

The Mother Centers in Germany



Empowerment Strategies for Community Women in Germany

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What are Mother Centers?

Mother Centers are a grassroots self help movement, springing up all over the country and now also extending to the eastern part of Germany.

They are successful to such an extent that we speak about a "historical need".

In Germany the period of parental leave is 3 years and the majority of women stay at home for this period of time or longer after the birth of a child. The housewife life style is still valid in Germany, in West Germany more by choice, the general feeling being that young children are best taken care of by their mothers. Also in West Germany the net male wage level permits families to live off of one wage, which has to do with the German tax system that supports the provider model.

In East Germany many mothers are at home partly by choice but often because of the high rate of unemployment among women in East Germany.

In the Mother Centers women break through the isolation they experience in our society when they have children and become "deviant" from the male life style, around which society and public life is organised.

The work world and public culture function on the basis of fulltime availability for the labor market, leaving family obligations up to others. For men these others are usually their wives, for working and career women these others usually are other women, the grandmother, the daycare mother, the nanny, the kindergarden teacher.

Most women in Germany do not follow the male pattern of total availability for work and public life. When they have children they choose to stay at home for a period of time or to cut down on working hours and career aspirations in order to create space in their lives to tend to children and to family life.

In the Mother Centers public visibility is created for female life styles, for the work women are taking on in the family and the contribution to society this involves.

The centers mean that the workplace of a mother in the private home is opened up and that mothers learn to use more social space both for themselves and for their children.

There are about 300 Mother Center projects currently in Germany, including 40 in the former GDR.

Despite the widely described and avowed isolation women experience when they stay at home to take care of young children, there is a lack of response to institutional support programs. Many parents have negative associations towards school-like structures and teacher-student attitudes parent education programs often convey. This is especially true for mothers who often are intimidated by the culture of hostility towards children they experience in public environments. Very little positive experiences with public spaces outside the family are available, often causing a retreat into private life. This retreat can lead to very defensive strategies in dealing with other people, neighbors, spouses and the children themselves.

Many mothers very impressively describe a process of loss of self-confidence, which they experience when living with children, a life, which demands different rhythms and laws than those constituted by public norms.

They speak of a "trap": On the one hand mothering demands an incredible growth of responsibility, competence and self-reliance. On the other hand, this process of development and growth cuts them off from public values which are based on earning money, on principles of success and competition and on (fulltime) labor force participation.

The insecurity in dealing with public life goes down the line to the children, who in turn are not introduced to the rules of public life, until they enter the rather strict environment of school.

In West Germany many women, when they first become mothers, quit their work situation, especially if they are in disadvantageous jobs and enjoy their new life: to have an own household, an own apartment, an own area of autonomy and responsibility for the children. They manage well and want to be acknowledged for that.

In East Germany women often find themselves at home with small children out of a mixture of internal and external factors. Unemployment in East Germany is especially high for women with small children. However, there also is a tendency now among East German women to indulge more in family life than it was the norm in the former GDR.

Problems emerge in both parts of Germany from the fact that women feel too isolated and left alone in their day-to-day life with small children. It is difficult for them to initiate new friendships, contacts and neighborhood relations in a new environment, physically new environment because many families move to new accommodations when their children are born, and socially new environment, because social interests and friendships tend to change during this period of the life cycle.

As the family budget in this phase of life is usually limited, women often look for jobs on the informal market. These jobs often create additional stress or feelings of guilt.

Mother Centers respond to this dilemma by offering it all: contacts, peer group exchange as well as opportunities to earn money.

The activities in the Mother Centers are paid. The range of jobs goes from childcare, group counseling, running the Mother Center coffee shop, doing the bookkeeping or offering services for the participating mothers, for instance: hairdresser-service, secondhand shop, beauty parlor, sewing courses, massage, repair service for frequent problems in the household, nutrition counseling, ironing service etc.

The mothers can bring their children along to these "jobs" in the centers.

