



# THE SOLUTIONS ARE IN OUR HANDS: **SUCCESSFUL WOMEN'S INITIATIVES AND CAMPAIGNS**

Moscow, 2013

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# THE SOLUTIONS ARE IN OUR HANDS: **SUCCESSFUL WOMEN'S INITIATIVES AND CAMPAIGNS**

THIS COLLECTION IS AN OUTCOME OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE «WOMEN'S ROLE IN WRITING A GENDER AGENDA FOR THE 21ST CENTURY», HELD IN MOSCOW ON MARCH 20, 2013. BOTH CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS AND PARTICIPANTS HAVE JOINED TOGETHER TO PRODUCE THIS BEST-PRACTICES GUIDE IN ORDER TO HELP CONTINUE OUR DISCUSSION OF THE ROLE OF MODERN WOMEN IN SOCIETY.



## Why did we decide to publish this best-practices guide?

**T**he conference «Women's Role in Writing a Gender Agenda for the 21st Century» was held on March 20th 2013 in Moscow. The event was dedicated to the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day in Russia.

In preparing the program of the conference, we included an explanation of our motivations for organizing it:

**“At the end of 2012, a few people who later formed the organizing committee for this conference, asked the following question aloud: in the 100 years since Russian women first celebrated International Women's Day, how have women's lives in Russia changed?”**

In long ago 1913, women participating in the «Scientific Conference on the Question of Women» included three main issues on their agenda: 1. Women's right to vote 2. State support for motherhood 3. The rising cost of living.

What has changed since that time? What problems are of concern to women in Russia today?

We decided to bring together women of all ages, professions and views to discuss the challenges facing women today, and to try to find responses together.

**Against the backdrop of a renewal in the growth of civil society initiatives by and for women around the world, we believe that by creating a forum for discussion for women in Russia today, we can help to promote an international and intergenerational transfer of knowledge and ideas.**

**Following the conference, we plan to publish a best practices brochure based on the results of our gathering. We will also invite you to join the conference Facebook group page, “100 Years of March 8th” in order to continue a dialogue with the other participants.**

**As we call this gathering, we look back 100 years for our inspiration, certainly, but mostly, we look forward, to the tremendous potential that can be unleashed by the grassroots, charitable and entrepreneurial initiative of Russia's women.”**

This best-practices guide includes the stories of activists who spoke at the conference and of their organizations, as well as stories from those who responded to our invitation to tell the story of their project or campaign in the «100 years of March 8th» Facebook group created after the conference.

It includes four stories from foreign guests who participated in the conference, and ten Russian stories.

It is our intention that the «best practices» described in these pages will help people and organizations seeking positive change to come up with new ideas, to meet and establish contacts, to energize and to be inspired by the successes and achievements of others ... and finally to act in order to solve the problems they are facing.

We hope that publishing this collection will be just one continuing step in our initiative. We believe that the public debate about the role of women in society must continue.

It will take continued dialogue and discussion to implement the changes that we need!

# OBTAINING WHAT IS RIGHTFULLY YOURS

**Experts from the Center for Social and Labor Rights** drew attention to the problem of non-payment of children's benefits – and in alliance with NGO activists they managed to solve it.



ELENA GERASIMOVA

For more than ten years, the Center for Social and Labor Rights (CSLR) has been providing legal assistance to workers affected by the arbitrary actions of their employers. The web portal “All about labor rights” ([www.trudprava.ru](http://www.trudprava.ru)) and the online consultations available there play an important role in the Center's work. Through the portal, users can obtain advice from a lawyer or search the categories to find the answer to their questions in the database of existing materials. Legal consultations are popular, with constantly alternating topics, including discrimination against union members, administrative refusal to contractualize the employment relationship and forced dismissals. A significant increase in questions on any given issue is an important indicator of its relevance. In 2009-2010, there was a sharp increase in the number of requests from women who were pregnant or had small children and were

unable to obtain the child benefits to which they were legally entitled. It became clear that the problem had reached acute proportions. In addition, colleagues from the Center's partner organization, “Petersburg AEGIS,” reported that non-payment of benefits was the most serious challenge they were encountering. So, CSLR lawyers went to work to solve the problem.

At first it seemed that helping women who had been deprived of their right to a benefit without prior warning would be simple: The employer does not want to pay, and the young mother cannot afford to hire a lawyer – so the Center could simply provide such women with qualified legal assistance and recover the money from the employer through the courts. But in practice, it turned out to be much more complicated.

The first case that CSLR lawyers worked on was that of Tatiana K., a young mother of three children. After the birth of triplets, Tatiana found herself in a hopeless situation: her husband had left her, and her employer refused to pay her benefits. In court, it became clear that the employer was not averse to paying... it was just that there were no funds in his account. In fact, the problem of “empty accounts” was faced by many businesses and organizations as a result of the 2008-2009 financial crisis.

By the spring of 2011, the CSLR had put together more than 50 different cases of non-payment of child benefits. In some cases, the employer had gone out of business. In other cases, the funds earmarked for payment of child benefits, which were deposited into the employer's account by the Social Insurance Fund (SIF), had been canceled by the tax office. In some cases, the employer's account had been seized by the very same tax office... The stories all boiled down to the same thing: mothers of young children, armed with the necessary documents, were unable to receive the money to which they were legally entitled.

CSLR staff analyzed the situation and came to the conclusion that the main problem was that the Social Insurance Fund itself is not required to assist women in obtaining benefits. The Fund only communicates with these women through an intermediary – the employer – who is also not interested in the payment of benefits.

Complaints to the Social Insurance Fund yielded nothing. The bureaucratic answers were as follows: yes, benefits are financed through social insurance accounts, yes, the Fund has the right to allocate the money to employers upon request (Editor's note: the employer does not have to request the money), and – no, the Fund does not have any relationship with the insured persons. This led to a question: why, in fact, is there no such relationship?

It was with this question that on Children's Day, June 1st, 2011, affected women joined together to picket the central office of the Social Insurance Fund. Journalists, representatives of civic organizations in Moscow and sympathetic citizens joined in the picket. As a result, the Fund's management offered to begin negotiations with the picketers.

Experts from the Center for Social and Labor Rights joined the negotiating team. They provided Social Insurance Fund staff with a general analysis of the issue, as well as specific information describing the individual cases of violations of the rights of insured women, together with documents demonstrating the ineffectiveness of all existing legal mechanisms for the recovery of child benefits.

A few months after the negotiations, the territorial authorities of the Social Insurance Fund behaved quite differently, not only in Moscow but also in the regions. In the summer of 2011 the case of Tatiana K. was successfully resolved, and benefits were paid directly from the Fund to several other women. Recovery of benefits directly from the Social Insurance Fund became established legal practice. Since July 2011, the Russian region of Nizhny Novgorod and the Karachay-Cherkess Republic have initiated pilot projects in which child benefits are paid directly by the branches of the Social Insurance Fund.

CSLR analysts developed information and training materials and posted them on the CSLR website, detailing in which cases benefits can be received directly from the Social Insurance Fund, and asked the central office of the Fund to publish an official explanation, which they failed to do. In their communications with Social Insurance Fund staff, the CSLR analysts formed the impression that the Fund did not see its mission as being to pay benefits to mothers – rather, they saw their job as accumulating money in their accounts. Meanwhile, the laws





SO, BY LENDING A HAND TO HELP INDIVIDUAL WOMEN TO SOLVE WHAT SEEMED TO BE ONLY THEIR PROBLEM, THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL AND LABOR RIGHTS WAS ABLE TO MAKE LIFE EASIER FOR THOUSANDS OF RUSSIAN MOTHERS.

remained unchanged, and by the autumn of 2011, it was impossible to detect any improvements in the work of the Social Insurance Fund. In December 2011, it once again became impossible to receive benefits directly from the Social Insurance Fund.

In 2012, the earlier problems re-surfaced, and the number of women who were victims of non-payment of benefits by employers and the Social Insurance Fund was growing again. CSLR specialists responded to numerous appeals from such victims with a detailed analysis on the challenges these women faced in exercising their legal right to receive maternity benefits. Proposals were made to amend existing legislation and gradually to move to a system of direct payment of benefits from the Social Insurance Fund.

On the initiative of the CSLR, on February 21st 2012, the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation held a hearing to discuss the issue. Recommendations compiled on the basis of the hearing were sent to the authorities. The basic idea was to introduce legislative amendments to expand the list of cases in which benefits are paid directly by the branches of the Social Insurance Fund, and to move in future to a system of direct payments across Russia.



On February 22nd 2012, yet another picket was held in front of the central building of the Social Insurance Fund.

The picketers demanded the introduction of a simple system of direct payment of child benefits. The Center for Social and Labor Rights once again supported the protesters. It soon became clear that the ice had melted: this time the picketers were invited to the negotiating table almost immediately, and the talks themselves were far more constructive: the Social Insurance Fund lawyers and the CSLR experts were no longer arguing about the existence of the problem – rather, they had joined forces to find a solution.

Unfortunately, not all of the agreements entered into on that occasion were then fully adhered to by the Fund. However – and this is very important – the central office of the Social Insurance Fund sent an order to its territorial agencies requiring them to provide all possible assistance to insured women to obtain child benefits. Based on the understanding achieved in the negotiations between the Fund and the CSLR legal specialists, lawyers in the territorial agencies of the Fund began to provide consultations to victims in order to help them to prepare the necessary applications and documents. They even explained how to petition the court with a claim against the Fund, that is against themselves. Starting in July 2012, six regions began to implement a pilot project for the payment of child benefits directly from the Social Insurance Fund: the Khabarovsk region, and the Astrakhan, Kurgan, Novgorod, Novosibirsk and Tambov oblasts. And on December 30th, 2012, the long-awaited amendments to the law on the payment of benefits came into force, allowing women whose employers had gone out of business to receive benefits directly from the Social Insurance Fund.

While providing individual assistance to women who had fallen victim to the non-payment of benefits, the CSLR team managed at the same time to spur the



amendment of legislation in order to eliminate the causes giving rise to the very problem. It was close cooperation between the CSLR and activists exerting pressure from below that ensured the success of the negotiations with the authorities. The union between experts and activists proved quite fruitful: the demands made during the public protests were strengthened by expert analysis of the situation, while the protests themselves showcased the need for a constructive solution. And the authorities listened to the experts' suggestions, and yielded to public pressure.

In 2013, it became possible for women to receive child benefits from the territorial agencies of the Social Insurance Fund in those cases where an employer suddenly goes out of business. It is hoped that by 2014, women will be able to apply directly to the Social Insurance Fund for child benefits in all cases. So, by lending a hand to help individual women to solve what seemed to be only their problem, the Center for Social and Labor Rights was able to make life easier for thousands of Russian mothers.

#### THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL AND LABOR RIGHTS ONLINE:

**WEBSITE:** [trudprava.ru](http://trudprava.ru)

#### "GENDER PAGE":

**WEBSITE:** [trudprava.ru/main/gender](http://trudprava.ru/main/gender)

**FACEBOOK:** [www.facebook.com/CSLRights](http://www.facebook.com/CSLRights)

**TWITTER:** [twitter.com/trudprava](http://twitter.com/trudprava)

**THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL AND LABOR RIGHTS (CSLR)** is a Russian non-governmental non-profit organization that supports the promotion, respect and protection of rights in social and labor relations. **ELENA GERASIMOVA** is co-founder of the CSLR, and its Director since 2004. She is a specialist in Russian and international labor and trade union rights, and in social partnership. Elena has many years of work experience in drafting legislation, and in co-operating with public authorities and non-profit organizations, trade unions, as well as in providing consultations to citizens and representing their interests in the courts. She has participated in numerous settlements of collective labor disputes. She has been collaborating for many years with local and international organizations as an expert in labor law, trade union rights and the protection of women's rights. In 2005, Elena was one of the initiators and founders of the professional association "Lawyers for Human Rights," of which she is currently the Chairman. She holds a PhD in Law. In 2011, she began teaching at the Higher School of Economics.

# DOES THE CONCEPT OF GENDER EXIST IN RUSSIA?

Increased discussion of gender equality as a distinct phenomenon in Russian society is in large part thanks to the efforts of **the Moscow branch of the Heinrich Böll Foundation**. For more than a decade, the Böll Foundation has been implementing its Gender Democracy program.



IRINA KOSTERINA

In the 1920s, Russia experienced a rapid period of women's liberation: civil unions and abortion were legalized, and women gained both the right to vote and free access to higher education. But already by the late 1930s there was a return to a rigid patriarchal system. Throughout the twentieth century, Russian women, the state and society expected women to combine sometimes incompatible roles: those of an active worker, entirely devoted to her job, and of wife and mother, entirely devoted to her family. "Equality for women" was no more than a beautiful slogan. This trend continues and is even gaining strength in modern Russia.

One example of a tightening of the bolts on gender issues was the adoption in late 2011 of a new law "On the Protection of Public Health," which places limits on Russian women's access to abortion. The ban on "propaganda of

homosexuality among minors" is in the same vein. Such laws have already been adopted in several Russian regions, leading to severe restrictions on the activities of LGBT human rights organizations, which are deprived of their ability to openly defend the rights of sexual minorities.

Against this backdrop, a considerable part of Russian society for many years has perceived the topic of gender equality as being peripheral and irrelevant to the lives of ordinary people. Organizations defending the rights of victims of sex discrimination have not traditionally enjoyed wide support in Russia. The Böll Foundation's Gender Democracy program, which was launched in 2001, encompasses gender education and awareness-raising, promotion of research on gender, support for feminist initiatives, protection of LGBT rights, and work on gender and peacekeeping

initiatives in the North Caucasus. In its 11 years of existence, the Gender Democracy program has carried out more than 100 different projects, many of which are the result of partnerships with non-governmental organizations and experts in the field.

The longest-running program was run in collaboration with Russia's first public charitable hospital for women in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, from 2002 – 2010. The hospital provided free in-patient and out-patient care to "socially vulnerable" populations: rural women, mothers with many children, forced migrants from conflict zones and women deprived of health insurance coverage under tragic circumstances. The hospital opened in 1994, and during its operation more than 5,000 women received in-patient treatment, while more than 30,000 were treated as out-patients. Medical field teams were sent many times into the mountainous regions of Dagestan to provide medical and preventive care to women and children.

From 2002 to 2008, the Information Center of the Independent Women's Forum (IC IWF) was a regular partner of the Böll Foundation, providing resources, consultations and information to women, women's organizations and researchers in Russia and the CIS. For many years, the Center published a weekly online information sheet, which was both mailed to subscribers and posted on the "Women and Society" website. It also published a monthly newsletter "Vestnichka", which is essentially a chronicle of the women's movement in Russia.

Two consecutive community art festivals, "Myths about femininity" and "Myths about masculinity," were held in 2009 and 2010, in partnership with the Association for German-Russian Exchange. The festivals explored both traditional and non-traditional ideas about men and women and their roles. The aim was to draw attention to social issues, and to show that gender differences are an advantage rather than a limitation.

