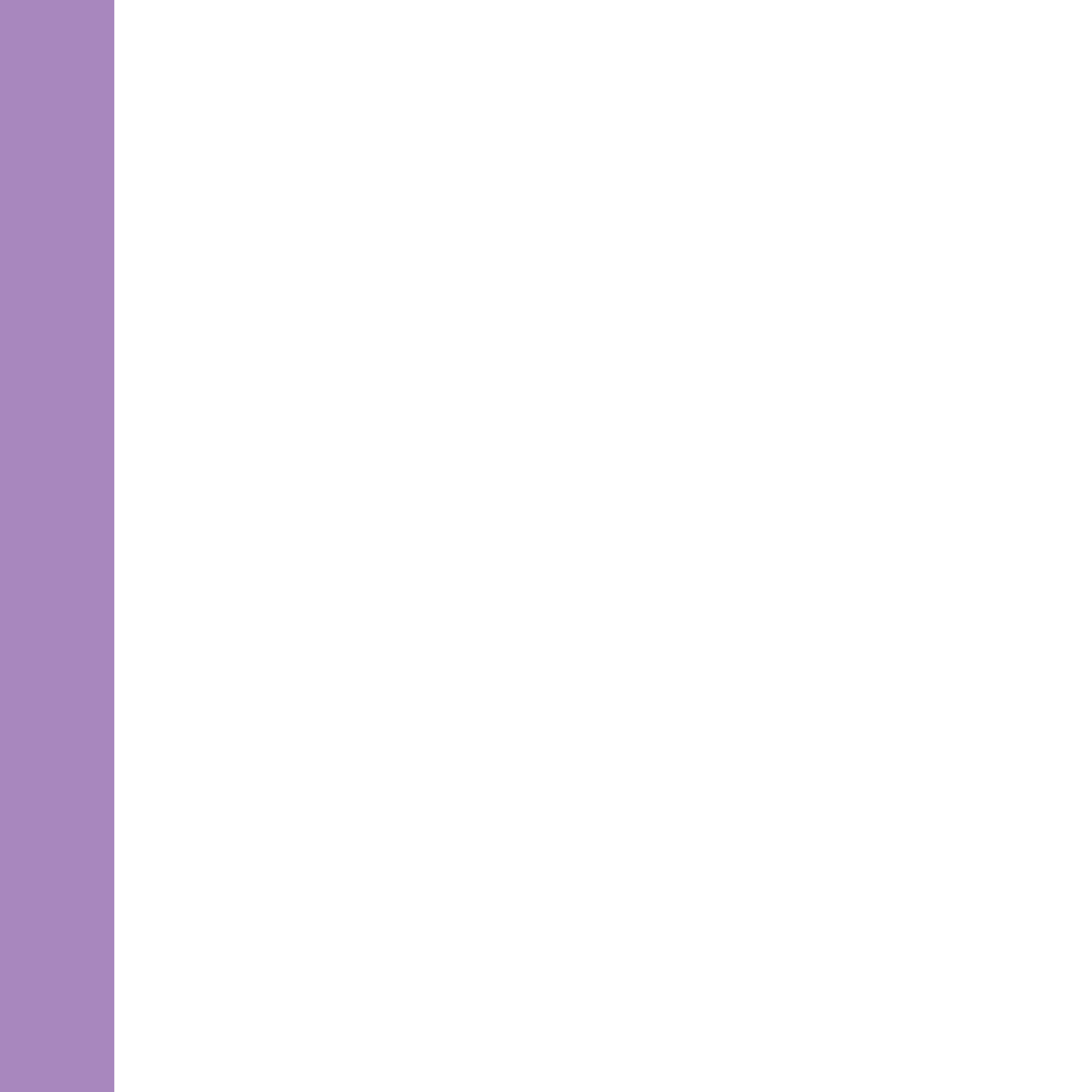
Training

In early 2009, he became the regional coordinator of a project to develop this rural area further. The initiative, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, provides training and information to the community. It aims to help people increase their incomes from farming and diversify into other sectors.

"The project helps farmers evolve from growing just for themselves towards selling their produce and building businesses," says Florin. Up to 750 farmers from four areas in Romania will attend various courses, over a three-year period. Modules focus on five topics:

- Developing artisan businesses;
- The transport and distribution of agricultural products;
- Hotels and development of rural tourism businesses;
- Developing hunting and fishing businesses;
- Developing services for social welfare.

Florin has high expectations that the hard work will pay off. "I'm hoping that in five years we will have a totally different situation here," he concludes. "It's my mission to help as many people as possible, to develop the area and its infrastructure."



New skills

A second chance, a new career



Marie Therese Vella has spent most of her adult life raising her two children in Iklin, a relatively modern village in the centre of Malta. As they grew up and went off to school, she had more time to spend on her long-standing passions of painting and photography, but she also wanted to be productive and earn some money. After years at home, she was not sure where to start.

"When I was younger, I worked as an assistant in a notary's office," she explains, "but I had to stop as the priority was my family at that time. Raising children is a wonderful and important experience. I have two great kids. My daughter will be finishing high school soon and my son is already studying design at the Art and Design Institute in Mosta. It has been a real joy being a parent, but as the kids got older and became more independent, I started to feel as if something was missing. I wanted to get out and back to work."

Back on board

The *Training and Employment Exposure Scheme* (TEES), co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, offered unemployed people aged over 40 throughout Malta a three-phase training programme, including work on core skills, aptitude and testing, life skills, specific intensive training sessions and work exposure to help them return to the workforce.

"I heard about TEES on TV, I think," says Marie Therese. "There was a really big campaign; it was on billboards and on the radio, it was all over the island."

The TEES courses included sessions aimed at giving participants new insights into their personal needs and motivations, why they wanted to work and what they wanted to do. *"Re-integration was an important concept for us during the training," says Marie Therese. "We had computer lessons and learned management skills and other related subjects, but it was the work with psychologists that really made you think. I realised I wanted to be part of the world again, to work with people and do some good for someone."*

"I realised I wanted to be part of the world again, to work with people and do some good for someone."

Sharing the load

TEES helped Marie Therese find an employer. *"After two months on the course, I started working with the Temi Zammit Foundation," she explains. "They paid half my salary while the other half was paid by the training scheme. After a further six months, TZF hired me as a fully fledged employee."*

Three years later, Marie Therese is still working for TZF, now as a senior executive, planning and implementing international projects aimed at helping people and boosting regional development. One of her recent projects involved gathering young people from Malta and across the EU for a 'European Youth Parliament' held in Venice.

"I enjoy my work tremendously," she says. "And I think there are also definite advantages for companies and organisations that want to hire older people: 'over-40s' like me. We have experience and judgement, and plenty of energy."

Adjustments and rewards

Marie Therese still spends time looking after her family, but her new responsibilities as a working mum mean that her kids have had to make some concessions. *"I am less available for my children now, but they're big and don't need me as much as they used to, and they know I'm working for them too."*

"I meet lots of people in my job. I work with international partners, deal with different projects from week to week, and I even get a chance to travel. I never thought I would be doing this kind of work, and it just wouldn't have happened without the TEES training programme and the European Social Fund."

Solving problems is simpler with a bit of support



"This is the ideal job for me, because I like working alone. I know what I have to do, and there is nobody giving me orders. I always try to do the work as well as I can, and I believe I have earned my colleagues' respect."

Andreas Apatzidis is full of warm enthusiasm and nervous energy. Relaxing in the Cyprus sunshine, he talks about his duties as a delivery driver for the baking and food retailing company Zorbas. *"When people ask me to help out or to do extra work I always do it. I have a good relationship with my superiors as well. Sometimes I am by myself all day, but I do my work and then go home, and that's how I like it. I couldn't stand to be shut up in the same place all day, every day."*

Andreas has come a long way. He moved to Larnaka in Cyprus in 1995, from his native Thessaloniki, in Greece. There, he had studied bookkeeping before completing three years' military service. When he left the army, he found it hard to settle into a suitable job even with his diploma. So when he read in a newspaper that Cyprus was recruiting volunteers for its own armed forces, he signed up for a five-year term.

In Cyprus, Andreas met his wife Helen – they married in 1999. She already had two daughters, Maria and Georgina, and the couple soon had two more children of their own, Giannis, 9, and Andrea, 4. After his army contract ended, he took a job with an energy company. But as the sole earner for a family of six, when he suddenly found himself out of work, times grew very tough indeed.

Family responsibilities

Andreas lost confidence in himself. *"My state of mind was very bad,"* he admits. *"I didn't even want to go for interviews. But then I heard about a programme for people with problems, supported by the European Union. I went to the social welfare services and told them I needed help. I had to provide for my family."* In July 2006, Andreas started the scheme for Vocational Training and Promotion of Public Assistance Recipients to Employment, co-funded through the European Social Fund. *"It was the best thing that ever happened to me,"* he says. *"My life changed totally."*

“Thanks to the programme I became much calmer. I no longer felt that everybody was against me, or talking about me behind my back. I felt socially accepted.”

The programme included a two-part training course: two weeks learning professional and problem-solving skills, followed by two weeks of information technology in Nicosia. *“The course was about knowing yourself better, and managing different situations in the workplace. At that time, the whole family was really stressed and nervous. But thanks to the programme I became much calmer. I learned how to behave better – I was not angry any more. I no longer felt that everybody was against me, or talking about me behind my back. I felt socially accepted.”*

It was a bit like going back to school, and he still has the books he studied. At the end of the course, the programme maintained his income while social workers helped him to apply for vacancies. The first job he looked at was on a factory production line, and Andreas knew it was not for him. *“When I told them I didn’t like it, they didn’t say I had to take it,”* he notes gratefully. Finally, in May 2007, he started at Zorbas, and has never looked back. He appreciates the independence his job offers, and the trust his employers place in him.

During the first year, he continued to receive both financial and moral support. For six months, staff from the programme, as well as the company personnel department, visited him regularly to see how he was getting on and find out if he had any problems. Both he and his employees filled in questionnaires on his progress.

Out and about

By now, Andreas knows the work well. He gets up at 4am every day to drive the ten minutes to the company premises. There, his first task is to load the prepared trolleys of food into his van and deliver them to shops between Larnaka and Nicosia. He is back at the factory by 8am to disinfect his vehicle and load up again with more dishes, for a second round of deliveries. He calls at the same shops to collect the empty trolleys, and then returns once more to base. The Nicosia traffic means he seldom gets back by noon, the end of his official working day, but this does not bother him. He sometimes stays on at work if there is more to do, and he says the overtime pay comes in useful for the family. He can also choose to work on a Sunday and take time off during the week, enabling him to avoid the heavy weekday traffic. His job gets him out and about, and he enjoys chatting with the shop assistants.

Andreas’ employers appreciate both his work and the programme that sent him. *“It’s a very good scheme, because there’s a contribution from the government,”* says Zorbas’ Human Resources Manager Zacharias Joannou. *“Employers need a motive to assist people.”*

At home, in the family’s compact, first-floor flat, Andreas embraces his wife and children. He checks to make sure that Giannis – who is eager to slip off to play football with his friends – has finished his school homework. *“It was very hard when Andreas was unemployed,”* reflects Helen. *“The course has helped him to know himself better, and he has changed. He no longer feels bad about himself. Anger is part of life, but now he knows how to deal with it.”*

“We know we are not alone,” she adds. *“There’s someone to help, even if we have a family problem – someone to talk to. Now we are doing really well. The programme was a miracle.”*



A good worker wins formal recognition



Zsolt Korcz loves to work. “I’m a workaholic,” he admits. Whether it’s decorating his apartment in vivid colours, looking after his young sons or doing the household chores, he needs to be active. Since he left school at 14, Zsolt has always worked hard. He comes from a large family in Zalaegerszeg, Hungary – one of 12 siblings – and his parents needed the income he and his three brothers could provide. “My father could not earn enough,” he explains.

Zsolt started as a carpenter’s apprentice, and went on to casual jobs in poultry and dairy farming. After his military service in 1994 he moved into the building trade, doing bricklaying and painting. “I have done so many jobs,” he notes. “I did whatever was available.”

In 2003, he and his partner Aniko set up home together, and the following year their first son David was born. That was when he began to worry about his income. “I had no qualifications, so although I was doing masonry, I was not being paid what I was worth, and I had no security,” he explains. As an unskilled labourer, he says he took home half of a skilled worker’s wage.

Back to school

Zsolt was already visiting the local job centre regularly in search of new contracts. It was there he heard about the First Hungarian-Danish Production School Foundation, established in Zalaegerszeg 15 years ago. At first he dismissed the idea of further studies, fearing he had forgotten how to learn, but Aniko persuaded him to take the plunge. In June 2006, he started a one-year, full-time course designed to help young unemployed and socially disadvantaged people to obtain a professional qualification, plus social and educational skills. Thirty-six participants received training in masonry, cooking, or as locksmiths, through a project co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. Targets for women and Roma ensured that 30% of the students were from Roma backgrounds. Thirty-five of them completed the course, and 31 got jobs at the end.

To his surprise, Zsolt found he enjoyed every moment. “I loved it, I never missed a day, and my work was very good. I was often better and faster than my colleagues because I had the experience. Learning social skills was also really useful. The teachers paid attention to me personally, and if I had any questions they answered them. They

"Now I can show that I am a qualified mason I am working a lot. I take pride in my work, and the certificate makes a real difference."

never said no." He passed his five final tests, covering health and safety as well as technical ability, with flying colours.

The Danish model

The pioneering school was set up in 1993 with backing from the Danish Ministry of Education. *"We get no state funding, but rely on local partners and European support,"* explains Project Manager Máté Molnár. Over the years it has helped some 1,500 young people to obtain qualifications in trades that are in demand. *"There are more and more young people without a proper education, and we help them to acquire the skills they need in society in general."*

Throughout the course, Zsolt was employed by the school and received the minimum wage. *"It would have been impossible otherwise,"* he admits. *"At first I thought I would have to work more to pay for it – but I could never have afforded it out of my own pocket."* The participants helped to rebuild and refurbish the buildings around the former primary school that houses the foundation, to serve as new classrooms.

Seasonal work

"Zsolt is a fantastic mason," says Máté. *"His performance is very high. The problem in the construction industry is that work stops in the winter and employers like to lay off staff. He is a victim of that approach, and we would like it to end. It's a real issue for families without financial resources."* The school offers advice on both job-seeking and obtaining benefits for the families of students.

Zsolt's partner is still on maternity leave from her cleaning and catering job in a large restaurant, looking after their second son: one-year-old Adam. *"It's not always easy to find nurseries, because there are not enough places,"* explains Aniko, who comes from a family of musical Roma and has relations who play in a gypsy orchestra. But as a skilled worker, Zsolt and his family gained the right to move into a bigger council flat when Adam was born. He was able to get an advance on his salary to secure the apartment.