Although not constituting an equivalent or substitute to regular employment, but rather a range of family friendly "on the side jobs" to supplement the family income, the money earned in the centers - no matter how small or symbolic these sums may be - constitutes an invaluable bridge over the schism of family life and the work world, as women experience it in present society. It contributes greatly to increasing self confidence, by increasing the visibility of women's work and the acknowledgement of the contribution of mothers to society.

But even as a regular participant with no special task, visiting the Mother Center can relieve the household budget by making use of inexpensive services, (second -hand clothes, cheap

toys, cheap repair services, childcare). The centers create a lot of room for the women involved to try out their skills and to raise their self esteem.

Mother Centers are a space where mothers receive public acknowledgement, knowledge, a public scope of action and room for contemplation. The entry point is a unthreatening, cup of coffee they buy in the mothers centers coffee shop.

Mother Centers avoid school like learning. In the centers they, the mothers are the experts. All activities are organized and carried out by the mothers themselves. Professionals if at all have a supporting role, they do not determine the daily events.

The centers function on a drop in basis, whenever it fits the family rhythm. Regular events, however, do exist, continuously providing occasions to visit the center.

In a historical perspective the goal of the centers is to reweave lost networks, to recreate neighborhoods that have been diluted in the process of industrialisation.

It is crucial to recognize, that this self help potential is not encouraged if professionals go on defining and categorizing family socialization in terms of "neurotic mothers" and "disturbed children".

Our present society offers only two alternatives for mothers, either to be a "working mother" or "only" a housewife. The Mother Centers focus on creating an alternative for all the ambivalent women who do not find themselves represented in these two alternatives, who need an in-between space. The centers are such a space.

Here children experience their mothers in a responsible public role, a learning process for both.

When a successfully innovative project comes about, often something very evident has become reality, one often wonders why it is new, it seems so natural or so obvious.

Something of the like happened with the Mother Centers. They are so convincing in their everyday reality, their daily stream of mothers and children, the intense neighborhood networks they induce, that one wonders why they haven't been there forever.

However, traditional agencies of social work are often challenged by the Mother Centers because they question traditional principles and structures of institutional work:

- Many professionals have not learned to trust in the competence of parents, because an awareness of the expertise of parents themselves is seen as a threat to their professional identity.
- There is often also much resistance to pay for what is considered volunteer work. Paying neighborhood women is a contradiction to the basic social structure of unpaid private reproduction work.
- Professionals frequently emphasize the needs of children. In the Mother Centers there is also an emphasis and sensitivity for the needs and interests of mothers as adults. This is a decisive difference to many playgroups or mother-toddler groups. Nevertheless, or maybe for that very reason, the children profit a great deal through the Mother Centers. They learn to deal with each other and with adults in public situations.

Many more activities are possible in the presence of children, than our public culture often leads us to believe. There is not always a need to tuck away children into childcare, in order for adults to be able to go about their own interests.

A public adult culture, which involves the presence of children, is one of the central processes generated by the Mother Centers.

Reconciling the public and the private

Mother Centers are a place where women own motherhood, a place where they are empowered by the experience of motherhood.

In industrial societies of today the experience of motherhood is marginalised, the mother child relationship experienced under conditions of isolation.

At the same time women are confronted with strong contradictory ideologies in public culture that don't correspond with the reality of motherhood as women experience it.

On the one side is the role model of the perfect mother, sacrificing all her needs and interests for the benefit and well being of the child and family . Of course this image is impossible to live up to.

On the other hand, however, there is an alternative public ideology, gaining ground in present northern societies, portraying children as a burden and barrier for the self realisation of women and personal freedom. This image escapes the reality of personal development through the experience of motherhood.

In the Mother Centers women meet and together build their identities and images of motherhood based on their own experiences rather than the ideologies they face in society.

The large gap contemporary society has created between the public and the private sphere contributes greatly to the marginalisation of mothers and children. Mother Centers bridge this gap between private and public life by creating public space in the communities for children and adults to share, we call the Mother Centers sometimes our "public living rooms".

