

MARTA 2011

EVENTS VALUES PRINCIPALS CHANGES

Centre MARTA is the only guardian of women's rights in Latvia. Our team at MARTA is convinced that our knowledge and experience help us make the welfare better of not only women and children, but the society on the whole as well; it helps us influence decision making processes and encourage others for action. MARTA's annual report 2011 reveals the organization's viewpoints, achievements and gratitude towards each and every MARTA supporter, sponsor and contributor.

OPENNESS

HELPING AND SUPPORTING WOMEN

In 2011, **330 women** from all over Latvia **received help** at centre MARTA. Out of those **289 women were new clients**.

Elza talked to the TV journalist calmly and with confidence.

*She is **one of the few** MARTA clients who, becoming victim of domestic violence, **decided to openly share her experience**.*

Elza is a young and well educated woman with two children. She was married to a violent husband and used to live in vicious relations. She was not sure that a divorce would be the best solution. Elza worried about her children, her savings and things that were bought during their life together and had doubts about herself and her behaviour, which, to her mind, might have possibly caused her husband's aggression; she was afraid to involve her children into adult relations.

***Elza shared her endless doubts** with MARTA professionals. After having received the support and the consultations she needed, Elza decided to start the divorce procedure, arranged and set up a safe place for herself and her children and agreed upon child care with the father of the children. Elza took the courage and did not change her decision, despite her husband's endeavours to bully the young woman. Still, her fear, disbelief and doubts tended to revert again and again.*

When Elza understood that a divorce is unavoidable, she realized that she is able to overcome her fear and take a rational look back at her life and marriage with a smile on her face.

*Elza says that this change in her life **makes her happy** and now she feels that she cannot **remain silent**.*

Comment of an expert

Women, who have been victims of violence, find it very difficult to decide to leave the violent partner, as they feel insecure, ashamed and powerless, which is an emotional status that violence victims experience very often. Victims are afraid that others might disapprove their decision to get a divorce, because a patriarchal family model is still

the ideal form of matrimony in our society, and thus a woman's decision to get a divorce is seen as one that destroys an ideal family. Thus, violence is excused in favour of the existence of the patriarchal family.

In 2011, MARTA provided 1895 consultations, which were given by a social worker, a lawyer, a psychologist, a psychotherapist and a personal development coach. MARTA specialists provided 1282 consultations on the spot and 613 consultations electronically or via phone.

Most often women in difficulties or crises situations needed the support of the social worker, lawyer or psychotherapist.

*Monta is a very young woman. When still in grade 11 at high school, she became pregnant. **Monta's family decided** that the girl has to finish school. In the meantime Monta's mother would take care of the baby. Monta did what she was told to, moved to Riga and graduated from high school last June. Monta's mother, hoping to keep her granddaughter Melisa, submitted a custody court application asking the court to deprive Melisa's mother of guardianship. Monta's mother expelled the woman from home and kept her granddaughter. She **forced Monta to sign a paper waiving her parental rights**. Monta's grandmother supported her. Monta tried to get back her two-year old daughter, but all in vain. **She was deprived of her vested rights** – to take care of and raise her child. The police called it a domestic dispute and did not really see a problem in a situation, in which a mother is deprived of her rights to her child. The custody court acknowledged that it doesn't know how to solve the situation as it had never had a similar leading case before. The State Inspectorate For Protection Of Children's Rights explained the rights of a mother of a child, yet it did not know how to give a child back to its rightful mother, adding that it shall not break in and take the child by force. Feeling hopeless, the young woman tried to commit suicide.*

Monta came to centre MARTA for help.

*Two days before Christmas Eve the custody court sitting in Monta's case took place and **the woman was represented by centre MARTA lawyer**. The sitting lasted for five hours. After it, Monta's mother of her own free will returned Melisa to her mother.*

The young woman celebrated Christmas together with her daughter

Comment of an expert

A young mother, raising a child on her own, needs both psychological and financial support. However, it does not mean that she is unable to be a caring parent. The assumption of Monta's mother that the woman would be unable to take care of the newly born baby was not based on an adequate evaluation of the situation, but rather on the prevailing idea that a patriarchal family is the ideal model and on the prejudice that one parent or *an incomplete family* is incapable of giving a child a wholesome care and upbringing.

At centre MARTA voluntary help was provided by psychologists, a masseuse and a personal development coach.

The lawyers helped 187 women – victims of domestic violence. In total, 241 legal documents were prepared; in 12 cases representation was ensured in police, in 29 cases in court and in 21 cases in custody court.

The most topical issues, which women need help with, include divorce, collection of child sustenance, child care and interrelation, violence against women and children, as well as division of a married couples' common property.