He says he is really happy. *"It turned out very well. What I needed was the qualification, because otherwise I could not prove that I could do*

the job. Now I can show that I am a qualified mason I am working a lot. I take pride in my work – I just love it – and the certificate makes a real difference. I am never bored because we are always going to different places and doing different things. I have always worked – I never stayed at home. I love my profession, and it's always been my desire to get a qualification, get better jobs, and have a higher salary. I want to be able to look after my family. They come first."

"We were very happy that Zsolt got this opportunity," confirms Aniko. *"Receiving the letter from the foundation was a kind of miracle – it just shows miracles can happen!"*



Investment in a good night's sleep



*"I'm curious by nature. I like to work. Now I'm learning something new every day – learning how to resolve problems. It's very satisfying," says **Daniel Dellisse** with a smile. "I've been very lucky – but you have to want to work."*

Since 1987, Daniel has been employed by a company that makes and exports PVC products for the building industry, based in Roeselare in northern Belgium. Manufacturing goes on round the clock, and for 21 years he worked night shifts, first as a packer and then as a technician in the extrusion process: the moulding of plastics for window frames and doors. But about two years ago, the unnatural pattern of day-for-night began to take its toll, and Daniel started to find it more and more difficult to sleep.

A retraining programme co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund helped to restore peace to the Dellisse household.

"It was a big problem for me, and my doctor told me the best thing would be to start working during the day," Daniel recalls. *"He offered me sleeping pills, but I didn't want to start taking medicines."* He was not the only victim – the disturbance affected his family life as well. On Saturdays he had to recover the sleep lost on Friday night, so he was unable to enjoy the weekend with his wife Dina or indulge in the couple's passion for walking and hiking.

Jobs in short supply

Daniel has worked hard all his life. His father died when he was nine years old, leaving his mother with four boys to bring up. He left school at 14 to train as a carpenter. *"We had to put food on the table,"* he explains with resignation. He moved on to a series of jobs, including the production line of a leading car manufacturer, which he admits he didn't enjoy at all. After his marriage in 1979, the building firm he was working for went broke, and Daniel found himself unemployed.

"It was very difficult to find work," he remembers. So when the vacancy on the night shift at Deceuninck came up he was pleased to take it. *"It was the only interesting offer and I could start straighta-*

"I like to work. Now I'm learning something new every day – learning how to resolve problems. It's very satisfying."

way ... and the money was very welcome." By then the couple had a newborn daughter, Sarah, so with Dina working afternoons and Daniel sleeping in the mornings they were able to arrange their time conveniently to look after her.

But he noticed the change as he grew older. Following his doctor's advice, he approached his employers about switching shifts. But to do that, he had to show he could handle a new job requiring fresh training, because opportunities in other parts of the company were limited. *"It was years since I had used the machines, and now it's all automatic. The company said 'we have a place for you, but first you must update your skills.'"* Deceuninck put him on their *Excellent Learning* retraining programme run by the Flemish jobs service the *Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding (VDAB)*. *"It was a challenge, but it was also a pleasure for me to rediscover the machines,"* says Daniel.

The course enabled him to get a position in the company's research and training centre, testing PVC frames, teaching independent contractors how to mould and fit the doors and windows, and researching new techniques and materials. *"There are always new innovations coming along. The company has to innovate in order to expand, and that has always interested me. I like to do my work, and I have always trained to improve myself. It's not pleasant to go to work unwillingly,"* he points out. As part of a team of engineers, clerks and operators, he has helped to share his knowledge with visitors from other European branches.

Enjoying life

He started his new regime of day work in January 2008. *"It took me five months to start sleeping well,"* he remembers. *"At first I would wake up after three or four hours. My wife told me to stay in bed, but I couldn't do that. I would get up and watch the TV, and then by the afternoon I'd be really tired."* But by June he was getting six hours undisturbed sleep a night. *"It's changed my life completely,"* he declares. *"After all, the night is made for sleeping."*

Daniel works a regular 40-hour week, finishing earlier on a Friday afternoon. *"I have more time with my wife, and all my weekends are*

free. I really enjoy life more." He and Dina have joined a walking club and on Saturdays and Sundays they regularly cover 20 to 30km a day, following routes in Flanders and the Netherlands. Within six months of starting his day job, he and his wife had covered 900km, and his ambition now is to complete a 100km non-stop walk. He has polished up his old carpentry skills to renovate the bedrooms of his house. And as if all that weren't enough to keep one person busy, Daniel is also an avid rearer of chaffinches, painstakingly training his pet songbirds to repeat simple melodies and taking part in competitions where champion birds can complete up to 800 songs an hour.

And yet, although he is entitled to an extra day off work each month, Daniel says he seldom takes it. *"I have good colleagues, and the week passes so quickly that I don't think about taking time off."*



Career progression



*"I like my work," says **Biliana Filipova**, from Dupnitsa in Bulgaria. "I'm constantly on the move and every day is different."*

As a regional manager for a large chain of filling stations, the 33-year-old spends much of her time on the road, travelling between 19 filling stations. She has overall responsibility for the day-to-day running of the stations, with her duties ranging from managing personnel, to ensuring equipment is maintained and stock is ordered, to dealing with legal issues, and responding to emergencies such as floods.

Promoted to her current position in March 2008, she was previously managing a single station. *"There's a lot more responsibility," she says. "But I knew what the job involved as I used to cover for the regional manager before."*

She outlines the qualities that she needs in her role: *"I'm able to stay calm and react quickly – that's important. And I often have to deal with lots of things at the same time. I have to prioritise and be well-organised. It's a responsible job. I have to make decisions alone. It can cost a lot of money."* There are also crucial safety considerations, she adds: *"For example with the fuel delivery trucks, it is very important to follow the correct procedures. There are big potential dangers."*

Change of direction

Biliana originally studied industrial engineering, specialising in technologies for clothes production. After finishing her five-year Masters' course, she had her daughter, Joanna. *"I didn't work for three years after that," she says. "But I began to get sick of spending all my time at home. I'm a dynamic person who likes to be doing things. I get restless easily."*

She began to work in the textile sector, in a role related to her studies. *"I worked as a technologist in factories."* However, after a year and a half working for two different companies, she realised she wanted to do something different. *"Sometimes you need to change completely to find satisfaction. I needed a new challenge to get energised."*

She heard that there were opportunities working for Petrol, formerly a state-run network and still one of the largest chains of fuel stations in Bulgaria. She was offered an interview for a position in

“The training helped me a lot with the job, and also skills for life in general. I’m satisfied with what I have achieved here at the company.”

management, but instead she chose to go for a job as a cashier. *“I didn’t want to go for a management position straight away. I wanted to start at a lower level as I didn’t know anything about this business.”*

The move paid off. Starting to work for the company in 2002, she applied herself to the job and quickly worked her way up through the ranks. *“Starting as a cashier helped me a lot. Now I know the job from the inside. I know where managers can miss things.”*

Training for a new role

She took part in a series of intensive training sessions co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. The courses involved team-building, role playing, discussions and problem-solving exercises. They helped her develop the skills that she needs in her new role – whether dealing with people, making decisions, prioritising or coping with difficult situations.

“The training helped me a lot with the job, and also skills for life in general. It really made me think about how you go about finding solutions to a given problem,” she says. *“I’m satisfied with what I have achieved here at the company. I have worked my way up. A lot of people have recognised my work and I appreciate that.”*

Thinking of the future, Biliiana says: *“I’m not sure what I want exactly, but I know that I want to continue to improve and develop myself. First I need to prove myself in this role.”*

Back home, her life is just as busy. Renovating the family home with her husband is an on-going – and long-term – project. *“We started the renovations five years ago,”* she says. Starting on land next to her parents-in-law’s house, the couple have built their own home from scratch – though there is still a lot of work to do. *“We’ve built the second floor but we still have to do more work before we can live in it,”* she says, adding that a few years ago all three of them were living in one room while work was being done.

The rest of her time is spent looking after Joanna, who is now 10, and seeing her extended family. *“I have two younger sisters and a brother-in-law. We all live around here and we’re very close. All the families get together with our parents at weekends. My priorities are my family and my job. I work hard to ensure our security,”* she concludes.

Re-activating knowledge



Peter Meller and his wife Olga are settling into their new home in Magdeburg, in Saxony in the east of Germany, where Peter has recently started a job as a software programmer for a small engineering firm.

Although he originally studied and worked as a mechanical engineer in Romania where he grew up, he had not worked in the sector for 15 years when, in 2008, he began a work experience placement at the company where he now works full-time.

His whole family moved back to their roots in Germany in 1990 – his parents, brother and sister as well as his first wife and young son. *“We moved for financial reasons. It was really difficult to earn a living in Romania at that time. We had wanted to leave before but it was impossible.”* The situation changed with the collapse of the communist regime. *“At the time, all our family and friends were leaving,”* says the 48-year-old.

Victim of downturn

Arriving in Bergisch Gladbach near Cologne in Germany at the age of 29, he initially got a job with a small company as a mechanical engineer. However, the German engineering sector went into decline at around this time and by 1993 he was left on the unemployment line.

With little prospect of securing another position as an engineer, he decided that retraining would help boost his employment prospects. He took a computer course. *“Before that I had never really had much to do with computers,”* says Peter.

After that he began developing computer-based training, working on a freelance basis. *“It was completely different from my previous work,”* he says. *“I worked for a small company that developed courses for big companies to train their employees to use common software.”*

He did this for several years and eventually set up a company doing the same type of work with four other partners. However, after a while the orders dried up and he was back to working on a contract basis. He continued working like this from 2001 until 2007, but was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the

"Before, I had lots of knowledge and skills, but I didn't know how to tell people about them. It's fair to say the course changed my life."

irregular nature of the work. *"I would work on a project for three months and then have nothing for months,"* says Peter. *"I could not see any future in it."*

Around this time engineering began to pick up again in Germany and Peter thought there could be opportunities for him to get back into his old profession. However, when he applied for mechanical engineering jobs, he found his lack of recent experience a problem.

Building on knowledge

A training programme, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, helped him to refresh and build on his engineering knowledge and skills. His course was one of 18 AQUA (*Akademikerinnen und Akademiker Qualifizieren sich für den Arbeitsmarkt*) organised nationwide, each targeting a specific professional sector. Working with universities, the courses give already qualified people the chance to build on their knowledge and improve their job prospects.

Peter's course packed a full 10-semester degree programme in mechanical engineering into 10 months. *"It was amazing how much I'd forgotten, but I was also relieved that more recent graduates had also forgotten,"* he says. He also learned more about recent developments, especially the use of computers in engineering, which was hardly covered in his original studies.

In addition to academic learning, the course covered practical skills for getting jobs, such as personal presentation, body language and communication, applying for work, and preparing for interviews. Peter noticed a big improvement in his personal skills. *"I was able to go to an interview and answer the questions. I am now much more self-confident."*

A complex task

Peter was able to use his newly improved skills when he did a three-month placement at the firm where he now works. The company specialises in quality assurance processes for the car-making sector. *"I realised what I had learnt was crucial. I was asked very early on to do complex computer programming. They gave me a*

non-urgent task which they didn't think I would be able to do. When they saw that I could do it they were impressed."

At the end of his stint in October 2008, he was offered a permanent job. He now works as a software programmer for engineering machinery, a position that combines his engineering and computer skills.

"Before, I had lots of knowledge and skills, but I didn't know how to tell people about them," says Peter. *"It's fair to say the course changed my life. I feel much more secure now and look forward to the future."*





**Education
and training**

The value of tradition



Sibiu in Transylvania is a historic town. The waves of Romans, Turks, Huns and Saxons that swept through the area over the centuries have left a legacy that attracts culture-seekers from far and wide. But one person with a professional interest in the region is anthropologist [Monica Stroe](#).

"I'm studying the Saxon heritage of Southern Transylvania," says the 24-year-old. "I started my PhD six months ago."

Her work focuses on how the cultural and tourist industries tap into the area's rich and diverse history and traditions. *"I chose the Saxon areas for personal reasons," she says. "I was born and grew up in a town founded by the Saxons where many medieval aspects remain. But I have always thought that Sibiu has made more of its heritage."*

A meticulously restored medieval city centre is one of Sibiu's traditional showpieces. The city was the European Capital of Culture in 2007 and hosts many internationally renowned events. For Monica, this was an ideal time to develop a case study. *"I was interested to see how Sibiu developed its 'brand' and how this has affected surrounding areas."*

Her research covers a wider area in the Southern Transylvanian region. *"I'm really interested in the rural areas – how they are now promoting themselves as cultural destinations," she says. "Another important aspect is that there is an ethnic paradox here," she continues. "The mayor is German, yet only around 1.6% of the population are German origin – it's a phenomenon happening throughout the region."*

Time for academic research

Monica's PhD studies followed on from her Master's degree in nationalism studies and ethnic relations at the Central European University in Budapest. After qualifying, she knew she wanted to continue studying related topics. *"My Master's looked at the dynamics of ethnic groups, regional identities and conflicts," she says. "It made me more aware of the difference between ethnic groups. I'm interested as to how identities are constructed."*

"The grant really mattered to me. It gave me the chance to stay in my chosen field. I wouldn't have been able to start a PhD without it."

However, when she returned to Bucharest where she had originally studied, opportunities for academic research were scarce and underpaid. She was considering a change of direction: *"I was thinking of going into market research work. It would have been a compromise, but continuing to study was looking financially unviable."*

Help came through a scholarship, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. *"The grant really mattered to me. It gave me the chance to stay in my chosen field. I wouldn't have been able to start a PhD without it."*

She receives a monthly stipend to cover her living expenses during the three years of her studies. And it also enables her to spend eight months in foreign universities across the EU and gives access the libraries and materials essential to her work. *"Having that mobility is vital for my research,"* she says. *"It gives me the opportunity to travel. I can get access to important archives and get a wider perspective."*

As part of the programme, she will write articles for academic journals and work with professors. *"It gives me good experience and the support that I need to focus on long-term field research."* Looking to the future, she says: *"I'm hoping that the PhD will open up doors. I want to improve my research skills and consolidate my theoretical background. Ideally, I'd eventually like to work in community development. But it is early days, I'm concentrating on my research,"* she concludes.



Supporting creativity



"I've always been interested in creative activities," says [Harri Haanpää](#) from Helsinki in Finland. With a passion for drawing and photography, he decided early on that he wanted to work in the creative industries. "When I was a kid I wanted to be an illustrator. I started off drawing comics but then got interested in other types of drawing.

"At the age of nine, I decided that being a commercial illustrator was the only way I wanted to make a living," he adds.

Harri set his sights on a course in commercial illustration offered by a local college. However, by the time he was getting to the end of his school studies, the class had ended. *"After that, I changed direction a bit,"* he says. He went to nautical college at the age of 15 and then worked as a chef on commercial ships.