The Böll Foundation enjoys fruitful cooperation with the LGBT-rights organization "Exit". A series of public interest posters were created through the "Rainbow Family" project. One poster reads "Yes, we are a couple. And the children are ours!" featuring same-sex parents talking about their family and family values. Under the "Parenthood" program, discussion is encouraged about the existence of "non-traditional" parents in Russia. The program aims to demonstrate the importance of protecting the interests of such families, and provides them with psychological and "peer to peer" support.

THROUGHOUT THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, RUSSIAN WOMEN, THE STATE AND SOCIETY EXPECTED WOMEN TO COMBINE SOMETIMES INCOMPATIBLE ROLES: THOSE OF AN ACTIVE WORKER, ENTIRELY DEVOTED TO HER JOB, AND OF WIFE AND MOTHER, ENTIRELY DEVOTED TO HER FAMILY.

"Stop Sexism!" was a successful project carried out in cooperation with the Union of Journalists of Russia in 2006 and 2007. "Stop Sexism!" had a number of goals, including countering the spread of gender discrimination ideology in the media and promoting a culture of tolerance and gender sensitivity among Russian journalists.

The three-year project "From Exclusion of Others to Recognition of Diversity", carried out by the Ulyanovsk Research center "Region" with the support of the Böll Foundation, provided young researchers and activists from non-profit organizations the opportunity to launch dialogue on topics practically never discussed before in Russia, dealing with



such themes as “Hetero/non-hetero/sexuality,” “Body and Physicality,” and “New (bio)technologies” from social, political, and ethical perspectives. The outcome of the project was the release of the book “In the Shadow of the Body,” containing articles and essays about understanding the human body today.

Three Gender Summer Schools for young activists were conducted together with the Samara Center for Gender Studies. Following their attendance of the summer school, participants, both young men and women, were inspired to create an online community and forum to continue their intensive discussion on gender issues. A round-table discussion on LGBT rights was held, as well as a series of public lectures for Samara students by Gender Summer School teachers and invited experts.

Educational outreach is one of the goals of the Böll Foundation’s Gender Democracy program. Across Russia, the Foundation regularly organizes seminars, presentations of new publications on gender issues, workshops and discussions, round tables, and cycles of lectures on gender for students, teachers and local and regional authorities. The Foundation also supports the creation of educational videos, the holding of photo and art exhibitions, and the participation of Russian experts in the International Festival of Queer Culture in St. Petersburg, as well as other initiatives.

Since 2009, the Foundation has been implementing the “Gender Pages” project: publications promoting the basic tenets of gender theory and the idea of gender equality are placed on popular websites, such as [www.polit.ru](http://www.polit.ru), [www.rabkor.ru](http://www.rabkor.ru) and [www.chaskor.ru](http://www.chaskor.ru). The texts are also distributed widely in blogs and posted in social networks, greatly expanding their audience.

The extensive list of publications issued in the framework of the Böll Foundation’s Gender Democracy program

**IRINA KOSTERINA** is the Gender Democracy Program Coordinator for the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Russia, and a gender researcher with a PhD in sociology. She graduated from Ulyanovsk State University, and worked for 8 years in the research center “Region”. She is also a graduate of the Moscow School of Political Studies. Her research interests include the sociology of gender, masculinity, women’s rights, gender politics and feminism. She is the author of more than 30 publications.



includes a collection of scientific articles ( “Globalization and Gender Relations: Challenges for Post-Soviet Countries,” “Modern Women, Families and Demographics: Recent studies,” “Gender Relations in Contemporary Russia: A Study of the 1990s”), as well as books designed for those involved in gender-based projects, and the current bestseller “Gender for Dummies.” This two-volume collection of essays and articles is written by Russian experts who are leading specialists in gender studies. As the introduction reads, “This book is written for Russians, both women and men, who have at least once in their lifetimes experienced the problem of hitting the “glass

ceiling”. Understanding the concept of “gender” referred to in the title of this book, which may already be familiar to many readers, will help to address these issues.” Presentations of “Gender for Dummies” were held in 15 Russian cities, as well as in Kiev and Minsk. A webinar with the authors was also held, featuring a discussion of the book’s most topical issues.

“The Böll Foundation’s Gender Democracy Program is unique,” says program coordinator Irina Kosterina. “Very few other donor organizations have individual programs that are directly related to gender equality. And our working methods are also unique: rather than holding grant competitions, the Foundation contacts partner organizations and gender experts directly to initiate new projects. One of our main interests is gender education, for which we organize events large and small across Russia. Together with the partners with whom we often travel around the country to hold such events, we jokingly call these our “gender propaganda trains.” It’s precisely in the far corners of Russia when meeting with people interested in gender issues that you really understand that what you are doing is both important and necessary. People not only listen to discussions about gender issues, they actively participate and share their life stories. After the events, they often remain to ask their most intimate questions, or to seek and receive advice. We have reprinted our “Gender for Dummies” collection three times, as it sold out in different cities. This is proof that women’s rights, sexuality, and gender equality are discussed much less often in public than Russians would like, and often not in the way they would like. So, I think our program has a long life ahead.”



THE GENDER DEMOCRACY PROGRAM OF THE HEINRICH BÖLL FOUNDATION ONLINE

THE GENDER DEMOCRACY SECTION ON THE BÖLL FOUNDATION

WEBSITE: [www.ru.boell.org/web/110.html](http://www.ru.boell.org/web/110.html)

“GENDER PAGES”

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# “WOMEN’S BRIDGE” BETWEEN RUSSIANS AND EXPATRIATES



American **Karen Olson** was one of the co-founders of this platform for dialogue between Russian and expat women in Russia. The goal is to promote the development of civil society.

KAREN OLSON

**K**aren Olson is a specialist in developing citizen initiatives. She has been living in Russia for the past few years. She describes how the idea arose of launching an exchange of experience between Russian women active in socially meaningful projects and their expatriate colleagues:

– “In the spring of 2012 in Russia, there were lively discussions underway about citizen initiatives, and women took an active role in them, with a focus on how to develop civil society. Expatriate women in Russia have a lot of experience to share in this area. Together with my Russian friends Natalia Budaeva and Anastasia Sergeeva, we decided that the time was ripe to create a more active channel to exchange information and views among Russian and expatriate women. We felt that the various organizations bringing

expatriate women together in Moscow shared one common shortcoming: they either excluded Russian women entirely, or set quotas on their membership. We sat down together to think how we could foster cultural and intellectual cooperation among Russian and expatriate women in Russia. And we gave ourselves a gift on March 8th 2012, when we created the Facebook Group “Women’s Bridge”.

On the group page, we reached out to our peers, and sent the same text around by e-mail to potential members:

“Let’s span the social, cultural and linguistic divide between Russian and expatriate women living in Moscow: let’s create a monthly forum to exchange expertise and experience among women who share an interest in the development of civil society. We invite open-minded women

interested in exchange who can bring knowledge, know-how or experience to share. If you are Russian, please be ready to use your English too. If you are a foreigner, please be ready to use your Russian ”.

We suggested a few topics to start with that seemed to be of interest in Russia and worthy of discussion: Why is it so difficult to re-cycle in Moscow and what can I do about it?; How can I launch my own start-up, and why is it more fun than a desk job?; Helping homeless children: is it better to donate money or become a volunteer?; Creating a network: how to communicate what is important to you to as many people and as little time as possible; Corruption: how does it affect you and what can you do about it?; Inclusive schools: the benefits of inclusive education to kids with and without disabilities; Moscow’s architectural heritage: how can we help ensure its restoration?; New media: from the “idiot box” to Smart-TV; Art Therapy – what is it and how does it work?; Education for Russian orphans: ensuring equal opportunities ...

“We asked those who were interested in our initiative to suggest topics for discussion, and determined if once a month meetings were practical, and asked for suggestions of time



and place. We also asked what their priorities were, and who was willing to speak to the group,” recalls Karen Olson.

The initiative quickly gained adherents. A year after its founding, in March 2013 there were already 230 members – 210 on Facebook and the rest participating via e-mail. Members meet monthly in an informal setting.

At the first face-to-face meeting in March of 2012, discussion focused on a timely theme for Russia – the inclusion of women in business. Maria Kosenkova, one of the founders of StartUp Women, talked about her and Alena Popova’s creation– a virtual business-incubator and community for women IT entrepreneurs.

The events throughout the first year of Women’s Bridge’s existence focused on equally timely themes.

Civil activist and lawyer Donna Norton shared her experience of working with one of the largest US women’s



**I**N JUST A YEAR’S TIME, “WOMEN’S BRIDGE” BECAME A NOTICEABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT. THE GORBACHEV FOUNDATION INVITED WOMEN’S BRIDGE MEMBERS TO TAKE PART IN ITS DECEMBER 2012 CONFERENCE “WOMEN IN THE 21ST CENTURY,” AND IN MARCH OF 2013, WOMEN’S BRIDGE WAS ONE OF THE CO-ORGANIZERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE “WOMEN’S ROLE IN WRITING A GENDER AGENDA FOR THE 21ST CENTURY”



WE SAT DOWN TOGETHER TO THINK HOW WE COULD FOSTER CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL COOPERATION AMONG RUSSIAN AND EXPATRIATE WOMEN IN RUSSIA. AND WE GAVE OURSELVES A GIFT ON MARCH 8TH 2012, WHEN WE CREATED THE FACEBOOK GROUP “WOMEN’S BRIDGE”.

organizations defending the rights of mothers, children and families – MomsRising. This project, which as of yet has no equal in Russia, was created by drawing on the broad user capacity of the internet, and specifically Facebook.

American IT-consultant and political scientist Ali Savino gave a presentation on campaigning and journalism using social media.

Karen Olson spoke of the development of American campaigning tools and technology, and on using community organizing principles to mobilize voters.

Elena Panfilova and Christina Marshall gave a presentation on fighting corruption in Russia and the US. Elena is the Director of Transparency International Russia, and Christina is a law professor and former staff member of the US Securities and Exchange Commission.

Marina Pisklakova-Parker, founder of the women’s rights organization “Anna” and Donna Norton teamed up for a presentation on fighting violence against women, a problem that is equally critical in Russia and in the US today.

American lawyer Susannah Shakow, who created the organization “Running Start” to help attract young women to politics, and Evgeniya Chirikova, leader of the movement to save the Khimki forest and former mayoral candidate in Khimki, teamed up to discuss women’s participation in political life in the US and Russia.

Women’s Bridge meetings in its first year also included cultural and historical themes: California environmental artist Suki Bryan gave a presentation of the paintings at her Moscow exhibit; art historian Nadya Plungyan spoke about gender in art, and American historian Ellen Hurwitz dedicated her presentation to the leadership style of Princess Olga and its significance for contemporary Russian women. There were also opportunities to relax and have fun: a master class on Italian cooking and flamenco lessons were on offer...

In just a year’s time, “Women’s Bridge” became a noticeable development in the women’s movement. The Gorbachev Foundation invited Women’s Bridge members to take part in its December 2012 conference “Women in the 21st Century”, and in March of 2013, Women’s Bridge was one of the co-organizers of the international conference “Women’s Role in Writing a Gender Agenda for the 21st Century”.



INTERNET:

FACEBOOK: [www.facebook.com/groups/womensbridge](http://www.facebook.com/groups/womensbridge)

**KAREN OLSON** was born in the US. In 1988, she received her BA in History with a specialization in Russian, Soviet and East European Studies. She has lived outside the US since 1989, when she worked as a Russian-speaking guide to a traveling US exhibit in the USSR, and later at the US Consulate in Rome and as an interpreter in Geneva. An early supporter of Barack Obama’s presidential campaign, she created “Geneva for Obama” in 2007, and in 2008 she worked on campaign staff in Florida. In 2012, she received a certificate for completion of the “Leadership, Organizing and Action” course at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and in 2013 she was invited to join the Global Leading Change Network, bringing together community organizers around the world. While living in Moscow, she helped organize leadership development programs for youth with disabilities at the Russian NGO “Perspektiva”, where she spearheaded the creation of the “Theatrical Perspective” program. Since 2011, Karen has been invited to lead training workshops for representatives of various civil society groups in Russia.

# HOW TO OBTAIN FAIR LAWS

## The experience of **Petersburg Aegis and the Women's Voice Coalition**



RIMA SHARIFULLINA

### In St. Petersburg, young mothers joined together to defend their rights. What happened?

Following the 2008 crisis in Russia, the problem of illegal dismissals of pregnant women and new mothers, and of non-payment of their legal benefits and specifically of children's benefits, became particularly acute. In order to save money, employers began en masse to avoid the "maternity penalty." It became commonplace for mothers not to be able to obtain legal aid because their employer's accounts were empty, or because their employer's business had mysteriously "vanished." It was a paradoxical situation: the Social Insurance Fund had the money to pay the benefits, but women could not receive their benefits because their pay, by law,

came not from the Social Insurance Fund, but from the employer.

Mothers, who were busy caring for young children, were deprived of the opportunity to find and hire competent legal counsel to defend their rights, and, as a rule, they quickly gave up. But in St. Petersburg, a few young women chose to pursue the issue. Though they began fighting for their rights individually, they eventually merged into the movement "Young Mothers for a Fair Law." This movement subsequently served as the catalyst for the creation of the broad St. Petersburg citizen's coalition "Women's Voice". The "Society for the Social Protection of Citizens," also known as Petersburg Aegis, played a key role in the creation of the coalition, and in solving the problem of unpaid children's benefits. The young

mothers met the representatives of Petersburg Aegis in the course of their struggle.

Petersburg Aegis lawyers advised the women who had been deprived of their benefits, helped them make claims, represented them in the courts, and made inquiries to officials on their behalf. But it soon became clear that it was shortcomings in the law in the first place that were impeding an effective solution to the problem. In particular, deciding in favor of the plaintiffs, the courts had determined that the defendant was the employer, rather than the Social Insurance Fund, despite the fact that obtaining payment from the employer was often impossible. Officials responded unanimously that this result could not be changed. Realizing that a legal impasse had been reached, Rima Sharifullina, the Director of Petersburg Aegis, suggested attracting the attention of the public and of the authorities with the help of a street protest. The resulting campaign, called "Don't give me flowers, give me a law!", was held March 4, 2010. The date was carefully chosen: on the eve of the traditional March 8th holiday, International Women's Day, women's issues always attract the attention of journalists, and the event was covered widely by the media. For the first time it was publicly stated that failure to pay children's benefits were not individual cases, nor the problem of individual families, but that they were a societal issue for the country as a whole.

