

# IF

# INSPIRED FEMALES OF EUROPE

## Women Entrepreneurs in Europe

The EQUAL partnership 'Women Entrepreneurs in Europe' brings together ten national networks from across Europe that focus on the development of women's enterprises. The partners exchange, adapt and finally implement new methodologies designed to support and improve the conditions under which women start and develop their own businesses.

**AWE**  
Accelerating Women's Enterprise

The Accelerating Women's Enterprise Partnership (AWE) which is funded by the European Social Fund under the EQUAL community initiative programme, brings together a number of leading agencies operating at the cutting edge of women's enterprise development spanning the English regions. Together they have developed a programme of activities, which includes, training, access to finance, pre and post business support, networking, mentoring and award schemes.

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women into the network

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 **Durham**  
University  
Centre for Entrepreneurial  
Learning



**AWE**  
Accelerating Women's Enterprise



The Accelerating Women's Enterprise (AWE) Development Partnership is funded by the European Social Fund under the Equal Community Initiative Programme.

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# Welcome to the first edition of IF (Inspired Females) of Europe...

IF Europe is a publication featuring the stories of enterprising female role models from around Europe, which will inspire women everywhere to achieve their goals and fulfil their dreams.

That's a pretty strong claim, but a magazine called Northern Lights, developed in the North East of England by Women Into the Network (WIN), and its national version IF ONLY showed that role models play a crucial part in motivating and encouraging others to take risks and grow both personally and professionally.

AWE (Accelerating Women's Enterprise), a partnership of leading women's enterprise agencies across England, together with their European partners of the Women Entrepreneurs in Europe was able to build on this work and has created IF Europe as an international version.

All the women featured in IF Europe have done remarkable things, yet we can all relate to them. They come from a variety of backgrounds and their businesses are located across many sectors, from beauty therapists to builders. The one thing they have in common is their determination, courage and an unwavering desire to succeed.

We all gain from having role models in our lives. They can be well-known entrepreneurs or celebrities - but more often are our mothers, neighbours, friends or colleagues. They can guide us, encourage us and help us to grow. And when starting a new business, or developing an existing one, learning from others' experiences and how challenges were faced along the way, can have a huge impact. Whether it be developing confidence, taking risks, coping with setbacks or overcoming fears - hearing from someone who has done it, perhaps struggled, and become a success, encourages budding entrepreneurs to make it happen for themselves.

We hope IF Europe inspires you and you enjoy reading the stories of all the women featured in this first edition.

If you would like to be featured in future editions of IF Europe or you would like to tell us about someone who has inspired you, please do get in touch with the partner organisation located nearest to you as listed on the inside back cover.

Best wishes



*Dinah Bennett*

**Dinah Bennett**  
Women Into the Network  
[www.networkingwomen.co.uk](http://www.networkingwomen.co.uk)

On behalf of AWE and Women Entrepreneurs in Europe partnerships.

Please see back cover for more details of the AWE and Women Entrepreneurs in Europe partnerships.

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## FARHANA ALI



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*"There are always obstacles but never give up on your dream."*

Henna body painting isn't just about making money by making people beautiful to Farhana Ali. It enables her to combine her love of art, design and her traditional Bengali Muslim culture with modern beauty treatments and growing Western interest in Asian beauty secrets.

She drives all over Wales and southern England applying intricate floral and Arabic designs in 100% pure henna to Asian brides, English and Welsh mums holding pamper days, and children at festivals and exhibitions. "People say it looks a bit like cake decorating!"

Since starting her business in her teens she has branched into make-up, hair styling and sari dressing. She also runs workshops in schools and libraries where she teaches adults and children about the art, culture and religion behind henna body painting. "It's a great way of giving insights into the lives of ethnic minorities."

Farhana started applying henna to friends and family during her childhood. By the age of sixteen she had 75 people queuing up at one community event. "When people saw the quality of my work they encouraged me to start a business. I thought: Why not? I know I can be successful and I love a challenge. Some of the people in my community were a bit shocked but I've won them round."

She worked in a bank in order to earn enough money to start up and got advice from the Ethnic Business Support Programme in Wales. Then she undertook a course with a BBC make-up artist and bought a car. She fitted it in around a degree in health science at university. "In an ideal world I would like to have done a design course at university or a degree in manufacturing make-up. But on the other hand you can't do a formal qualification in henna creativity. It's just part of you."

Farhana is realistic about the challenges of running a business, and optimistic about developing training courses, pattern books, her own accessories and a chain of beauty shops in the future.