After three years, he decided that life at sea was not for him and he wanted to get back into something creative. In 1995, he took a course in film studies at college in Voionmaa. *"I got hooked on photography,"* says Harri. *"I was shooting everything that moved."*

Practical experience

Afterwards, he moved back to the Helsinki area and started working for a Finnish music channel. *"I started working non-stop. I did everything – lighting, camera, controls,"* he says. He was also working on music videos and began directing. *"I really liked it because I always wanted to learn more."*

This experience gained Harri a position in Los Angeles working on Hollywood Express, a TV show about music, films, popular culture and celebrities, and he spent a year and a half in the United States before returning to Europe. He took a European Masters in Multimedia and Audiovisual Business Administration (EMMABA), which involved studying in Athens, Greece, and then in Lapland back in Finland. "That programme taught me how to produce, and I met a lot of people from all over Europe."

In 2000, after completing the course, he set up his own production company, DreamMill. *"I always had the goal of starting my own company. It wasn't a question of if, but when,"* he says. He directs,

"I've realised that you can never have enough knowledge. This is a fast-moving sector and I need to be able to compete with new graduates."

produces and films TV shows, music videos, commercial films and mobile TV applications.

For Harri, the advantages of running his own business are clear. *"I love to create,"* he says. *"If you work for someone else, then often your hands are tied. Having my own company means I have more freedom to do what I want to do. I always want to do quality work. I like to see good quality television. It's good to get paid, but it's not the main point."*

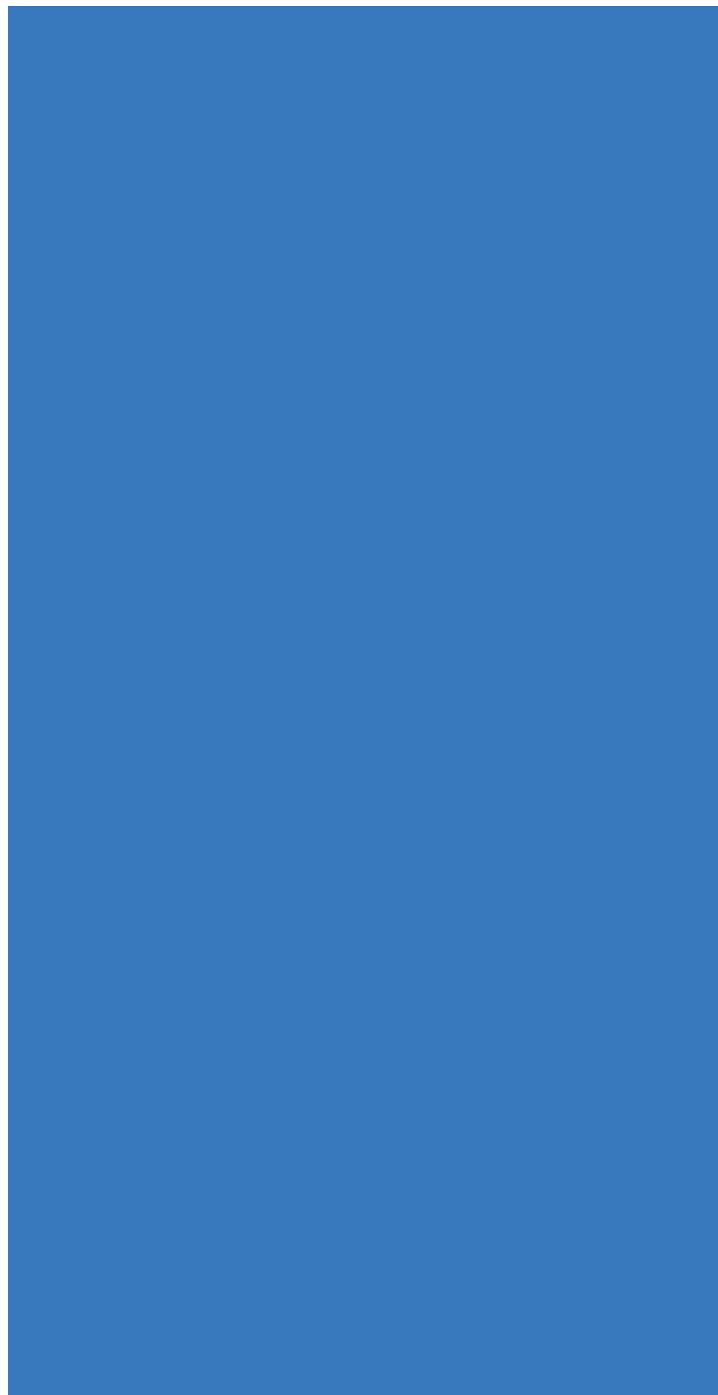
Continuous development

Harri is an enthusiastic advocate of education and training. *"I've realised that you can never have enough knowledge. This is a fast-moving sector and I need to be able to compete with new graduates. Experience doesn't count for much in this industry,"* he says.

From 2005 to 2006 he took a course of practical training for media entrepreneurs. The MEDA course, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, helped him to develop his skills and expand his business. *"I wanted a more theoretical point of view,"* says Harri. *"It was about running a business and how to produce."* Through the training he made new contacts, opening up greater opportunities for the company. *"I got a lot from the course. I learned not to reinvent the wheel and to concentrate on keeping things simple,"* he says.

For Harri, the course had direct relevance. *"It was great because I could immediately apply what I was learning and think how it could help my business."* Now he is keen to continue with his learning, the next step being a master's level degree. *"One day I want to be a teacher and spread my knowledge,"* he adds.

However, his overall goal remains clear. *"My motivation is simple: always to produce better and better work."*



Out of the woods



It is September in the countryside near Boelhe, a small village 40km from Porto in the north of Portugal. The sun is shining as *Maria Balbina Soares Melo Rocha* walks through lines of neatly ordered young trees, checking the condition of the trunks here, pruning a branch or two there.

Maria works her forests when not at her full-time job as the head of administration for a group of 18 schools in the area. *"I've always been really active," she says. "When I was a child I was involved in music, theatre, dance, church and sports."*

These days the 59-year-old has a very full schedule of activities outside her job: involvement in local politics, counselling children, chairing the local development agency, presiding over the board of the regional union for school clerks, and sitting on the committee of the local forest owners' association – in addition to being there for her two grown-up children and her husband.

Yet the forests and working on the land remain a treasured activity. Her parents had a farm and managed forests – a tradition she is keen to continue. Indicating the lush woodland around her, she says, *"My parents always taught me to appreciate and respect nature. I grew up in this environment, so I totally identify with the countryside."* After school, she studied chemical engineering at university in Porto. However, she returned before finishing her course. *"It wasn't what I wanted to do," she says. "I missed it here, so I came back."*

Inherited land

In 1973, Maria got a job as an administrative clerk at a school in the area and began working full time. *"I was attracted to working with youngsters, but I didn't see myself as a teacher. The other advantage was that it was close to my village, my parents and friends."*

However, when she inherited her parents' land in 1984 – around 18 hectares of farmland, and the same amount of forest – she found it difficult to combine with her other activities. The land lay untouched for nine years. *"It was in 'standby' mode. I didn't know how to manage it," she says. "I didn't have any time to devote to it and I couldn't find anyone else to do it. I didn't know how to handle the situation. The land grew wild."*

"Forests are a long term project. It's very important to keep the tradition going. I'm hoping to pass the same interest to my children."

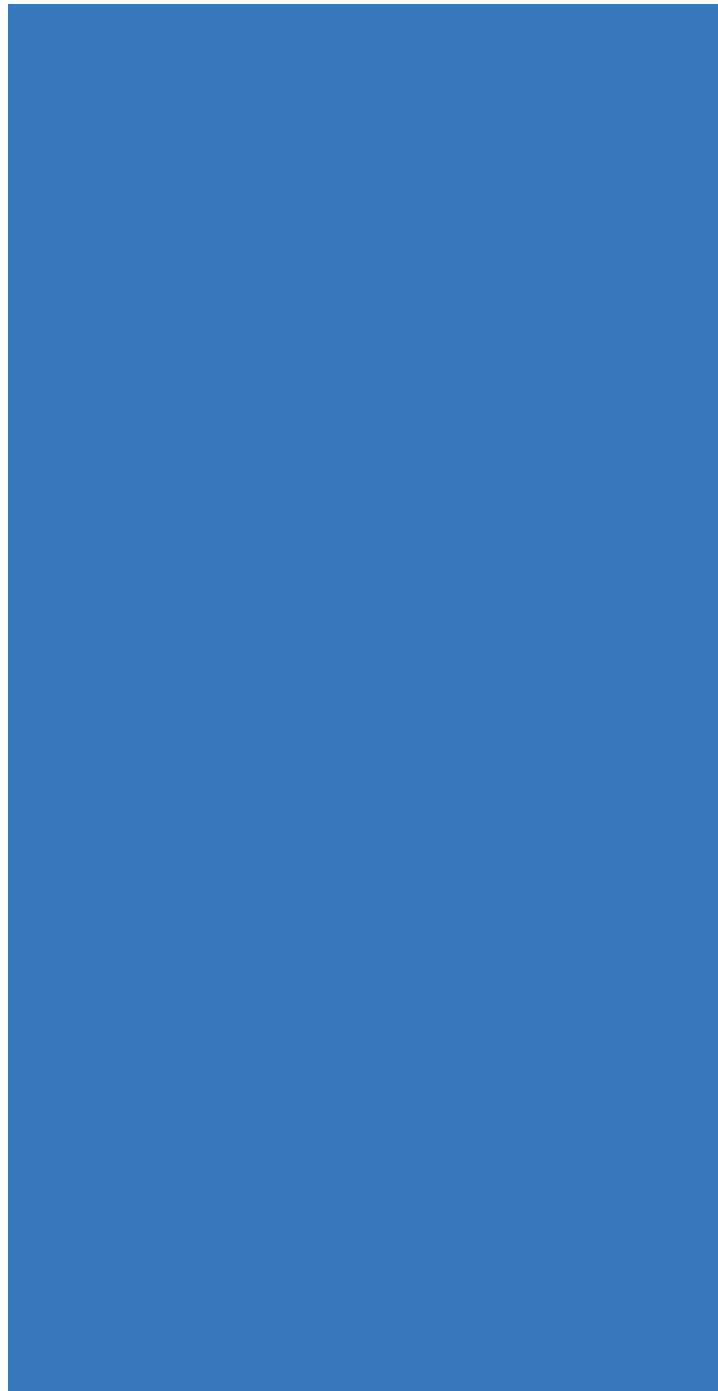
However, she was determined not to leave it abandoned. *"I was ashamed of the state it was in. I wanted to do something, so I began to contact other forest owners for advice."* By 1993, the forest owners in the region had formally created an association, with Maria as one of the founding members. *"There was much to gain in forming a group,"* she adds. *"And we found out that there were European Union funds available to develop and manage forests."*

Bringing owners together

The association helps owners to assess the quality of wood and its value, prepare applications for funding and implement joint projects, as well as providing training in forestry management. It also helps to consolidate owners' lands into larger plots, as they often hold several small areas. *"We set up exchanges between members, so that they can manage their land together,"* she says. *"Larger plots of land are more profitable, and easier to manage and protect from fires."*

Maria took a number of EU co-funded training courses between 1996 and 2008, in topics ranging from how to prune and plant trees, to the prevention and control of forest fires, and the marketing of forestry products. The courses gave her the knowledge she needed to take control of her land and begin to get it managed properly again. Through working together, association members have accessed EU funding to start projects in the area.

Maria herself has replanted her land with profitable varieties of trees and cleared out dead growth. *"Forests are a very long term project,"* she says. *"It's very important to keep the tradition going. I got a connection to the land from my parents and I'm hoping to pass the same interest to my children."*



A career in innovation



For as long as he can remember, all things mechanical have fascinated *Simone Rossi*. *“As a child I was always interested in cars, planes and technical things,”* says the 30-year-old from Montecastello di Vibio, a medieval town perched on one of the rolling hills of the Umbria region of Italy.

“I wanted to find out more about how machines really work,” he continues. After finishing high school, Simone chose to study mechanical engineering at the nearby University of Perugia, and his interest grew even deeper. *“I didn’t just study to pass the exams. I really wanted to know how things worked in depth,”* he says. *“I began to see how maths, physics and chemistry were the basis of everything and wanted to learn more about them.”*

When he graduated in 2005, he knew that he wanted to make a career in a related field. However, he found it difficult to find a suitable job. He was unemployed for a period; then did some work for an insurance company and took some other administrative positions in business. *“I knew I didn’t want to do those jobs in the long term. But it’s difficult to find engineering jobs, especially in this region,”* he says. *“Engineers are in demand, but not to do engineering.”*

An incentive for employers

Help came through a research grant scheme co-funded by his local region and the European Union’s Social Fund. The programme gives unemployed researchers grants to work on projects in businesses or research centres, gaining experience and improving their job prospects. The companies or other organisations involved benefit from research that they may not be able to justify commercially, and are given incentives to hire researchers at the end of the grant period.

For Simone, the scheme was crucial to his gaining a permanent job, as it enabled him to do an 18-month placement at the company where he now works full-time – the technology and innovation manufacturer Angelantoni (<http://www.angelantoni.it/>), which is based in the region.

“The scheme was really important for me because it helped me to continue researching, patent the product, experience life on the job and increase my employment possibilities,” he says. *“I found out*

about the grant by accident. I saw an advert looking for researchers but at first I thought it wasn't for me. I thought the grants were for people already working at universities or research centres. But I had nothing to lose, so I applied."

Solar energy

Simone was chosen out of many applicants and awarded the grant. It opened the door to the research placement at the company, looking into the potential for a new type of small-scale 'concentrated photovoltaic' system to harness the power from the sun to generate energy.

"When I started the research I didn't know much about photovoltaics," he says, "but it's a very exciting field, especially at the moment with the growing interest in renewable energies."

The development of photovoltaic systems started in the 1980s in the United States. *"But here in Italy, no one knew very much about them,"* says Simone. *"We were pretty much starting from scratch."* Working with other Italian research institutes and universities, he successfully developed an application with lower costs and increased efficiency compared to traditional solar photovoltaic processes.

The system concentrates energy from the sun using a lens and then splits the rays into different frequency ranges. *"The main advantage is that it has a much lower temperature than similar solutions. The cells don't overheat and that makes it much more efficient,"* he explains. The company has patented the invention and in autumn 2008 Simone was offered a permanent position to continue his work.

"When I first started it was a bit like I game. I was finding out about a new field and investigating things," he says. *"When the application was patented what I had achieved hit home. I was very proud."*

He warns that it is still *"very early days"* and that it may take several years before a finished product reaches the market. *"However, I really want to see it through to completion now. It's great being at the forefront of something like this."*

Aim high



The provincial city of Siauliai in northern Lithuania feels far removed from the heart of Europe, even from the country's own capital of Vilnius, but *Nedas Jurgaitis*, a language teacher at the local college, is intent on keeping up with the rest of the world.

"There are real positive changes taking place in our region," he says. "We are a long way from the centre of things here, but we have an excellent school system, a great college and a lot of very good students. The future looks bright."

Nedas' real love is comparative linguistics. After taking a Master's degree in the subject, he started teaching at Siauliai College, but with little research experience, his prospects of making a mark in the academic world looked remote.