Women can enjoy a public life in the centers with all aspects of their personalities, including their identities as mothers. They do not have to stick to their "public personas", something that often costs a lot of energy, when women participate in male dominated public fields.

With this more holistic approach the Mother Centers defy the male dominated rules of public life, creating an alternative, more female way of public interaction and community life, often rebuilding a sense of community, where it has been lost in the process of modernisation. They are a safe and caring place for many different life situations. For instance, Germany after reunification has become a popular destination for refugees of eastern countries and many of the centers are now involved in integrating refugee families into the communities.

The impact of the centers on the family and the community - some quotes

" The children learn to deal with other children and other adults right from the start. It happens often that they don't turn to their mothers but to one of the other adults around, if they need attention or care."

"Joseph used to cover his mothers eyes or mouth to emphasise his claim on her. It took him a while to learn that his mother has interests of her own. Now, however, he sometimes doesn't want to leave the center when his mother does, because he too has developed his own network of friends and activities."

"Some of us mothers have become real experts in dealing with hoards of children. We've learned how to get children of different ages to play with each other, we can see a fight coming and can prevent it, we know how to integrate shy children and how to gently lure them away from their mothers, when they seem to be too clinging. The more mothers that have been involved in the childcare programs of the center, the more the general atmosphere has become calm and patient towards all children".

"Dear mother, Can you imagine, our little Hans is the new trouble maker in the center. He bites and scratches other children. Thank goodness most of the other mothers are quite understanding. When I think back when Hans was 6 weeks old, I didn't allow any one to get near him. When he began to walk, he often was shoved or pushed by other children. I remember having many quarrels with other mothers, I thought they just didn't know how to bring up a child. And now Hans is having his aggressive phase.

A lot of us mothers by now have witnessed different generations of children growing in and out of the biting stage, so there's a lot less panic now about Hans. What a change of perspective this has brought about."

The experience of the Mother Center gives the mothers involved more confidence and courage to defend the interests of their children in public:

"As a mother you fall out of the networks of your former friends, who don't have children. People aren't enthusiastic about having children around. You are expected to keep them out of everyone's way, to discipline them, so that they don't break or dirty any property. I don't like having to be the enemy of my child, so that it doesn't get on anyone's nerves. Sometimes I defend my kids against hostile environments, but I don't always have the energy. The Mother Center gives me a lot of self confidence in this respect."

"I joined the Mother Center's team because I wanted to learn to be articulate and assertive so that I can deal with the school and other places I have to represent my children."

"The other day, a bus driver didn't want to take us. We were a group of 10 mothers and about twice as many children, trying to get on the bus. He sure got his lesson of the day! We were very articulate.. In the end he was really very patient and kind to the children."

Strengthening the neighborhoods

Insecurity and lack of self-confidence are often the cause of intolerant attitudes and communication problems towards others.

The Mother Centers are places where mothers from different class or cultural backgrounds meet, where they learn to understand people who think or behave in a different way, who have different life-styles, or who deal with their children in a different manner. A culture of public tolerance is developed.

"When you are at home with small children, you often don't see very much farther than your own house. Your small circle of friends view life very similarly, have the same kind of marriages, have similar views. Your small world is quite unanimous. You start to lose the experience of being confronted and dealing with other views, other life styles. In the center I've encountered many women I would have never dreamed of actually enjoying the company of in my old housewife days. I'm not so judgmental any more. I've learned to be a better listener. I've also learned to get used to the fact that people talk about me. I don't fear conflict as much as I used to."

Mother Centers are places where women find self esteem and a voice as mothers to reflect their experiences and competencies and to raise the issues they are concerned about from their everyday experiences in the communities and in society at large.

Mother Centers are focal points in urban as well as rural settings to recreate neighborhoods that have been weakened and dried out by modernization.

In the discussion on the crisis of democracy in Europe it has become very clear how important neighborhoods are for the social integration and democratic functioning of societies. Anonymous environments and isolation are key elements leading to the increase of violence and racism.