"You have good and bad days and there are always obstacles but never give up on your dream."



## MONICA GARCIA CUETOS & MARIA VALDES-HEVIA TEMPRANO

A shared passion for the art, history and culture of northern Spain has blossomed into a business for two friends Monica and Maria. When they met at university in Oveido in the province of Asturias on Spain's Atlantic coast they had no idea what the future held. Little did the two teenagers know that their lecturers' inspiring lessons about the fiercely independent Asturians were sowing the seeds for their own independent enterprise 20 years later.

Now they try to bring their region's art history to life in different ways for different customers. One week they might be busy arranging trips and running innovative workshops for groups of visitors and schoolchildren, and the next they concentrate on writing guidebooks and publicity leaflets and producing detailed historical research reports for the public and private sector.



### ARTEYRUTA

Art historians specialising in research, writing, training courses and guided visits

Based in Asturias in northern Spain  
Tel 00 34 (0) 985 692227  
Web www.arteyruta.com

Learning what to charge and how to make ArtyRuta financially viable has been a steep learning curve. "If we could change one thing it would be to reduce the paperwork you have to fill in when you start a business!"

It's a big change from working at home bringing up children and, like many entrepreneurs, they now find it hard striking the right work life balance.

But they enjoy the challenge of proving that they can put their academic training to good use.

"The best thing about ArtyRuta is proving that we can face up to the challenge of running a business and showing how our background in humanities has given us the skills to enable us to be entrepreneurial."

Their role models are other professionals who run similar businesses elsewhere in Spain. The finance, training and mentoring they have received through the Equal project and the Valhalon business centre, where they are based, are absolutely vital.

In future they aim to employ other people and to expand the business without losing sight of their original vision.

"We thoroughly recommend starting up in a business centre, joining a programme for women entrepreneurs and meeting other women in the same position. And being patient!"

*"We thoroughly recommend joining a programme for women entrepreneurs"*





## ANA M<sup>a</sup> BARJOLLO GONZÁLEZ

**BARJOLLO**  
Interior Plastering

Based in Gijón in northern Spain  
Tel 00 34 (0)985 140481

*"If you have an idea you believe in you must keep on trying and not give up"*



Ana has had to be exceptionally determined to set up her plastering business in the city of Gijón on Spain's north coast. She's been up against one of the biggest barriers faced by women entrepreneurs from across Europe - not being taken seriously by the banks.

But she didn't give up and now she's running a successful business, which she plans to expand.

She says: "If you have an idea you believe in you must keep on trying and not give up during the first stage. It will get better during the second stage and so on. Sometimes you come across the wrong people and the wrong information. Make sure you talk to the right people and listen to different points of view before making decisions."

Ana started her business literally from scratch. She was unemployed, separated from her partner and lacked formal qualifications.

But she had good communication skills, developed while working in the catering industry and for an estate agent, and she had learned all about plastering during a stint in the building industry.

Most importantly she believed in herself and her idea. All she needed was a loan of 6000 Euros to buy a plastering machine.

She approached banks and other financial institutions. None of them backed her. It was only when she turned to the Equal project 'Equality Creates Employment' that she found the support and funding she needed.

She bought her first machine and started doing jobs for anyone and everyone from large construction companies to individual homeowners. At first it was tough paying off invoices but she proved to her suppliers she was a reliable customer and was gradually allowed to buy materials on credit.

In the future when she gets the business on a secure financial footing and has saved enough money, she wants to buy another machine to enable her to increase her turnover and expand the business. She loves working for herself and being able to combine work with family life and wouldn't change anything.



## ANNA DARZENDA

Anna Darzenda was a social entrepreneur long before the word entered our vocabulary!

She and her neighbours on Syros have drawn on the best of their traditional roles as domestic managers, five-star chefs and community workers and created a co-op called To Kastri, or 'little castle' in English. It's profitable, serves the community and enables the women to fit work in around their home lives.

They produce, pack and sell traditional fruit preserves, liqueurs, pastries and sweets, and also run a restaurant and takeaway in the island's main city Ermoupolis.

*"Use quality and love as the main ingredients in everything you do"*

It's a step up from their first venture, a sewing co-operative, in 1986. It wasn't financially viable but the women built up good relationships, undertook vocational training and visited other enterprises. They were driven by the need to earn a living and boost the economy on Syros after the decline of the port and shipyards. Eventually they realised they could turn their passion for their island's culinary heritage and their catering skills into a viable business and support their community by using local suppliers.