*Alda does not know how to protect herself, her child and her mother. Alda has no brother or father to ask help to. The Ogre Municipal police states it has a lot of work to do, thus the **police just give an advice** "don't get involved with such pigs; deal with the situation". Alda asked centre MARTA for help.*

Alda is divorced and has a 10 years old daughter. For nine years already Alda has been living with a man. The house and the mortgage loan, assumed during their life together, is legally Alda's responsibility. She and her mother are also responsible for paying the bills. The man she lives with has been unemployed for four years already, and everything he earns doing some temporary work is spent on alcohol. He tirelessly reminds Alda that the house and the bills are her responsibility and she has to pay those. So she does.

*In the meantime, the man's aggression increases. **Alda is ashamed of her weakness**, she understands that there is no hope that the guy might change.*

Alda had planned a peaceful Christmas celebration with her family and prepared nice dinner. The conversation on Christmas party turned out to be a reason for conflict.

The man persecuted Alda for several days, wished her a safe death whenever she sat in her car, called her names, acted jealously, prohibited Alda and her daughter to enter the house, said harsh things and constantly threatened to hang himself.

During the conflict Alda's daughter managed to escape by climbing out of the window. The man casted a bucket at Alda, unhinged the door, as well as threatened to beat the woman up and destroy her life.

Alda's mother called the police. The police said that it might come over and have a look, yet it never did.

Alda cannot leave the house and she is unable to drive him out.

Comment of an expert

This is a story of gender unequal relations between two partners. Unfortunately, there are many situations like that in Latvia. Alda accepted her powerlessness and subordinate role in the relations, regardless of the fact that she actually was materially more independent than her partner. She had to do both – take care of the house and assume financial responsibilities, yet she was unable to decide upon her life and make the necessary decisions for her family.

Centre MARTA offers the only free of charge *HOTLINE* in Latvia that operates for prevention of human trafficking, sexual exploitation of children and young people and for questions regarding safe employment abroad. **By calling 80002012**, 86 clients received help in 2011. In 27 cases help was needed to stop violence, in 9 cases – to help possible victims of human trafficking; 27 clients were given information on help possibilities at centre MARTA.

EVENTS

ADVOCACY OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Centre MARTA supports progressive changes in politics. MARTA not only sees the tension of the reality, summons to dare and seeks to influence decision making, but on a **daily basis also sees its main task in improving the life of women and in advocating their rights.**

MARTA policy experts drafted suggestions and submitted opinions for State Family Policy Guidelines and Action Plan, seeking to handle the painful issue of demography in Latvia and urging to take the principle of gender equality into consideration.

At the Ombudsman's consultative council and public discussions, MARTA experts stood up for the rights of women living in unregistered relations, advocating for the necessity to draft a modern remedy mechanism protecting these women.

MARTA took active part at the work of the Gender Equality Council of the Ministry of Welfare, providing opinion on the topicalities and convincing representatives from various sector institutions to take the rights of women into consideration.

MARTA experts drafted and submitted suggestions to the State Gender Equality programme on integrating gender equality in primary education, on harmonizing work and family life and on the necessity to make amendments in the field of labour rights.

Referring to the **experience of MARTA clients**, suggestions with regard to the field of labour rights were given to the Ministry of Welfare.

By attaining a favourable Supreme Court judgement and by clearing up the procedure, in which employer and employee disputes are to be settled in Latvia, centre MARTA lawyers have ensured a favourable leading case for the interests of broad society groups.

As a result of the work of MARTA experts, the Ministry of Welfare is setting up a working group, which will review the possible amendments with regard to Labour Law Article 75 on calculation of the average salary of employees. It is not fare that any compensation (e. g., for firing, for vacation) and salary for the time period the employee due to justified reasons (e. g., child-bearing, child

*care and illness) has been out of work for a longer period of time is being calculated from the minimum salary in the country and not the employee's actual earnings. The planned **amendments would be a remarkable step towards ensuring social justice** with all employees getting fair remuneration for the work.*

At the EU house MARTA gathered female politicians, journalists and researchers for an open discussion on the "Role of Women in Latvian and European Politics" to discuss women representation and involvement in politics.

*Centre MARTA has elaborated cooperation possibilities with Legal Aid Administration (LAA) and MARTA experts have submitted amendments for the Regulation on the Legal Aid Administration, anticipating that **state ensured legal aid may be provided by non-governmental organizations as well.***

In 2011, MARTA constructed close and productive cooperation with non-governmental organizations that deal with interest advocacy and service provision, thus forming a joint stance for an effective advance of social problems and initiatives.