Soon thereafter the birth of the "Young Mothers for a Fair Law" movement was officially announced. In the VKontakte social media network a new group appeared, called "Mothers deceived by their employers," which quickly grew in size. The group helped members to find free legal help, to learn how to write letters to various state agencies, to make claims to the court, and so on. For many young mothers, especially those living in small towns, the VKontakte-group was the only help available to them in their struggle. A hotline for victims was also established. These resources

were subsequently used to collect data on the violations of mothers' labor rights all over Russia. These statistics were necessary to open a dialogue with the government, as proof of the extent of the problem.

At the end of March 2010, the State Duma held parliamentary hearings to discuss population policy. Petersburg Aegis President Rima Sharifullina spoke at the hearings about the problem of children's benefits, and showed a video of the "Don't give me flowers, give me a law!" campaign. She proposed including a new provision in the draft recommendations of the hearing on approval of the law: the provision would allow working mothers to receive their benefits directly from the Social Insurance Fund. Shortly thereafter, Ella Pamfilova, the chairman of the Presidential Council on Human Rights, submitted an appeal from the Council to President Medvedev. The appeal was based upon the violation of the human rights of pregnant women and mothers of young children. The President instructed the Prosecutor General's Office to verify the facts set out in the appeal. The prosecutor's investigation identified more than 5,000 such violations, and hundreds of employers were subject to disciplinary and administrative liability, while some were found to be criminally liable. However, the Prosecutor General's office decided that the existing system of payment of benefits should be maintained, so the Council reiterated its call to the president, asking that he again examine the situation.

The President then instructed the Ministry of Health and Social Development to study the possibility of changing the system of payment of benefits. Special departments were set up in the State Labour Inspectorate and the Prosecutor's Office for the rapid resolution of conflicts, unpaid benefits were charged to employers without the need for a trial, and red tape was cut in the consideration of appeals made by women who had been wronged by unscrupulous





employers. In many Russian regions, the prosecutor's office, the labor inspectorate and the regional offices of the Social Insurance Fund introduced the practice of regular inspections of businesses to ascertain whether such benefits were being paid fairly. Reports on the results of the inspections and the measures taken were published in the media.

The Young Mothers for a Fair Law group and the Women's Voice Coalition continued to hold public events, and to publish articles in the media. Meanwhile, the Petersburg Aegis lawyers, who provided free legal support to mothers asking for help, managed to reverse the action of the court. Previously, a response from the Social Insurance Fund that the "disappearance" of the employer was not grounds for the payment of benefits directly from the Fund would have put an end to the proceedings, and the woman would not have received the benefits. Petersburg Aegis lawyers suggested that the young mothers challenge these verdicts of the Fund in court. Initially, the courts sided with the state agencies, but then they gradually began to rule in favor of the victims.

At the same time, a campaign was underway to change the regulations governing the payment of benefits. The Moscow Center for Social and Labor Rights (CSLR) played an important role. Its legal experts performed a detailed analysis and made a recommendation. The CSLR initiated a hearing in the Public Chamber, presenting their analysis on the payment of benefits and on judicial review in such cases across the country. The Public Chamber hearings had a significant impact on the success of the campaign that had been launched by the Petersburg Young Mothers group in 2010.

The results of this campaign are impressive. Public authorities now rapidly address the non-payment of benefits. Moreover, the Russian regulatory framework has undergone major changes :

- A Special Resolution of the Health Ministry, which entered into force on July 1st 2011, provides women the right to appeal directly to the Social Insurance Fund with a statement on the assignment of benefits in the event their employer goes out of business.

- An amendment was made to the Federal Law "On compulsory social insurance in cases of temporary disability and maternity" for those cases in which a woman cannot provide proof of salary, establishing that benefits are to be calculated based on information from the Russian Pension Fund.

- In April 2012, the Social Insurance Fund issued a letter spelling out in detail the mechanisms for receipt of benefits in the event an employer "vanishes".

- And last, but not least, starting on January 1st, 2013, new amendments to the law "On Compulsory Social Insurance", came into effect, based on a draft prepared by the Center for Social and Labor Rights. Now the basis for receipt of benefits directly from the Social Insurance Fund is recognized to be either termination of activity by the employer on the date of application for benefits, or the impossibility of their payment by the insured party (the employer) due to lack of funds in the employer's account. What is more, the law now contains a provision under which benefits may be paid directly from the Fund "in the event it is impossible to locate the insured party (the employer) and his property, against which a penalty may be imposed, in the presence of an enforceable court decision on the establishment of the fact of non-payment of such insured benefits." The new procedure is in place in eight pilot regions, and in 2014 it will be extended to the whole of Russia.

Petersburg Aegis recently published a special brochure which describes in detail the organizational methods behind this extremely effective public campaign. The key to success was the ability of young mothers who were

THE RESULTS OF THIS CAMPAIGN ARE IMPRESSIVE. PUBLIC AUTHORITIES NOW RAPIDLY ADDRESS THE NON-PAYMENT OF BENEFITS. MOREOVER, THE RUSSIAN REGULATORY FRAMEWORK HAS UNDERGONE MAJOR CHANGES



faced with the problem of non-payment of benefits to come together and find a civil society organization professionally engaged in this issue: the CSO was then able to help the women to build a winning public relations strategy in order to gain the support of qualified experts. As a result, by working together to solve their individual problems, St. Petersburg women have now helped women across Russia.

#### CAMPAIGN PARTICIPANTS:

"YOUNG MOTHERS FOR A FAIR LAW"

WEBSITE: [vk.com/club17104391](https://vk.com/club17104391)

"WOMEN'S VOICE" COALITION

WEBSITE: [www.trudwomen.ru](http://www.trudwomen.ru)

"PETERSBURG AEGIS"

WEBSITE: [www.spb-egida.ru](http://www.spb-egida.ru)

"THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL AND LABOR RIGHTS"

WEBSITE: [trudprava.ru](http://trudprava.ru)

FACEBOOK: [www.facebook.com/CSLRights](https://www.facebook.com/CSLRights)

TWITTER: [twitter.com/trudprava](https://twitter.com/trudprava)



# CITIZEN PARENTS



OLGA MIRYASOVA

**The civil society movement “Affordable Early Childhood Education for Russian Children”** brought together parents seeking a spot for their children in public kindergartens. Gradually, they realized that the only way to solve this personal problem was to do it on the scale of the whole country.

The growth in the Russian birth rate that began in 2007 has led to a situation in which one of the most pressing social problems in Russia since 2008 has been a critical shortage of public kindergartens. Almost no kindergartens were built in Russia over the preceding 15 years, and existing kindergartens were considered unnecessary, so many of the buildings housing them were transferred to commercial structures and various state agencies. By 2010, 1.7 million children were in line for a ticket to a public kindergarten, and by 2011, the number had climbed to 2 million. Parents register their children for a spot immediately after birth, and the line of children waiting to receive a spot in kindergarten has become so long that often it is impossible for them to get to the front of the line before reaching school age. Young mothers are either forced to stay at home, thus worsening their re-em-

ployment opportunities, or to pay for a nanny or a private kindergarten. Both of the latter options deal a painful blow to the family budget.

At the beginning of 2013, the line for kindergarten grew shorter for the first time in many years, down to 1.3 million children. The “Affordable Early Childhood Education for Russian Children” movement was in part responsible for the decrease in waiting time, as they had managed to elevate the conversation about the problem from the municipal to the national level.

The movement emerged online. It grew out of the many online forums where parents share their experiences, usually unsuccessful ones, of struggling to obtain the constitutionally guaranteed right to free pre-school

education for their children. One of the initiators of the movement was Simon Gunkin of Novosibirsk, the father of two pre-school children, but the movement never had a formal leader, only regional coordinators. By May of 2011, the movement numbered more than 10,000 participants from 75 regions. The movement’s website, [www.rdddo.ru](http://www.rdddo.ru), and groups in social networks Vkontakte and classmates.ru help with information and organizational activities. The website features discussion of issues of concern to parents, such as how to defend their rights successfully in court, and includes a special section offering legal advice, [www.rdddo.ru/sud](http://www.rdddo.ru/sud). There are also announcements about upcoming nationwide campaigns, with contact information for coordinators in different cities. On the website, users can learn about the availability of places in kindergartens in areas where there are representatives of the movement, about actions of local authorities to address the problem, and about the outcome of litigation in cases of refusal to provide children with places in preschool.

**FIVE YEARS AFTER THE MOVEMENT’S CREATION, THE SHORTAGE OF KINDERGARTENS REMAINS A PROBLEM. HOWEVER, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS PUBLICLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE PROBLEM EXISTS AND HAS BEGUN TO DEMAND THAT REGIONAL AUTHORITIES TAKE SPECIFIC STEPS TO REMEDY THE SITUATION.**

Starting in 2008, parents in a number of regions held demonstrations and pickets demanding a solution to the lack of places in kindergartens. But the demands were addressed primarily to municipal and regional authorities, who are formally charged with overseeing preschool

education. The “Affordable Early Childhood Education for Russian Children” movement began coordinating this activity by organizing a nationwide campaign. The lack of a response from the authorities to the numerous pickets, rallies, written and video messages forced the members of the movement to resort to an extreme method of attracting public attention: they went on hunger strikes.

Five people took part in the first hunger strike, which was held from April 2nd to the 4th, 2010: four of the participants were from Novosibirsk and one was from Krasnoyarsk. By the time of the seventh hunger strike, from the 20th to the 22nd of May 2011, there were 181 participants in 50 towns across Russia.

By the end of 2010 a citizen’s initiative group formed a list of demands to the federal authorities, based on the proposals of the movement. The demands were published on the movement’s website on the eve of the next hunger strike. Among the demands were the adoption of a federal program for the construction and return of kindergarten buildings with co-financing from municipal, regional and federal budgets, and monthly compensation payments equalling not less than 80% of the average cost of local private kindergarten to each child not given a spot in the city or state kindergarten. There was a separate demand that the authorities put an end to the harmful practice of overcrowding, which was denounced: “because this method of reducing the waiting period will inevitably cause increased illness and injury, as well as a deterioration in the quality of the educational and developmental process and in the psychological health of children.” Movement members insist on the restoration of the Federal Health Regulations norm specifying capacity limits for kindergartens, which was struck from the regulations in December 2010.

Five years after the movement’s creation, the shortage of kindergartens remains a problem. However, the federal



THEY DO SO, AND IN THE PROCESS OF WORKING TOGETHER THEY BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE ROOTS OF THE PROBLEM GO DEEP, AND THAT IF AFTER SOME TIME THEY HAVE ANOTHER CHILD, THEY WILL HAVE TO START TO FIGHT FOR THEIR RIGHTS ALL OVER AGAIN.



government has publicly acknowledged that the problem exists and has begun to demand that regional authorities take specific steps to remedy the situation. One of the provisions of the decree “On measures for implementation of the state policy in the field of Education and Research,” which was published by Vladimir Putin in May 2012, just after his inauguration as president, ordered that all children from ages three to seven have access to preschool education by 2016.

The year 2016 is not a very reassuring date for the majority of the members of the movement: their children were already of kindergarten age when the presidential decree was signed, and in 2016 their children will go to school. Is it possible in this case to consider the movement a success? What is the significance of such civic initiatives?

Sociologist Olga Miryasova, a researcher on modern social movements in Russia, and an active participant in the movement, shares her reflections:

“This is one of the so-called “single-issue movements” that arise to address a particular problem. But at the same time the movement has created a network, as this problem cuts across almost all Russian regions. And, as they try with the help of the movement to solve a very personal task, the participants actually formulate a proposal for a national social policy: they are trying to figure out what the root of the problem is, and what they need to demand in order to solve it once and for all. The activists come to understand that in order to achieve success they must attract media attention, which they do quite well, and that they must participate in various round tables – for example, at

**OLGA MIRYASOVA** is a researcher at the Institute of Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow. Her research interests include social movements and civic engagement. Olga is author of the books “From Townsfolk to Activists: Emerging Social Movements in Contemporary Russia” and “Urban Movements in Russia 2009-2012: Towards the Political.” Since 2005, she has been working with the NGO “Institute for Collective Action”. In 2011, she joined the “Affordable Early Childhood Education for Russian Children” movement.

the Public Chamber, and that they need to collaborate with other community organizations.

The repertoire of collective action used here is quite typical: rallies, pickets, hunger strikes, and appeals to the authorities by collecting signatures for petitions – including over the internet. Also important are lawsuits and appeals to supervisory authorities. These lawsuits and appeals, of course, are related to specific cases, but taken together they can be considered as a way to accumulate a broader case, so that parents seeking legal remedies take into account the previous experience of other parents, so they become a method of exerting pressure on the government. There is also ongoing monitoring of the situation, and a debate about the authorities’ proposed solutions to the problem, which is family kindergartens, or “in-house” kindergartens – on the first floors of residential buildings, or such crafty methods as “density increases” of classes in existing pre-school institutions.

“Affordable Early Childhood Education for Russian Children” has no unified center, which is typical for such social movements: rather, there are several centers in the regions, each of which has its own leadership, which is not very stable. As long as the problem is a pressing one for a

INTERNET:

WEBSITE: [rdddo.ru](http://rdddo.ru)

VKONTAKTE: [vk.com/club26839922](https://vk.com/club26839922)

ODNOKLASSNIKI: [www.odnoklassniki.ru/group/53880373772336](http://www.odnoklassniki.ru/group/53880373772336)

particular person, that person remains engaged in finding a solution. But as soon as that person’s problem is solved, he or she may leave the movement, though reactions vary. What should be understood here is that the work of organizing collective action is quite time-consuming, and not everyone is ready to participate in such a campaign for years on end.

As for the success or failure of the movement... This is always a very difficult question. Some of the participants in the movement manage to obtain places for their children – the authorities end up making concessions, and in so doing attempt to coax the most active and effective people out of the movement. While a fundamental solution has yet to be found, in some cities, the authorities really are starting to tackle this problem.

In my view, these kinds of movements are extremely important for Russia, regardless of their short-term success. People are beginning to fight for their rights – and they are learning that it is very difficult to win without addressing broader issues. Indeed, how can there be places for children in kindergartens, if these kindergartens simply don’t exist? So, kindergartens must be built. But, one person alone cannot convince the authorities to build them – people need to join forces. They do so, and in the process of working together they begin to understand that the roots of the problem go deep, and that if after some time they have another child, they will have to start to fight for their rights all over again. This is why some members of the movement are beginning to seek more than just a spot for their child in a kindergarten today – they are trying to find a lasting solution to the problem. And this is precisely the way the common man becomes an active citizen,” – says sociologist Olga Miryasova.



# CHILDREN NEED TO PLAY, AND TO HAVE A FAMILY

After starting out a few years ago in Russia building children's playgrounds, **Natalia Vodianova's charitable foundation "Naked Heart"** has set itself a much more ambitious task.