Strong neighborhoods are crucial for the development of a democratic society "from the bottom up". Mother Centers have proven to contribute greatly to create and sustain strong neighborhoods.

Support for reentry into the labor market

The centers have also proven to be very successful with retraining and reentry programs for women wishing to rejoin the labor market. Programs in the mothers centers are equipped

with structural support services like childcare, lunch services, ironing and laundry services, pick-up and transport services for children, home-work support for children. Trainings are timed according to the rhythms of family life. Motivation of the participants is supported by organizing peer group exchange and counseling of learning patterns.

For re-entry into the labor market the main issue is self esteem and self confidence. This is what many women lose, when they stay at home with small children and this is what is reestablished and strengthened in the Mother Centers.

In the centers the women discover or reinvent their talents, capacities and resources, create new balances for reconciling public activity and family life and strengthen their courage to envision and demand a world that is accommodating towards a women with a child at her hand. Some centers have created new job opportunities for women that allow for flexible work patterns and support services for working mothers.

Mother Centers and funding

Mother Centers are a place for women to organise without being clientalised. Women there are experts of their own daily lives and own daily experiences, supporting each other and creating problem solving strategies on equal footing and with the common vision of increasing the influence and leadership of women in the communities and in society.

Although the Mother Centers are financed by public funds, they are involved in a continuous battle with public administration, that tries to confine them to the logic and structure of social welfare and social work.

A continuous issue is the issue of professionalism.

What are experts?

The approach of the centers is that every woman participating can contribute her skills to the center. This is why the different centers look very different and have different activities, because what is developed is defined by the skills, know how and ideas of the women involved in a given center.

Funders often try to introduce a professional to run the center, especially when the work is not on a voluntary level but paid. This has proven to change the whole inner dynamics and culture of a center. It is very important that the centers are a self help, grass root organisation and not a professional social work project, if they are to unfold their potential, as described in this article. The presence of professionals in a leading role in the centers has had the effect that the self help and leadership potential of the women in the centers does not develop to the same extent.

Nevertheless public funding has proved to be essential in creating and maintaining Mother Centers. First of all, Germany is part of the European welfare state system and there is more state money available for community development and family policy than for instance in the USA. Secondly, commercial enterprises based on family services like catering, sewing, baby sitting tend to be so time intensive that it is very difficult to build them up on a self sustaining profitable basis, at least in Germany where wages and the costs of living are very high.

What has proven to function in the centers are commercial services like hair-dressing, natural food coop, second hand shop, that contribute to the family budget of the women setting them up, and to the budget of the centers, but do not sustain the centers nor the full livelihood of the women running these services.

However, some Mother Centers when looking for opportunities to create self determined job opportunities equivalent to regular labor market participation have expanded into the area of

quality care services for the community, which, however are also subsidised by the state and the German social security system.

This choice was also based on the kind of work that corresponded with the values of the women participating in the Mother Centers, which turned out to be "working with people".

The historical trend shows that resources for family care of dependants are diminishing, while professionalisation in these areas often lacks genuine care quality. This is growing especially clear in the areas of sick care and elderly care.

The need is growing for alternative care networks.

In creating new forms of social services evading traditional deficits it seems necessary to pursue new roads: to separate professionalism (meaning formal qualification and long-term job orientation) from the provision of paid services.

The greatest structural problem of professional care-work has proved to be the lack of personal involvement, that cannot be repeated over and over again outside of personally motivated structures.

The Mother Centers have created a new mix: creating childcare and eldercare services for the community that are integrated into the informal structures of the Mother Center, even while creating jobs and earning money is involved. These services prove to be much more flexible and person oriented than many professional care systems, while at the same time embedding the individuals serviced into community structures.

The Mother Centers with these projects have profited and been on the forefront of the German debate about the new "welfare mix", introducing state support and public subsidy into the system of family and neighborhood self-help networks as a means of increasing the range and quality of social policy.

This means that public funds are rechanneled from social work and social welfare directly to support women's self help and grassroots projects in the community.

