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Centerleder Vera Eckhardt

## Annual report 2003

In January 2003 EVA's ARK started off with social/ community related activities as well as more dialogue and networking initiatives. The Equal Opportunities Minister's New Year reception tied all women's rights together with the rights of women of other ethnic origins. 'Our women's' participation in a major political conference put focus on the social conditions of weak groups, among them recent immigrants and gave the new Danish woman who participated many new experiences: political debate, Danish tradition of societies, and the diversity in debates and points of view. And a visit to Copenhagen Police Headquarters with a guided tour, and a meeting with the Chief of Police Hanne Bech Hansen, lasting several hours brought forward many questions and some answers, and was rewarding for all parties.

Several topics from that meeting were followed up by internal/ in house meetings, where the participants (women of foreign background and Danish women) told about and discussed the many facets of a democratic society and political and community culture.

Throughout the year there have been many similar meetings, events and internal meetings.

With spring came a very happy and much needed initiative: The study/ reading room, whose establishment was made possible by the donation from "Enkefru Plums Støttefond" ( Mrs. Plum's Support Foundation). The inauguration of the room took place on International Women's Day in the presence of the Minister for Integration Bertel Haarder, and also with a speech by a representative of the foundation.

The planning and establishment of the physical and pedagogical contents took place in an exciting network of helpers, experts, and other supporters. The room and the possibilities it offers is proving its worth more and more. At times the room is almost bursting its seams.

In early summer Copenhagen municipality put focus on integration. One of the users and helper had nominated EVAs ARK for the municipality's integration prize. Unfortunately we did not win it. But nevertheless, the presence of several hundred New Danish citizens in the Town Hall on the day of the presentation was an important manifestation. We could have wished that the Municipality had been wearing the spectacles of diversity and noticed the women on that occasion, and either explicitly given the prize to women, or made certain that both sexes were equally represented both officially and on stage. It was not with proud women's eyes we viewed the scene of politicians, civil servants, and prize winners consisting only of men.

On June 14 Copenhagen Municipality hosted the International Day for Ethnical Equality. We at EVAs ARK took a keen interest in the preparatory meetings, met many members of ethnic societies, and on the day we participated proudly with a fine and well patronised stand at Copenhagen Town Hall Square.

Following the tradition we had a week of social and cultural activities during the summer, some in sunshine, other indoors in pouring rain.

Autumn and winter were for a great part taken up by catching up with the large number of customers of EVAs ARK. We have become widely known all over the country; and many women



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of foreign background come through the hearsay. Others see our programmes and leaflets round about, and a not so small number have their attention to the opportunities of EVAs ARK drawn by neighbours, colleagues, and relatives, including husbands.

We rounded off the year's series of informal and network meetings with a before-Christmas get-together on December 16, where we had a good time, read stories, sang songs, and wished each other all the best for the coming year.

### **A selection of the women:**

**Country of origin:** Russia\* Morocco\* Saudi Arabia\* Salvador\* Canada\* The Philippines\* China\* South Korea\* Turkey\* Argentina\* Kenya\* Iran\* Venezuela\* Bosnia- Herzegovina\* Kurdistan\* Japan\* Estonia\* Honduras\* Pakistan\* India\* West Africa\* Azerbaijan\* Poland\* Finland\* Egypt\* Romania\* Haiti\* Brazil\* South Africa\* Italy\* USA\* Mexico\* Iraq\* Latvia\* Belorussia\* Afghanistan\* Armenia\* Ukraine\* Peru\* and many other.

**Age:** The users/ the women are most strongly represented in the age group 25 to 35, but there are many both younger, the youngest is 16, and at the upper end the age is 55 to 60. Moreover their children occasionally accompany them on visits and arrangements to the great delight of everybody.

**Family circumstances.** Many women are married, some to Danish men, some to men from their country of origin. Many are single, and some are divorced. On an average there are just as many who are mothers as not mothers.