ANASTASIA ZALOGINA

Everyone knows the story of the "Russian Cinderella" Natalia Vodianova. Raised in Nizhny Novgorod in a very poor family, she became a world-famous fashion model. And, once she achieved fame and financial independence, she decided to create a charity that would help add joy to the lives of Russian children. The activity was born in 2004, when her Naked Heart Foundation began building playgrounds in Russia: one of Natalia's most bitter childhood memories, which she described in her interview, was the inability of Russian children to play to their hearts' content.

The Beslan tragedy provided her the impetus for the creation of the Naked Heart Foundation. It was in Beslan that Vodianova decided to build the first bright, festive playground, as a way to distract the children living there from their terrible memories. The Beslan project took a few

years to implement, through no fault of the Foundation. So the first playground was built in Nizhny Novgorod, not far from Natalia's childhood home. Thanks to Vodianova's foundation, more than 90 such playgrounds have been built in different regions of Russia. There are plans to build 500 of them. This is the first Naked Heart program, known as "Play with Purpose." Natalia's philosophy is that for children, play is a necessity, not a luxury.

Many of the playgrounds Vodianova has created are to be found on the territory of children's hospitals and rehabilitation centers. Sick children are a special focus for Natalia, whose younger sister Oksana was born with severe damage to the nervous system. Her mother did not yield to the advice of doctors to abandon the baby while still in the hospital. Natalia's father left the family, fearing the inevitable

I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SHOULD LIVE AT HOME. ONLY IF SURROUNDED BY LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING CAN THESE CHILDREN DEVELOP THEIR POTENTIAL, LEARN TO COMMUNICATE AND CARE FOR THEMSELVES, AND BECOME PART OF THE COMMUNITY.

problems that arise when raising a child with a disability. But Natalia helped her mother to cope with the hardship, and Oksana grew up surrounded by their love and care. "It has always been very difficult and painful for me to think about how my country treats children with developmental disorders. It is terrible for me to imagine what would have happened to my sister Oksana if my mother had left her in the care of a state institution," says Natalia now. "What upsets me even now are the memories of the harsh treatment of Oksana by people in our community. We were mercilessly taunted by the neighborhood kids in our courtyard, and when we walked down the street, even adults sometimes recoiled, as if Oksana were somehow contagious!"

Traveling the world, Natalia became aware of how different the situation of Russian children with disabilities was from the situation of such children in developed countries. In particular, in developed countries there is no tradition of trying to convince mothers to reject a child born with a serious illness, and, in addition, there is widespread adoption of children with disabilities. Is it possible to change the situation in Russia? The Naked Heart Foundation has created an advisory council which includes leading Russian experts (physicians, psychologists and teachers), and in 2011 the Foundation announced the launch of a second program - "Every child deserves a family." This program is aimed at creating the conditions necessary to ensure that children with disabilities remain in the family, and do not join the ranks of children's homes and orphanages. To this end, in particular, the program requires that parents of a child with developmental disabilities do not try to face the problems on their own, rather that they receive expert assistance.

The program "Every child deserves a family" has a number of goals. One of these is to create specialized centers that provide psychological, legal, medical and social assistance to families raising special-needs children, as well as

to impoverished families and to those who are seeking to adopt or to become foster-parents. The first such center, for families raising kids with cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome or autism, was opened in Nizhny Novgorod. And in the Tula region, thanks to support from Vodianova's foundation, a special pre-school just opened for children facing health problems, or challenges with social adaptation, physical or psychological development.

In addition, the program supports public and charitable organizations working with special needs children. It has provided funding to more than 20 projects of Russian NGOs, including the legal and publishing projects of the Center for Curative Pedagogics in Moscow, as well as summer and fall camps for special needs children and their parents in 14 Russian cities and regions.

The real challenge in Russia is that people know too little about the problems of these children and their families, and some just do not want to know at all. This is why the Foundation pays special attention to educational programs.

"I firmly believe that children with developmental disabilities should live at home. Only if surrounded by love and understanding can these children develop their potential, learn to communicate and care for themselves, and become part of the community. To make this happen, families need support from social and healthcare workers, as well as access to day care centers and special education institutions. And it would be a good idea for all of us to reconsider our attitude towards people that do not fit into our concept of the norm. We just do not have the right to remain indifferent to the injustice from which they suffer," says Natalia Vodianova.

When they began working with Russian non-profit organizations engaged in the provision of care to children with developmental disabilities, experts from the Naked Heart



## THE NAKED HEART FOUNDATION ONLINE:

SITE: [www.nakedheart.org/ru](http://www.nakedheart.org/ru)FACEBOOK: [www.facebook.com/NHFcharity](http://www.facebook.com/NHFcharity)VKONTAKTE: [vk.com/nhfcharity](http://vk.com/nhfcharity)TWITTER: [twitter.com/nakedheart\\_ru](http://twitter.com/nakedheart_ru)

**ANASTASIA ZALOGINA** has been President of the Naked Heart Foundation since February 2013. She joined as a volunteer in 2005, and became Executive Director in 2007. Her first job as a Regional Coordinator of an international adoption agency was also closely related to child welfare. She has also worked in the international department of the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater, and of ITC Publishing. She received degrees in Philology and Cultural Management from the German Petrozavodsk State University.

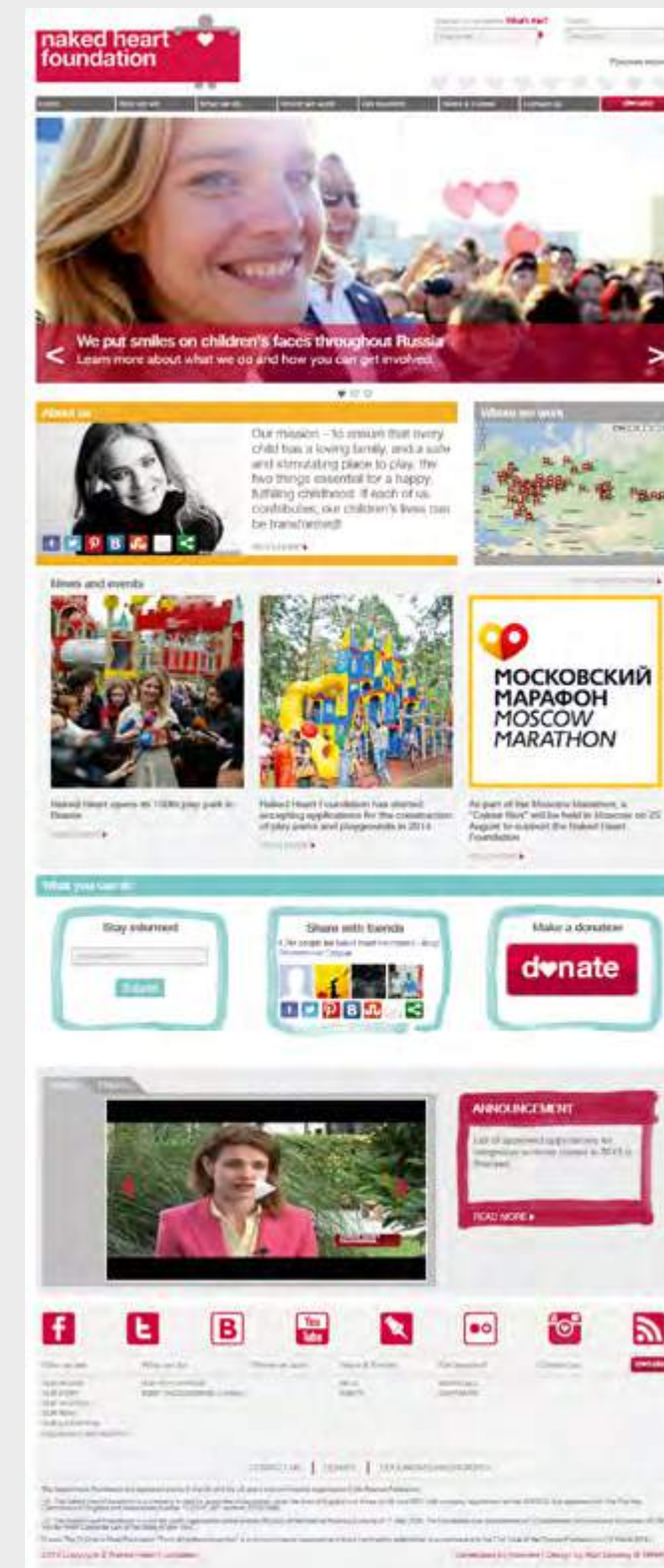
Foundation quickly came to the conclusion that in Russia there was no platform for communication between experts from different Russian regions, or between Russian and foreign professionals and parents of children with special needs. The First International “Every child deserves a family,” Forum in October 2012 was a step in this direction. Participating in the forum were 423 specialists in the field of child development from eight countries and 43 different Russian cities. They discussed issues such as social, medical and educational support for families with special needs children, principles for reforming the Russian system of “closed” children’s homes, and ways to match orphans to families. There was talk about the need to change the attitude of Russian society towards the problem. The forum included a roundtable discussion entitled “An Inconvenient Topic: how to talk about special needs children to fight stereotypes,” which included notable participants – TV host Vladimir Pozner, director Dunya Smirnova, actor Sergei Belogolovtsev, the father of a child with cerebral palsy, and director Akkour Bakuradze, the father of an autistic child, as well as well-known journalists Valeri Panyushkin and Andrei Loshak, among others.

The second “Every child deserves a family” Forum was held in October 2013 and was devoted to the problems

of children diagnosed with autism. For Natalia Vodianova herself, the topic of autism is very personal: her sister Oksana was not diagnosed with autism until she was 22 years old. And to this day there are still thousands of people like Oksana, living without a proper diagnosis or qualified medical attention and support, simply because Russia is desperately short of health professionals and up-to-date information on successful international practice in dealing with this problem.

The money needed to support the Naked Heart Foundation’s broad range of activities comes from all over the world. Natalia Vodianova regularly holds charity “Love Balls” in different countries with VIP participants. At the last Cannes Film Festival, there was a BEACH BALL charity evening, organized by the CineMoi television channel in support of two foundations, one of which was the Naked Heart Foundation. The Naked Heart website features a long list of donors who support its activities.

Minimizing costs has been one of the most important principles of Vodianova’s foundation over the years. All projects go through rigorous peer review before receiving financial support. Great efforts are made to bring local authorities on board to implement programs. Volunteers take an active role in the activities of the Foundation, which has just seven full-time employees.



# WOMEN'S RESPONSE TO THE "PATRIARCHAL RENAISSANCE"

**T** HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS NOTE THAT GENDER INEQUALITY IS OFTEN LEGALLY ENSHRINED, I.E. IT IS CONSIDERED NORMAL BY THE STATE.

**The founders of the "Sexist of the Year" Internet Award** believe that fighting discrimination and violence against women is impossible without educational outreach. Society must understand where the roots of this violence and discrimination lie.



**T**he term "sexism" is little known in Russia, although the phenomenon, based on the premise of physical and mental disparities between women and men, is firmly rooted in the country. Sexist ideology assumes that people are divided into "higher" (men) and "lower" (female) "races", and posits that men are the main creators of civilization, the makers of history, while women play a supporting role. The consequence of sexist ideology is gender discrimination in education and employment, and in public and private life. The impression of the inevitability of such discrimination has become a stereotype in Russian society. Moreover, human rights activists note, gender inequality is often legally enshrined, i.e. it is considered normal by the state.

"The logic of the 'patriarchal renaissance' which we observe in Russia today aggressively imposes standards of

conduct on women which are favorable to men. Women artificially limit themselves in their choice of employment, often associating their choice with their "natural destiny" – having children, raising children and keeping house. Excessive demands are made on women's behavior and appearance. Discriminatory practices are so embedded in the social and cultural context that they are perceived by most people as the norm. This is the main danger of sexism, that discrimination against women becomes ordinary," emphasizes Tatiana Karim-Zadeh, one of the members of the citizen's initiative group "For Feminism" which was created by several activists in Moscow in September 2010.

For the past three years, the activist group "For Feminism" has been constantly monitoring the media and advertising,

as well as the discourse and activities of politicians and public figures, in order to identify sexist material, statements and decisions. Calls for nominations for "Sexist of the Year" are published in social networks, where anyone who likes can send a link to sexist material. At year's end, the working group puts together a list of nominees by category and publishes it on the website [www.zafeminizm.ru](http://www.zafeminizm.ru), with explanatory comments about why a given statement, product or action is sexist. Voting is open to all.

The award includes several different categories:

- "Sexist of the Year" (for a personal statement);
- "Women against women" (statements by women that discriminate against and devalue women);
- "Sexist policy" (Sexist laws and institutional or systemic discrimination);

- "Sexism in Advertising";
- "Sexism in the Media."

Journalist and writer Natalia Bitten, one of the creators of the "For Feminism" movement, tells how it all began:

"We met at the "Yabloko" party gender school, where they were discussing the situation in Russia regarding what the United Nations calls "the human rights of women." When we were deciding what to call our group, I suggested that the title should necessarily include the word "feminism," because it's time to call a spade a spade, whether we are talking about discrimination, clericalization or feminism. We agreed that the attack on women's rights by the state is out in the open now and that we can no longer remain on the sidelines: we must unite and





fight for our rights. There are no professional politicians among us – whatever we do, we do in our free time and with our own resources. We try to establish contacts with the media and with specific journalists. There are a few media outlets that publish our articles and campaign in support of women's rights. We are actively working with bloggers, disseminating information through social networks. And, of course, we are involved in organizing rallies, pickets, marches and performances to promote the idea of gender equality. We strive to bring people of different political views together, because gender discrimination can only be overcome together, by breaking down barriers between different political and social forces."

– How did the idea for the "Sexist of the Year" award originate? Who do you hope to influence through this action?

"It was my idea. I am a journalist, so I see quite clearly the extent of sexist ideology and understand its negative consequences. I know how the propaganda machine works, and how quickly people can change their views under the influence of the media.

Unfortunately, in recent years in the media and advertising, the worst of the old clichés have returned - women are presented as stereotypes, either as housewives or as an ideal body, which is used as a decoy to draw attention to a product. Modern Russian media and advertising are far from being able to show the real roles of men and women in society, or to represent men and women equally.

Our task is to show people what sexism is and why it is harmful. We try to do this in the most accessible and democratic way possible, on the Internet, where information can be quickly and widely disseminated, and where you can provide feedback and organize platforms for dialogue. The Russian Internet is growing steadily thanks to women, who make up more than half of all social network users.

Women are the victims of sexist ideology, which is precisely why they are our target audience."

– How do you promote the "Sexist of the Year" award among people who are not involved in the feminist movement, and possibly don't even know what it is?

"There have been three open votes on the internet – in 2010, 2011 and 2012. The results were published on our web-sites and in social networks, and were reported by other online media. The outcome of the voting was announced on the website of the Russian United Democratic Party "Yabloko," and at an event in Moscow in honor of International Women's Day. News of the award was also published in a United Nations International Women's Program newsletter.