That changed when he attended a series of special training courses, seminars and workshops, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. The *MOKOM* project (Developing scientific research competence) was aimed at training, enhancing qualifications and re-qualifying scientists and other researchers to meet today's market needs. Nedas heard about the programme from one of the administrators at the college and he and some of his fellow teachers were encouraged to participate.

Tapping in to Europe's strengths

During the *MOKOM* series, which ran from September 2005 until February 2008, Nedas and his colleagues met some of Europe's finest and most qualified researchers, scientists and university lecturers.

Course topics included 'new IT tools for research', 'team building', and 'communicating research results'. Practical work included developing new research methodologies and preparing state-of-the-art scientific presentations.

Nedas says he gained important insights into his work and the field of comparative linguistics. The experience gave him a fresh sense of confidence and motivation. *"I gained valuable experience by participating in this programme," he says. "It has had a positive impact on the way I teach, and, more fundamentally, on the way*

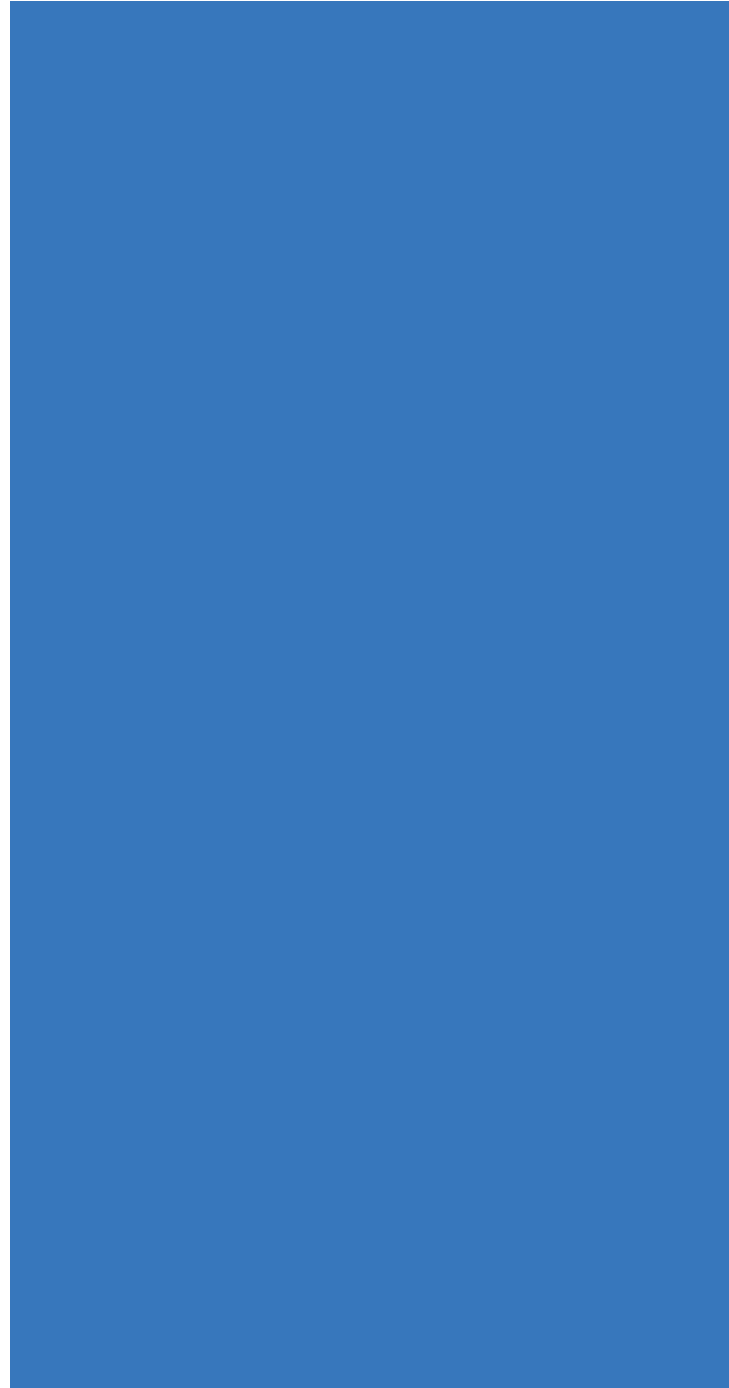
“This programme has had a positive impact on the way I teach, and, more fundamentally, on the way I think about education and research.”

I think about education and research.” With new self-assurance, Nedas says he is better equipped than ever to compete in the world of high-level academics.

New-found confidence

At just 28, Nedas already serves as Head of Siauliai College’s Department of International Relations. He has now decided to push ahead and is planning work on a PhD, hoping eventually to become a full professor. And with a brand new baby girl to look after, Nedas and his wife are indeed expecting better things to come.

“I wouldn’t say I completely lacked confidence before,” he says. “I was sure of myself and of my future, to an extent, but I didn’t have the knowledge and experience I needed to take the next step, to make that future a reality. Something was missing. Now I see the way forward and that includes new doors opening for myself and my family.”



Showing others the way forward



Mogens Lausen has an outgoing and engaging personality, but he wasn't always that way. Today a talented musician and actor, he had to overcome early timidity at school and in his personal life.

"I grew up in a small town in the north of Jutland," he explains. "I was a quiet kid and it was difficult for me to express myself, but I always loved music."

Mogens originally wanted to study music at Aarhus University, but music departments were being scaled back all over the country at that time. *"Becoming a professional musician was always going to be a struggle," he says. "The theatre presented other challenges and I thought it might be the thing for me, so I opted to enrol as a drama student."* The decision was a bold move indeed for someone with chronic shyness. Either way, the city of Aarhus was to play a major part in his future.

"This is an exciting and vibrant cultural centre," says Mogens. Aarhus is the second largest city and the principal port of Denmark, and it has seen a series of major public renovation projects in recent years, transforming its once crumbling inner city into a showpiece for local culture and commerce. With over 300,000 inhabitants, Aarhus claims the unofficial title 'Capital of Jutland'.

Building on valuable experience

"I did some professional acting here in the city when I finished college," says Mogens, *"and even a little directing. My work taught me an enormous amount about self-confidence, but life in the theatre is not easy and my wife and I did go through some difficult times."*

Mogens realised the way forward was to start his own business. He saw in himself the potential to help people with building confidence and perfecting their 'life performances'. He had developed his own coaching techniques over his years in the theatre, using his knowledge as an actor and performer to draw other actors out, find motivation and face difficult personal issues. These same techniques could be employed to help people in general, he realised, but he still needed help in turning his ideas into a viable career.

"The experience helped me to get a clear picture of where I want to go and how I want to get there. And that's what I teach others."

"I had some pretty clear notions about where I wanted to go," says Mogens, "but I was trying to start a company without any experience. Meanwhile, my wife was looking for support for a theatre group she heads, and this meant our financial situation was not very stable. I knew I needed real help to get my business started, and I needed to act quickly."

"Knowing who you are and why you want what you want can influence how well you do," says Mogens. "This is something I learned during the ESF course. The experience helped me to get a clear picture of where I want to go and how I want to get there. And that's what I teach others; I have now helped hundreds of people to move forward in their lives and careers. I would call that success."

More than rules and regulations

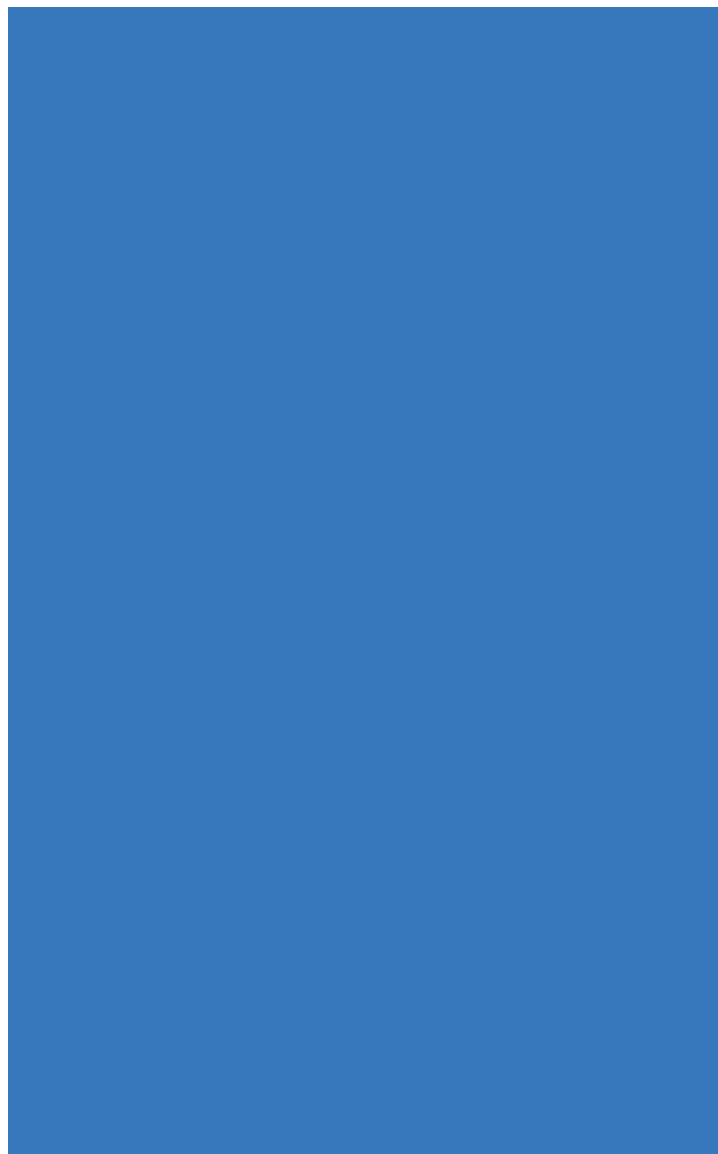
Help arrived for Mogens and his family in the form of a special training course for budding entrepreneurs, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. The course helped Mogens get his company off the ground. *"I received some very valuable information about how to get started. There are lots of administrative rules to follow, hoops to jump through,"* he says.

The training course, organised by the Centre for Entrepreneurship at Aarhus University, included concrete advice on navigating commercial rules and regulations, but it also required participants to examine their personal skills, motivations and expectations. *"Being familiar with the 'rules of the road' was a real help,"* says Mogens. *"I could not have started my business without it, but I also learned something about my individual strengths and weaknesses, my personality, and my potential as an independent entrepreneur."*

Towards success

Today, Mogens runs his own business in Aarhus. *Re-Act!* provides coaching and consulting to people who want to move forward in their careers, develop skills, work through business problems and vanquish personal demons.

Mogens' work takes him to companies and organisations in the city centre and surrounding countryside, and he also does coaching sessions at his home office. *"My clients come in all shapes and sizes,"* says Mogens. *"They can be people, individuals who want to make career moves, companies considering strategic restructuring, or organisations involved in tough negotiations with government authorities or other bodies."* All of these, he says, represent people with different personalities and traits, who need to express themselves and understand and interact with other people.





Social inclusion

Getting on the right track



A student at the University of Ljubljana, *Jana Urbanija* is enthusiastic about the future. The 26-year-old is reading geo-technologies and has set her sights on a career in the mining industry.

"I want to become an engineer," she says. "I want a job where I can work on large-scale projects in different countries around the world."

However, the path she followed has not always been smooth and a few years ago her future did not look so bright. Her teenage years growing up in the region near Lake Bled were turbulent. *"When I was growing up I had lots of problems," she says. "My father drank a lot and my parents divorced. I first ran away from home when I was six years old and I was depressed from the age of 12."*

She loved sport, but had to give up many activities due to problems with her knees – increasing her already growing sense of alienation. *"I didn't fit in and my life sucked."* Her search to find a place where she belonged led her to start experimenting with drugs. *"It started off as a social thing, at parties and clubs, but it got more serious."* She began taking ecstasy every day and her drug use soon escalated to harder drugs. *"I was taking up to five pills a day. I then started taking heroin to come down."*

She began stealing to fund her rapidly growing addiction and her behaviour estranged her from her friends. *"We were on a different wavelength. I didn't really care about anything. At school I became a loner and I started to search out druggy friends. In the end I was spending more time in bars than at school," she says.* Perhaps predictably, she failed in the last year of school and dropped out. *"And I was getting in more and more trouble with the police."*

Making a change

A programme of informal education co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund helped her to begin to change her life. The *Project Learning for Young Adults* (PLYA) programme is aimed at helping young people who do not complete their regular education to get into employment. It works through projects in arts and crafts, practical learning, life skills, personal development and counselling.

"On the course they treated me like an individual. There was a good atmosphere. Everybody supported each other, there was no competition and we were able to be ourselves."

For Jana, it helped her turn her life around. *"It was what I needed. I began to see I could live a different way."* She immediately noticed a positive difference compared with her previous educational experiences. *"At school they treat you like a number. But on the course they treated me like an individual. All the people there were in the same boat, they had all been pushed out of the regular system,"* she says. *"So there was a good atmosphere. Everybody supported each other, there was no competition and we were able to be ourselves."*

She attended the course for a year. However, she was still doing drugs, but at this point she began to realise that she wanted to get clean. *"I was becoming crazy,"* she says. *"I was scared that I would end up in a mental institute or die."*

She decided to go to a closed community in order to get off drugs and get her life back on track. *"It was very hard,"* she says. The community, organised by a catholic organisation based in Italy, was strict – no television, minimal contact with the outside world, few material comforts and a programme of hard physical work. *"It was worse than the army,"* says Jana.

But even harder than the physical work, says Jana, were the personal changes. *"You have to accept how you are and then work to improve yourself. You are given responsibility and you come out as a person. You get to see your faults,"* she explains. *"It was like a hell, but now I have good memories because the community is so pure. It's honest and you make great friendships. There are beautiful moments because the life there is so pure."*

After nearly three years, Jana felt ready to face the world again. She returned home in 2004. *"My old friends accepted me and that was a big help. I started studying again immediately. The worst thing [for a drug addict] is to be lonely and alone."* She retook her school exams and then did a further course to get onto the university course that she is now following.

Giving something back

Jana is philosophical about the past and realises she had a lucky escape. *"I'm really grateful for all the help I got and the people who were there for me,"* she says. *"I received a lot and I want to pay it back."*

She works night shifts at a centre for young people with drug and alcohol problems, using her experience to help others going through difficult times. She supervises the adolescents staying there and gives them advice when she can.

"I'd like to establish a community like the one I went to, but to help people suffering from depression," she says. *"But that's a long term aim. At the moment I'm just enjoying what I'm doing and looking forward to the future."*



New IT skills for a better future



"Like many people today, I use computers both for business and pleasure. Knowing how to get the most out of these technologies means a better life and a more promising future." So says **Christos Giannakopoulos**, a young man with a bright outlook, thanks in part to the European Social Fund.

