



# Marta

Association

“Resource Centre for Women”

# Annual Report

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RIGA

2013

## ACHIEVEMENTS IN IMPROVING THE LIFE OF WOMEN

### ASSISTANCE

During 2012 the MARTA centre has assisted a total of 313 women, out of which 261 visited the centre for the first time.

*Anna is a Latvian citizen. She has been living in the United States for 3 years. Anna's husband George is a U.S. citizen. They have two sons; Michael (6) and Mark (5). Both children were born in Latvia and have a double citizenship; Latvian and American.*

*The family lived in Latvia, but when George was offered a good position in America, they moved to the U.S.*

*After six months in America George told Anna that he has a girlfriend and that their life together is over. George had no issue regarding Anna's wish to return to Latvia; however, he demanded that his sons to stay in America with him.*

*Anna, her husband and their children continued to share an apartment. The father of the children spent his days and sometimes even his nights with his new girlfriend. Anna asked her husband to change their family model, which was unbearable for her. He informed her that his new girlfriend was going to move in to the house on the opposite side of the street. "There's no use talking about the humiliation which I experienced," says Anna.*

*While in America Anna was unemployed, as her time was spent taking care of the children. Anna lived a lonely, socially-isolated life. She was afraid to talk about her situation, she dreaded to ask for help, she was ashamed of her situation and afraid of her husband's anger. When Anna tried to make self-dependent decisions and not succumb to her husband's humiliation, he became aggressive.*

*Presently Anna and her youngest son live in Latvia. Her husband is looking for a new place to live and is receiving the services of a mediator, a lawyer and a finance consultant. In his letter to Anna he suggests that they mutually agree upon their duties and responsibilities.*

*Anna turned to the MARTA centre for help upon returning from America as she needed legal assistance. Her husband's proposals are unacceptable to Anna. She is unaware of her rights and unsure about her chances in court. Anna does not have the financial means to pay for legal help, therefore she asked MARTA to provide unpaid assistance.*

*MARTA prepared an application and all the necessary information for the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as providing contact information and possible assistance within collaboration organisations in the U.S.*

#### MARTA comments:

Anna is in a situation which is familiar to many women in Latvia. It is especially complex due to financial dependence, isolation from society and unequal relations in the family with the husband demonstrating control and being violent. In cooperation with other crises centres in Latvia MARTA experts took a firm stand in favour of amendments to the Latvian legislation, providing for the protection from persecution and violence. The amendments will enter into force as of January 1, 2014, envisaging that it is the oppressor who is obliged to leave home. Thus women (victims of violence) and their children will not have to look for a safer place to stay.

## SCOPE OF THE ASSISTANCE

- The social worker has given 426 consultations
- lawyers – 566
- psychologists – 278, (out of which 115 were provided to children victims of violence)
- the psychotherapist – 389,
- coach – 17,
- the masseur helped 4 women.

Clients were represented in situations involving the police, in court and in custody court.

A significant share of the above mentioned services by our experts was provided on a voluntary basis.

The MARTA centre provides a hotline for issues regarding violence, human trafficking and safe employment abroad.

Throughout the year a total of 123 calls were received:

- 47 calls regarding domestic violence;
- 9 calls from alleged victims of human trafficking or their family members;
- 4 calls on potential risk associated with looking for employment abroad.

When calling the hotline, clients were informed on services available at the MARTA centre regarding difficult divorce cases, child custody cases, disputes with the custody court, protection in unregistered partnership, assistance by the social worker in cases of disablement or unemployment, residence dispute issues, as well adolescent problems.

## AN INNOVATION — HELPING CHILDREN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

The MARTA centre has helped 10 children (victims of violence) and their mothers by providing the assistance of a social worker, child psychologist, psychotherapist and lawyer.

## SELF-AID SUPERVISION

On a daily basis MARTA centre experts listen to painful stories told by women who have experienced violence, sexual harassment, trafficking in human beings, violence in early childhood, poverty and inability to provide for themselves and their children. Our everyday work searches for solutions to difficult emotionally-challenging situations, caused by the feeling that there is no way out of the many complex situations.

In addition to mutual support by colleagues, as well as the transfer of knowledge and experience, our expert team is given *supervision* on a monthly basis, which is an excellent form of support and a way to advance professionalism. It aims at advancing the professionalism of the staff, thus helping to raise the quality of the service to the client.