We publish information on various women's online resources, and ask that readers re-post it in their blogs. We do not just list the names of sexists, we also provide a short summary explaining what sexism is. We get indirect advertising from anti-feminist online resources, as well as from the nominees and winners of the "Sexist of the Year" award when they describe the award on their websites. At the very least, when they do so, they provide us with confirmation that they have taken notice."

– What social movements do you work with during the "Sexist of the Year" campaign?

"We work with a variety of democratically-oriented online resources and women's online resources, in Russia and the other CIS countries. We count among our allies the Moscow School of Feminism, the Kharkov Women's History Museum, the History of Women and Gender Movement (Ukraine) and the magazine "Women's Dialogue" (Georgia). The gender faction of the "Yabloko" party supports us by providing meeting space, and invites us to its

FOR EXAMPLE, IN 2013 THE LARGEST RUSSIAN NEWS AGENCY RIA NEWS AND THE WEBSITE KASPAROV.RU BOTH ANNOUNCED THE RESULTS OF THE COMPETITION. IT IS TRUE THAT NOT ONE OF THE MAJOR MEDIA OUTLETS REPORTED THAT THE "FOR FEMINISM" CITIZEN'S INITIATIVE GROUP WAS THE ORGANIZER.

International Women's Day rallies for the announcement of the election results, which are also published on the "Yabloko" party website.

In 2013, the Union of Journalists of Russia and the Consortium of Women's Non-Governmental Organizations lent their active support to the award: the "Sexist of the Year" awards were presented at the prize-giving ceremony of the All-Russian Journalism Competition against Domestic Violence in the Central House of Journalists, and at the conference of the Consortium for Representatives of National Women's Organizations. There was also an awards presentation at a meeting of the "Yabloko" Gender School. Reports were published on the various awards ceremonies. Both the audience and the range of stakeholders are expanding every year."

– Has anything changed in the public perception of the problem of sexism in the three years that have passed since the announcement of the first "Sexist of the Year" award? For example, has the intensity of sexism in the media subsided? In other words, are there any signs that your efforts are not in vain?

"Three years is too short a time to draw conclusions. In Europe and the U.S. feminists have been fighting against sexism for decades. And in those countries people's views of sexism have been gradually changing. We are at the very beginning of our campaign. But there are already some results. For example, in 2013 the largest Russian news agency RIA News and the website Kasparov.ru both announced the results of the competition. It is true that not one of the major media outlets reported that the "For Feminism" citizen's initiative group was the organizer. However, bloggers and online independent media did.

If you do a Yandex (search engine) search for "sexist of the year," you get 19,000 responses. Among the first search results are the media outlets of participants in the "For

Feminism" citizen's initiative group, blogs and small news sites. A Yandex photo search for "sexist of the year" yields three thousand images. So the award we have created is now better-known than its organizers."

#### "FOR FEMINISM" CITIZEN'S INITIATIVE GROUP

WEBSITE: [www.zafeminizm.ru](http://www.zafeminizm.ru)

#### PRESENTATION OF THE "SEXIST OF THE YEAR" INTERNET AWARD

WEBSITE: [www.zafeminizm.ucoz.ru/Presntations/Sexist\\_of\\_the\\_year-2012.pdf](http://www.zafeminizm.ucoz.ru/Presntations/Sexist_of_the_year-2012.pdf)

VKONTAKTE: [vk.com/club20603593](https://vk.com/club20603593)

FACEBOOK: [www.facebook.com/groups/zafeminizm/?ref=ts&fref=ts](https://www.facebook.com/groups/zafeminizm/?ref=ts&fref=ts)



# “FOR THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE MOTHERHOOD” LESSONS FROM A PUBLIC CAMPAIGN

Feminists of both sexes have tried to prevent the tightening of anti-abortion legislation. **What are the results of the struggle?**



VERA AKULOVA

Until recently, Russian legislation on abortion was relatively liberal. Termination of pregnancy was performed upon a woman's request for up to 12 weeks, with an extension to 22 weeks for social reasons and at any stage of pregnancy for medical reasons. Abortion (at least, surgical abortions) are included in the services covered by mandatory health insurance, that is, women can obtain them for free. Based on the experience of the Soviet Union and of some other countries, independent experts have repeatedly pointed out that restricting access to legal abortion only leads to an increase in the number of illegal abortions and therefore to an increase in female mortality.

However, in the summer of 2011 two bills were introduced by the State Duma sharply restricting a woman's right to decide whether to have children and how many

children to have. Both documents, which were proposed by “United Russia” deputy Valery Draganov for the “protection of the rights of unborn children” and amended by “Just Russia” deputy Elena Mizulina in the law “On the Protection of Health,” were prepared by the same working group and differed only in the severity of their restrictions on advertisements for paid abortions. Most of the provisions in the bills coincided: a ban on abortion for one week after a doctor's visit (to give the woman time to “think again”), mandatory counselling before an abortion, the abolition of all social reasons for abortion except for rape, a provision providing the doctor the right to refuse an abortion, a requirement for married women to present their husband's written consent to an abortion, and in the case of minors, a requirement that they present the written consent of their parents.

Following reports on these initiatives, a public campaign against the legislative limits on reproductive rights was launched. Vera Akulova was one of the participants in this campaign. She recalls:

“Everybody understood that this was a serious attack on the rights of women and that we needed to take action. The LiveJournal community “Feminists” (<http://feministki.livejournal.com/>) served as a platform for mobilization on the basis of which we formed a citizen's initiative group. In Moscow and St. Petersburg pickets were held with the slogan “Fight abortion, not women,” and later the citizen's initiative group took the name “For the freedom to choose motherhood.” We began collecting signatures on a petition to State Duma deputies with a call to reject laws that infringe upon the reproductive rights of Russian women, and to adopt amendments to the draft law “On the protection of health” in order to protect these rights. In particular, we proposed that the government take all possible measures for the prevention and treatment of reproductive diseases, that it ensure that all citizens, regardless of age and material status, have access to modern contraceptive methods, and that it provide sex education to teenagers. This petition was supported by the Russian Association for Population and Development and the Society of Professionals of Evidence-based Medicine, and signed by about four thousand people. We collected signatures for the petition online and at all public events, such as rallies and pickets.”

– Doctors and demographers actively participated in the campaign, which certainly gave it some weight. How did you manage to attract the experts?

“At our first picket, on June 18th, 2011, colleagues from the Russian Association for Population and Development joined in. They have long experience in the field of reproductive health and rights. Through them, we met demographers and

physicians who supported us, shared their information with us and joined us in speaking to the media.”

– Was there a single leader of the campaign?

“Probably not. Both women and men who cared about this issue simply joined together. Some of them were outside Russia, but still actively participated: they did research and summarized the information, wrote texts for our websites and for the media, made suggestions on campaign strategy and tactics, and monitored the media. Several people in the citizen's initiative group engaged in lobbying activities: they wrote letters to the State Duma deputies, called their offices, spoke with the deputies themselves and with their assistants.”

– Who took part in the street protests?

“Apart from feminists, both women and men, our events were attended by political activists - Socialists (the Committee for a Workers' International, the Russian Socialist Movement), and anarchists. About 50 people joined the rally in Moscow on June 18th, 2011. In St. Petersburg, the Women's Crisis Center played an active part in the campaign, and the Socialists also lent their support. The first St. Petersburg rally was held on June 25th and brought together about 20 people.

We declared September 2nd to September 5th 2011 to be “International days of united action in defense of reproductive freedom.” On September 2nd in Moscow

**I'M SURE THAT IF IT WERE NOT FOR OUR CAMPAIGN, ACCESS TO ABORTION WOULD BE EVEN MORE HARSHLY RESTRICTED.**

we organized a free film screening and discussion of the award-winning film from the Cannes Film Festival, “4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days.” The film takes place in Ceausescu’s Romania, when abortion was illegal. On September 3rd, a protest was held in St. Petersburg, and in Perm there was a citywide protest rally for social rights, which also included slogans against the restrictions on the right to an abortion.

Perhaps the most significant event of the International Days of united action was the protest in Moscow on September 5th, which was attended by about 100 people. It was the first mass street protest with an avowed feminist agenda. Attracting 100 participants was considered to be a major success: this was before the series of “White Ribbon” mass protests. It is important that a significant portion of those who joined the rally were not activists, but women who had learned about the campaign through feminist online resources.

The last street action in the campaign took place on September 30th in Moscow – it was a memorial service for women who have died from illegal abortions. It drew about 30 people. We released red balloons into the sky as a sign of remembrance.”

– Do you think the campaign “For the freedom to choose motherhood” has been a success? After all, despite the fact that you managed to enlist the support of doctors and demographers to draw public attention to this problem, the new law, together with the Ministry of Health instructions, has seriously infringed upon a woman’s right to reproductive choice...

“I’m sure that if it were not for our campaign, access to abortion would be even more harshly restricted. It’s possible that Russian women in general would be left without the right to free abortion, with forced counselling by Orthodox

**VERA AKULOVA** has taken part in the feminist movement since 2010. She has participated in the actions of the citizen initiative group “For Feminism,” in organizing the educational project “School of feminism,” and in the free choice campaign. In 2012, she worked as coordinator of the “The Coalition for Reproductive Choice” project in the Russian Association “Population and Development”. She is a member of the Moscow Feminist Group and the “Feminist Initiative” Forum. Created in 2008, the Moscow Feminist Group is a “consciousness-raising group.” Its members support the information portal [www.ravnopravka.ru](http://www.ravnopravka.ru), and regularly hold educational events, such as public lectures and discussions. The “Feminist Initiative” Forum is a coalition of feminist activists from Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kiev, who share the principles of intersectionalism, or the theory of intersecting discrimination: they consider the specific interests of women of the lower classes, ethnic minorities, teens, lesbians and transsexuals, women with disabilities and others to form an integral part of the feminist agenda. In 2012, the “Feminist Initiative” Forum held street protests and actions, and participated in events sponsored by other like-minded groups.

psychologists and a requirement of written consent from a husband or parents as a condition for abortion. During the campaign we ran into strong opposition from the so-called Orthodox community – there were even provocateurs at our meeting on September 5th in Moscow. Thanks to the continuous monitoring of the media, we know that organizations such as the “Warriors of Life” hold daily protest actions in different cities. This is a far-reaching and well-funded organization supported by the Russian Orthodox Church. We do not have any funding at all – the Russian Association for Population and Development just provided us with office space for meetings, a printer to make flyers and posterboard to make signs for rallies. Everything we that we have done has been done drawing exclusively on our own resources. In a sense, it is almost a miracle that we have managed to achieve anything. But we did manage something: the most odious amendments were not adopted. Moreover, even the adopted amendments have not yet been applied, because there are still no regulations that would define, for example, the concept of “waiting time.” This allows many educated and conscientious doctors who want to help their patients to circumvent the requirements of the new law in order not to expose their patients to unnecessary human suffering.

PERHAPS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAYS OF UNITED ACTION WAS THE PROTEST IN MOSCOW ON SEPTEMBER 5TH, WHICH WAS ATTENDED BY ABOUT 100 PEOPLE. IT WAS THE FIRST MASS STREET PROTEST WITH AN AVOWED FEMINIST AGENDA.



And finally, our campaign has worked by inspiring many women, who have seen that it really is possible to unite in order to fight for their rights and achieve something, even when the scales are tipped. Thanks to the campaign “For the freedom to choose motherhood,” for many people feminism has ceased to be an abstract concept, because in people’s minds it is now associated with specific issues that affect the lives of women everywhere. For many women, this campaign was the first opportunity to participate in work aimed at solving specific social and political problems: it gave them the opportunity to move from



INTERNET:

WEBSITE: [za-vybor.ru](http://za-vybor.ru)

FACEBOOK: [www.facebook.com/svobodnoematerinstvo](https://www.facebook.com/svobodnoematerinstvo)

VKONTAKTE: [vk.com/zavybor](https://vk.com/zavybor)

online to offline action. Even those who could not actively participate (because they live in small towns, or are too busy caring for children) promptly reacted to our reports on the progress of the campaign, made suggestions and supported us in every possible way.”



# MOMS RISING TO POWER



DONNA NORTON

**MomsRising** has taught American families to talk to politicians, and politicians to hear their voices.

“Moms can change more than diapers”, is one of the mottos of the large American women’s organization MomsRising. Women burdened with their jobs, child care and housework, who in the past did not think about any political activity, are now willing and able to influence political decision making. This opportunity has come to them through MomsRising, founded in 2006 when it first put IT to work to serve the interests of the family. Today, more than one million American women are active MomsRising members.

“Even relatively recently, it was complicated to bring moms together in a more or less mass movement: 80% of American mothers work, and they just don’t have enough free time. But the situation changed with the IT revolution. In the US, 35 million mothers of children under the

age of 18 use the internet; 15 million American women have their own blogs, and approximately 20 million read and comment on them. A majority of Facebook and Twitter users are women. Now, if a mom has a few free minutes, she can sit down and write about her problems online. It’s important that her letter is then read by decision makers who are able to solve the problem, and that they recognize the need to solve it,” says Donna Norton, a co-founder of MomsRising.

MomsRising’s enthusiastic founders set themselves a goal: to unite millions of people who agree that America needs to become a more family-friendly country. The organization compiled existing information on the most difficult challenges facing American families, and began an educational campaign to provide systematic information

“MOMS REALLY LOVE FACEBOOK, AND EVERYTHING THAT WE PUBLISH THERE IS QUICKLY SHARED. IT’S THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO TELL PEOPLE REAL STORIES AND TO USE THOSE STORIES AS CONCRETE EXAMPLES TO EXPOSE THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM.

about these issues. MomsRising also exerts powerful social pressure on politicians whose responsibility it is to address these challenges. Improving children’s health and ensuring the financial security of American families are two of the main issues for MomsRising.

The technological foundation of MomsRising activities is an interactive multimedia internet portal. Through this portal, any user can easily send a letter to their Congressional representative, for instance on the health care program, or on any other issue of importance to moms. A special form is available which makes it easier to collect individual stories into notebooks dedicated to issues of importance to families. On the form, users can choose from a broad list of topics: health care, hiring discrimination against moms, payment for temporary disability, school nutrition, fighting toxic products and toys, childrearing, etc. From these disparate stories a national picture is formed.

“We have gathered real stories from all corners of the US,” continues Donna Norton. “The website features these stories on an interactive map of the country, so that journalists and political leaders can see what issues are of concern to families living in their state. We regularly compile books of moms’ stories and take them to Congress, so that the representatives can understand how the decisions they are taking affect real families. We tell our members about each visit to Congress, and let them know that they can write letters to their representatives calling on them to pay attention to the information we are providing them. We also bring groups of moms to Washington, so that they can take part in conversations with their representatives about issues that are important to them. Of course, not everyone can travel, so we also make films featuring our members and then show the representatives their stories.”



