



Crescenda!

The concept is unique in Switzerland.

It's an organisation to help immigrant women set up in business on their own and become an integral part of the local community.

If you read Crescenda and think of crescendo, it's no accident. Beatrice Speiser, a Basel lawyer who initiated the project, said she hit on the idea of using this word with its connotations of burgeoning growth, and found it exactly expressed what she was hoping to do.

The idea of setting up a centre offering coaching and advisory services specifically for women who've moved to this country took a while to develop. "I'd been to India and Santo Domingo several times in the past, working for voluntary organisations," said Beatrice Speiser to *Hello Switzerland*. "I saw what an important contribution the women make in these countries, especially in India with the help of micro-credits, and I wondered why we couldn't do something similar here in Switzerland. When they come here, women are often left by the wayside as far as jobs are concerned: their qualifications aren't recognised, or they're limited by their family situation

or cultural background." Setting up in business by themselves is often a way out of their dilemma.

Crescenda's dedicated team – the entire project is very much a team effort – sets out to help these women develop their potential with a carefully structured programme starting with a self-orientation course for 8–12 women at a time. The aim is to find out what their interests are, their knowledge and training, their resources, and, essentially, their limitations too. This is followed by other courses and professional coaching from specialists on a modular basis. The key concept is empowerment. Crescenda also does a wonderful job helping women with problems to find their feet: "It's very rewarding when you see someone start to smile again," smiled Beatrice Speiser.

Everything is in German, since it's important for these women to integrate into the Basel community on a long-term basis. "They must be able to understand enough German when they come to us, as our instructors use only German. Then they start speaking German with each other, too. And they have to be committed," she emphasised. "The women have the most varied backgrounds and come from all over the place – California, South America, Caribbean, Africa, East Europe, Germany, France, Philippines, Iran and even China."

At the end of their course, the women receive the Crescenda diploma, recognised by EduQua, the Swiss certification procedure for further education institutes.

Swiss Integration Prize

In 2007 Crescenda received the Swiss Integration Prize, a well-deserved acknowledgement of its achievements. Its work is easier now it's moved into the Villa Crescenda, a superb privately owned *Jugendstil* villa by the



The Villa Crescenda

Schützenmattpark, which Crescenda can use free of charge. For Crescenda is an association, supported almost entirely by donations, grants, subsidies, subscriptions and so on. The Swiss government has made a substantial contribution, and there's a long list of companies and prominent local people who also help. Beatrice Speiser is president, and says – with another smile – she hopes it'll provide a role model for the rest of Switzerland!

Bistro and rooms for rent

The Crescenda team does more than help immigrant women set up in business: it also provides services. The Bistrot in the basement is run by Crescenda graduates and offers a wonderful selection of exotic food and a lovely garden, and is steadily getting better known. New is an American-Canadian brunch with a mouth-watering menu on Sundays, masterminded by a Senegalese married to a Canadian.

There are also six rooms for rent. At the top of the villa is a huge, newly converted room just under the roof – just the thing for a dinner for up to 50 people, an *apéro*, birthday party, wedding celebration, seminar or anything else. All catering is supplied by the Bistrot staff, whose record to date, I heard, was 180 people! The others are smaller, offering accommodation for meetings of every description, from a small room for four with period furniture, to a modern seminar room with its own kitchen and large terrace, and what looks like a boardroom. The income from these also makes a useful contribution to Crescenda's budget.
www.crescenda.ch

HANDYMAN

Basel & surrounding areas

All household tasks

- lighting/pictures
- furniture assembly
- repairs and maintenance
- satellite installation (Sky)
- transport/delivery

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