But starting up was tough, and learning to co-ordinate each woman's duties was also a huge logistical challenge.

### TO KASTRI

Produce traditional preserves and sweets and run restaurant and takeaway

Based on the island of Syros in Greece

Tel 00 30 22 810 83039

Email [tokastr@otenet.gr](mailto:tokastr@otenet.gr)

They say they did it with the support of their families, the Cyclades Vocational Training Centre, the NOW programme and their local council.

Anna has always been a leading light, due to her sense of social responsibility and entrepreneurial get up and go. She says her mother, who ran a grocery business, was a great role model. Anna started buying and selling items like cosmetics and kitchenware during her teens when she married and started a family.



She has always been active in the community and served as a local councillor in the 1990s. People say: "She isn't frightened of public speaking. She's very good at it. She speaks from the heart." She travels around Greece talking to other entrepreneurs. She values patient relationship building. "Time works for you, not against you!"

She says: "Believe in yourself, have the courage to go after what you want and ask for help. The key to success is using quality and love as the main ingredients in everything you do."



## VIOLAINE DELAHAUT

**FIDUCIAIRE DELAHAUT**  
Accountant and tax advisor

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*"Since I took on staff the business hasn't stopped growing."*

Too little customer contact and too much hierarchy were the main reasons Violaine swapped big business for her own business in the town of Erbisoeul near Brussels. She's a chartered accountant and tax advisor who has gone from financial management in big corporations, to helping small-scale enterprises manage their money.

Good relationships are all important. She thrives on face to face contact and being able to lend a sympathetic ear when clients and staff come to her with problems. Her business advisors Union des Classes Moyennes say that her convivial approach is exemplary.

It's been a steep learning curve, which she's negotiated with the support of her husband and family. Her mother, a freelance psychoanalyst, has been a helpful role model.

"My business is quite different from hers but we have one common characteristic. We never add up all the hours we devote to our work."

Violaine's biggest challenge was and still is having to make all the major decisions by herself. If she was starting up now she would employ permanent staff from day one, rather than relying on freelance secretarial help. "Since I took on staff the business hasn't stopped growing."

In the early days she ran the business single-handedly in the evenings and during holidays after a full day's work for a big employer. When she got pregnant she couldn't fit everything in and gave up her permanent job. When her daughter was born it took her time to find suitable childcare and strike the right work life balance, but she feels she's got the best of both worlds now.

Violaine is a keen supporter of the Diane Development Partnership in Belgium, which brings together a range of business support organisations in Belgium in the same way Accelerating Women's Enterprise (AWE) does in the UK.

She advises other entrepreneurs to do market research and business planning, and to seek advice from people in whom they have confidence, who in turn believe that in them.

"When there are problems stay positive, patient and flexible, and remember that Rome was not built in a day!"



## DANIELA FERRI



*"Continuous training is important for professional and personal growth."*

At first her customers, nearly all men, were suspicious. It took time to build relationships locally and nationally. "It took years of effort and commitment to reach the current levels of collaboration and trust that we enjoy now," she says.

One thing that has not changed is the excellent atmosphere in the workshop. Daniela has always talked to her staff, held regular meetings, involved them in decision-making and encouraged them to take responsibility. She also offers flexible working and a 'bank of hours', which allows employees to swap shifts with each other and take time off work when necessary.

In future Daniela would love to go back to university. After finishing scientific high school she started a degree but had to give it up in order to gain financial independence. She says: "Although most of my experience so far is practical, I think continuous training is very important for professional and personal growth."

Daniela Ferri doesn't talk up the fact that she's shrewdly run an all-woman business in a predominantly man's world for 20 years. Instead she says she employs 22 women from her home town in northern Italy for practical reasons. They need paid work and she needs patient workers who pay attention to detail in her cable assembly and wiring enterprise.

If you asked Daniela to flag up the reasons for Cablocavi's strong performance she would focus on her ISO 9002 and Vision 2000 certificates, internationally recognised management standards, which prove how well Cablocavi is run. She regularly sends out customer satisfaction questionnaires and carries out business analysis, in order to keep track of problems and opportunities, and change with the times.

It's a big change from the early days when she and her sister started up in a garage with just one employee. Daniela knew all about electric systems after working in her husband's electrical business. But after their first child was born she wanted to work from home and make a niche for herself in electrical cabling. "My husband helped a lot, especially on the technical side. As for the rest, that was up to me!"