Donna Norton emphasizes the importance of the emotional impact on legislators when they are immersed in the problems of their women voters:

“Of course, we provide politicians with statistical information, showing the number of people they can help by taking a given decision. But they are people too, and they are persuaded by more than rational argument. When one of the women who was participating in a discussion of health care reform suddenly burst into tears as she spoke about her experience as a single mother of a disabled child, and her fear of how she would cope if a program were cut, it was obvious what a strong impression her words had on the representatives. It doesn’t matter that sometimes from excitement moms forget numbers or cannot answer questions about how many millions of dollars are needed for a given program, or the welfare of how many millions of Americans are depending on it. What is important is that politicians see the real people behind the numbers.”

MomsRising does a lot of education and awareness-raising work, using traditional media sources as well as social networks and their own media resources:

“Moms really love Facebook, and everything that we publish there is quickly shared. It’s the most effective way to tell people real stories and to use those stories as concrete examples to expose the root of the problem. For instance, during a campaign in favor of maintaining financing of Medicaid, (Editor’s note – Medicaid is a government program providing medical assistance to Americans whose incomes are below the poverty level) we called on moms who were using Medicaid assistance to care for premature infants or to obtain treatment for children with disabilities,” continues Donna Norton. “At a certain point, we realized that we had ceased to be totally





**DONNA NORTON** is one of the co-founders of the non-governmental organization MomsRising, which counts more than 1 million members. Previously, Ms. Norton headed the National Center on Domestic Violence at the Foundation for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. In this capacity, she helped companies, government agencies and lawyers in twenty states improve measures to combat domestic violence. She also provided legal support to more than 600 victims of domestic violence in California. Ms. Norton is a graduate of the Law School of the University of California at Berkeley, the London School of Economics and Stanford University. She is married to the current US Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, and is the mother of two children.

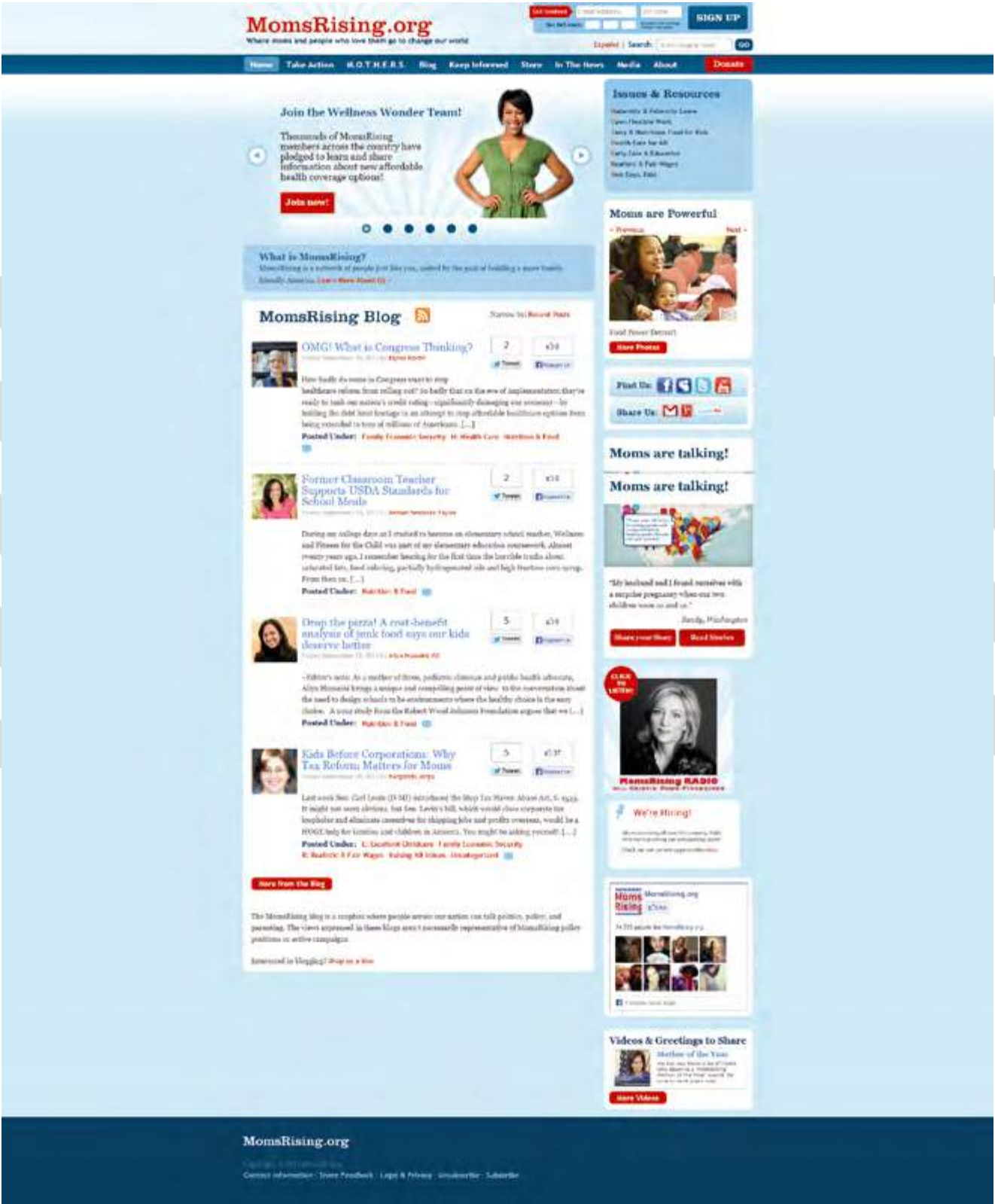
MOMS RISING ONLINE:

- WEBSITE** [www.momsrising.org](http://www.momsrising.org)
- FACEBOOK** [www.facebook.com/MomsRising.org](http://www.facebook.com/MomsRising.org)
- TWITTER** [twitter.com/momsrising](http://twitter.com/momsrising)

dependent on whether or not journalists wanted to work with us or not. Today, the user audience for our social media platform is 3.5 million people, and we can inform them directly about what we think is important. MomsRising has more than 900 active bloggers. We created our own online radio station, which features a weekly podcast. We have a column in the Huffington Post, a publication with a larger audience than the New York Times (Editor's note – The Huffington Post is an American online media outlet, aggregator and blog). We also do “blog carnivals” in which we collect what we think are useful blogs from people and organizations across the country and draw them to the attention of our readers.”

Donna Norton points out that in a relatively short time, MomsRising has managed to achieve an increase in investments in child care, has obtained specific measures to prevent the spread of toxic products and toys, and has taught politicians to turn and “face the family.”

“Just ten years ago, people considered that the women with whom we work were unable or unwilling to influence political life. But today, they are a force to be reckoned with,” says Donna Norton.



# WOMEN'S ECONOMICS

The success story of the largest **women's cooperative** in Europe



CLAUDIA NEUSSUSS

In the very center of Berlin, in a building of more than 7,000 square meters, there are 70 small and medium size enterprises run exclusively by women. When this project was first proposed more than 20 years ago, few thought that it would succeed...

It all began back in 1987, at the height of the economic crisis. Unemployment was growing in Germany, especially among women. A few young women activists thought up a slogan: if you can't find a job, create one yourself!

"At first, scientists in our group showed in an empirical study that women are discriminated against when they create a business, so they suggested a special center to

make female founders more visible. Usually, women are founders of smaller or even "one woman" businesses. We realized that there was a need to think bigger – combining small and big in a new way. Business is usually thought of as a male discipline, in which women occupy a secondary role. We started to think about how to create a different, fairer economy, in which women would not be discriminated against, and in which they would be full-fledged participants," recalls Claudia Neussuss, co-founder of the women's cooperative and business center WeiberWirtschaft. "We said to ourselves: women can earn money, and they can spend money; why not spend money on creating a business?"

That is how the idea of this large women's business project was born. We decided right away that there would be no men



in the management or Board of Directors of the cooperative, that only women would work here, and that investment in new businesses would only be accepted from women. A larger team of like-minded women which included not only economists, but also political scientists, sociologists and lawyers, worked out the details. At the beginning of the 1990s the question arose as to whether or not to purchase the building. It became clear that in order to do so, given the economic situation in the transformation phase of the re-united Germany, we would require much more capital than we had originally anticipated: not 2 – 3 million marks, but almost 13 million marks and millions more to reconstruct the building. We could have tried to find a few wealthy women to invest in the project. But the organizers chose a different path: they decided to attract a large number of small investors. The idea proved fruitful. A number of women of modest means were attracted by the investment opportunity, and they invested their small savings in the women's cooperative. Today the cooperative has around 1,800 members."

Nevertheless, the funds thus collected were still not enough to purchase the building they had taken such a liking to – a former cosmetics factory. So, they had to ask for a bank loan. They negotiated with nearly two dozen banks, none of which were interested at first: each of the banks expressed doubts about funding a women-only project.

"However," says Claudia Neussuss, "when you ask for a really high amount, one of the bankers is bound to be interested, because if the project goes into port, then they can make a bunch of money from your success!"

In the end, the cooperative managed to get the necessary loan from a bank, thanks to the unexpected support of one of the directors. Today, in response to the question of why a 65-year-old male banker, overcoming stereotypes, suddenly gave his vote of confidence to the women's project, Claudia Neussuss responds:

"I think he was a very intelligent, rational person and he made a judgment: even if these women fail, the bank will still own a fabulous building as collateral, and will earn well off the interest on the loan (the interest was quite high). Maybe he really believed in our project: sometimes people of a certain age are more open to new ideas. And it's not impossible that this banker wanted to end his professional career by creating something out of the ordinary."

Once the bank extended the loan in principle, it was easier to attract the rest of the funds: the organizers of the cooperative worked hard to bring attention to their creation, and in the end both the Berlin Senate and the European Union provided additional funding.

"Good PR is a very important part of the success story," Claudia Neussuss emphasizes. "On the day that we signed the contract to purchase the building of the former cosmetics factory, we were interviewed on TV, and the next day the "Wall Street Journal" published a story on us. That is when

**WE CAUGHT A WHIFF OF WHAT WAS IN THE AIR: PEOPLE WERE HUNGRY FOR CHANGE. WE ALSO BENEFITTED FROM THE POWERFUL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT THAT EXISTED IN BERLIN AT THE TIME.**





we understood that we needed to use all available media – television, radio, newspapers – to share our ideas with the general public. That is how to attract more investment: it was finding capital that was our weak spot for many years, and we had to be careful with spending and to really count our pennies. Each time we took out a new loan, we worried that we might not be able to handle the interest payments.”

If it weren't for female solidarity, it is likely the project would not have been as successful. Claudia Neussuss speaks with gratitude about the help the cooperative received from women activists – and also a few men – from a variety of organizations, the government and parties, who petitioned officials and gave interviews to journalists on the cooperative's behalf:

“We were able to overcome any obstacles we encountered in the cooperative with the help of pressure from civil society. You could say that we not only attracted the investment of many women but also a tremendous amount of their energy.”

WeiberWirtschaft opened for business in 1996 and today it is the largest women's business center in Europe. There are no vacant premises available – occupancy is at 100%. There are some industrial companies (pharma) and craft businesses, and an increasing number of companies are working in fashion. But most companies offer services such as consulting, marketing or translation, and work in the area of law or health. The conference center plays an important role in the life of WeiberWirtschaft: this is where the cooperative holds its numerous community events. The conference center can also be rented out, which provides a nice profit. Today almost all loans have been successfully repaid and the members of the cooperative are ready to re-invest their profits into new projects.

At WeiberWirtschaft, members focus not only on business, but also on how to increase human capital. Great attention

is paid to working with the younger generation. For instance, the business center has a tradition of celebrating “Girls' Day” every year. An important part of the celebration is a tour offered to school-age girls, and meetings with representatives of community and political organizations:

“This way girls learn how businesses work, and many of them become interested in participating in the work of the cooperative,” notes Claudia Neussuss. “Some of them even decide to invest in the cooperative. Of course, as long as they are still minors, their mothers have to temporarily fill in for them in signing contracts to purchase shares. What's most important is that the young shareholders are just bursting with new ideas, which is great for the further development of the cooperative. We use Facebook to stay in touch with them – that is where you find young people communicating today.”

The WeiberWirtschaft business center also features a kindergarten:

“In education we want to move away from the concept of femininity and masculinity in the traditional sense, so we try to see to it so that the children feel equal. From the very beginning of their lives, our children learn to consider it normal that women can fulfill a variety of social functions, including head of an enterprise or organization. The children understand that not every boy has to become a boss, because he can enjoy and succeed in other activities that were previously not considered very masculine. We are pleased that many fathers bring their children to the kindergarten and pick them up in the afternoon,” says Claudia Neussuss.

The idea of a women's cooperative, so revolutionary two decades ago, is becoming more and more popular in Germany today. In Berlin alone, four women's cooperatives have been created based on a different but related model



to the model of WeiberWirtschaft, and there are already 20 women's business centers operating in the country as a whole. But could such a project work in Russia? Claudia Neussuss is often asked this question when she travels to other countries. Here is her answer:

“I'm rather skeptical if it would be possible to repeat our exact experience in another country and in another era. When we tried to analyze the reasons for our success, we realized that it was due to a combination of various factors. First of all, the specific historical juncture, when there were huge societal transformations underway after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. We caught a whiff of what was in the air: people were hungry for change. We also benefitted from the powerful women's movement that existed in Berlin at the time. The unique combination of personal qualities that the founders of the project brought to the table also played a role: we were a highly diverse community of women, which included scientists and practitioners, economists and humanitarians, optimists and skeptics. It's very important that there was no uniformity among the participants in the project, otherwise the results could have been one-sided. It takes experts in various fields, so that they



INTERNET:

WEBSITE: [www.weiberwirtschaft.de](http://www.weiberwirtschaft.de)

FACEBOOK: [www.facebook.com/WeiberWirtschafteG](https://www.facebook.com/WeiberWirtschafteG)

**DR. CLAUDIA NEUSSUSS (CLAUDIA NEUSSÜSS)**, is a co-founder of the women's cooperative and business center WeiberWirtschaft. For many years she was a member of its Executive Board, its Steering Committee and a manager. Today, she is at work on her own business – [www.compassorange.de](http://www.compassorange.de), a company for personal and organizational development, and is still actively involved in several projects related to WeiberWirtschaft, such as international cooperation, gender studies and sustainability, and workshops on economic empowerment.

can learn from each other, and offer each other constructive criticism. I think it is thanks to the unique combination of women that we were able to stay afloat, although, of course, we sometimes suffered defeats. I think those who want to try to do something similar should not try to repeat our experience 100%. I think the answer is to analyze what kind of resources you have in your very specific context and what your success factors might be. The example of WeiberWirtschaft can perhaps offer hope and inspiration but than it is about making the most of every opportunity.”



# PATH TO LEADERSHIP: MORE AMBITION, LESS FEAR!

The goal of **NGO “Running Start”** is to convince young women that they can hold political office, and to help them get elected.