## ACHIEVEMENT

### THE MARTA CENTRE PROVIDES STATE GUARANTEED LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Lawyers of the MARTA centre cooperated with the Legal Aid Administration (LAA) of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Latvia to elaborate amendments to the law, which were adopted by the Saeima. These amendments provide the NGO's with the rights to give state guaranteed legal assistance. These rights may be entrusted to organisations that have provided legal assistance to clients for at least five years . MARTA has entered into an agreement on the provision of state guaranteed legal assistance.

This will help to ensure long-term support to women who have experienced violence or find themselves in another type of severe crisis situation. Presently, due to the small number of MARTA centre experts, it is not possible to provide long-term representation in court and other law enforcement bodies in all cases.

The women need continued psychological and legal support. MARTA works to provide full support to the women during the legal procedure.

Often under-aged children are also involved in crisis situations and women are frequently forced to leave their home. Therefore continued psychological and legal assistance is needed.

Cooperation with the LAA envisages MARTA with additional funding for advocacy of women rights. Negotiating with the management of the LAA, experts of MARTA try to find a solution to the problems associated with the provision of state guaranteed legal assistance, by defining persons, entitled to receive such assistance and stating inadequate funding to service providers, as well as defining the quality of the provided service and the trivial state compensations for victims of human trafficking (on average 70 % of the minimum wage), reconciling those with the criminal offense.

*Justīne was very young; just a girl. She gave birth to a baby boy. After her son was born Justīne's joy was mixed with fear, because she was aware that she would not realistically be able to manage without the support of the boy's father.*

*Back when Justīne had informed the man of her pregnancy, he had stopped spending nights at home and started drinking.*

*When the boy was born, the man started to express physical and emotional violence. Justīne did not have means to buy proper food for herself and the new-born child. Her mother was unemployed and the child care allowance was not enough to buy all the necessary things. She asked the boy's father for help, but his response was filled with insults. "I'm not going to shatter my youth," he replied.*

*The boy was not even six months old when his father left.*

*Justīne could not find a job in Latvia, so she decided to go to England. She left her son with her mother.*

*In England Justīne found a job and sent money, clothes, and toys for the child to Latvia. Justīne returned Latvia once a year to spend her vacation with her son.*

*Due to the boy's sickness the young woman had to stay in Latvia longer than she had initially planned, and because of this she lost her job. Justīne's mother started to work, and therefore the mother of the child's father agreed to look after the child.*

*When the boy was 4, his mother went again to live and work in England, the boy lived with the mother of his father, while his other grandmother visited him regularly.*

*Unexpectedly both Justīne and her mother found out that the mother of the boy's father wanted "to keep him for good". The boy was prohibited from having any contact with his mother or grandmother. His father had another family.*

*Justīne's mother came to the MARTA centre for help. In order to regain her son, Justīne had to move back to Latvia.*

*The struggle was difficult and involved the police and the custody court, so professional support was given by MARTA. The process lasted for more than six months, filling each day with obscurity and despair.*

*Presently Justīne works in Latvia and lives together with her son, whose name is Jānis. Jānis studies in grade 1 at school, and attends karate and drawing classes.*

#### MARTA comments:

The story of Justīne reveals the particularly unprotected situation of young mothers in both economic and relationship crisis situations. These women have to face inadequate expectations and emotional pressure from their relatives, officials and the general public. Gender inequality is apparent in the dissimilar division of obligations by the partners and the parents, the difficulty in co-ordinating and balancing their working and family life, as well as in the insufficient involvement of fathers in the daily care of their children. The father of the child is quite often incapable of assuming responsibility or having an emotional connection with the child. Furthermore, the image of the ideal mother which is actively portrayed and striven towards in society, contradicts to the modern socioeconomic situation and needs. It is the women alone who are forced to both take on several shifts at work and do more at home, in order to provide daily bread for themselves and their children, as well as care for other relatives. Support from the partner or other family members is limited. Stereotypes still present from the past promote violence against women. In recent years cases like this have been often witnessed at MARTA. The centre's lawyers, whilst defending the interests of the women, simultaneously carry out an educational work; deepening the understanding of, for example, the staff of the custody court, the police, and the judges, and revealing the reasons and consequences of the unequal situation of women.

#### PROGRESS WITH REGARD TO LOBBYING FOR CHANGES IN POLICIES AND DECISION MAKING

In cooperation with the leaders of MARTA youth groups and partner organisations, MARTA centre experts have taken part in key decision making processes, advocating for the rights and interests of women and furthering Latvia's social growth.

In collaboration with "boy and girl group" leaders from Riga and other regions of Latvia, issues concerning human trafficking, gender inequality and risk of violence, which are of personal interest to the youth, were identified in target group discussion.