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## MARIA HOFVENDAHL



### MARIELUNDS MANOR HOUSE

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Based in Mörarp in southern Sweden

Employs 5 people

Tel 00 46 (0) 42 71000

Email marielund@lm.lrf.se

*"A business woman needs to know where and how to market her product"*

You never know who you might meet if you stay at Maria's manor house on her farm in southern Sweden. She doesn't just open her doors to B&B guests. She welcomes everyone from children to company directors. It's all part of the experience of staying with an inspiring entrepreneur who combines business acumen with a strong sense of social responsibility.

Maria got involved in the Bo På Lantgård or Stay on a Farm scheme in 1993 when she and her husband were finding it hard to make a living. They wanted to diversify and keep the farm as a working farm.

So Maria approached the Federation of Swedish Farmers, who gave her a grant and put her in touch with other farmers. She had plenty of ideas, thanks to her parents, who were teachers, and her background as a chemical engineer. "I was used to taking responsibility and working in a man's world."

She decided to develop a range of activities, from an outdoor play area for children to conference facilities for business executives, and offer visitors economy to luxury packages to suit their budgets.

Appealing to such a varied customer base was quite a challenge in the early days. If she could change one thing it would be to have known then

what she knows now about marketing! "A business woman needs to know where and how to market her product."

Drawing a line between family life and work has been a challenge. But she's learned to delegate, and to make sure she and her family spend time together by themselves as a family.

She advises other entrepreneurs to seek advice and training from business advisors. "Find someone with whom you can share your ideas and who is also willing to criticise them."

She says: "There is always the risk of working too hard when you have your own business. Work might be highly stimulating but you have to listen to your body and recognise when it is time to slow down."



## QUEENIE IBIA

Queenie Ibia really had to stick to her guns to achieve her dream of opening her own restaurant. When she was looking for financial support, she was told more than once that an Afro-Caribbean restaurant in Liverpool would never be successful.

"In the end, I just had to laugh. I decided to stop bothering with banks and save up my own money to make it happen".

Before launching Quynny's Quisine in Liverpool's city centre in 2000, Queenie enjoyed 10 years as a social worker. But friends and customers who tried out her food at local festivals and carnivals encouraged her to believe that her passion for cooking could become her business.

Eventually, she turned to Merseyside-based Train 2000, an organisation which specifically aims to help women. Queenie believes that they were a



### QUYNNY'S QUISINE

Serves Afro-Caribbean and English food

Based in Liverpool in northern England, UK

Tel +44 0151 708 7757

lifeline in finding her financial support. "I definitely think it is more difficult for women to access loans and grants. I first started looking in 1988. For a start, you are very rarely talking to a woman - it was certainly always men who said no to me".

After three years in business, Queenie still finds the going is tough. She works long hours, as the restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner seven days a week. She would like to spend more time with her three children, but is happy that they are proud of what she does. "My 7-year old thinks I'm the best cook in the world! And they all help out - it would be much harder if they didn't show any interest".

What keeps her going is the satisfaction of doing what she loves - at last. She also gets a lot of pleasure from seeing other people enjoy her cooking. "It all seems worth it when you see the smiles on people's faces as they leave".

Queenie was out on a limb going into business by herself. She didn't know anyone else in the same situation. She hopes her story will help others, as she thinks role models are extremely important, especially for women. "It gives you added confidence if you can see that someone else has managed to succeed".

What Queenie values most now is her independence. She is keen to encourage other women to follow their hearts and try their best. "Life can be very hard for us.

We have to liberate ourselves - nobody else is going to do it for us".

*"It gives you added confidence if you can see that someone else managed to succeed"*



## LIZ JACKSON

### GREAT GUNS MARKETING

Appointment making, lead generation and provision of customer service professionals to businesses

Based in Basingstoke in southern England, UK

Employs 70 people

Tel +44 01256 330 571

Web [www.greatgunsmarketing.co.uk](http://www.greatgunsmarketing.co.uk)

*"In business, it really isn't going to happen for you if you always think the glass is half empty"*



Liz Jackson has already achieved a huge amount. She set up Great Guns Marketing aged 25, and now has a turnover of £1.5 million. She employs thirty people at her head office in Basingstoke, and has eight regional branches with more in the pipeline. She was 2003's winner of the Women Mean Business Award aged only 30. What makes her success even more remarkable is that Liz lost her sight five years ago.

Liz is as go-getting a woman as you could hope to find. She credits her family and friends for surrounding her with inspiring role models. "My family is full of self-made people, and my peer group is really dynamic. When you know people like that, you really don't want to get left behind!"