SUSANNAH SHAKOW

“**R**unning Start” founder Susannah Shakow often speaks to female audiences, and asks them the following question: “Who believes that their country and the world as a whole would be a better place if there were more women in politics?” Her answer is a sea of raised hands. Susannah then asks the crowd how many of the women present are prepared to run for office and become politicians. In response to this question, only a few hands are raised. Why don’t women want to go into politics? Why aren’t women burning with the desire to become leaders? Regardless of the country, the answers are almost always the same, with few variations.

Women are too overloaded with domestic responsibilities and fear that if they were to hold political office, they would have less time to spend with their families, and that their

families would be unhappy as a result. They are not sure that they possess the knowledge and experience necessary to lead. What is more, since childhood, they were taught to be modest and that they shouldn’t speak up, that ambition is a big drawback. One common fear of women is that entering politics will force them to play according to men’s rules, to become more rigid and aggressive, which many of them do not want to do. Women also shy away from too much publicity, and from interference in their private lives. They say that there is a common perception in society of politics as “dirty business” and they worry that their peers will not approve. They also point to the difficulty of raising sufficient funds to run for office, and to discomfort with public speaking.

Susannah Shakow notes that the younger generation is not as afraid of politics: high-school and college students show

a readiness to go into politics much more than older generations of women do. Yet even they do not strive to take leading roles, or to run for office – rather, they see themselves as members of a team, such as aides or advisors.

The results of a study conducted a few years ago by an American university on the political ambitions of men and women who have already achieved significant professional success are revealing. The study showed that men are not only more willing to run for office than women, but also that the level of their interest is incomparably higher. In response to the question, what position they aspire to attain, a majority of men answered either senator or president. The women respondents who were willing to run for office intentionally lowered the bar, choosing positions in local government. They doubted that they were sufficiently competent to reach the summit of power, despite the fact that the educational level of the female respondents was higher than that of the male respondents. Facebook Executive Board member Sheryl Sandberg describes a similar problem in her book on women’s leadership. In her view, women are their own worst enemies because they do not seek to attain the highest positions. The same holds true for politics.

The idea that women’s participation in politics is necessary is gradually growing in American society, notes Susannah Shakow, however the face of power remains male. In 2010, only 17% of representatives in the US Congress were women, while among state legislatures the proportion of women representatives was 23%. As for women chairing Congressional committees, the record is held by the 110th Congress, (2007-2009) in which women chaired six of the 40 committees.

Is it possible to change the situation? Susannah Shakow’s answer is yes. In 2007 she created “Running Start.” The organization grew and with good reason: Before creating “Running Start,” Susannah was the director of the Women Under Forty Political Action Committee (WUFPA), which supported women under forty running for federal office, regardless of their party affiliation. After a little while it became clear that there were very few such women, and that in order for there to be enough to change the face of power, it would be necessary to train girls and young women for political leadership. Sometimes it just takes a little doing to break down stereotypes.

“We have a program called “Elect Her”, that we hold on college and university campuses across the US. It is a

very simple one-week program. We talk to female students, and ask them: did you know that there are more women than men enrolled at your college? When they answer yes, we then ask them: And did you know that men make up a majority of your student government organization? Usually, the response to this question is a pause, because most female students hadn’t considered this fact. Then the conversation begins, and the women students themselves come to the conclusion that they could change things for the better if they were given the chance. I have understood that in most cases, it is sufficient to raise the question and leave the discussion to the young women themselves. To create change, often just asking one question is enough!” says Susannah Shakow

“The Young Women’s Political Leadership Program” is another “Running Start” initiative. Most of its participants are high school students. The goal is to familiarize women students with the world of politics, and to help them acquire the skills they need to get involved in public affairs. In this way, should they decide after graduation that they would like to run for office, they already have the necessary knowledge and abilities. The “Running Start” philosophy is that, in order to reach the heights of power, women need to get involved in politics at a young age, yet most women linger at the starting line, and lose out to men of their own age who surpass them. How can young women learn not to fear running for public office?

**ONE COMMON FEAR OF WOMEN IS THAT ENTERING POLITICS WILL FORCE THEM TO PLAY ACCORDING TO MEN’S RULES, TO BECOME MORE RIGID AND AGGRESSIVE, WHICH MANY OF THEM DO NOT WANT TO DO.**

Every summer, a few dozen young women from all corners of the US are invited to Washington DC by “Running Start” to participate in the program. Last year, 75 women from 30 states participated. The young women meet with older women who have been successful in politics, with members of Congress and with high-profile administration officials, who tell them about their work and about their paths to power. Susannah Shakow is convinced that:

“When a young woman is considering a political career, what is most important is that she be able to meet with strong female role models who have achieved success.”

THEY SHOULD BE TELLING THEMSELVES: I CAN DO THIS, IF I WANT TO – AND THEY SHOULD TRY IF THEY HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY.

During the five-day program, students participate in a range of seminars and training sessions at which they learn skills including public speaking, how to speak in front of a TV camera, how to organize a campaign, and what tech tools are available to politicians launching campaigns.

“We talk to the young women about how important politics is, because it provides a real way to effect positive change. Of course, corruption does exist, and sometimes the political system can seem off-putting and even scary, but it is impossible to achieve change without getting involved. We want them to realize that if enough honest people get involved in politics, it is possible to achieve change,” says Susannah Shakow. “We help young women to understand that it is not really that complicated to develop the skills they need to run for office. We encourage them to try, and they are successful! Right before our eyes, they become more confident, and they begin to understand that they really can become people who will change the world. I’m not saying that all young women should go into politics. But I hope that those young women who are capable of running for office will stop thinking that they can aspire only to secondary roles. They should be telling themselves: I can do this, if I want to – and they should try if they have the opportunity.”

“Running Start” also has programs for young women who have already taken their first steps in politics but would like to strengthen their leadership skills. Since 2007, over 7,000 young women have received training from “Running Start.” The most recent step in the development of women’s leadership in the US was the first ever Young Women’s Leadership Summit in Washington DC, held in July 2013.

**SUSANNAH SHAKOW** is a community leader, and president of the nonprofit organization «Running Start,» which she founded in 2007. Previously, in 1999, she co-founded the Women Under Forty Political Action Committee (WUF-PAC), which she led for five years. She is convinced that the earlier young women acquire leadership abilities and «get a running start», the higher on the political ladder they will be able to rise, and the more women in the US will become decision makers.

During President Clinton’s administration, Susannah Shakow worked for Hillary Clinton’s Health Care Task Force, for which she planned and executed grass-roots health care events for the President and First Lady and coordinated speaking events for Congressional Members and White House staff on health care reform.

In 1998, she received her J.D. from the University of Virginia School of Law and worked for several years at Verner, Liipfert, Bernhard, McPherson and Hand, lobbying for state and local governments, foreign governments, corporate entities and trade associations before Congress and the Executive Branch.

#### RUNNING START ONLINE:

**WEBSITE** [www.runningstartonline.org](http://www.runningstartonline.org)

**FACEBOOK** [www.facebook.com/runningstart](https://www.facebook.com/runningstart)

**TWITTER** [twitter.com/runningstartDC](https://twitter.com/runningstartDC)





# EQUALITY: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Teaching young men and women to overcome gender stereotypes, to fight all kinds of discrimination, and to intelligently uphold the principle of equality in discussions with their peers – these and many other challenges are addressed by the gender summer school, held by the **Samara Center for Gender Studies, with the support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.**



LYUDMILA POPKOVA

The Samara summer school for gender activists of youth organizations started in 2008. The purpose of this extended project not is just educational. The organizers consider it a priority that youth groups which had not previously considered the problem of equality between women and men include gender issues on their agenda.

According to the Director of the Samara Gender Center Lyudmila Popkova, there are three times more applicants than there are available places at the summer school. This allows the organizers to choose only the most motivated and active participants:

“We publish information about the school with the application form on social networks, and we include both in mailings to human rights and environmental organizations,

as well as to our academic counterparts at universities. The applicant must fill out a form specifically describing their experience in civil society. We select young men and women who show initiative, not those who just participate in formal committees and youth organizations. Applicants have a definite advantage if they work as volunteers with children, are activists in human rights, environmental or anti-fascist groups, or are involved in organizing cultural events such as exhibits or festivals, as well as demonstrations and other forms of protest.

In assessing applicants, we try to identify a certain understanding of what it means to be a citizen. We also look at how convincingly, in our view, the applicants put forward their arguments in the questionnaire about why knowledge about gender is needed in their work. For

example, in the 2010 summer school, there were a few young women from the left- from socialist unions. They wrote in their questionnaires that they wanted to confront discrimination within their movements, to learn to convincingly defend their views on gender equality,” Lyudmila Popkova explains.

According to Popkova, 80 people from different Russian regions have received training in the three summer schools conducted so far. Expanding the “geography of enlightenment,” the organizers tried each time to invite young people from new cities, including human rights defenders, activists from anti-fascist groups and support groups for teenage migrants, members of cultural projects and discussion clubs, and members of the LGBT community. Participants in the gender summer school, in particular, included representatives of organizations such as the Voronezh Youth Human Rights Movement, the environmental group “EcoDefense,” the St. Petersburg LGBT association “Exit”, Moscow’s “Rainbow Association”, the Ulyanovsk “Youth Initiative Centre”, the

“AS ONE PARTICIPANT WROTE,  
“I THOUGHT I KNEW ALL ABOUT WOMEN’S ISSUES, BUT DURING THE TRAINING I HAD THE FEELING THAT I CAME FROM A REMOTE VILLAGE, AND THAT I HAD REALLY NOT UNDERSTOOD BEFORE.”

NGO “Center for Social Assistance to Children”, the “For Feminism” initiative, “Femiinfoteki”, the Perm human rights group “Youth Memorial”, the Saratov University debate club, the “Antifa” network, the Ekaterinburg human rights NGO “Sutyazhnik”, and the Samara State University Film Club.

One class was of special interest to participants: in it, they analyzed the realities of the Russian gender system and state gender politics, discussed the modern practice of sex discrimination, and the main gender trends among young people. The teachers, who were all recognized experts in various fields of gender studies, tried to avoid using an overly academic tone, and made extensive use of interactive forms of learning, assigning tasks for independent work in groups. After all, the goal of the summer school is not just to communicate knowledge to young people, but to develop their skills in critical thinking and analysis.

How are gender stereotypes formed? What role do culture and the media play? Teachers and students sought the answers to these questions together, including during an evening film class. First, they viewed specially selected feature films, like “Harvey Milk”, “Thelma and Louise”, “Chapiteau Show”, “Tales of Darkness”, “If This Is Love”, “Everybody Dies But Me”, and documentaries, such as “Virginity”, “Mother”, and the collection “Gender Montage”. And then, after each film, there was always a heated discussion of youth gender issues.

During the 2012 summer school new classes were tested, such as an “awareness-raising group” organized by participants of feminist organizations. These personal growth groups, which were very popular in the Western women’s movement and are practiced today by some feminist organizations in Russia, have become a sensation. As one participant wrote, “I thought I knew all about women’s issues, but during the training I had the feeling that I came from a remote village, and that I had really not understood before.”

Another novelty at the 2012 summer school was the introduction of public debates on topics suggested by the students themselves: The topics included “Is the family



necessary in the modern world?” and “Should same-sex marriage be legal?”. Later, many students noted that it had been their first experience of public debate. The students considered that kind of experience, so necessary in civil society work, to be one of the most important elements of their summer study.



The 2012 summer school was also distinguished by the introduction of student-taught classes. Women students from feminist groups offered a class on “How to organize a public campaign to protect the reproductive rights of women,” and representatives of the “Youth Human Rights Movement” chose the theme “How to defend the labor rights of young people.”

In all three summer schools, the result of the week-long classes, discussions, brainstorming sessions, master classes and film class were two final projects – one by the students and one by the teachers.

The teachers held an exhibition of home-made posters under the slogan “The ironic feminist viewpoint”, and gave a presentation at a press conference, entitled “Gender

**DR. LYUDMILA POPKOVA** is the Director of the Center for Gender Studies at Samara State University. She is an expert on women’s rights in the CIS countries for the United Nations Women’s Fund. Her research interests include the history of feminism, the international women’s movement, women’s participation in politics, gender politics in Russia and abroad, and multiculturalism and women’s rights.

Lenses: How men have appropriated power in Russian culture.” Students were given a group assignment to use art forms to reflect the themes discussed in their classes, with no restrictions. In 2008 and 2010, students were divided into groups of five, each of which produced their own creation: an ironic role-play, an art installation, a concert, a satirical performance, etc. But in 2012, the students joined together to produce their final project: a theatrical performance entitled “New social roles in the family”, which included presentations by participants, exercises for the audience, competitions, videos and music. A student who was a director by profession oversaw the project, so the production was quite professional. The organizers of the school are convinced that these communication techniques can be used with many different audiences.

Following each summer school session, the participants created an online community where they continued active debate and discussion. Many activists who have studied at the gender school have gone on to start their own educational projects, and have joined feminist groups.

“We believe that one important result of our work at the school is that the young activists began to understand the need for joint struggle against all forms of direct and indirect discrimination – irrespective of whether such discrimination is based on sex or sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, class, or religion. During the classes, the students came to a conclusion: it will be impossible to achieve gender democracy in Russia without fighting xenophobia, nationalism and religious fundamentalism. The participation of LGBT activists in the work of the school, together with discussions on fighting homophobia, help to significantly enhance the gender agenda of youth organizations. Online discussions among graduates of the school and the creation by graduates of new groups in social networks both demonstrate the willingness and ability of these activists to influence the opinion of youth audiences. One undoubted

**GENDER SUMMER SCHOOL :**

**E-MAIL:** sam-gender@yandex.ru

**VKONTAKTE:** vk.com/club40611169

success of the project is the fact that many of the young women who have been trained in the school learned how to confidently assert their own point of view, and were no longer afraid to take leadership positions in their organizations. As we imagined, the creation of a permanent network of civic activists allows them to invent and promote independent projects on the fight for gender equality not only in the virtual world, but also in the real public space,” says Lyudmila Popkova.

Each graduate of the school went away with “subversive” gender literature. Especially popular was the two-volume book “Gender for Dummies”, which was published with the financial support of the Böll Foundation and provides information about a broad range of gender issues to the general reader in an accessible format.



# DON'T BE AFRAID OF AGING!

How can we avoid becoming despondent or losing the zest for life in our old age? How can we keep alive the desire for self-fulfillment and the desire to help others? **The St. Petersburg School of Active Aging “The Third Act – 55 and Over”** teaches just that.



