



IN ENGLISH

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Marthaförbundet (The Swedish Martha Association in Finland) is the largest organisation for Swedish-speaking women in Finland. Our members are “marthas”.

Quality of life, welfare and sustainable development are keywords in all our activities. Marthaförbundet influences decisionmakers and authorities through initiatives and statements and serves as a channel between the authorities in society and people at grassroot level.

Knowledge is the basis for our work – knowledge is power. Forming new networks, both formally and informally, is the key to success. Together we can make great things happen.

We are a non-political, non-governmental organisation. Our goals are to give women tools to achieve balance in their lives and support women as they pursue their own way. We also provide adult education and extend advisory services.

Marthaförbundet offers advisory service by telephone, gives lectures and demonstrations, writes informative articles and produces information material within household, food and nutrition, ecological consumption and environmental control, and family economy and debt management.

Within the household area the focus is on teaching the use of healthy food, whereas the ecology aspect concentrates on informing about ecological consumption, waste handling and means of preserving the Finnish nature. The main concern within home economics is teaching young families sound consumer behaviour and giving (especially women) economic advice.



MARTHAFEMINISM

Ms. Lucina Hagman, the founder of the Martha Association, wanted to teach women how to read and write, skills not always common in the countryside almost 110 years ago. She wanted to influence society through the women.

Today, our definition of marthafeminism is that each and every woman should have the right to choose her own way of life, whether it's making a career or staying at home taking care of the children, or a combination of the two. And her choice should be supported and made possible. We want to make women more visible in the society by forming opinion and influencing decision-makers. One of our most important tasks is still to spread knowledge and build bridges between generations.

We focus on issues close to women and their lives: family, work, knowledge, networks, health, food and nutrition, an ecological lifestyle and personal economics.



HOW IT BEGAN

The Martha Association was founded in 1899, at a politically difficult time, when Finland was still a part of Russia. The aim of the association was to spread knowledge and enlightenment among the women living both in the countryside and in the cities. The founders of the Martha Association wanted to make women, the fosterers of coming generations, aware of the political situation in the country, increase their self-confidence and improve their knowledge and skills in housekeeping and raising a family.

This was considered too dangerous by the authorities, who at that time forbid all gatherings that could lead to upheaval. The Martha Association started out with the name Education in the home, but soon took the more innocent, biblical name Martha as guise. In 1924, the movement had spread all over the country and grown so large, that it out of practical reasons was divided into two separate organisations: the Finnish-speaking "Marttaliitto" and the Swedish-speaking "Marthaförbundet".



Lucina Hagman (1853-1946), one of the founders



THE ORGANISATION OF TODAY

Today Marthaförbundet has more than 10.000 members, it is organised into 13 districts and has about 450 local associations and clubs. Our members come from all of the Swedish-speaking areas in Finland, and are mostly women of all ages, older as well as younger. We also have some male members.

The association also has a section for children, called the M-club, with over 1.000 members. We have special groups for teenage girls, groups led by a young adult where the girls are allowed to express themselves freely and ponder on subjects important to them without being criticized or belittled.

The popular monthly magazine "Martha", which has about 5.000 subscribers, is the voice of Marthaförbundet. The headquarters, located in Helsinki, has a staff of about 14 people. Since year 2000 the organisation has received financial support from the government.



THE INTERNATIONAL ASPECT

International co-operation is another important field of the Martha work. Marthaförbundet is a member of the international organisation ACWW (the Associated Country Women of the World) and a member of the Nordic Women's Association (Nordens Kvinnoförbund).

From 1977 to 1998 Marthaförbundet carried through a project in Sri Lanka, building and supporting 13 nursery schools for small children. During three years at the beginning of the 1990's, education for women in small scale enterprising was arranged in co-operation with the local organisation Lanka Mahila Samiti.

In 1998 a new education project, financially supported by the EU, was started for women in Latvia. The objectives of the project are to promote the integration of unemployed or low-paid women into society and increase the equality between women and men. Local associations have co-operation projects in e.g. Estonia and Romania.

Presently we are exploring the possibilities of carrying through a UNDP project in Macedonia on raising the rate of employment amongst women, and securing a more stable economic base for the women.



Martha – Balance in everyday life



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