

## LRC Resources Transcend Institutional Boundaries

"The best part of my job is that I always get to see the results of my work," says Nino Didmanidze, who has taught computer classes at the National Information Learning Center (NILC) since it opened in December 1996. "I love it when a person who knows absolutely nothing about computers signs up for my course because, for me, teaching is like building a house, laying a foundation of knowledge one stone at a time. I also love that the training classes we offer here last for three weeks, so I never have time to get bored and am always meeting people from a variety of professions—sometimes clinicians or medical students, other times teachers or business people looking to obtain new skills," the 31-year-old explains.

Since its inception, the NILC has held more than 114 training courses both to teach healthcare providers involved with the Tbilisi/Atlanta partnership much-needed computer and Internet research skills and to open up the world of information technology to medical students, patients, and other members of the community, as well.

Offered primarily during the evening, these courses focus on computer skills, use of standard software programs, and Internet searching techniques, among other things. "Georgians tend to be very curious people by nature and most have an innate ability to pick things up quickly. I've found that a majority of the NILC students really make the most of the experience," states Didmanidze, who also teaches computer science full-time at a local technical college.

"The people who come in for computer training range in age from 12 to 60. It is always a pleasure to interact with them and to watch them learn—especially here at the NILC because the quality of our equipment is very good. We also have a back-up generator that switches on within three seconds of a blackout, so service is not interrupted," she says, explaining that, in Georgia, many households and businesses only receive a few hours of power each day unless they use a supplemental source such as a generator. "It is really awful to spend time working on some project only to have the power cut out, so the students here are pleasantly surprised that, when the screen goes black, a



PHOTO: BY SUZANNE E. GRINNAN

Computer science instructor Nino Didmanidze with a student at the Tbilisi NILC.

few seconds later it comes back to life with their work intact," she says with a chuckle.

"Really, places like this are very important in Georgia because people need to be able to learn new skills and to access information from other parts of the world," Didmanidze says, citing one particular man who came in for training as an example. "He was a physician at a local hospital, the head of his department. They had a computer there, but he didn't know how to use it and he felt very ashamed because a young girl who worked on the floor had to help him whenever he needed something," she says. "But, after he completed my course, he was able to navigate his hospital's computer system and he was very proud that he had learned something that once seemed so foreign and intimidating."

While teaching this physician new skills was gratifying, for the deeply religious Didmanidze, the fact that she was able to assist the nuns at Tbilisi's Peristsvaleba Convent in their efforts to publish religious pamphlets and other materials was even more rewarding. "From time-to-time, I assisted the nuns by preparing some documents or creating letterhead for the

Convent," Didmanidze explains. "Then I proposed that a few of them come to the NILC so they could learn how to do these things themselves; two of them did—Sister Theona and Sister Marika—and they were a joy to work with." Both were thrilled with their new knowledge, she continues, noting that Sister Marika was very animated, openly expressing her delight when she mastered a new skill, while Sister Theona was especially amazed at how the computer could make the task of typing various prayers and psalms for the publishing project so much easier for her. "Sister Theona was so happy that she was able to quickly find and correct any mistakes she had made. She was very grateful that her newly-acquired skills helped her to better serve the Church and called computers marvelous tools that make life easier for so many people. And, she's right," Didmanidze concludes. "In this day and age, there is really no excuse for not possessing at least some rudimentary knowledge about computers and the Internet—not when classes like those we offer here are so comprehensive and affordable."

While providing information services to healthcare providers is a key goal of AIHA's Learning Resource Centers (LRCs), some of these facilities also offer computer training courses, Internet access, and other benefits to the general public. The LRC established by the graduated Tbilisi/Atlanta partnership, for example—now called the National Information Learning Center—has trained some 1,600 people in basic computer skills, Internet research, and other related topics since 1996. In addition to providing a valuable service to the community, these courses produce income that helps sustain the operation of the Center. This is the story of one instructor at the NILC who reached out to a group of nuns who were tasked with publishing religious materials in their native language; the story of these nuns is on the other side.

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