TATIANA KOBZAR

“If you are not content to live by the principle of just getting by and surviving, and you seek to think, to move and to act, we invite you to the “Third Act” School of Active Aging... The school’s program will help you to acquire new knowledge and skills so that you can remain an active member of society at any age, to increase your physical and social activity, and to expand your circle of friends...” This announcement appeared on posters in Moscow’s Primorsky district in the autumn of 2012. Prospective students were reassured in advance: “Classes start in October, after you are done working at the dacha. Lessons will last for 4 months – they will be over as soon as you need to start working at the dacha again.” The school program, promising lectures and workshops on medical and psychological topics, clubs with interesting people, and master classes on cooking, gardening, and more, attracted the attention of local residents: twenty people came to

the first meeting. The audience grew through word of mouth,” says Tatiana Kobzar, the founder of the “Third Act” school, and in the spring the school produced 45 graduates.

Tatiana Kobzar heads the independent NGO “Seasons of Life”, a member of “The Courage to Live” Alliance of NGOs. The “Third Act” school was Tatiana’s idea, and is part of a larger Alliance project in support of the elderly. The goal of the school is to help senior citizens cope with age-related problems by becoming aware of and drawing upon their own intellectual, creative and physical resources.

“For many people, when they retire, they think that sadly now their existence will be spent visiting clinics and pharmacies and running errands. Having been accustomed to spending most of their time at work, people just don’t know

what to do with themselves, or how to keep busy, and their contacts with former colleagues fade... They may still be going strong, but they come to the conclusion that their normal active life is over. The result is depression, and many other illnesses,” said Tatiana Kobzar. She believes that it is very important to provide people with information to help them overcome age-related social and psychological identity crises, and problems stemming from their family and social relationships. This is why educational outreach programs are a focus of the school.

The classes began with a series of workshops on psychology, during which a detailed survey of participants was conducted: they then received individual recommendations from a psychologist. There were lectures from a therapist and a geriatrician (a specialist in illnesses of the elderly). All those who expressed an interest received personal consultations and training in the rehabilitation center. In addition, the educational outreach program included computer courses and advice on legal and social issues.

FOR MANY PEOPLE, WHEN THEY RETIRE, THEY THINK THAT SADLY NOW THEIR EXISTENCE WILL BE SPENT VISITING CLINICS AND PHARMACIES AND RUNNING ERRANDS.

Participation in clubs is another important component of the “Third Act” project. On the one hand, being in a club helps the participants to develop their creative talents, while on the other, it offers a good excuse to socialize: the elderly often suffer from a lack of socializing. All those interested were given an opportunity to participate in classes on painting, gardening, art, make-up and flower arranging. The last class was especially popular: the

teacher’s personality played a big role, as he is a man who lives for his work.

The third focus of the school’s activity was to develop the practice of volunteering. This meant not only attracting students and schoolchildren who offered guided tours, animated parties and clubs, and led video and photo workshops. Some of the school’s students became volunteers themselves: about 10 people expressed a desire to volunteer in orphanages as well as in a nursing home which has been sponsored by “The Courage to Live” Alliance for the past four years.

The “school year” ended with a bus tour of the city and with the presentation of commemorative badges and gifts at a special tea party. The students agreed on the results of their experience, noting how quickly the winter flew by thanks to the school, and how many interesting and useful things they learned, as well as what wonderful friends they made.

“Old age is just another period of life, like a season that we know will come. The idea behind our project is to help people “age correctly,” that is to enter the next phase of their lives without fear,” says Tatiana Kobzar. This humanistic idea has inspired many. “The Third Act” has become a joint project of the “Courage to Live” Alliance and the NGO “Petersburg Aegis”. It is sponsored by the Vladimir Smirnov Community Foundation. In the Primorsky district, the project received support from members of the local Legislative Assembly. And much help was provided by volunteers.

Tatiana Kobzar is sure that the success of the experiment will allow for the “Third Act” project to expand. “In the autumn of 2013 the “School of Active Aging” will continue in the Primorsky district of Moscow and another chapter will open in the Vyborg district of St. Petersburg. Perhaps in time the government will adopt this model of elderly inclusion, in our country which is aging demographically. In any



THE IDEA BEHIND OUR PROJECT IS TO HELP PEOPLE “AGE CORRECTLY,” THAT IS TO ENTER THE NEXT PHASE OF THEIR LIVES WITHOUT FEAR

case, the St. Petersburg social welfare authorities closely monitored the progress of the pilot project.”

Tatiana Kobzar says that when starting the pilot project, they looked long and hard for a convenient location that would be familiar to the inhabitants of the area and within walking distance. In the end, they chose a neighborhood recreation center specialized in working with older people. Tatiana plans to find premises for the next schoolyear using the model of Finnish clubs for adults:

“It’s all so simple: children attend school during the day, and in the evening their parents, grandmothers and grandfathers attend classes. And, of course, the finished program should be offered to all centers that are engaged in work with the elderly... I am about to start my own blog, called “Seasons of Life”, which will be dedicated to the topic of the elderly. I plan to post a lot of material about the “Third Act” project on my blog. I am also planning an online version of the school. I am happy to share project ideas with all those interested.”

**TATIANA KOBZAR** is the Assistant Director of the NGO Alliance “The Courage to Live”. She is Director of the independent NGO “Seasons of Life”, which is a member of the Alliance. She is also an activist in the “Women’s Voice” NGO Coalition.

#### INTERNET:

**WEBSITE:** muzhestvozhit.ru

**E-MAIL:** konstata84@yandex.ru

[LINK TO A DOCUMENTARY ON THE THIRD ACT SCHOOL OF ACTIVE AGING](#)

**VIDEO:** spb-egida.ru/node/375





# WOMEN ARTISTS DISCOVER A NEW PERSPECTIVE



FIRST OF ALL, WE WANT TO SHOW WORKS IN WHICH WOMEN TALK ABOUT THEIR LIFE EXPERIENCE. FOR EXAMPLE, MOTHERHOOD AND CHILDLESSNESS, THE FATE OF WOMEN ARTISTS, VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIFFERENT GENERATIONS OF WOMEN, THE EXPERIENCE OF SUCCESSFUL CAREER WOMEN

**“The Feminist Pencil” project** not only provides women graphic artists specialized in socially meaningful themes with the opportunity to showcase their work to the public. It also helps them to find like-minded artists, and to gain confidence in themselves.



VICTORIA LOMASKO

“PUSSY RIOT” by Strasbourg resident Paulina Petrushina: An unconventional view from abroad of the dramatic story of the Russian female punk band.

“Double Loop. Quadriptych” by “Smart Masha”: Stylized images inspired by Soviet posters featuring female characters and sad stories. “Women for centuries have done all the washing and fed brave grandchildren and their revolutionary husbands. But they have no rights of their own,” grimly observes Smart Masha.

“Unknown stories from the life of Leni Rodina” by Izhevsk artist Tatiana Faskhutdinova: The touching life story of a lonely young disabled man, and of the society that rejects people like him. Most importantly, in the words of the artist herself, the story is “about Leni’s ability to make friends, to dream, to make plans and carry them out, his passion for being active, and the total absence of any resentment about his fate: it’s about his inner peace and pride, despite the harshness and even cruelty of his circumstances.”

Men confidently explore the feminine world and create artworks about all facets of women’s lives. At the same time, it is somehow not accepted or there is simply no time or space, given the responsibilities of families and children, for women themselves to move beyond the role of the described object and explore what concerns them most directly. We have seen the trend of women artists who speak openly about the social problems of women in Russian literature and film, but it is almost never featured in the visual arts.

We are also interested in the figure of a female researcher who works with various social issues, which may not be directly related to the issues of women’s experience, but which indirectly intersect with them. Among these issues are social inequality, the relationship between the capital and the provinces, disability and health problems, education, and pressure based on sexual orientation, ethnicity or age.

The title of our exhibition “The Feminist Pencil” refers to a political leaflet called “The Fighting Pencil” printed by the Leningrad lithographic workshop in 1940. Today, both women’s daily existence and our contributions to the arts, science and public life are all invisible. We believe that women artists working with a feminist perspective, and speaking frankly and directly, have the potential not only to change modern graphic arts, but also to influence the mood of Russian society.”

What prompted Victoria Lomasko to break away from her own artwork and become a curator for “The Feminist Pencil?” This is how she describes it herself:

“As an artist, working in socially meaningful graphic arts, I have long felt some frustration that there are virtually no exhibitions featuring social graphic arts in Russia. The

Inspired by the success of the first exhibition, in the spring of 2013 its curators Victoria Lomasko and Nadia Plungian, graphic artist and art critic respectively, announced that the second “Feminist Pencil” exhibit will be held in the fall of 2013. It will include the works of no fewer than twenty artists. A statement published by the curators on feminist websites and in social networks reads:

“...First of all, we want to show works in which women talk about their life experience. For example, motherhood and childlessness, the fate of women artists, violence against women, the relationship between different generations of women, the experience of successful career women... Each of you can easily continue this list of topics, the discussion of which almost never goes beyond private conversations between women themselves.

archetypes than to specific images of women: faded and lonely; drunken and sluttish: a tough old Soviet woman...

“The People’s Will” by Michaela: These are stencil portraits of female revolutionaries and terrorists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Michaela herself admits that while she does not agree with the politics and methods of the heroines she depicts, she thinks it is important that they “changed the history of their country and took responsibility for their actions.”

“New Architecture” by Natalia Pershina-Yakimanskaya (Gluklya): Crowds of migrant workers, shown in sharp contrast to the buildings of St. Petersburg, with quotes from real stories told by the subjects about the humiliation and abuse they are forced to suffer.



In October 2012, Moscow hosted the first exhibition of women social graphic artists, entitled “The Feminist Pencil.” There were six participants in different genres, including documentary comic strips, reportage drawings, posters, and urban stencils. All of the images were accompanied by texts. The exhibit included the following works:

The series “Women’s Lives” by Victoria Lomasko: These portraits were done live, and quotes from the subjects are reproduced verbatim. The portraits are more akin to



INTERNET:

LIVEJOURNAL: [soglyadatay.livejournal.com](http://soglyadatay.livejournal.com)

reason is that social graphic arts are considered to be no more than applied art by the Russian art community – illustrations and journalistic caricatures. There are no Russian curators or gallery owners ready to show figurative drawings, which more or less realistically reflect Russian reality without a slant towards conceptualism.

There are activist exhibitions, at which you can find socially meaningful graphic art among other things. But such exhibits are too closely linked to current events and to the needs of the political opposition. In the end, socially meaningful graphic arts are about all of us. They tell the story of our everyday existence and our problems. In any case, it's



**NADIA PLUNGIAN** is an art historian and a senior researcher at SIAS (Moscow). Her spheres of interest are the history of Soviet graphic art, street art and gender studies.

clear to me that its focus on a burning topic does not free socially meaningful graphic arts of the need to be satisfying to the eye.

I have had to justify my right to work on what is interesting to me not only as a graphic artist, but also as a woman artist. Very often women artists are perceived primarily as wives or girlfriends of talented, brilliant men, and only secondarily are they considered as independent artists. For some reason it matters whether we are married or live alone, and whether we have children or not. In this case, either situation will most likely be viewed negatively – if a woman artist is married, they will say her husband helped her career, or if she has children, they will say she is imitating art to earn and support her family, and if she is childless, then she becomes a soulless career-woman.

I shared my thoughts with feminist art historian Nadia Plungian. We discovered that our views largely coincide, and decided that since no one is putting on the exhibits we dream of, we will have to do so ourselves.

We want to show socially meaningful women's graphic arts – statements by artists in the first person about the issues of immediate concern to them, and not the issues of concern to the curator or to some politician. And we want to help women artists to unite – to start a dialogue with one another and to feel its power. "The Feminist Pencil" was conceived as a movement right from the start, because even the most successful solo exhibit by a woman artist would not meet the goals we have set ourselves.

**VICTORIA LOMASKO** is an artist who works in the documentary graphic arts genre, producing reportages. She received a degree in book illustration from the Moscow State University of Printing Arts in 2003. She has participated in contemporary art and alternative comics exhibits, and is a Kandinsky Prize nominee. Since 2008 she has been working on creating graphic reportages on acute socio-political issues. A series of courtroom drawings from the trial of the organizers of the "Forbidden Art" exhibit (in cooperation with Anton Nikolayev) was nominated for the Kandinsky Prize and published as a separate book. Lomasko's work has been shown at the Fourth Moscow Biennale, at the Central House of Artists and in the Sakharov Center, among other galleries, as well as published in many periodicals. She has had solo exhibitions at "MIR" (Reflex Gallery, Moscow, 2008) and at "Forbidden Art" (Art re. FLEX Gallery, St. Petersburg, 2011), among other locations. Her reportages "May Holidays" and "Everyday OkkupyAbay" from the series "The Chronicle of Resistance" were presented in May 2012 during the "OkkupyAbay" campaign at Chistiye Prudi in Moscow. She is a winner of the "Drawing the Court" competition held by Gelabert Studios Gallery, New York.

Now, as we prepare for the second "Feminist Pencil" exhibit, I am convinced that we were right in believing that women artists working on socially meaningful subjects need the support both of curators and of other women artists. Many artists who have sent us their applications to participate in the exhibit, or who we have invited ourselves to participate, have never before had an opportunity to show their work – they were accused of being simple illustrators, or of producing overly dark depictions, which was a serious blow to their self-esteem as artists.

At the first "Feminist Pencil" exhibit, we showed the work of six artists, as that was all that fit into the space available at the "Fabrika" art hostel. All the images were accompanied by text – these were stories told in different graphic genres. Taken together, the works on exhibit formed a coherent whole.

We already knew many of the women artists who exhibited. I had a lengthy correspondence with Tatiana Faskhutdinova when she first began working in the documentary comics genre, while she was working on "Unknown Stories from the Life of Leni Rodina". I am delighted if some of my advice proved useful to her. I helped Paulina Petrushina a bit in gathering material for the documentary comics about Pussy Riot. In my view, all of this goes into the curator's job.



The first show received mainly positive reviews. However, some men – critics, curators and artists – were surprised that we did not show any works by male feminist graphic artists. The reason is probably because we didn't know of any such artists, except for Anatoly Belov from Kiev.

Before the first "Feminist Pencil" exhibit had been taken down, we had already received several letters from women artists wanting to join the movement. One of them sent us a very strong piece about a women's mental hospital.

We posted an invitation to participate in the second exhibition in a number of feminist media outlets and in our blogs. We received an impressive amount of requests. This time, the exhibit will be held in a larger space at ArtPlay, where there is room for the works of at least 20 artists.

In preparing for the second "Feminist Pencil" exhibit we are finding that a few artists whose work we value and would like to include in the show have been scared away by the word "feminist." Others believe that holding an exhibit of women-artists only with no male artists is unwise, because participation in such exhibits could spoil the artist's reputation. And some artists' husbands have forbidden them to take part in the exhibition.

My conviction that such exhibits are needed is what helps me to continue working on the project. We see clearly that after receiving some friendly support, women artists grow before our eyes," says Victoria Lomasko.