

**The Telecentre of Jászkisér****Interviewee: László Balogh, Programme Director of the Telecentre and Deputy Mayor of Jászkisér****The organization's history, activities and business situation**

The Telecentre of Jászkisér (Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County), one of the first of its kind in Hungary, was formed in 1997. Formally speaking, it was set up by the Foundation for the Children of Jászkisér, which in turn had been established by a retired couple to aid bright but socially disadvantaged children. The idea of creating it was raised by László Balogh and DEMNET (short for Democracy Network), which is an American organization to support democracy programmes and local civil initiatives.

This how László Balogh recalls the birth of the idea:

“I was deputy mayor of Jászkisér between 1994 and 1998, and my premier priority was to assist with the growth of local civil society. We keenly watched announcements about opportunities to apply for grants for non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and that is how in autumn 1996 we stumbled into DEMNET's invitation for applications. I travelled to Budapest to seek personal advice from DEMNET's programme coordinator and tell him about my plan how to use the grant. When it occurred to me to set up a telecentre, I did not even know how switch on a computer, let alone about IT in general. There was one thing I did know however: a telecentre would enable local NGOs to overcome geographical distances and directly access information. I had seen a documentary about the telecentre of Csákberény (Fejér County) and was quite impressed. We submitted an application and were among the seven successful applicants out of 97. Later on the government realized the importance of telecentres, which means the public sector also began inviting applications for grants.”

In the beginning the telecentre operated in a wooden cottage, which was put at its disposal by the local farming cooperative free of charge. In 2002 the telecentre moved to a somewhat bigger stone house, which was put at its disposal by the local municipality free of charge.

The foundation, local sponsors and the local municipality cover the overheads and the wages of the employees jointly. Occasionally, the local job centre also helps pay the wages.

The basic activities of the telecentre are as follows: access to the Internet, office technology services, doing various jobs that need a computer, sending and receiving faxes, giving consultation for local residents, passing on information of public importance and collecting and editing news for, and printing, the local monthly press publication. (Telecentres usually carry out those basic services.)