*She contacted the MARTA centre in the late autumn. She called and said: **"I don't think anybody can help me."***

*Marta was 23 years old. Ever since her childhood, she had been violently forced into child prostitution.*

*The life of Marta reveals the fine and inhuman mechanism of prostitution and human trafficking; it gives a precise view of the influence of organized crime and helps to understand the process, which turns a woman into a victim.*

*Marta was not raised by her mother and father. She was raised in institutions, experiencing emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Marta was emotionally dependent on and lived in infinite control of “the relatives”. People close to Marta, whom she trusted with her childlike trust and docility, were the ones who planned and organized her gang-bang. When the girl returned to the institution haggard and frightened, nobody bothered to ask her what was wrong. Marta found herself in a trap of fear, guilt, debt and misinterpreted liability; a perfect for the perpetrators of organized crime to further manipulate the girl and turn her into a living, marketable, elite product.*

*Marta was afraid; she didn't trust the experts. It took tormented weeks and countless phone conversations with the confidant of the MARTA centre until the girl summoned up the courage and will to meet. Unexpectedly she decided to move to a crisis centre, breaching her “obligations” with the pimp, clearly understanding that this might result in her destruction.*

*Marta has an inborn intelligence and acuteness. Keeping up with the events of the world and Latvia on TV and news portals, Marta identifies criminals among officials and famous persons, who have used her both in her childhood and adult years.*

#### MARTA comments:

Marta has experienced a long-lasting violence, which has been extremely traumatizing both emotionally and physically. At first it was the violence of people closest to her, followed by a terrible experience in prostitution. Within the framework of the existing legal system it is very difficult to help and assist Marta in Latvia, because presently an unsound burden of liability lies upon the victim, as it is legal to demand and purchase sexual services. Women in prostitution can get no support if the society accepts such a crime and buyers of sexual services are not penalized. Thus experts of MARTA carried out interest advocacy activities among decision makers in the Cabinet of Ministers, as well as in Ministries of Welfare, the Interior, Health and Justice, encouraging the elaboration of prostitution exit programmes in Latvia, as well as effective measures for curtailing prostitution. This would also include initiating a decline for the demand of sexual services, thus preventing future involvement of children and women in prostitution and sexual exploitation.

## **RESULTS**

### **PREVENTION OF PROSTITUTION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

The Ministry of Justice formed a working group for curtailing prostitution. Proposals by the responsible ministries and the NGO were submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers, on the necessity to elaborate on *a prostitution exit programme* and measures for the elimination of prostitution. The adoption of the proposals will affect future activities of the institutions of justice, the interior, health, and education, aiming to prevent the involvement of children and women in prostitution and sexual exploitation.

As a result of international cooperation Members of the European Parliament were asked to object to prostitution, provide assistance to victims of prostitution and to penalize the buyers of these services. The Call requests the legislators to form an

adequate regulatory framework in the European Union, thus affecting national policies.

The report on human trafficking in Latvia, drafted for the U.S. Embassy, helped not to exclude competent NGOs from various activities of state institutions and the decision making process. I. Lāce, the head of MARTA, took part in European Commission events in Brussels for the Anti-Trafficking Day against trafficking in human beings.

Participation at the Security Council provided an opportunity to express our viewpoints within the elaboration of the Police Development Concept, pointing to significant shortcomings in advocacy of victims with regard to them being exposed to the arbitrariness of the officials.

## PROVISION OF QUALITY EDUCATION

Participation at the Gender Equality Committee facilitated the establishment of a working group for provision of gender equality within the field of education. Its work has resulted in proposals, asking for changes in the content of the general education and the activities of the teachers, aiming to prevent gender segregation within the future labour market.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare and the Nordic Council of Ministers a contribution was made to the education of preschool teachers and to the development of teaching aids encouraging a gender equal attitude and equal opportunities for boys and girls in preschools.

*“Taking a closer look at successful, well-known, creative individuals, we can see that most of them have had 'untraditionally' thinking parents. Their children have become successful not because boys had to play girl games or vice versa, but rather because each and every one of them was given an opportunity to develop his/her abilities and talents. Their parents supported them instead of shushing, scorning or shaming them, even if the boy took an interest in cooking, gardening or doll's fashion or hairstyle design or the girl was keen at experimenting in physics or making bird cages, or fond of arm wrestling. Later on these children grew up to become famous fashion designers, cooks, or Nobel Prize winners in physics, architects of industrial buildings, or world champions in arm wrestling. What would have happened to these children if their parents hadn't taken notice of their wishes, but rather sent the boy to play ball in the yard or made the girl knit or bake apple pies? The fostering of an individual's talents has nothing to do with one's gender or sexual orientation, which was the unsound argument of so many worried people after the publishing of the presently scandalous book on gender equality in pre school. Children whose parents put them in a strict 'box of traditions', now stand lower on the social stairs; their wage is lower, and they are less happy and satisfied both at work and home. There is more violence in their lives and as a rule they have lower education. Furthermore, due to their unhealthy habits their health is worse and life shorter. By continuing to embody the same 'traditional' stereotypes and models into their children parents are leading them down the road to the life of the 'barbarous guy/unskilled worker', the 'low paid shop assistant' and the 'exhausted housewife'.”* Iluta Lāce, head of MARTA.