Christos lost his parents at an early age and was moved, with his older brother, from Athens to a small orphanage on the outskirts of Chalkida. The institution, where he still lives, is housed on the grounds of an ancient cloister. Perched on a rocky coastline, a tiny church is surrounded by a huddle of small buildings, including classrooms and a playground, as well as a larger building housing dormitories, a large kitchen and common rooms for about ten orphans.

Overcoming harsh odds

"The setting was picturesque," Christos muses, eyeing the placid blue of the Gulf of Evia, *"but growing up without a mother and father was still tough."* Even so, the two boys managed to find their way. When the time came, Christos went off to do his national service.

Greece currently has universal compulsory military service for males, under which all men above 18 years of age serve for 12 months. During Christos' time in the army, his commanding officer suggested that he enrol on a free information technology training course. Christos jumped at the chance. The course, aimed at a broad group including disadvantaged individuals and members of the armed forces, was supported by the European Union through the ESF.

The aim of the training programme was to teach basic IT skills, to improve the 'digital literacy' of students and enhance their job market potential.

The project was run by Greece's ESF Actions Implementation Authority of the General Secretariat for the Management of European Funds – Ministry of Employment and Social Protection, in the framework of the Operational Programme *Information Society 2000-2006* – Ministry of Economy and Finance.

“Information technologies provide important tools in all sectors today, and participating in the training course was definitely a useful experience for me.”

The Management Organisation Unit (MOU) is a non-profit institution within the broader public sector that assists public authorities in the effective management of EU-funded programmes. The MOU reports to the Greek Minister of Economy and Finance.

The IT lessons, says Christos, helped him hone his previously rather modest computer skills, giving him a better understanding of the basics of word processing and spreadsheet applications and how to use the internet.

A practical use

Christos works with a computer on a daily basis, both at home and on the job. *“There’s so much to access on the internet,”* he says. *“I use it to communicate with my friends, and to get information on all kinds of subjects. And I can find out about new products and services, but I also use a computer at work.”*

He is employed full-time at a nearby home furnishings store. He spends part of his time helping customers on the showroom floor, but he also checks orders and updates stock and inventory databases on the office PC, and he makes deliveries when he feels like getting out for some fresh air.

“Having a free computer course has made a big difference in my life,” he affirms. *“I wouldn’t be where I am today without it.”* Christos says other students who were on the course with him have also done bigger and better things as a result of the skills they learned.

Eyeing the future

Christos sees his current job as an important stepping stone, where he has learned a lot about management and how to run a successful business. He hopes one day to start a business of his own, perhaps in partnership with his brother. *“We like to get together and throw ideas around,”* he says. *“We’re looking at maybe opening some kind of café or an internet bar. It’s going to happen one of these days, when the time is right.”*

“I come from an ancient country where we are proud of our history,” he adds. *“But we don’t have to live in the past; we can also look to the*

future. Information technologies provide important tools in all sectors today, and participating in the training course was definitely a useful experience for me.”



From the streets to the catwalk



*"I love Bologna, but it's been my ruin," says **Fiorella**, surveying the Italian city's world-renowned Piazza Maggiore. "And yet there's a kind of solidarity on the streets that you don't find anywhere else."*

Since she ran away from home as a teenager, Fiorella has had a tough and eventful existence. She spent several years in prison, followed by a long period of depression. For two years she lived rough, sleeping in parks and station waiting rooms. Now, at the age of 50, her life has finally settled down. She shares a flat of her own with her placid mongrel Alsatian dog, Alba, and has a stable relationship. She also manages an elegantly decorated vintage clothes shop – *Il Vestito* – in the centre of the city, where residents and tourists stroll through Bologna's famous arcades. The shop belongs to Piazza Grande, a local organisation set up in 1993 to support homeless people. With support from the European Union, through the European Social Fund, Piazza Grande arranged the dressmaking training that led Fiorella into work and restored her self-respect.

"Piazza Grande accepted me and gave me the space and time to recover, and I took all the opportunities they offered me," she says. "I have had lots of problems, but I have always kept my dignity and my values. In essence, I'm a worker."

Breaking free

Fiorella was born into a wealthy family, but rejected her background from an early age. *"My mother developed a tumour after I was born. She died when I was 13. It was a difficult story. I could have eaten off a golden platter, but I have always had a wish for freedom. I wanted to live my own life. My parents were splendid, and they wanted to spoil me. But at the time I just wasn't interested."*

"It's important to respect your family," she now believes. "They made mistakes with me, but it was because they had problems. And they were too rich."

Fiorella ran away from home to get married at 16. *"My father forbade my marriage, so we went to Rome to get permission from the Pope himself," she remembers. But the couple separated within a year. She soon fell in love again, this time with an American Indian. But a week after Fiorella discovered she was pregnant, he was*

"Piazza Grande accepted me and gave me the space and time to recover, and I took all the opportunities they offered me."

killed in a flying accident. She was about 18 when she gave birth to their son Michele, who was diagnosed with congenital heart disease and died in hospital after just six months.

"After my son's death, things got bad," admits Fiorella. For the next few years she travelled the world - Australia, Brazil, Thailand - always surviving on the margins of crime. When finally she was caught, it led to a lengthy prison term.

Yet, on her release, she was reunited with her father, and started work in his restaurant business as a cook. Then, one morning in 1992, when Fiorella took him his morning coffee, she found he was dead. He had suffered a massive heart attack. The tragedy plunged her into a deepening depression. Although she went on working at first, *"I wasn't living in reality,"* she says. Cutting herself off from other family members, she resorted to drug-taking. *"Heroin, cocaine, methadone ... I've tried everything."* As she fell into debt, she started stealing to feed herself and sustain her habit, until she finally ended up homeless.

Help where it is needed

Fiorella's first contact with Piazza Grande was in 2002. Originally launched to publish a newspaper to raise funds for homeless people, the organisation now involves social workers and 'street lawyers' (*avvocati di strada*) who go out into the city to provide practical help (food, clothing and blankets) and advice. It also employs some 20 people in its cleaning and decorating cooperative (*Fare Mondi*), bicycle workshop, and the clothing warehouse, which collects donations and distributes them to people in need. It runs a theatre group, and has expanded to organise training activities, offering more job opportunities to the poorest and most excluded people in Bologna, many of them immigrants and Roma. *"The aim is that everyone develops and does what they can,"* say organisers.

"Piazza Grande workers found me in the park," remembers Fiorella. *"I'm not really a street person, so I had decided to come off drugs. I did it alone, by myself. I learned to fight for myself when I was in my mother's womb, and I have a strong character - in prison they used to call me 'ice and fire' because of my pale eyes. I have seen too many things, so before being attacked, I attack myself. I'm hard, but I'm also passionate."*

The essential value of work

Piazza Grande offered the hope she needed. After several months in hospital with serious liver and kidney damage that could have been fatal, she was finally able to get accommodation of her own. *"Although I still had problems, Piazza Grande started to give me work,"* she continues. In 2004, she took the course in basic dress-making. *"When I was little, my babysitters were dressmakers. I used to watch them. It was always something I wanted to do myself."* A second training in 2006 taught her to identify vintage garments and transform them into fashion wear. Finally, in November 2007, *Il Vestito* opened its doors. Fiorella and her assistant Micaela Ugo- lini are responsible for the financial management of the business, selecting items for sale from the clothing donations, and running the shop, with the assistance of a small team of trained dressmakers who carry out alterations.

"I am happy with what I do now - although I could take on a little more. But Piazza Grande has invested in me and I can only thank them," reflects Fiorella. Some time ago, she was also reunited with her brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, after a long period of isolation.

On the streets, she lived with a group of homeless people who shared mutual respect and an unwritten rule that each one minded his or her own business. *"But I would never go back - absolutely not!"* she declares. *"I needed to get rid of my self-destructive instinct, but not the people I knew. It's important to stay positive. If you are positive you can help other people as well, and I try and give other people a hand, in my own way."*



A hand up, a chance for redemption



Allan McGinlay is not a bad person, but he faced hard times growing up on the tough streets of Glasgow. Moving in questionable circles, by the age of 18 he had made some mistakes and been caught up in doubtful activities. Eventually, his life began to revolve around drinking, causing trouble in local pubs and brawling in the streets. Time passed and he found himself falling into a dizzying cycle of unemployment, drug use and, finally, a jail sentence.

He got out of prison, more years passed, and a happy marriage provided some respite, giving Allan a sense of structure and belonging, but his bad luck wasn't over. Frustration set in when he lost another job. The downward spiral seemed unbreakable. He lost hope and became depressed.

Today he says, *"Sometimes people need a second chance in life, and I was lucky enough to get a second chance."*

Wisdom through experience

The *Life Coaching* project, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social fund, gave Allan his second chance. Its aim was to move former prisoners into gainful employment. Trainees, ex-offenders themselves, were taught how to provide advice and counselling to other ex-offenders returning to the Glasgow area after a period in prison.

The project helped Allan face his own demons and turn his life around. After completing the training, he was engaged by the Wise Group, and he now works full time at its office in Wishaw, Scotland, assisting other ex-offenders.

So, now, Allan is back in prison – but this time it's to help others: people like himself who have hit rock bottom and made bad choices. He meets with soon-to-be-released inmates and helps them return to life on the outside, find work and housing, get in touch with services, keeping their spirits up and their eyes on the straight-and-narrow.

The peer-support model, using former prisoners to aid other former prisoners, is seen as an effective way of establishing trust, strengthening service users' mental and emotional health, reducing self-harm and re-offending.

"Sometimes people need a second chance in life, and I was lucky enough to get a second chance."

Job satisfaction

"Some pretty rough cases come through our doors," Allan explains. "We see young people who are drug addicts, in bad condition, hopeless, even suicidal. It's tragic, it can be heartbreaking, but it gives us an enormous sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when we can help turn one of these kids around, help them find a place to live, and get a job."

Satisfaction and self-confidence are the keys to Allan's new-found success. The *Life Coaching* project, he says, has made all the difference in the world to him and his family, and today he can honestly say he is a happy man. *"If the programme hadn't come along, my life would have spiralled completely out of control. It's allowed me to become the man I should have been long ago."*



Communication for deaf people



Born deaf and dumb, *Mário Greško* was just an infant when his mother left him at an orphanage in rural Slovakia. It was only at the age of six, when he was moved to a school for deaf children, that his long journey to freedom and fulfilment could begin.

"I tell people I was born twice," he says. "The second time was when I was six years old. Before that, I had no clear thoughts. My memories of that time are almost non-existent, only vague impressions. I know I played with other children. I could see their mouths moving and I knew that this was significant, but I was confused and didn't understand what was happening. Almost nothing is left to me from those times."

Getting over a rough start

Being moved to a special school meant Mário could learn and begin to form clear and specific ideas. *"I learned to sign," he says, "and that's when I start to have memories."* Mário also learned to read lips, and how to read and write. *"I came to understand who and what I was," he says, "how I am different, and I could hope for something better."*

When the time came, he moved to Bratislava, where he began work as a tailor's apprentice. *"Part of the curriculum at the deaf school was learning a trade," Mário explains. "I did clothes making, so it was a logical thing to look in the tailoring sector. It was a start, but it wasn't what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. My real dream was to work in the automotive industry. It's simple, I just love cars."*

New hope

A friend told Mário about a special information technology training course for deaf people, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. The course, in the framework of the EQUAL programme, included information about new software tools and online services for the deaf.

"Deaf-mutes face specific problems related to language," says EQUAL project coordinator Milan Ručkay. "It isn't a simple question of translation. Written language is completely different conceptually"

"Knowing how to use a computer and the internet opened all kinds of doors for me."

when compared to signing. Reading and writing are symbolic acts: letters in a word correspond to sounds, words correspond to things, actions and concepts. We see letters and words and we hear them in our minds. But a deaf-mute hears no words." Ručkay says signing is more like describing something physically with your hands. *"It is its own language, with a particular syntax and grammar."*

During his training course, Mário learned about online services that are available to help non-hearing individuals, for example to better understand written information. Mário finally decided to invest in a laptop computer. *"It was the best thing I ever did,"* he says. *"Knowing how to use a computer and the internet opened all kinds of doors for me."*

Life in the fast lane

With new skills and a new sense of confidence, Mário began applying for jobs online, and he got one. He now works at the Brose company as an automobile assembly line operator. Brose is a longstanding manufacturer of components for the auto industry. Its Bratislava facility produces car door assemblies for the Volkswagen plant just a few kilometres away.

Mário is not the only deaf-mute on the Brose assembly line, explains Human Resources Manager Ediltrúda Makarová. *"We have an open policy towards people with disabilities. We have deaf people and we have hearing people who are fluent in sign language and can help with translation when necessary. The fact is that Mário is an excellent communicator, with or without words. We all manage to understand each other. He is an excellent and highly motivated worker, no different from anyone else on the floor."*

By any standard, Mário can be said to have overcome incredible odds, but he does not dwell on the past. At the age of 30, with a good job and a competitive salary, he is making a better life and a better future for himself. He says he would like to move into a nicer apartment and is on the lookout for a potential marriage partner. *"Only eligible females need apply!"*

"Things have really changed for me," he says. *"Learning to work with a computer was a great move. I'm glad I got the chance to do it."*

Smile, and say cheese!



Passengers alighting at the railway station in the southern Swedish town of Hässleholm pass by a smart grocery shop with an inviting assortment of cheeses displayed in the window. 'Anne-Lie's Ost & Delikatess', announces a cheerful sign. Inside, *Anne-Lie Thuveesson* smiles broadly as she greets customers and serves them from her range of specialist cheeses, fine teas and coffees, imported oils and biscuits and chocolate selections.

It is easy to see that the shop is Anne-Lie's pride and joy. "I designed it all myself, with some help from my sister and friends," she declares. The black-and-white chequerboard flooring, polished wooden shelves, rows of coloured tins – all testify to a perfectionist eye for aesthetic detail.

Conveniently, the shop is situated next to the apartment that Anne-Lie shares with her two daughters, 17-year-old Hanna and 16-year-old Amanda, and a grey cat named Fritz. "It was just luck that I found it – as if it was meant to be! This is my dream. I feel very satisfied with my life now," she says.

The 52-year-old divorcée opened the delicatessen in July 2008. It was a bold move, after five years off work on sick leave suffering from 'burn-out' and depression. And what made it possible, says Anne-Lie, was a health and rehabilitation project designed for unemployed women who previously worked in care services, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund.

Three decades of service

Anne-Lie left school at 16 and spent almost 30 years as a psychiatric care worker. She looked after recovering alcoholics and schizophrenic patients, before taking a job in Hässleholm's new hospital department for dementia sufferers. In 1991 she married, and in the following years Hanna and Amanda were born. But the marriage did not go as she had hoped. Her husband was unstable and aggressive, says Anne-Lie. She moved to a new post in the nearby town of Bjärnum and after a painful and difficult divorce in 1994 she dedicated the next eight years to her work and her daughters.