Her career got off to a good start when she left school at 17. She joined a local business as an office junior, and worked her way up the ladder as the business grew. After eight years working in the UK and US, Liz decided she needed to spread her wings. Her boss, a highly entrepreneurial man, couldn't have been more supportive. Understanding that big hierarchical organisations wouldn't suit her, he suggested she start her own telemarketing company, and offered to be her first client.

With a grant and a loan from the Prince's Trust, Liz set up Great Guns Marketing from her flat. Three months later, she had enough business to open an office. It was only after the business had started to take off that Liz realised her eyesight was deteriorating.

She didn't let it hold her back for a moment. "You can't afford to be negative - in business, it really isn't going to happen for you if you always think the glass is half empty".

She loves being her own boss. She likes the fact that she can choose her colleagues, use her own ideas and be spontaneous - even if it means making mistakes.

"Yes, there are things I would change. But you learn from your mistakes - and at least any mistakes are my own."

Liz is always keen to share her experiences. She is an enthusiastic networker, with the South East Development Agency and Women in Enterprise amongst others.

She also regularly talks at schools to raise young people's awareness about entrepreneurial opportunities. Her aim is to motivate them to set their goals high and take every chance.

"Running your own business, you learn new things every day. I'm driven by it. It's exciting! I've got a lot to be thankful for".



## MARINA JEDHEIM-HANSSON

Marina and her two business partners Eva-Lena and Marie have lots of different skills and several big things in common. They all have children and need to fit in work around their domestic responsibilities, and they all like chocolate! It's the ideal mix for a successful business.

In fact if you ask Marina if she has any role models she says she's most inspired by her business partners. They got to know each other while working in ski hotels in Åre in central Sweden. They went into business together in 1991 after attending a start your own enterprise course. They wanted a change of direction as many jobs in Åre are only seasonal. They knew that chocolate factories were common in Alpine skiing villages and were sure there was an opening for one in their Scandinavian resort.

*"If you are a young woman who wants to have a family it's a good idea to start an enterprise with other women in the same situation"*

Now they employ 10 people and are planning to invest in a chocolate dipping machine, expand their offices and develop their marketing strategy. They hope this will enable them to increase production and sales, pay better wages and take more time off. If they produce and sell more they will also be able to reduce the freight costs that eat into their earnings.



They decided to concentrate on hand-made pralines, which are made by dipping fruit, nuts and other tasty treats in chocolate. They used natural Swedish goodies like blueberries from the woods in the mountains around Åre, and designed beautiful packaging to appeal to their customers in good food and gift shops. The city council welcomed their idea and the local and national media loved their story.

Marina says: "You can set up and run a successful business if you are committed. If you are a young woman who wants to have a family it's a good idea to start an enterprise with other women in the same situation and then you can support each other."

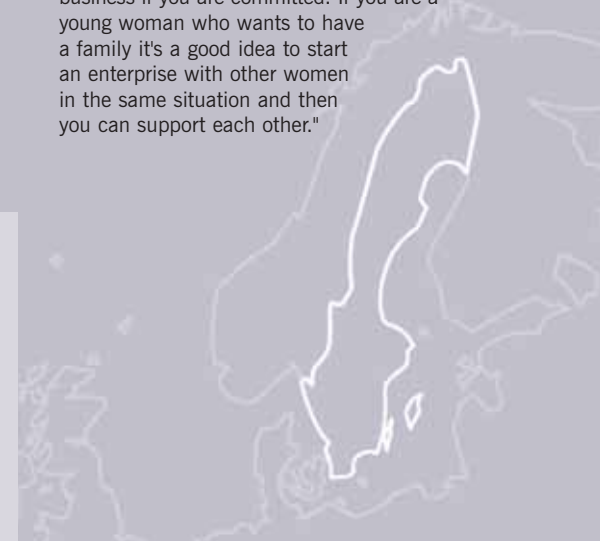
### ÅRE CHOCOLATE FACTORY Chocolate factory

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Employs 10 people

Tel 00 46 (0) 647 325 80

Web [www.fjallkonfekt.se](http://www.fjallkonfekt.se)





## GILLIAN MONTAGUE

### ALL CREATURES VETERINARY HEALTH CENTRE

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Based in Limavady, Northern Ireland UK

Tel +44 028 7776 9777

Email [allcreaturesvets@msn.com](mailto:allcreaturesvets@msn.com)

*"If you provide a good service your customers will advertise your business for free."*

Gillian's veterinary business didn't start on the day she opened her doors. The germ of the idea started years earlier while she was working as a veterinary nurse in other people's practices. In fact it probably started during her childhood when she first developed a passion for nursing sick animals.

