

“We must reach these girls at an early stage”

Ms Elin Hedén founded the Young Women shelter in Västerås, Sweden when she was only 18 years old. She has been working there for seven years.

The first women's shelter in Sweden was founded in the late seventies, and the first young women's shelter was founded in Stockholm in 1996. The purpose of the young women's shelters is to create a sanctuary for girls who have been abused physically, psychologically or sexually.

“We support them. We have an open phone line where girls can reach us, and we are active on various internet sites. We encourage and support contact between the individual and the authorities. Our experience is that cooperation between authorities and NGOs is vital. We think there is much more to be done to improve that. We have also educated 140 volunteers.”

The young women's shelter also works with prevention by empowering girls and young women to stand up for their rights. They discuss equality, sexuality, gender, ethnicity and violence.

“It is important for us to go to schools in order to reach out and establish a first contact. We strive

to spread awareness of female solidarity as an empowerment strategy.”

According to Elin Hedén, violence and sexual abuse of women is more common than many are aware of:

“Every week we come into contact with at least one new girl in need of help. The largest group has been assaulted by their boyfriend and/or sexually abused. Most girls know somebody who has been raped. There are also girls who seek our help because they are subjected to oppression in the name of honour. It is very important to support those victims for a long time after they have decided to leave their family.”

“We try to make them aware of how they talk. During the course you can see how the boys start to change.”



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