**Education/ work. Knowledge, experience, and everyday life.** New Danish women, from which there came more than 60 enquiries just in the autumn, come for: talk, guidance, and/or support in Danish, questions about training and questions concerning the job market/ job application and independent use of the reading – study room. They may be confused, uncertain, lack overview, lack support and encouragement on their way. Here as for the rest of the users and guests there is a wide variety of education and job and job experience, among others: BA in education and public relations\* sociology\* language and administration\* hospital lab technician\* English marketing and economy\*social psychology\* open folk high school\*engineer\* accountant\* political science\*sociology and economy\*design, textile and clothing\*social and health care worker\*MA in Hindi\*secretary\*eskimology\*Danish High School education\*child psychology\*nursery school teacher\* high school teacher\*high school for foreigners\*seamstress\*bank clerk\*Russian teacher\*journalist\*job activation\*social welfare (rehabilitation)\* dental nurse\*administration and office\* interpreter\*hotel\*shop assistant\*self-employed\*hospital assistant\*day carer\*book keeper\* many attending language schools, some are housewives for the moment, and many others.

For most women the main wish is to form their own life, to bring up their children, take care of the family, and be / become independent and take an active part in Danish society. And most do not have an occupation where they themselves and / or the Danish society can take advantage of the massive knowledge and competence they possess, or the enthusiasm they show in improving their competences.



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The women seek EVAs ARK for support, encouragement, for somebody to assist them to plan their future, for cross-cultural dialogue, to meet Danish women and to share out the competences and resources, they brought with them.

**A keyword of EVAs ARK is help so that they can help themselves.**

Many indigenous Danish women have joined the network as affiliated, as job trainers, job trainees, interlocutors, expert network relating to the society, and volunteers. Here also the age spread is wide, there are plenty of opportunities to meet across generations and learn from each other. Several young women job trainees get proper jobs while they are with EVAs ARK, and many learn new aspects of themselves and the world we live in.

**A keyword of the intercultural meetings is: we enrich and are enriched**

At EVAs ARK you meet women with different skills, networks, societies, and individual persons, who are joined in the wish to support a positive integration and strengthen women's lives and participation in the surrounding society, with special focus on foreign women, be that refugees, immigrants, descendants, foreign married, as itinerant worker or....

At EVAs ARK people of good will are welcome.

EVAs ARK has participated nationally and internationally: among other things, we participated in a Nordic conference on gender equality and integration in Malmø, and the manager of the centre, Vera Eckhardt, participated in the international conference in Vienna on 'Metropolis-gaining from migration' with a presentation at a workshop on the day to day work on integration and gender equality at EVAs ARK. One conclusion is that equal rights for men and women, for all citizens of the country are basic. But added to that are equal opportunities to exert these rights. In far too many cases women are worse off than men, be it legally or in reality. Or be it opportunities to be able to act in a democracy like the Danish, which to all appearances is neutral with regard to gender.

The **aim** of the society is:

- To support and strengthen women's life and participation in society
- To watch and further equal conditions for new Danish women
- To arrange activities, meetings, debates, and seminars on cross-cultural and international subjects
- To assist new Danish /migrating women in building bridges to their life in Denmark
- To create favourable conditions for growth of competences and resources
- To contribute to networking

In the coming years there will also be a great need for EVAs ARK, attempting to embrace the whole life, the many facets of phases in women's lives, wishing to build bridges between many different nationalities, generations, actors, and agents. EVAs ARK will be among those taking the initiative, seeking new ways and be present where competences, resources, drive, and will power



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make the way for a positive future, nationally and internationally, for and with the women of the world – their families, and their children.

“I think it has been fantastic to feel and watch the women’s growing self-confidence and self-awareness, which they get when they work their way through a CV together with us, and we talk together. Some of them have very little self-confidence when they first come, with a despondent attitude to their job prospects, not really believing in themselves. When they then become aware how much they actually have to offer, they become happy and suddenly believe it will be possible to change their way ahead.” Says Camilla, an enthusiastic job trainer, about her work with the reading-study room at EVAs ARK autumn 2003.

Vera Eckhardt, Manager of the Centre, LL.