*The Ministry of Welfare responded to recommendations given by MARTA experts with regard to rehabilitation of trafficking victims using state funds and called a tender on the rights to provide social rehabilitation services to trafficking victims, as well as conceded that **the victim's daily allowance is to comply with the actual needs of the client** according to each individual's rehabilitation plan and not exceeding the total contracted amount.*

In order to fight against persecution, MARTA involved itself in the work of the working group of the Ministry of Justice, drafting proposals for the Civil Law and the Civil Procedure Law.

MARTA's **EVENT OF THE YEAR** was **the submission of almost 16 thousand signatures of inhabitants of Latvia** that were handed in to Saeima — the Parliament of Latvia — urging to stop sexual exploitation of children, young people and women. Proposals and explanations were drafted for A. Bērziņš, President of State, and Saeima Human Rights Committee telling about the necessity to stop the demand of sexual services and thus protect both women and children from violence.

At the Ministry of Welfare the support programme for victims of sexual exploitation was lobbied.

PROCESS

RESEARCH

THE FRIENDLY LIFESTYLE OF WOMEN

Centre MARTA has conducted the **first ecological footprint research in Latvia**, which targets at comparing the spending habits of people from a gender point of view. The results are not surprising and are similar to those of other parts of the world – **women have a more environment friendly lifestyle**. The biggest difference exists between male and female habits of and responsibility with regard to use of transportation.

The research results show the difference among age groups with regard to environment – older people harm the environment less if compared to the younger generation and middle-aged people.

The research reveals that the differences among gender and age groups have not with the willingness to act environment friendly to do but rather with the possibility for various social groups and genders to realize their needs.

The research results show the prevailing social strata system and the value of social status in Latvia.

THE EFFECT OF BLOWING UP GENDER STEREOTYPES

In order to change an individual's perception and behaviour with regard to traditional gender stereotypes and in order to show that promoting diversity of opinions makes it possible to start living more actively, centre MARTA conducted the **first systematic research in Latvia** on the work of youth groups. The aim of the research was to show that by raising one's self-confidence it becomes possible to minimize the risk of violence and human trafficking.

The research was conducted in cooperation with researchers from Scandinavia.

The so-called *girl and boy group method* has been successful in Scandinavia for about 20 years already. The aim of the method is to stimulate young people to live a responsible life in accordance with themselves rather than norms that prevail in the society and are not always true, correct or right.

Scandinavians are convinced that **educating young people** is an effective way to form an active and democratic future society, in which each individual is empowered to realize oneself, be happy and live one's own lifestyle.

The first Latvian research proves that as a result of their work in *a girl or boy group* the youngsters become aware and start critically reviewing common societal and peer values and behavioural norms. They revalue gender stereotypes and gender roles, assume diversity of opinions and become aware of their strength and possibilities to live an active personal life rather than passively reacting to external conditions.

The research reveals that perception of gender stereotypes is a key aspect in preventing violent behaviour. Non-acceptance of a violent behavioural model as a norm during adolescence becomes possible only if the concepts of femininity and masculinity are conceived.

The research is available for reading and downloading on www.marta.lv.

CHANGES

YOUTH GROUPS

Kristīne /13/ I have become much more courageous. I understand what I can do and what I can't. I realize that I am able to do much more. Besides, I think that it has become easier and better with my studies at school as well.

In Latvia — in Talsi, Dobele, Jelgava, Olaine, Upeslejas, Rīga, Ogre, Cēsis, Birži and Jēkabpils — 21 youth group was opened. In the groups a Scandinavian method was used to carry out prevention work with boys and girls in order to strengthen their self-esteem and raise their self-confidence, to enhance reciprocal cooperation, to advance their listening skills and ability to show respect towards others, to challenge them make an active choice and take independent stance, as well as to critically review the societal processes from a gender perspective.

Laura /14/ I believe that the girl group helps one raise self-confidence. It helps one lose fear for various things, which seemed scary before; one starts to grow. One feels that it is possible to achieve much more.

The group method helps the youngsters to recognize the traditional male and female roles, thus diminishing the risk for them to experience violence.

Aivars /14/ This is a place to get good emotions. If something went wrong at school, then it is possible to come here and talk about it and get some peace from school and other troubles in life.

Support trainings were organized for the group leaders. At the end of the year new group leaders were trained in Dobele and Sigulda.

COOPERATION DEVELOPMENT

MARTA has developed a wide range of international activities, thus promoting development cooperation.

In 2011, **MARTA visited** Finland informing on human trafficking; coordinated the Estonian, Swedish and Latvian joint project on educating primary school children; cooperated with important European organizations in Rome in assessing the progress of stopping human trafficking; visited Sulaymaniyah and took part in an international cooperation network against human trafficking and honorary killings, establishing cooperation with women organizations in Iraq to prevent Latvian women becoming subordinate to violence in the name of honour because of the rapid growth of the number of fictitious marriages.