Then in 2002 the stress caught up with her. Working shifts and conflict with her manager added to the pressure. "It was too much," explains Anne-Lie. She started to suffer from dizzy spells, crying fits,

"I feel so happy now. I wish everyone could have the same opportunities I have had."

and became aggressive – shouting at her daughters. She took a month off work, but within a fortnight of returning was back on sick leave. *"I stayed in bed for two days without doing anything. Doctors in Sweden call it depression, but it was hard for me to accept that diagnosis – I had been working in psychiatric care for almost 30 years. I wasn't getting any support in my job, but it wasn't just that. It was a period of crisis in my life. I was very sick. I couldn't read a newspaper, for example, and I had to hold myself up while I was washing the dishes. I was crying and crying, and I felt very angry. For the first year on sick leave I did nothing: I sent the girls off to school and then I slept."*

Fortunately, Anne-Lie received lots of support from her family. She visited a councillor every two weeks, and was put on anti-depressants. *"I didn't want to take medication,"* she admits, *"but my doctor explained that my brain was not producing a chemical it needed. I still take small doses; opening the shop has been stressful."*

An offer she could not refuse

And then, after three years, came a letter offering her a place on the Sustainable Health programme. *"I didn't feel at all up to it,"* admits Anne-Lie. *"But I felt I couldn't turn it down, so I said OK."* The scheme was designed specifically for former female care workers on long-term sick leave, giving them the tailored skills and knowledge they needed to find a new role in the labour market. Seven local communities took part in selecting candidates from among their former social and health service employees.

"We didn't have a predetermined plan," says Coordinator Per Larsson. *"We worked with each person as an individual, finding out what they really wanted to do. I'm convinced that's why it went so well. As it developed, we saw it was such a good project that it should not exclude men, although the majority of people in these jobs are women."* From 2005 to 2007, it helped 200 people with a wide range of conditions both physical and psychological. *"Our initial, ambitious goal was to get 70% back into work or studying,"* says Per Larsson. *"Our final figure was 69% – it was fantastic. Even if just one person had been successful it would have been worthwhile! It shows that people do have the power inside if they get the chance to develop it."*

Per has since launched a new rehabilitation project. And one of the participants, Berith Eriksson, is now working in Anne-Lie's

delicatessen. She spent 23 years in healthcare before starting the retraining. *"It's a very nice shop,"* she remarks. *"We have been good friends, so I hope I get the chance to stay."*

"It's really a fun story," adds Per. *"Anne-Lie has done well and started a business, and now she is helping someone else in the same situation."*

Time heals

Anne-Lie is grateful that she was given the time to put her life back together. *"Not everyone understands,"* she explains. *"There's a tendency to rush people. But thanks to the support from the EU, the project leaders could take their time. That's why I'm here today, and feeling well."* Her strong religious faith also helped her through the dark days. She used to play guitar in the local Sunday school. *"I said to God, I put all this in your hands. And it all worked out."*

Starting with very small steps – one thing at a time – she put together her business plan. *"Even before I was ill I was thinking about cheese,"* smiles Anne-Lie. *"It's an idea I've had for a very long time."* Raising half the capital from an organisation that supports small entrepreneurs, she was able to secure an additional loan from her local bank. For over a year she worked in another cheese shop in the town of Kristianstad, learning the ropes from owner Tom Persson. He helped her set up a network of suppliers and make contacts.

The shop is already turning a profit. *"In the weeks before Christmas there were five people working here,"* says Anne-Lie proudly. Train passengers stop to buy a piece of cheese for the journey or to take home. *"I get new customers every day. This is the only delicatessen in town, and you have to travel a long way to find similar products elsewhere. I wanted to create a nice place where customers feel welcome, and that's how it is."*

"I feel so happy now, and I enjoy being my own boss," says Anne-Lie. *"I have lots of friends who have been in the same position as me. I wish everyone could have the same opportunities I have had. The project had helped me so much I would like everyone in Sweden to know more about it."*



**Fighting
discrimination**

Estonian integration project opens doors



"The training programme made people think for themselves, rather than looking for others to help them," says Messurme Pissareva. "It didn't tell us what to do, but made us examine what direction we would like to take. It wasn't difficult for me to learn, because I wanted to know it all. Now I want to learn more!"

Petite and dynamic, smartly dressed in a tailored trouser suit, Messurme is managing director of a real estate company Ida-Virumaa Kinnisvara in Jõhvi, northern Estonia. But before she embarked in 2004 on a training programme for the integration of non-Estonians, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, her life was very different. She was unemployed, isolated and frustrated.

Messurme grew up in Dagestan in the Soviet Union, in a mountain village by the Caspian Sea, where her family kept a vineyard. She spoke the local Lesgin language, which has a Cyrillic alphabet and incorporates elements of both Russian and Turkish.

Twenty years ago she moved to Estonia. Her older brother had arrived in the country as a soldier with the Soviet army, when the Baltic States were still part of the USSR. After military service he decided to stay on and settle in the region, enabling Messurme – then aged 17 – to join him and go to school in Jõhvi. *"He said it was a different kind of civilisation,"* she remembers. *"Initially I intended to go back to Dagestan after my education finished, but then I met my husband."*

So instead she got a job in a local chemicals plant in Jõhvi where her engineer husband now works for a machinery manufacturer. She signed up for an evening course in Tallinn studying mechanics and construction, undeterred by making an unusual choice for a young woman at that time. But the job was hard, with long, tiring shifts, and when her second and third sons were born she took maternity leave and then stayed on at home to look after them.

After six years confined at home with the family, she began to feel increasingly excluded and under-qualified. *"It was hard financially because we had only one income, but I didn't know what to do to fit back into the labour market after being out of it for so long."*

“Psychologically, the project taught me that I could do anything. Whatever I want, it’s possible if I put my mind to it.”

Language problem

Besides a lack of confidence, her main problem was linguistic. Messurme had studied in Russian. About one-quarter of Estonia’s population is of Russian origin, and Jõhvi, which is near the border, has many Russian speakers. At school in Dagestan she secured good grades in the language, but finding herself among native speakers she realised she was far from fluent, and she knew no Estonian at all. *“If you don’t speak the local language it’s much harder to communicate, whereas the more languages you know, the more the world is open to you,”* she believes.

The local employment office referred her to the ESF co-funded project, run by the Ontika Training Centre. It offered not only a chance to learn the language, but also to get to know Estonian history and culture, as well as social skills such as writing a CV, applying for jobs, and interview techniques. Through discussions, video presentations and excursions, with experts ranging from lawyers to psychologists, Messurme gradually recovered her self-esteem.

After three months or so, she found a job in a bookstore, where she was later promoted to manager. *“My goal was to acquire the skills to go further,”* she says, so she started more courses to upgrade her abilities, and moved into the real estate business. Once her Estonian is perfected she plans to apply for a law degree at Tartu or Tallinn University. *“I feel I need more knowledge,”* she declares enthusiastically.

Jõhvi is very different from Dagestan. Although Messurme misses the good wine from her father’s vineyards, she reveals that she learned to drink coffee in Estonia. Now her daily routine starts with a quiet cup of coffee in her kitchen after the three boys, 15-year-old Vladimir, Jeugeni, 8, and Renat, 7, have left for school. She begins work in her nearby office at 10am, and as head of the company her tasks include carrying out administration at her computer, liaising with clients, and showing them round the houses and apartments on her books. Her responsibilities are not limited to selling property. In Kivioli, 30 kilometres outside Jõhvi, for example, her agency works with a building firm converting a traditional stone apartment block into 44 flats, plus rooms for people who come to Kivioli to work in the thriving garment factory.

No fear of the future

Messurme feared that when she quit her job she would never get another one. But the project changed that. It taught her to look forward without being afraid of the future. When she arrived in Jõhvi she knew only her brother, but now she has a wide circle of friends.

The most important thing she gained was self-confidence. *“Psychologically, the project taught me that I could do anything – that I’m not a pushover. Whatever I want, it’s possible if I put my mind to it. I needed a shove to get out of the situation I was in, and on the project we were told: ‘You can do it!’ I knew I would get a job afterwards because it gave us a good feeling about ourselves.”*

“If you want to achieve something you have to work hard,” confirms project coordinator Eha Korkus. *“Messurme is one of the best examples. It was a wonderful group of people. We were told that if 30% got jobs it would be a good result, but in the end 60% were integrated. The results were unexpected and we were very happy. Now we are running another project, because workplaces are waiting for people.”*

Eha also believes the teachers gained as much as the students. *“Not all Estonians are fond of Russians,”* she explains. *“We had to change ourselves – not everyone can do it.”*



Getting into the workforce



Originally from Cameroon, *Serge Mbami* moved to Ireland in 2001. *“Back home life is hard and it is difficult to make a decent living,”* he says. *“I was looking for better life opportunities.”*

However, at first he found he was unable to get work. *“It was hard for me to find a job,”* says the 38-year-old. *“It was frustrating. I was doing volunteer work teaching children, but it was not paid.”* To provide for himself and his young son, Ryan, he depended on government support. *“I wanted to do more,”* he says. *“I decided I needed some training to boost my chances.”*

In 2003, he began studying for a diploma in logistics and supply chain management at the Irish Institute of Purchasing and Materials Management. *“I had some experience in this area before and I knew it was the type of work that suited me,”* he says. *“I’m a natural multi-tasker, I speak languages and I am good under pressure.”*

The three-year course covered logistics, warehousing, procurement and supply chain management. However, he still found it difficult to get employment when his studies were finished. *“Even with the diploma I couldn’t find a job because I had no relevant work experience. In Ireland it is very important.”*

Work placement

Then he heard about the FÁS (Ireland’s National Training and Employment Authority) traineeship in supply chain logistics administration. *“It was absolutely what I was looking for,”* says Serge. The course, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, consists of 22 weeks of classroom-based study followed by work placements in businesses.

Serge gained a recognised vocational qualification – the level 6 FETAC Advanced Certificate in Supply Chain Logistics – and, more importantly, did a 16-week placement at SerCom Solutions, a DCC-Subsidiary company in Limerick specialising in integrated worldwide procurement, logistics, storage and distribution of electronic, telecommunication and durable goods. The business acts as a global Sourcing and Supply Chain Management (SCM) partner to many of the world’s leading technology and telecommunications firms, as well as distributors and retailers.

"I can send money back home and that's a big help for them over there. I feel more secure and I can relax without worrying about what the future will bring."

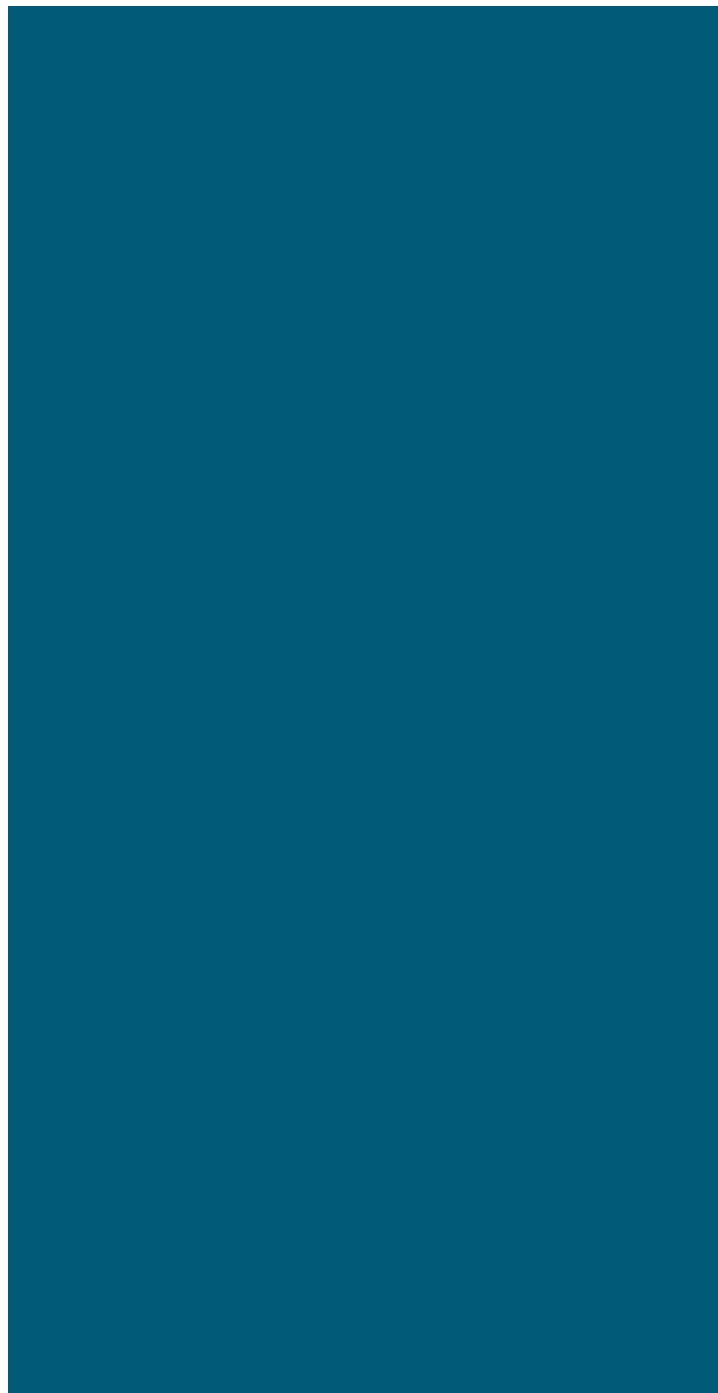
After completing the training, he was offered a permanent position in the company. *"I had started some projects on my placement, implementing a new contract with a US-company that wanted to move into Ireland and Europe. The company offered me a position to continue the work."*

His job now involves all aspects of logistics from licensing, to shipping, to production, to storage and final delivery. *"I'm having worldwide experience,"* he explains. *"I deal with customers from countries in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. I really like working in this company. It's great to work as part of a team."*

Getting regular employment has made a huge difference, says Serge, improving his quality of life greatly. The increased security means that he does not have to worry about providing for his son, and can assist his family back in Cameroon. *"I can send money back home and that's a big help for them over there. I feel more secure and I can relax without worrying about what the future will bring,"* he adds.

"I'm enjoying life in Ireland now. It's a very welcoming country," he points out. *"The Irish are very entertaining people. You can never sit next to an Irish person and not have a chat. Although it is very rainy,"* he laughs.

In his spare time he likes to stay healthy, going to the gym and jogging. *"I love to watch football,"* he says, *"I'm a big supporter of Arsenal."* However, Serge says he is not content to rest on his laurels, and will keep on studying business. *"I always want to achieve more. I want to make my son proud."*



Room at the top



"I love my job because it gives me stability and the opportunity to learn new things," says [Amparo Navaja Maldonado](#), from Seville, Spain.