MARTA supported the implementation of the Swedish, Estonian and Latvian cooperated project “*Gender Equality, Entrepreneurship and Environment in Preschool*”, supported by the programme “Nordplus”.

## STRENGTHENING THE HEALTH OF WOMEN

In collaboration with the association PAPADES ZIEDS, the issue of a woman's right to reproductive choice was advocated at the Saeima Demography Subcommittee and its working group "On the Rights to Life of the Unborn Child". Individual meetings with members of the Saeima helped to raise their awareness on reproductive rights and women security issues, as well as the necessity for remedy in unregistered relations.

The interests of patients — women, young people and children — were advocated at the Ministry of Welfare "Mother and Child Health Council".

## PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A regular representation of the MARTA centre's opinion was guaranteed at the Ministry of Justice working group for elaboration of the concept of preventive means for public security, by jointly drawing up amendments to the Family Rights section of the Civil law, as well as promoting elaboration of amendments for the Civil Law, Law of Proceedings and the Law "On Police". This will ensure the protection of victims of domestic violence, as well as victims of other types of violence, for example persecution and repeated violence.

With the support of the MARTA centre an agreement with the Ministry of the Interior and the State Police was reached within the working group, stating that the amendments to the law should include additional duties for the police. The amendments will enter into force as of January 1, 2014 and the MARTA centre will continue its active advocacy work in order to validate the amendments in Saeima. Furthermore, based on the MARTA centre's experience with assisting women (victims of domestic violence) proposals on the improvement of police work were drawn up, taken into consideration and incorporated in the project for Development Concept of the State Police.

*Larisa came to the MARTA centre carrying a suitcase full of problems. She had been depressed for a long time; she had taken medication and suffered a permanent head trauma after a car accident.*

*Larisa was living together with her grown-up children, who still demanded her care. Yet her husband's emotional abuse — inattentiveness and disregarding her needs — was the most painful. Larisa's husband was constantly blaming her for all the family troubles. He reminded her of her illness and inferiority as a woman.*

*Larisa came to the MARTA centre for help, for a long period of time. For her summer vacation she visited her parents and relatives in Russia.*

*In the autumn the MARTA centre opened its doors to a different, fundamentally changed woman. Her depression had lessened; she had stopped taking medication and had learned to accept her severe health problems. Furthermore her grown-up children had started their own independent lives. Larisa says: "I feel I'm not bound to the washbasin anymore". She has ended the abusive relationship with her husband and is experiencing the joy of a relationship with a man who respects her and listens to her.*



## YOUNG PEOPLE IN LATVIA AND PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY

*“I’d say a woman can do the work of a man and the other way round, if she likes it and it comes easy for her. It is possible!”* says Pēteris, a 'boy group' participant.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Åland Islands Peace Institute organized a 'boy and girl group' method gathering in Åland (Finland), giving the youth group leaders a possibility to exchange experiences. They met their colleagues from Lithuania, Belarus, Russia, Azerbaijan, Finland and Sweden, to discuss common problems, share success stories and look for new ideas to organize group activities in their home towns.

On September 1<sup>st</sup> the MARTA centre opened an informative tent at Vērmanes Garden during the public event *Zem Viena Jumta* (Under One Roof), organized by the Riga Board of Schoolchildren. The event was attended by children, young people and their parents, who took part in interactive and educational activities on gender equality.

During 2012 training for new group leaders was organized in the region of Kurzeme (in the Latvian towns of Kandava and Tukums) and Latgale (in the town of Rēzekne)

### *ES BŪŠU* (I WILL BE) FOR THE YOUTH

Within the framework of MARTA’s campaign *ES BŪŠU* several youth activities were organized, including an anti-violence campaign with the boy/girl group participants being the main initiators and implementers of the campaign activities. Here and there young people were seen offering hugs to one another, encouraging others to get rid of aggression, and promoting peace. One group visited children from a family support centre. Activities were organized in Cēsis, Jēkabpils, Birži, Līvāni, Rīga and Lejasstrazdi of Dobeles region.