Centre MARTA experts gave a presentation on violence against women in Latvia at Linköping university in Sweden, took part in international conferences in Copenhagen, on Åland and in Istanbul and took part in elaboration of a joint EQUALITY NOW strategy for a global network urging for prevention of sexual exploitation in New York. In Westhampton and in cooperation with Great Britain and Spain MARTA prepared a programme for turning against domestic violence.

In 2011, **MARTA became** a member of AWID — Association for Women in Development.

PRINCIPALS

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

To be the one you are, IS a BIG DIFFERENCE!

Supporting the principle of **BEING the one you are**, centre MARTA launched an informative campaign targeted at the youth reminding it: *By refusing to pretend to be someone you are not and **acting according to your feelings**, you strengthen your self-confidence and gain better possibilities to achieve more*".

The campaign materials were distributed in youth gathering places, including the biggest Baltic music festival POSITIVUS and Bikini Bash — a public action organized by Cosmopolitan.

Within the global social campaign "Stop Selling of Sex of Children and Young People" and in cooperation with The Body Shop almost 16 thousand signatures of Latvian inhabitants were gathered to push Latvian decision makers to stop trafficking of girls and women.

In cooperation with the State Guard a campaign was launched on the borders and cities of Latvia, telling everybody that **SLAVERY WAS NOT ABOLISHED IN 1834**.

Within the campaign about 100 supporters of the idea unified themselves in a street procession from Riga Central Railway Station to the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia.

BY SAYING "NO" I REALLY MEAN "NO" was one of the slogans used by MARTA when starting the public action in gathering places of foreign visitors in Old Town on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

HELP ELIMINATE physical, emotional and economic VIOLENCE, whenever you encounter it! In order to draw the wider society's attention to violence, a street procession *Puppet action* was organized celebrating the International Human Rights Day. The aim of the action was to use non-traditional, yet apparent and attractive ways to draw the attention of the society on the gender stereotypes dominating the society.

“Well, mom does the dishes and dad just lies on the couch, so, yeah, well...!” said a girl describing division of gender roles in her family. Traditional gender stereotypes increase the risk for violence in private and public sphere.

POWERFUL MUSIC

Centre MARTA has launched the second CD “STIPRI VĀRDI/ THE WORDS OF POWER”. With the help of this CD, MARTA calls to comprehend its values, support its ideas and ideals, donate and help women who find themselves in difficult situations in Latvia. For that, MARTA reimburses with strength and encouragement to BE able to act.

The CD is a creative carrier of a social advertising campaign and is intended to be the instrument for provision of sustainable activity.

With the help of words and contemporary music, the content of the CD touches upon the sense of a woman’s world, urging to conformably cooperate in forming our world.

PROVISION OF ACTIVITY

In 2011, MARTA’s ideas, values and work was supported by Nordea Bank Latvian branch, Swedbank, Latvia’s State Forests, The Body Shop, AVON, *airBaltic*, *Jaunais laiks* (New Age), EQUALITY NOW INC WOMEN’S ACTION NETWORK, Finlands svenska Marthaförbund, Stockholm-Lidingö Soroptimistklubb, Fellesorganisasjonen (Norway), Stockholms Stadsmissionen folkhögskola, Moderata Samlingpartiet i Stockholm, Öppna Förskolan Sala, individual donators, as well as donators of portal www.ziedot.lv, the Norwegian Embassy in Latvia and the U.S. Embassy in Latvia.

In 2011, centre MARTA attracted financing within various projects:

- EU European Regional Development fund Central Baltic INTERREG IV A programme 2007—2013, international project *“Challenging Gender Roles for Prevention of Trafficking!”*;
- Open Society Institute project *“Save Yourself – Stop the Violence”*;
- Soros Foundation in Latvia, project *“Crisis for Strengthening Growth”*;
- OAK foundation project *“Save Yourself – Save Peers!”*;
- Project financed from the funds of the Latvian-Swiss Cooperation Programme within the Enlarged European Union *“Corrective Self-help Support Groups in Regions of Latvia and Iļģuciema Women Prison”*. (*Self-help Groups – Let’s Help Each Other!*);
- Projects supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Latvia *“Stop Violence Against Women”* and *“Safety of Women – the Foundation for a Sustainable Latvia”*;
- International project with the financial support of the Nordic Council of Ministers, *“Small is sustainable – Estonian, Finnish and Latvian NGOs` cooperation for an eco-friendly lifestyle”*;
- International project with the financial support from EC Daphne III programme: *“EU Comparative: Counselling Survivors of Domestic Violence”*.