Speaking in the lobby of the upmarket hotel where she works, the 30-year-old appears positive and contented. However, not so long ago she was in a different situation. Having left school at the end of compulsory education with few qualifications, the only employment she could find was irregular work, cleaning offices. *"My life was stuck in a rut," she says. "I didn't really have anything stable – just cleaning jobs from time to time. I would get a two-month contract here, or a few days' work there, but there were long periods when I was unemployed."*

Amparo grew up in a large family of Roma origin. Her parents made their living travelling from market to market selling fruit – a life that she saw was difficult, with little certainty. When she and her husband, Juan Manuel Gallego, had their first baby, Marco, just over five years ago, she began to realise that she wanted more security for her own family. *"I wanted to do something different and change my situation," she says, "I wanted a career and to be able to support myself and my children."*

With no fixed income coming in, the young family stayed at her parents' house along with her four brothers – meaning conditions were cramped. *"It was tough. I was living with my parents with a young baby and my husband," she says, "There was no privacy and it really put a strain on our relationship."*

Tailored support

Help came when she found out about the ACCEDER training course through a local employment centre. The course, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, aims to fight discrimination against the Roma communities and help individuals gain the training and education that they need to get permanent employment. It has been operating since 2000 and in its first six years helped more than 30,000 individuals to get employment contracts throughout Spain.

The course enables people to obtain the skills and experience they need to access job opportunities, through flexible training programmes. Courses combine the practical and theoretical and

"My life has changed dramatically, because now I am on the payroll. I was able to get a mortgage."

are tailored to the needs of individuals. Amparo trained as a chambermaid and undertook work experience in a hotel in Seville. *"The course gave me an extra qualification to help get jobs,"* she says.

But more importantly, she continues, the training increased her self-esteem and confidence. *"I saw that I had more options. It opened many doors."*

Supervisory job

Soon after finishing the course in 2004, she gained a job as a hotel chambermaid with a fixed contract. Four years later, she switched to a position at one of the biggest hotels in the city where she has a permanent contract and has been promoted to a supervisory role.

She is now in charge of a small team of chambermaids, assigning work rotas and ensuring that standards are kept up. Amparo says that one of the things she appreciates most about her job is the colleagues she works with: *"It's great to work as part of a professional team."*

At a personal level, the stability of her position at the hotel has enabled the young couple to buy their own home. With the latest addition to the family, baby Adrian, arriving in early 2008, the upturn in their fortunes has come just in time. *"My life has changed dramatically, because now I am on the payroll. I was able to get a mortgage,"* says Amparo. *"We now have our own home and car and I feel financially secure."*

Standing on his own two feet



When *Abshir Abukar* started working in one of the largest garden centres in Sweden, he did not know much about plants or tools and he was even allergic to pollen. But he learned quickly and now has a varied role that involves managing stock, helping customers and working in a team. In fact, it has proved a great role for the 25-year-old.

Abshir was 17 when his family moved to Malmö in Sweden from Ethiopia in 2002. As a sociable and lively individual, he wanted to get fully involved in life in his newly adopted country. However, he found it difficult at first. *"It was a real culture shock,"* he says. *"Everything was different from what I had imagined and I felt like an outsider. A lot of things were confusing."*

He initially went to a language school to learn Swedish and his father, a teacher who had moved to Sweden five years before the rest of the family, wanted him to continue with his studies. *"But I didn't want to. I would have had to start the education system from the beginning,"* says Abshir. *"It caused tension between us."* The clash of cultures between his family's strict Muslim background and the more liberal society Abshir was trying to become part of only added to this tension.

He wanted to be independent and stand on his own two feet, *"But I didn't know how to get a job or anything like that,"* he says. He picked up some casual work cleaning and was a care assistant for handicapped children. *"I did that for two and a half years part-time, but I wasn't earning enough money,"* he recalls.

Not having any stable work, he could not afford to move out and get a place of his own. *"I was still supported by my parents."* And with 10 younger brothers and sisters, life back home was crowded. *"I also got a girlfriend at this time and I wanted more space,"* he says. At one stage, he even resorted to sleeping in the store cupboard of his mother's shop.

Learning valuable skills

A programme for young people, *New City*, helped him change his life. Run by a local community organisation, *Drömmarnas Hus*, and co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, the project provides advice, training, cultural and self-development activities for people who are not fully integrated into society.

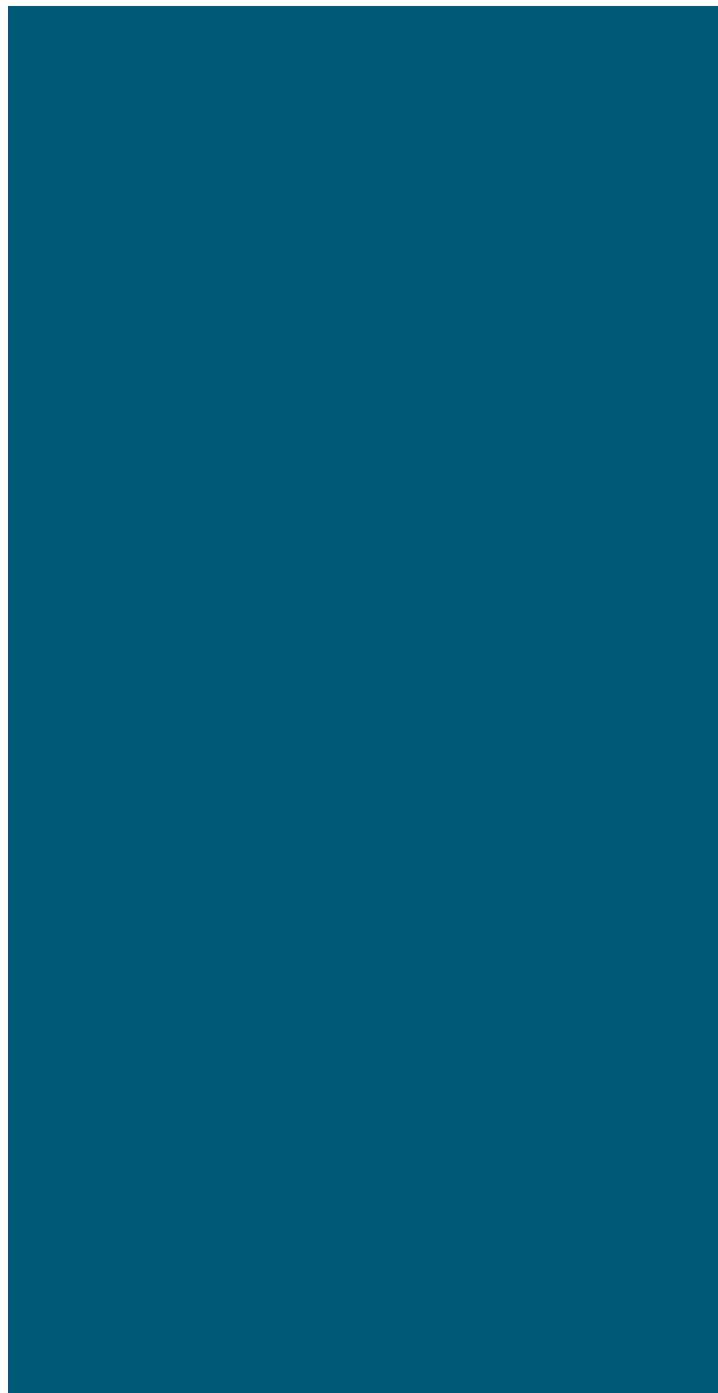
"It was a real culture shock. Everything was different from what I had imagined and I felt like an outsider. A lot of things were confusing."

Through the programme, Abshir got training for work and life skills and learned how to present himself. He also obtained a work experience placement at the garden centre, which led to the offer of a permanent position. *"I really like my job," he says. "Especially helping customers and working as part of a team."*

A place of his own

He was able to get his own apartment and he has learnt to become more independent. *"Many things are different now because of the course," he says. "I have my own place. I also got a driving licence and I have my own car." Outside work, he has an active social life. Sports and dancing are his passions; he plays football regularly and practises salsa up to three times a week.*

Abshir is now satisfied with his life. *"And I also get on much better with my parents. Even my father is happy."* The security he has gained through getting a permanent job means Abshir can plan for the future. He and his girlfriend, Shanka, are planning to get married next year. *"And then I want to start a family. A big one,"* he announces.



Knowledge is empowerment



As a young girl, *Khadija Majdoubi* dreamed of nothing more than owning her own hairdresser's salon. She realised that aspiration for a while in her native Morocco, but when she moved to the Netherlands, tragedy struck and her world was turned upside down. Her husband died when she was pregnant, expecting twins. The shock was tremendous and her babies were born prematurely. She spent the next few years as a full-time mother, and looking after her friends' children.

With a family to care for and still adjusting to life in a new country, Khadija had to rely on state aid. With only a basic knowledge of the Dutch language, she had a hard time finding even a simple job, much less starting a new business.

The road to recovery

"It isn't easy raising children on your own," says Khadija. "It seemed like everyday was so full, I had no time for anything else. To start with, finding a job was a big problem."

At her local social services office, Khadija found out about a free training course for unemployed women, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund. *"The course helped me realise my dream, starting with improving my language skills,"* she explains. *"That was so important, and it helped me to feel better about myself."*

VONK is a work and education centre for women living in the Zeeburg district of Amsterdam. The programme helps women irrespective of their level of education, experience or origin. It provides information and recommendations and helps them with finding a job, training and obtaining social benefits. More generally, it provides support for integration and well-being. VONK also cooperates with other Dutch and local agencies, with women's organisations and social service institutions.

Feeling good about yourself

One of the most difficult obstacles women face after long periods of unemployment is a lack of confidence. The training course therefore included sessions specifically aimed at building self-esteem and assertiveness.

"I was a hairdresser before, when I lived in Morocco. But I never thought I would be able to do this here, to open my own place."

"I learned to communicate better," says Khadija, "and I understood better how things work when you are opening a business. The first thing I had to do was find a job. I had become dependent on other people. I needed to get back on my feet."

VONK staff accompanied Khadija on her job searches, and with support and encouragement from friends and family, she finally got a job at a local hairdresser's. *"The people I saw about a job were reluctant at first," she explains. "I am not from here and I don't look like everyone else, and I was not able to express myself the way I would have wanted. The people at VONK helped me to get my foot in the door."*

"I never thought I would be able to do this"

Once back at work, Khadija managed to put some money aside. In the end, she managed to save enough to realise her childhood dream. In April 2009 she opened her own hairdresser's boutique not far from her home in Amsterdam. *"I was a hairdresser before," she explains, "when I lived in Morocco. It's what I love doing and I'm good at it. But I never thought I would be able to do this here, to open my own place."*

Khadija says the VONK training course and individual assistance helped her to find herself, and it has changed her own and her children's lives for the better. *"I'm really glad I did the course," she says. "It's the reason I'm here today."*



Strength in diversity



Born in Esslingen, near Stuttgart, [Cornelia Schultheiss](#) studied linguistics and then went to work for a world-leading automobile manufacturer in Berlin. Initially engaged as a translator, Cornelia distinguished herself by proposing and developing her own specialised service in the company, providing unique 'intercultural' training to help staff from around the world work together.

"Europe is a crossroads for so many peoples and cultures," she says. "It's a source of opportunity, but also a challenge." Working in a huge and varied company, Cornelia realised that there was more to teamwork than just following orders. "People from different countries and cultures have different habits and expectations, and they don't always understand each other, even when they speak the same language."

Unfortunately, the company she worked for went through some drastic changes and, in 2007, restructuring forced her to choose between keeping her job or staying in her favourite city. She chose Berlin, where she had been living with her partner for 15 years.

"It was a tough decision," she says. "Leaving my job meant starting a new career, finding something to do." She decided to try to start her own business as an intercultural coach and trainer, but while she saw a market for her specialised skills, she didn't know how to exploit it, with no experience of her own in creating a company.

Concrete advice

The *Human Venture II* project, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, gave her important insights into what it takes to start a business, as well as concrete advice on commercial rules and regulations.

The scheme, which ran from August 2006 to September 2008, was aimed at improving participants' abilities to start their own businesses and included group discussions, workshops and training sessions. Activities covered various topics related to the formation of a company, helping Cornelia to prepare her own start-up. *"I got a lot of information on topics I didn't know much about," she says. "This allowed me to avoid a lot of possible pitfalls. But I also simply enjoyed the experience and the chance to build a network of contacts with the other participants."*

"My intercultural workshops focus on building a successful and trusting working atmosphere, where different traditions and communication styles are bridged."

Today, Cornelia runs a successful consultancy, providing highly specialised instruction to people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, helping them to band together, share experiences and better understand each other. *"Losses due to 'intercultural friction' are minimised,"* she says. *"Teams meld and are able to work more efficiently."*

Cornelia's clients include both individuals and groups working or living in an international environment, people from places like India, Russia or Japan, Germany and many other places.

"My intercultural workshops, training and coaching sessions focus on building a successful and trusting working atmosphere, where different traditions, communication styles and so on are bridged and synergies can be developed," she explains. Some days, Cornelia works in her office, just one door away from her flat in historic West Berlin. On others, she takes her services to the client, in Berlin, in Germany, across Europe and around the world.

"I couldn't have done any of this without the help I received," she says. *"The training I got through the European Social Fund showed me how to prepare and work independently, and I learned a lot about myself in the process. It was a great experience."*



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Ljubljana (Slovenia)		108-109
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Local politics		98-99
Logistics		54-55, 76-77, 124-125
Luxembourg		12-13, 48-49
M		
Magdeburg (Germany)		90-91
Malmö (Sweden)		128-129
Malta		62-63, 80-81
Management	54-55, 56-57, 66-67, 74-75, 80-81, 88-89, 122-123	
Manufacturing	16-17, 42-43, 54-55, 74-75, 86-87, 88-89, 90-91, 100-101, 116-117	
Marketing	16-17, 20-21, 56-57, 66-67, 68-69, 98-99	
Maternity leave		34-35
Media and communication	30-31, 54-55, 56-57, 62-63, 66-67, 96-97, 102-103	
Medical treatment	38-39, 40-41, 42-43, 48-49, 86-87, 112-113, 118-119	
Mental health		38-39, 46-47, 118-119
Mentoring		46-47, 66-67, 68-69, 118-119
Migration	12-13, 48-49, 90-91, 122-123, 124-125, 128-129, 130-131	
Mining		108-109
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N		
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O		
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P		
Petrol distribution		88-89
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Poland		30-31, 40-41
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Portugal		16-17, 98-99
Post and telecommunications		48-49, 124-125
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Real estate		74-75, 122-123
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Religious faith		118-119, 128-129
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Retailing	10-11 20-21, 82-83, 88-89, 110-111, 112-113, 118-119, 128-129	
Retirement		48-49, 52-53, 58-59
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Roma		84-85, 126-127
Romania		76-77, 94-95
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S	
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Travel	56-57, 80-81, 94-95, 96-97, 112-113, 132-133

U		
Umbria (Italy)		100-101
Unemployment	40-41, 42-43, 46-47, 52-53, 56-57, 62-63, 70-71, 82-83, 86-87, 90-91, 114-115, 118-119, 122-123, 126-127, 130-131	
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V		
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Z		
Zalaegerszeg, Hungary		84-85

List of projects for investing in people

Young people

France (Audrey Libres)

Title: [Ecole de la deuxième chance](#)

Period: 2002 – 2009

Budget: €1 027 208

Participants: 650 – 700 a year

Luxembourg (Bruno de Almeida Aveiro)

Title: [Liewenshaff project \(Päerd's Atelier asbl\)](#)

Period: three-year course

Budget: €256 578.57

Participants: 40

Website: <http://www.liewenshaff.lu/>

Ireland (Sheena Matthews)

Title: [Spoirt Teic Local Training Initiative course](#)

Period: 2000 – 2008

Budget: €2.6m

Participants: 232

Website: http://sports.southdublin.ie/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=54&Itemid=114

Portugal (Bruno Teixeira)

Title: [Inov Contacto](#)

Period: This program previously called Contacto@lcep exists since 1997. From 2005 its name changed to InovContacto.