Over the years she collected ideas and wrote them up in a notebook. She started off in a practice in her hometown in Northern Ireland and then took on jobs in South East England. "I began to want to do things my own way. I was convinced I could provide a better service and earn more money."

She actively started looking for premises in the late 1990s after new legislation came in allowing nurses to own a veterinary surgery as long as there was a vet on the premises. At first she bid for properties in England but other businesses got there first.

She had more luck back home in Northern Ireland, where an estate agent pointed out an empty industrial unit in a small retail park. After kitting it out from scratch she opened up and quickly won business by word of mouth - and an All Ireland Best Business Award. "I love having my own customers and seeing people's pets grow and change. Don't overspend on advertising. If you provide a good service your customers will advertise your business for free."

It might sound like a dream come true but she's honest about the problems. At the same time as she started her business she also started a family. "Although my mother was a great help my daughter did spend the first few months of her life at the surgery!" She still has to put in long hours and finds paperwork and staff management particularly time-consuming.

Gillian advises other entrepreneurs to think seriously. "It may be a bigger commitment than you expect. Know your business and the competition, which is never far behind. Don't walk into it blindly. It's a tough, cut-throat, cruel world in business." But this hasn't put her off. "I would love to see the business grow into a chain of surgeries under the All Creatures name!"



## SANDRA NILLESEN



*"Do the things you are good at and radiate enthusiasm."*

"You're on your own and very insecure. You daren't take any risks. Things got easier after a newspaper article about Babygeluk. Customers started getting in touch."

Since then she has invested in new equipment, speeded up production and taken on an administrator to manage orders and deliveries. She supplies large and small companies and individuals.

It's still tough taking sole responsibility for the decision-making. But she loves the freedom and manages to fit her business around her number one priority, her children. Balancing work and home comes naturally to her as her parents had a cafe in Arnhem, which she helped out in when she was growing up. Sandra admires the way they managed their family and their business and thinks they are great role models.

In future she plans to upgrade her website, take on more staff and start a business in Germany. Her ultimate goal is to open up a shop with production, administration and storage space in the same building.

She says to other entrepreneurs: "Do the things you are good at and radiate enthusiasm. Network, show your face and talk about your business. Keep a good work life balance. Have guts and do it!"

While Sandra was pregnant with her first child she thought a lot about new beginnings and realised she had the beginnings of a great business idea - unique gifts for newborn babies.

The time was right. She was artistic. She had savings to invest thanks to a redundancy payment from her previous job as an office manager. She had a supportive partner and family. And most of all she had vision.

She was convinced there was a market for personalised presents like classic Dutch clogs decorated in bright colours and presented in beautiful wicker baskets.

But there's a gap between thinking of a great idea and making it pay. At first she was frightened of taking risks and buying specialist equipment. So she did everything by hand, which was terribly time-consuming. She also threw herself into promoting her products and made the most of her communication and marketing skills.



### BABYGELUK

Personalised baby gifts

Based in the Arnhem region in the Netherlands

Employs 1 person

Tel 00 31 (0) 26 327 4606

Web [www.babygeluk.com](http://www.babygeluk.com)



## KATJA VAN PUTTEN



**FÉ. SOUL COMMUNICATION**  
Advertising agency

Based in Diest, Belgium  
Employs 11 people  
Tel 00 32 (0) 13 32 31 91  
Web [www.fe-losophy.com](http://www.fe-losophy.com)

*"Don't lose heart and don't be afraid of being a woman"*

Visitors to the Fé. Soul Communication website can click onto cartoon pictures of the staff. Katja is the 'borrelende vulkan' which means 'bubbling volcano' in English.

It's a colourful description of a dynamic woman who is on a mission to improve the way organisations communicate with women and to take female thinking into account in marketing. Fé is an agency with a clear social commitment. Respect for people and nature are basic concepts. Katja and her team don't only preach to the converted like the green cleaning products firm Ecover, one of their longstanding customers. They also work with traditional male businesses like the financial group Fortis.

They have even written a book about their vision and are spreading their message so successfully that Katja appears in articles and on TV as a role model. Some people now name their newborns Fé!

Katja says it can take time to find the right path in life. As a child she dreamt of a career in TV, film and photography. But she couldn't get into film school and ended up in advertising. She found it soul-destroying and left. She and her husband started renovating an old convent and she went back to work in an advertising agency called Surplus in order to have a stable income.

