

STRONG WOMEN TEAM (STERKE VROUWEN PLOEG)

An example of a unique project (in a nutshell) that presents the public library's function as a meeting and debating (both physically and digitally) centre in the local community.

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An example of a unique project (in a nutshell) that presents the public library's function as a meeting and debating (both physically and digitally) centre in the local community.

The Strong Women Project was set up in 2009 as part of the local Strong Women Project that was initiated by the municipality.

The municipality asked all the cultural institutions to participate in this project. The library took its part very seriously and decided to start a network project for the women of Schiedam (a playful variation on the famous 'old boys networks'): the local project "Strong Women Team Schiedam" (in Dutch: Sterke Vrouwen Ploeg - SVP).

We named it the Sterke Vrouwen Ploeg (Strong Women Team). Our female Mayor was the captain of the team, which gave it a certain added value. The Mayor, because it was a local theme, was enthusiastic about having been asked to be involved.

She is a true ambassador for our town and, during the year, she used the SVP as her personal platform to get informed about the town and the opinions of its women.

She participated in 50% of the meetings, showed her personal side when talking about the subjects, and by the end had truly adopted the formula.

The Strong Women Team formula:

The formula was based on **five unique selling points:**

1. To prevent it from becoming a selective group of women (and to grow as a platform and group), we introduced the approach of asking each woman to bring along a woman by whom she had been inspired. This resulted in a very varied group of women that changed every month. It was not intended for the top 10, but for all the women of Schiedam!
2. A meeting on the 8th of each month, mostly in the library, focused on one specific subject such as: International Women's Day (March), breast cancer (October), youth, nature (April) motherhood, etc.
3. Each monthly meeting has a formula:
 - A plenary meeting to start with, with one or two expert women making a presentation on the topic of the month,
 - 3 or 4 workshops to choose from,
 - Each meeting had the opportunity of a presentation: tell the audience in no more than 5 minutes about something that you are involved in, something that you want to be advised on, perhaps something that you are working on for which you are looking for participants. Most times, there were 4 or 5 women making a presentation.
 - Of course, time to spend together with a drink to meet and talk in a relaxed atmosphere (networking)
4. There was no charge for the program, the library only received €3,000 from a local communications fund.
5. No men allowed! It should be an intimate, comfortable meeting for all women!

Strong digital element

Apart from the physical meeting function, there was a strong digital element.

Firstly, we decided to use modern social networks and developed a special Hyves Internet page (the Dutch equivalent of Facebook) for (women) members only, where we announced the meetings and asked for help organising meetings. Hyves is a place where the women can exchange topics, interests, and special messages without involving the entire WWW.

Secondly, two members of the group, a graphic designer and a web developer, developed a special website, open to everyone on the World Wide Web to see the general items about the Strong Women.

Thirdly, we organized two workshops for the women only: one about how to get on to Hyves and how to handle it (as a social network site) and one about how to write for the Internet.

Achievements during the year and benefits of the project:

From 75 to 400 women members!

Initially, we invited 75 women whom we connected to the various subjects.

About 100 women participated in each monthly meeting, sometimes more, sometimes less. (The special event on International Women's Day attracted about 350 (women) visitors).

By the end of the year, we had about 400 women participating.

Most of the women were between 30-50 years old, working mothers, and they loved learning more about their town and meeting other interesting women.

A large group of women who knew each other from the Second Feminist Wave in the 70's, found each other again here.

No charge, no obligations

The participating women were very enthusiastic about the 'no-obligations' formula.

Special connection and benefits through a brooch

All women members received a brooch or pendant specially developed by one of the women, who is a graphic designer. It gave the women a special feeling of belonging. Some local entrepreneurs even gave women discounts, for instance on meals, on presentation of their SVP brooch!

The face of THE strong woman 2009

An artist photographer, also a member of the group, photographed 162 women. She combined them all in 'one face': THE strong women of Schiedam 2009. She also made an animation in which you can see the face 'develop'.

A special glossy

We presented a glossy magazine as a final for the project at the end of December 2009.

Benefits for the library

The benefits for the library are:

- The library has a better place in society,
- We acquired a large amount of information about what is happening in our town
- Our network, goodwill and recognition in town have grown
- We experienced and have shown that we (as a public library) *can do* big projects

We believe that the big success of the project is that it was adopted by a group of enthusiastic Schiedam women who will carry on with the project. This is the crowning glory of our year's work. The women will also continue with the formula: a monthly meeting, each month a different location in town, and several thematically larger events each year. This includes a

large walking-dinner event on International Women's Day in March, a 30+-dance party on the eve of the Queen's Birthday (which is a big event in Holland on April 30th) and more to come this year.

Background information about the Waterweg Public Library in Schiedam - Holland.

The town of Schiedam has about 75,000 inhabitants and is located near Rotterdam in the western part of the Netherlands. The library is a public library, with two main libraries in town, 17 educational service points in schools and 2 service points at different locations in town, such as in a service building for elderly people.

The mission and vision of our library:

*The Waterweg Library is **the** cultural organisation in Schiedam, offering the inhabitants of Schiedam access to knowledge to provide them with opportunities and to stimulate them to partake in the social and cultural life and to make them responsible and critical. The library acts in cooperation with partners in town.*

Our motto: together in town... a place for information and inspiration

More information about Strong Women Team , City of Schiedam and public library Waterweg

Read more about the Strong Women Team, the Waterweg public library and the Schiedam community:

Download information from our website: www.bibliotheekwaterweg.nl/ifla

Other related websites:

www.svpschiedam.nl

www.svpschiedam.hyves.nl

www.bibliotheekwaterweg.nl

www.schiedam.nl

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