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Building Social Bridges
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Role models

Denmark

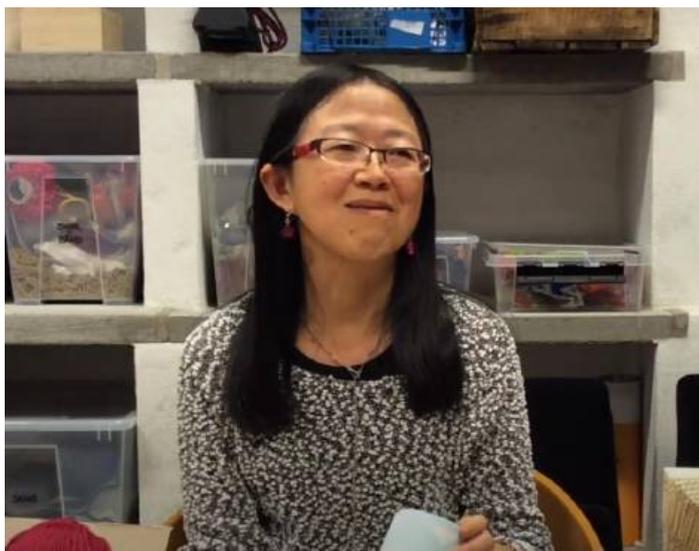


Meilinda

“Volunteer work can open doors”

The way to Denmark

Meilinda first came to Denmark in 2007 through her education, when she was given an opportunity to study through the European study program Erasmus Mundus. The last two months of her study period in Copenhagen, she met her future husband. At that time, they decided to both continue with their work and have a long-distance relationship where they took turns visiting each other. She therefore went back to Indonesia, but eventually it became difficult for them to make things work with visiting each other as both had very busy jobs. It was too difficult for her husband to find work in Indonesia, and she



wanted to return to Denmark, so in 2012 they decided that she should move to his home in Vejle in Denmark. In the beginning when Meilinda moved to Denmark, she worked long distance. She worked for an international tropical forest organization (Centre for International Forestry), where her boss was based in Indonesia, and she was, among other things, an assistant on a major European project, where they worked to create an international research network about rainforests across Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific area. When the project was finished in 2013, Meilinda decided to quit her job and focus on her Danish education at Vejle Language School, which she had started in 2012. She would have liked to keep her at job, but it was difficult to work there due to the time difference and the salary was too low to support her life in Denmark.

Meilinda wanted to learn the Danish language, and therefore chose to focus on her Danish education, which took three years before she applied for a new job. She had great confidence that it would help her find work and that she would not have a hard time getting a new job afterwards. When she studied in Copenhagen, she had three jobs next to her studies and they had been easy to find through the international study network she was part of. So she thought it would be just as easy to find work in Vejle. Today, Meilinda thinks that it was not the right decision to learn Danish before she applied for a job. After she finished her Danish education, she had two years without work on her CV, and this can be difficult for an employer to understand. Many have since told her that in Denmark it is easiest to find work while having a job. After studying Danish, Meilinda started looking for work. She has applied to many different places but

has only been denied. She applied for a job at LEGO as an office assistant because she had an English education as an office assistant, and advanced to the second round of interviews, but unfortunately did not get the job. She took a new office education in Danish, but could not find an internship at a company, and therefore took the internship of 1 year at Campus Vejle's internship centre.

In 2018, Meilinda got an internship with the artist Junette in [Fabrikanterne](#), which is a workshop community of individual designers and artists, in the field of interior design, lifestyle and design, selling in a common store. It was also during this period that Meilinda began to cultivate creative activities and crafts, to get through a depression. Here she met the manager of Fabrikanterne, Marit, who gave Meilinda the opportunity to arrange workshops about her creative activities. In her workshops, Meilinda mostly uses recycled materials which she gets donated from her network, from Fabrikanterne or from various activities she participates in. For example, Meilinda has a lot of tape rolls from an art project she volunteered for, in [Spinderihallerne](#), which is a centre in Vejle for creative entrepreneurs, companies, knowledge and cultural institutions and the municipality. She uses the materials to make nice creative products, such as paper boxes. Through her volunteer work, Meilinda has found a way to work with the profession she is trained for, namely to protect rainforests and work to take care of the environment. The payment for the workshops she arranges, she donates to a rainforest organization (ASRI) in Borneo that works to preserve the rainforest, by offering the local population health services and courses in organic farming. In Vejle, there is a great focus on recycling and on taking care of the environment, and this has inspired Meilinda to think about recycling in her workshops. For Meilinda, it is important to give things a new life and recycling is a good way to create less waste, which can be bad for the environment. It just requires that you think creatively and have an open mind, to find ways for how things can be used again.

Facts about Meilinda

Name: Meilinda Wan

Gender: Female

Age: 53

Nationality: Indonesia.

Education: Bachelor in Agronomy from Indonesia. Master in Agroforestry from University of Wales, Great Britain, and Nature Resources and Development at Copenhagen University in Denmark. Office assistant education from USA and Campus Vejle, Denmark.

Profession: Meilinda has previously worked internationally with tropical agroforestry, which she is educated for. She has however had difficulties in applying her education in Denmark and find a job. At the moment, she is job searching.

Interests: Meilinda is very fond of being creative and doing crafts. For example, she knits and crochets in a voluntary group in a local church, who donates the things they make for poor people in Romania. Even when she is in class she knits.

Languages: Indonesian, Danish and English.