After four years the owners asked Katja and her colleague Dettie Luyten to become partners. They said yes on one condition: that they could do it their way. Since then they haven't looked back. "Being a colleague was completely different to being a boss. But we learnt by trial and error."

When Katja looks back she realises she's always been interested in influencing the way people communicate with each other. One of her role models is her best friend who uses her communication skills to teach her three children at home. "What she does is just as relevant as what I do."

She says: "Have a mission and go for it. Don't lose heart and don't be afraid of being a woman. Be guided by feelings but also be realistic and honest with yourself."



## TRUUS VAN DER SANDEN

Estate agents aren't always the most popular people in the world but Truus's commitment to socially responsible business has made her a winner. She's been running her estate agency in Nijmegen for 20 years now and still finds it hugely rewarding.

When she started up she was the first woman estate agent in her hometown. She decided to do things differently from other estate agents. She charged an hourly rate rather than commission and specialised in working exclusively with buyers.

"They are the most vulnerable party. Every day is a new challenge. It gives me an amazing sense of satisfaction to be able to help someone and make a difference."

Truus is an inspiring example of an entrepreneur who has come through heartache and hardship to make the most of opportunities and contribute to her community.



**BV TRUUS VAN DER SANDEN MAKELAARDIJ OG**  
Estate agent

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As an only child she was hit hard by the death of her mother when she was a 22-year-old physiotherapy student. She fled into marriage with a builder and had two children. Her husband set up a contracting business, which she helped him run. When the going got tough, he went off with another woman, leaving Truus to raise the children by herself.

By chance she met an estate agent at a party who enthused her about the job so much that she studied and qualified as an estate agent herself. But she put her ambitions on hold when her father fell ill, and cared for him until his death two years later.

Then she invested the money she inherited from him in a building where she could live with her children and work as an estate agent.

Her goal was to combine work and motherhood without neglecting either, and to stick to the principle 'small is beautiful'. She's managed to do both and now her son is her business partner and her daughter is training to be an estate agent too.

She says to other entrepreneurs: "Just keep believing in yourself and your ideas. Being both a specialist in your field and a socially responsible person will help you succeed!"

*"It gives me an amazing sense of satisfaction to be able to help someone and make a difference"*



## MARGRIT SCHICKER

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*"There is always a solution even for the most difficult problems"*



You could describe Margrit as a serial entrepreneur but that wouldn't do justice to the rich tapestry she's woven in her personal and professional life since launching her first enterprise in her twenties.

She says doing business is in her blood. It allows her to be independent and creative. She thrives on learning and believes new opportunities are always waiting just around the corner, shaped by the people you meet and the events that occur in your life.

Born in northern Germany, she trained as a translator and moved to Portugal with her partner in the 1980s. Her linguistic skills were invaluable when they set up a real estate business. "I worked with the most diverse international clientele buying and selling the most diverse kinds of properties in wonderful locations."

When that came to an end in the 1990s Margrit moved to the Netherlands where she set up a business translating from Dutch and English into German.

"I went from very extroverted work in Portugal to very introverted work in the Netherlands because I wanted to be around at home as much as possible for my son."

As her business grew she realised she and her partner could offer the Dutch companies she worked for additional help in marketing their products and services in Germany. They set up the Interim Management Office to do just this.

"The most satisfying thing about running my own business is making my clients happy. The hardest part is maintaining high standards and excellent customer service during financial ups and downs. There is always some problem or other to solve, but there is always a solution even for the most difficult problems."

Now another new challenge is taking shape. Margrit is training to be a therapist in complementary medicine at the Akademie voor Mesologie and plans to open her own practice.

"I hope I will be able to translate the business intuition that helps me make my clients happy into a therapist's intuition that helps me make them healthy as well as happy."

Her advice to other entrepreneurs is: "Be prepared in good times for bad times and always trust your intuition."



## ANGELIKA ULLMANN

When Angelika Ullmann left college she had two big ambitions. They were to be her own boss and to put her creative talents to full use. It took her over ten years to take the plunge and now she only regrets one thing - that she didn't set up her own business as an artist and illustrator sooner.

She doesn't just illustrate books and posters. She turns furniture, kitchenware, doors, walls, roofs and garages into works of art.

"I illustrate everything you can imagine. My clients are individuals and businesses, publishing houses and public facilities like children's playgrounds. My work has even been shown on TV."

It's a huge change from the frustration she felt while employed as a graphic artist in big publishing houses.

*"React flexibly to opportunities as this will open doors you never dreamed of"*

"I was often unhappy and bored. But I didn't have the courage to set up in business on my own. I was afraid of the insecurity."