Budget: Average is €25 000 / Internship – this includes everything, also structure and operational costs

Participants: Each edition has different number of participants, the average is around 145 internship / year

Website: <http://live.networkcontacto.com/pt/Paginas/default.aspx>

Czech Republic (Radmila Petroušková)

Title: [Beginning entrepreneurs support centre](#)

Period: November 2006 – August 2008

Budget: CZK 5 104 670.00

Participants: 165

Website: www.cepac.cz

France (Yann Lelievre)

Title: [Escape from home – Espace Initiatives Jeunes](#)

Period: 2002

Budget: €60 000 (annual budget)

Website: www.espaceinfojeunes.net

Equality between women and men

Cyprus (Koulla Aggelou)

Title: [Never Home Alone \(within the framework of the Project “Expansion and Improvement of Care Services for the children, the Elderly, the Disabled and Other Dependants”, Measure 1.4.1 of the Single Programming Document, Objective 3 “Human Resource” of the Programming Period of Structural Funds 2004-2006, which begun in 2005\)](#)

Period: January 2007 – November 2008

Budget: €76 896 in 2007, €70 500 in 2008 (January – November)

Participants: 15

Website: http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/sws/sws.nsf/dmlunion_en/dmlunion_en?OpenDocument

Austria (Stephan Wittich)

Title: [Children's Office of the Vienna Universities](#)

Period: December 2002 – December 2005

Budget: EU contribution: €142 065 – Total budget: €308 838.76

Participants: 634

Website: <http://kinder.univie.ac.at/>

Finland (Riikka-Leena Lappalainen)

Title: [Reaktioketju – Pohjois-Savon naisyrittäjät kehittymisen voimavarana \(Chain Reaction – Woman Entrepreneurs in Northern Savo as a Development Resource\)](#)

Period: November 2004 – February 2008

Total budget: €1 489 200

Participants: 456

Poland (Beata Szozda)

Title: [An idea to start a new business 2 – Promotion of academic entrepreneurship in Wielkopolska](#)

Period: March 2007 – June 2007

The Netherlands (Gerard Jansen)

Title: [E-papa project](#)

Period: April 2006 – September 2007

Budget: €127 206

Participants: 66

Website: <http://www.ewerkforum.nl/>

Slovakia (Katarína Vargová)

Title: [SPD Objective 3 – Information and Supporting Centre of Employment](#)

Period: September 2007 – December 2008

Budget: €161 352

Participants: Number of persons participating in activities – 203

Number of persons who finalized courses and trainings – 178

Website: www.zzvp.sk

Disadvantaged people

Greece (Georgia Chrisikopoukou)

Title: **New Horizons (Psychargos programme: project for all around Greece co-funded by ESF (period 2001-2010))**

Period: 2007 – 2009

Budget: €350 000

Participants: 50

Website: <http://www.msu.gr>

Poland (Andrzej Lubowiecki)

Title: **Disabled workers on the open labour market (Fundacja Gospodarcza)**

Period: October 2005 – December 2006

Budget: PLN 103 323 (€23 552)

Participants: 30

Website: www.Fundacijagospodarcza.pl

Hungary (Éva Gyulai)

Title: **LIFT Likeliness – Integration – Full employment – Training (Blue Bird Foundation)**

Period: June 2006 – February 2008

Budget: €446 000

Participants: 36 young people with disabilities

Website: <http://www.kek-madar.hu>

http://www.izleloetterem.hu

Latvia (Sarmite Gromska)

Title: **“The provision of diversity of Library services in Braille as a precondition for the integration of blind and visually impaired people in society and competition on the labour market.”**

Period: July 2005 – September 2005

Budget: LVL 16 222

Participants: The users of the Library (blind people) – 155

Workers in the Braille Department of the Library – 5

The students of the school for the blind – 15

Website: <http://www.neredzigobiblioteka.lv/eng/about.php>

Slovenia (Andrej Lovrencec)

Project name: **On-the-job training**

Period: 2007 – 2008 (in operation since 2004)

Budget: ESF funding: €2 877 275.20 – Total funding: €3 836 367.01

Participants: 2007: 694 – 2008: 2 226

Website: <http://www.mddsz.gov.si/>,
<http://www.euskladi.si/>

Luxembourg (Otilia Marques)

Title: **Action de reinsercion des lombaliques et action de prevention par une formation adequate (Final phase)**

Period: January 2007 – December 2007

Budget: €431 899

Participants: 425

Website: <http://www.stm.lu/home.html>

Older workers

Denmark (Jane Grøne)

Title: **Job Competence Project**

Period: August 2007 – April 2008

Budget: €5 641 000

Participants: 116 (51 women, 65 men) – by July 2008, 54 of them had successfully found work

Website: <http://www.amunordjylland.dk/front.do>

Czech Republic (Milan Nedbal)

Title: **Life long learning centre**

Period: September 2005 – August 2007

Budget: €75 475

Participants: plan was 625 participants (623 participants finished courses but 2 participants found work during the courses)

Website: www.knihkm.cz

Austria (Roswitha Kerbel)

Title: **Initiative 50 – Beschäftigungsinitiative für ältere Arbeitnehmer (Employment initiative for older workers)**

Period: December 2002 – December 2005

Budget: €6 000 000

Participants: 1 200 persons taken care of, 650 transitworkers

Website: www.initiative50.or.at

Bulgaria (Tsvetan Ivanov)

Title: **Through Social Services, for Decent Living**

Period: August 2008 – July 2009

Budget: BGN 92 522 (€47 300)

Participants: 20 workers, 40 beneficiaries

Lithuania (Aldonis Mikalauskienė)

Title: **Computer literacy training for members of LPS ‘Bociai’**

Period: June 2006 – July 2008

Budget: €2 396 157

Participants: 1720

Malta (George Mifsud)

Title: **Training and Employment Exposure Scheme**

Period: 2004-2006 (one year: six months training and six months work exposure)

Budget: €3 642 543

Participants: 460

Website: <http://www.etc.gov.mt/>

Entrepreneurship

Estonia (Peeter Tarmet)

Title: **Mentoring Programme**

Period: December 2007 – November 2008

Budget: 2008: EEK 1 125 000

Participants: 2008: 40 mentors and 53 mentees

Website: www.eas.ee – www.holjukid.ee

United-Kingdom (Sandra Barnes-Keywood)

Title: **Rural Welcome**

Period: February 2004 – April 2008

Budget: GBP 334 000

Participants: 786 individuals from 622 businesses

Website: www.tourismtrainingsoutheast.com

Latvia (Normunds Zeps)

Title: **Support to families with children for business and self-employment start up in Daugavpils District**

Period: September 2006 – October 2007

Budget: LVL 22 317.53

Participants: 30

Website: www.daugavpils.partneribas.lv

Belgium (Gaetane Anselme)

Title: **Preventagri formation**

Period: 2003 – 2008

Budget: 2007: €187 597

Participants: about 70

Website: www.preventagri.be

Spain (José Salmerón Guindos)

Title: **CRECE Company creation and consolidation programme**

Period: 2000 – 2006

Budget: €65m

Participants: 18 300

Website: <http://www.eoi.es/nw/publica/crece.asp>

Romania (Florin Istrate)

Title: **Dinamizare Rurală prin angajare Sustenibilă (DR-ES) (Rural Development through sustainable employment)**

Period: November 2008 – October 2011 (36 months)

Budget: RON 16 408 535.00

Participants: 750 persons (350 men/400 women)

Website: <http://dr-es.eu>

New skills

Malta (Marie Therese Vella)

Title: **Training and Employment Exposure Scheme**

Period: 2004 – 2006 (one year: six months training and six months work exposure)

Budget: €3 642 543

Participants: 460

Website: <http://www.etc.gov.mt/>

Cyprus (Andreas Apatzidis)

Title: **Vocational Training and Promotion of Public Assistance recipients to Employment**

Period: 2005-2008, Programming Period of Structural Funds, 2004-2006

Budget: €900 000

Participants: Public Assistance Recipients, Private Sector Employers

Website: <http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/sws/esf>

Hungary (Zsolt Korcz)

Title: **A Way Out of the Disadvantaged Situation (First Hungarian-Danish Production School Foundation)**

Period: June 2006 – June 2007

Budget: HUF 106m (€373 000)

Participants: 36

Belgium (Daniel Dellisse)

Title: **Excellent Learning**

Period: 2008 – 2009

Budget: €1 000 000

Participants: 700

Website: www.deceuninck.com

Bulgaria (Biliana Filipova)

Title: **Training of employed –investment in company development**

Period: 2008 – 2009 (13 months)

Budget: BGN 232 223 (€118 734)

Participants: 254

Website: <http://www.petrol.bg/news.php?id=241>

http://www.az.government.bg/internal.asp?CatID=28&WA=Efunds/OPHRD/AP2101/Menu_AP2101.htm

Germany (Peter Meller)

Title: **AQUA (Akademikerinnen und Akademiker Qualifizieren sich für den Arbeitsmarkt)**

Period: 2006 – 2010

Budget: €13 000 000

Participants: 715

Website: www.obs-ev.de/AQUA

Education and training

Romania (Monica Stroe)

Title: **PhD scholarships in support of research: competitiveness, quality and cooperation in the European higher education space (ESF grant awarded to The National School of Political and Administrative Studies in Bucharest (SNSPA))**

Period: October 2008 – September 2011

Budget: RON 4 215 105

Participants: 40 PhD students

Finland (Harri Haanpää)

Title: MEDA-project (entrepreneurship in media field)

Period: May 2005 – December 2007

Budget: €597 470

Participants: 64

Portugal (Maria Balbina Soares Melo Rocha)

Title: Plano de Formação da Forestis – Plano de Formação para a Gestão Sustentada

Period: May 2004 – December 2007

Budget: €737 175.35

Participants: 865

Website: <http://www.forestis.pt/default.aspx>

Italy (Simone Rossi)

Title: Bando Assegni di Ricerca finalizzato al miglioramento delle risorse umane nel settore della ricerca e dello sviluppo tecnologico POR Umbria Ob.3 2000-2006

Period: the General Scheme started February 2007 and ended on October 2008 (the Project had been programmed before – year 2006 – and was paid with 2000-2006 ESF funds)

Budget: €1 825 503.99

Participants: 214

Website: www.ilpontesuldistretto.it

Lithuania (Nedas Jurgaitis)

Title: MOKOM

Period: March 2005 – February 2008

Budget: LTL 1 506 411

Participants: 610

Denmark (Mogens Lausen)

Title: Entrepreneurship course

Period: Spring 2004

Budget: DKK 50 000

Participants: 28

Website: www.cfe.au.dk

Social inclusion**Slovenia (Jana Urbanija)**

Title: Project learning for young adults – PLYA

Period: 2004 – 2006

Budget: total budget: €270 000;

ESF co-financed: €195 000

Participants: 400

Website: <http://www.euskladi.si/>,
<http://www.mss.gov.si/>

Greece (Christos Giannakopoulos)

Title: Training in basic ICT skills (cycle I)

Period: June 2003 – December 2003

Budget: Total funding: €18 152 216.32 /

ESF contribution: €13 614 162.20

Participants: 20 000 (18 000 socially vulnerable groups – 2 000 soldiers)

Website: www.esfhellas.gr –
www.eyekt.gr

Italy (Fiorella)

Title: Servizio itinerante inserimento donna (SIID I/II)

Period: April 2005 – September 2006/October 2006 – December 2007

Budget: €239 500/ €236 000

Participants: 283/±500

Website: <http://www.siid2.it/>

United Kingdom (Allan McGinlay)

Title: Life Coaching Project

Period: January 2006 – March 2007

Budget: Total Project Costs GBP 413 140 of which GBP 178 499 was received from the European Social Fund

Participants: 44 participants in total, 25 of which received European Social Fund support

Website: <http://www.thewisegroup.co.uk/site/>

Slovakia (Mário Greško)

Title: EQUAL – Centre of social-rehabilitation and information services for people with hearing disabilities

Period: March 2005 – July 2008

Budget: €199 163.52

Participants: Number of participants: (plan/reality)

Number of persons participating in activities – 30/71

Number of trained employees of public and other employment services – 15/26
Number of persons involved in projects in the area of group training for disabled people – 80/97

Website: www.sppn.sk

Sweden (Anne-Lie Thuvesson)

Title: Sustainable Health

Period: March 2005 – June 2007

Budget: SEK 18 851 000 (€1 709 991)

Participants: 200

Website: <http://www.anneliesost.com/3.html>

Fighting discrimination

Estonia (Messurme Pissareva)

Title: The integration of non-Estonians into the labour market

Period: September 2004 – December 2005

Budget: EEK 3 360 089 (ESF 2 517 146)

Participants: 242 non-nationals, aged 16-63

Website: www.sm.ee/esf2004

Ireland (Serge Mbami)

Title: Supply Chain Logistics Administrator traineeship

Period: 2007

Budget: budget for the course was €129 025 of which allowances paid to learners totalled €116 242

Participants: 16 participants 14 of which found logistics related employment at the end of the course

Website: www.fas.ie

Spain (Amparo Navaja Maldonado)

Title: ACCEDER: Fight discrimination against the Roma community

Period: 2000 – 2007 (1st phase) and 2008 – 2013 (2nd phase)

Budget: 2000 – 2006: €57m/ 2008 – 2013: €41m

Participants: 40 743 (up to 2007)

Website: <http://www.gitanos.org/acceder>

Sweden (Abshir Mohamed Abukar)

Title: UP New City

Period: 2005 – 2007 (restarted again 2008-2010 and are now named New City)

Budget: €2.5m

Participants: more or less 2 000

Website: www.drommarnashus.se/newcity

The Netherlands (Khadija Majdoubi)

Title: VONK

Period: November 2005 – December 2007

Budget: €382 438

Participants: around 1 000 women

Website: <http://www.vonkzeeburg.nl/>

Germany (Cornelia Schultheiss)

Title: Human Venture II (project designed and carried out by the agency of entrepreneurship encouragement (gründungsservice) at the Technical University of Berlin (TU Berlin).

Period: 2006 – 2008

Budget: €611 000

Participants: 313

Website: www.gruendung.tu-berlin.de

European Commission

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