Find video interview with Meilinda on the project website:
<https://buildingsocialbridges.eu/>

Getting through the difficult beginning

The biggest challenge for Meilinda in coming to Denmark is finding a job, which could potentially affect her residence permit. Personally, it is also important for her to have a job. She never saw herself as a housewife, and got her education with the intension to use it. Meilinda's husband has a job where he travels to Greenland for several months at a time. This means that Meilinda lives almost half the time as if she were single. It was especially hard right when she had quit her job and was alone much of the time while she was looking for work. This motivated Meilinda to seek out volunteer work and build a local network in Vejle. Today she knows more of Vejle than her husband because she has a large network there, than he does.

For Meilinda, volunteering became a way to find her way in Denmark. The volunteer work has led Meilinda in different directions, which has led her to get to know Danes, practicing Danish and finding opportunities to make money, even though it has not led to a permanent job. No matter what country she has been to, she has always found opportunities to volunteer, for example in Indonesia, USA and Great Britain. For Meilinda, being a volunteer is good both for her, and for others. She likes to feel that she is making a difference for others and for society. Meilinda believes that Denmark is a unique place, because there are so many opportunities to become a volunteer. It provides a good bridge and the opportunity to get to know Danish people, learn the language and culture. You can become a volunteer in all kinds of areas such as art, clothes, nature/environment etc. She is very lucky because she is interested in many things and it gives her the opportunity to take part in many different opportunities. Fabrikanterne and Spinderihallerne have been special and important places for Meilinda. They are both places with open doors that reach out and invite you to participate in different activities. It is especially important when you are a foreigner, to have the opportunity to get involved in something and to get to know people. At the same time, they have given Meilinda the opportunity to pursue creative activities that have also been of great importance to her.

It has not always been easy to keep up her spirits. In 2018, Meilinda got a depression just before she started an internship at Fabrikanterne. Her friend Susie suggested that Meilinda start working with creativity and making things to get her mood back up again, which has proven to work for her. She still has ups and downs, and especially the winter time is difficult for her, but she is stubborn and does not take medication. Meilinda has been doing crafts and creative activities since she was a child, but she had not cultivated it for many years before the opportunity came again in Denmark. It started in earnest as a medicine for her depression, but developed into much more and she volunteered in various creative projects and started arranging her own creative workshops.

The way into the Danish society

As previously mentioned, volunteer work has been a way for Melinda to find her way in Denmark and build networks in Vejle. Meilinda has met Danes and networked in various ways that have usually always been about volunteer work. When she went to the Danish education, she met a woman who was a volunteer language trainer, with whom Meilinda - and her husband - have become good friends. She offered Meilinda extra language training and that is how they got to know each other and became friends.

Meilinda has a volunteer job knitting and crocheting in a local church in Vejle. They are a group of women who meet on the weekends, where they talk and knit blankets and other things that they donate to poor people in Romania. Meilinda does not always have time to participate in the regular activity in the church, so one of the other volunteers has arranged for a small group to meet at her home. The group has been very important for Meilinda to get a social network and practicing her Danish language. The ladies who come in the group are very sweet and Meilinda always feels that she leaves from their meetings with happy feelings.

Meilinda has also been a volunteer in Green Forum, Vejle Municipality, where she has been involved in collecting waste in nature around Vejle. Through a local event for volunteers on environmental protection, Meilinda met Susie who works in the House of Associations, a local centre for voluntary associations, and who has also started the Butterfly Movement, which works to protect butterflies from being extinct. Meilinda is a deputy member of the board of the Butterfly Movement. Susie later

introduced Meilinda to the local artist Junette, who Meilinda did an internship with, in Fabrikanterne. That is how she got to know Spinderihallerne and Fabrikanterne, and Marit who works in both places. Both places are important to Meilinda and she feels very welcome there and can make her crafts there. People are really nice to her and there is a good atmosphere.

Good advice

Meilinda's advice to others people who come to Denmark is that if you cannot find a job right away, then it is a good idea to become a volunteer and engage with associations. It opens a door to networking. For Meilinda, it is her commitment to volunteer work that has made things develop and has led to work and opportunities for her creative projects and workshops in Vejle.

Meilinda hopes others can learn from her story. She does not see herself as a typical entrepreneur, but she is good at making use of the opportunities she encounters. When she meets other people, opportunities arise, almost by themselves. She herself is an introverted person, and had not planned or imagined that her volunteer work would lead to workshops and paid work, but when the opportunities rolled in because she was a volunteer in Spinderihallerne, she accepted them. It is important to dare to accept the opportunities and challenges you face. Personally, she was just happy to be asked.

The future

Meilinda is still finding her way in Denmark. Right now, she is focused on finding a job. Meilinda has a temporary residence permit and needs to find a full-time job. She still hopes that she can find a way to combine it with creative and volunteer activities in the future, but she does not think that she will be able to sustain herself just by arranging workshops and being creative.

She has given several thoughts on how she can combine her educational background and experience from Indonesia with what she can do in Denmark. She still has contact with people who do projects in Borneo and has looked at different options for combining it with activities in Denmark. There are many people in Denmark who care about the rainforest, so there is an opportunity to make some programs in Denmark that can benefit the rainforest. She also has contact with a researcher working on climate change, who produces and sells palm sugar from Indonesia. The money they make on sugar is used to plant trees instead of cutting them down, which is more sustainable and better for the environment. In the future, there may be an opportunity to sell the sugar in Denmark, and then Meilinda may be involved in the project and will be part of introducing it in Europe. It would allow her to get a job where she helps locals in Indonesia. Meilinda also wants to find a way to use her office education from Denmark and the USA, because she likes working with computers, especially with Excel.

Meilinda and her husband also plan to become partially self-sufficient in food production by planting vegetables and purchasing some livestock. They have an area in Jelling output Vejle, which they would like to start cultivating. They want to work from what is called permaculture and forest garden principles, which is about finding some more sustainable ways to cultivate land, and be self-sufficient. They have had to postpone the project due to the corona crisis, but hope to be able to get started soon. Later, she would like to do workshops and sell things based on it.

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