When the publishing industry suffered a downturn and she was made redundant, she realised that working for someone else was as insecure as working for herself. In 2003 she took two big steps. She got married and got in touch with advisors at Kompass Business Incubator in

Frankfurt am Main. They helped her set up Ullikat - Die Illustrationswerkstatt.

Kompass advisors said: "Angelika is a great role model because she is flexible, creative and possesses excellent communication skills. She has a talent for establishing good relationships with her customers and is a superb networker."



Angelika says the best thing about being self-employed is being able to create her own products and projects and receiving positive feedback from clients. The hardest part is keeping herself motivated and doing all her own advertising, PR and book-keeping.

In the future she plans to build up her core business illustrating books for publishing houses, work on new projects, and eventually open her own workshop and showroom.

She advises budding entrepreneurs to build up their savings and develop good relationships with future clients before going solo. "React flexibly to opportunities as this will open doors you never dreamed of, and make the most of your contacts."

### ULLIKAT - DIE ILLUSTRATIONSWERKSTATT

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## SHAHEEN UNIS

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*"Be prepared to keep on moving the goal posts as many businesses have to develop far beyond the founder's original idea"*

When Shaheen started work in a jewellery factory in London in the late 1960s she never dreamt of how brightly her own star would shine in the future. But 30 years on that's exactly what happened when she was nominated as one of Scotland's National Treasures. It's just one of the awards she's won for her contribution to business and the community in Edinburgh, where she runs a factory making handmade speciality Indian food, and works with numerous voluntary organisations.

She's not the only award winner. Her food is too. She makes traditional samosa, pakora, naan bread and chapatti. She's even branched out into Scottish style delicacies, and combines the essence of traditional haggis with eastern spices to make a vegetarian haggis samosa!

Shaheen has always enjoyed making food - and always wanted to make something of herself. She was born in Pakistan, where her mother died when she was very young. Although she was the only girl in a family of eight boys, she always felt she could do anything a man could do.

She came to Britain as a young bride and started making pakora out of a single fryer in her kitchen with her husband in 1974. They sold them to takeaways and then opened their own outlet, which grew and grew until they relocated into a purpose-built factory in 1999.

Shaheen is still involved in all aspects of Mrs Unis Spicy Foods and says the most satisfying part of running her business is that it's hands on. "The hardest part is balancing the complex boundaries between family and business. At least half of the workforce is a family member and undoubtedly conflicts and problems do arise." If she could change anything it would be to have been able to spend more time with her children while they were growing up.

She advises other entrepreneurs to do their market research. "It's all very well having an idea but how can you meet your customer's needs, wants and expectations unless you know what they are?" She adds: "Be prepared to keep on moving the goal posts as many businesses have to develop far beyond the founder's original idea."



## MARTINE VERSTRAETEN



*"If you really want something in life go for it and follow your heart."*

When she finally gave up work she realised she had been so busy living for other people that she had forgotten about herself.

So Martine made a dramatic career change and went on a hat-making course with Belgium's star milliner Christophe Coppens. She felt as if she re-found herself and ended up helping him develop a new product line making scarves.

Now she works part-time for him and part-time for herself. She dreams of one day telling Christophe that demand for her hats is so high she has to stop making scarves for him and concentrate 100% on her own business. She also dreams of her own shop on a busy shopping street and articles in glossy magazines!

She still finds it a challenge juggling her roles at home and at work, and keeping on top of the paperwork and accounts. But her customer's delight when they come to collect their hats make it all worthwhile.

She says to other entrepreneurs: "If you really want something in life go for it and follow your heart. But be realistic and aware of the consequences."

Martine is a fantastic role model for any woman who has ever burned out, got depressed and dreamt about starting a new life.

She's pursuing her passion for making fabulous handmade hats for women. But she's no ordinary milliner. She uses traditional methods and encourages customers to have a say in the design. She runs hat-making courses for all sorts of people and lets them look behind the scenes of her workshop. She also supports other women entrepreneurs by working with the enterprise support agency Markant CEZOV, and is now president of her local branch.

When she was young hats were the last thing on her mind. She wanted to work with children and took a degree in family science at university. Then she taught children with disabilities for 17 years and also started her own family. Although she felt fulfilled, juggling night shifts at work with her family responsibilities put her under too much pressure. She became tired, ill and depressed.

**HOEDENATELIER  
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*Increasing the number of female entrepreneurs; encouraging them in setting up their own businesses; raising awareness for women's potential.*

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