Educational activities for girls and boys on gender stereotypes and gender-based violence were organized in various regions of Latvia. Cēsis, Jēkabpils and Jelgava hosted informative seminars with structured discussions for 13—17 year olds, informing the youth on issues of human rights and violence against women. The second part of the seminar engaged the participants in brainstorming, encouraging active citizenship and strengthening the awareness of the fact that each individual is able to act and make changes in society. Urban objects, entitled “*A SAFE STOP*” were made in each of the cities, providing a small territory which served as a safe place that is free of violence — a symbolic transformation from fear and negativity into safety and positivity.

### *ES BŪŠU* IN LATVIA AND THE WORLD

In 2012 MARTA started a campaign *ES BŪŠU*, which encourages to make world better and enjoy supporting MARTA’s work.

## EVENTS

The campaign included a benefit concert tour in Latvia and Scandinavia, youth activities, publicity events and the first MARTA summer camp.

*“To enjoy a soup made outdoors from local products, to listen to strong women who expand their organizations on a daily basis despite the rough times and to teach card games to colleagues in evenings, to learn to survive in a tent, for two very saturated days. Also a possibility to take part in four workshops, with one giving an opportunity to cry out from the depths of the heart, and evenings with very skilful dance teachers”*, says Liene.

The Happy Art Museum of the shopping centre 'Gallerija Riga' opened an audiovisual room VIŅA SMILTSĒRKŠĶIEM NOLASA ĒRKŠĶUS (She picks thorns off sea buckthorns) — a multimedia project combining Ulla Perkune's photos portraying women, the voice of convicts for grievous crimes of violence against women, and audio texts by young writers.

## MARTA AND THE WORLD

A foundation for significant cooperation with women organizations in Kyrgyzstan and the Seychelles has been laid. Work on the establishment of a MARTA branch in Uzbekistan has started, aiming to support the development of social work, to strengthen the support network for professional experts and to improve work with young people.

## GUARANTEE OF MARTA'S ACTIVITIES

During 2012 the ideas, the values and the activities of the MARTA centre were supported by Nordea Bank Latvian branch, Latvijas Valsts Meži (Latvia State Forests), The Body Shop, AVON, Ltd. “Madara”, airBaltic, Latvian Evangelic Lutheran Church in America, Equality Now, Ruth Turner Foundation, Finlands Svenska Marthaforbund, Martharellerna, Stockholm-Lidingö Soroptimist Club, Norköping Social Democratic Women, University Involda, Agenda kurs + reiser (Norway), Malakta Art Factory, individual benefactors and donors to portal [www.ziedot.lv](http://www.ziedot.lv), Charity factors and Donoraction aid donators, the Embassy of Norway to Latvia in Riga and the U.S. Embassy in Latvia.

In 2012 MARTA received funding for various projects

- 1) *“Challenging Gender Roles for Prevention of Trafficking”*, project funded by the European Union European Regional Development fund central Baltic Interreg IV A programme 2007-2013;
- 2) *“Save Yourself, Stop the Violence!”*, project by the Open Society Foundations;

- 3) *“Save Yourself — Save Peers!”*, project by the OAK foundation;
- 4) *“Corrective Self-Help Groups in Regions of Latvia and Ilģuciems Female Prison (Self-Help Groups — Let’s Help Each Other!)”*, project by the Swiss Confederation and the Republic of Latvia funded by the means of the Latvian and Swiss Cooperation programme for an enlarged European Union;
- 5) *“Safety of Women — the Foundation for a Sustainable Latvia”* and *“Youth Against Violence: I Will Be”*, two projects supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Latvia;
- 6) *“EU in a Comparative Perspective: Provision of Consultative Support to Survivors of Domestic Violence”*, international project of EC Daphne III programme;
- 7) EC project *“Enlarging the Network of Women Help Desks. An Integrated Project for Reduction of Social Marginality and Empower Vulnerable Women in Ferghana, Andijan and Tashkent”*.
- 8) *“Safety of Women and Children — Basis for Latvia’s Viability”*, project by the European Social Fund;
- 9) *“Zero Tolerance for Violence against Children”*, project by the World Childhood Foundation;
- 10) *“Inspiring Youth for Sustainability”*, project by the Nordic Council of Ministers;
- 11) *“A Safety Compass — Signposting Ways to Escape Trafficking!”*, project by the EC Prevention of and fight against crime programme.