For the women involved in such projects it is a collective experience of creating jobs that are family friendly, that are structured around the needs of working mothers, creating flexible time schemes and support structures like meals, transport and homework services for the children or laundry and grocery services for the mothers that show the innovative potential of work environments when looked at through the eyes of women with children at their hands.

What are the elements of the Mother Centers experience that have proved to contribute to the empowerment of grassroots women?

- 1) In the Mother Centers women do not have to leave their communities to develop their potential for participation in public life. Their priority for making sure everything is well for their families is respected and their activities are embedded in their private family and neighborhood networks.

Mother Centers have shown the great potential of public activities women can develop in the presence of their children. by creating a very flexible childcare system in the centers allowing for the children (and the mothers) to go to and fro between adult and children's activities.

"To get rid of the children" is not the only way to go when activating women.

- 2) One of the main reasons Mother Centers are so successful is that women are not approached by relating to their "deficiencies and problems", but by relating to their strengths, capacities and positive visions.

In the Mother Centers women are invited to bring their ideas, talents and resources out of the limited sphere of their own four walls into a public setting to contribute to the neighborhoods and society at large.

Mother Centers function by practicing the simple belief: Everyone is good at at least one thing and thus has something to contribute to the center and to the community.

- 3) Mother Centers have shown that the monetary dimension is extremely important when activating women. To gain access to some independent money is an important element in raising the confidence and the potential of women. It has proved to be very important that activities in the Mother Centers are not purely on a voluntary basis, but that they are paid (mostly on an hourly basis).
- 4) It has also become very clear in the experience of the Mother Centers that in order to activate and empower women it is important to develop a climate where women experience support, learn that they are entitled to support networks, and how to create them for themselves. To work with methods of how to deal with conflicts, how to create constructive group cooperation etc. are important elements in working with community women.
- 5) What is needed is physical and public space, autonomously managed public "rooms of their own", where community women are able to meet, exchange ideas and resources and build support networks. This is especially important currently in East Germany where old networks and systems of public participation have fallen apart and new economic and social structures must develop.
Places of social integration, like the Mother Centers, are gaining importance especially in East Germany and also in eastern Europe in view of the fact that the current labor market is increasingly excluding women and can no longer function as a system of social integration for all.

The political implications of the Mother Centers movement

"Grassroots" is used to define social movements creating change "from the bottom up", the "bottom" often implying economically low-income or poor.

The Mother Centers movement is a grassroots movement which developed in a very affluent society, in West Germany, and the women participating range in their social economic backgrounds from welfare recipients, low-income families to affluent middle class families, depending on the area and the community the center is situated in.

However this applies when looking at the level of family income.

When looking at the income of the mothers themselves the vast majority of the mothers is low-income, because most of the women are housewives and their labor at home and in the family is not paid at all.

The situation of housewives cuts through traditional class definitions.

All those dealing with the reproductive sides of life, with private care-giving work, are marginalised by the social structures of our society.

The focus of Mother Centers is on challenging these social structures.

Being "grassroots" in the Mother Center movement implies being outside of professional and labor market structures, which in current society are the predominant channels to social integration, power, status and political participation.

The dominant male culture of professionalism, full-time and non-stop labor market participation and the devotion of main resources to public life undermines the participation and leadership potential of women.

Women tend to be active and visible when politics connect to their private lives and to the neighborhood and the community. The experience of reunification of Germany was a lucid example of this.

Women were very active and visible in the East German local groups and movements right before and after reunification.

In the process of setting up the public political structures of representative parliamentarism they were increasingly excluded and lost their leadership roles.

The few women involved in traditional male professional and political structures often seem to lose their connection to their female sources and networks and with that a lot of their potential and power.

The Mother Center movement challenges the exclusion of female values and female connectedness to "home base", to the family, to children.

Extending the slogan under which the NGO Forum at the UN World Conference on women 1995 in Beijing is being held, we ask:

What would the world look like if looked at through the eyes not only of a woman, but of a woman with a child at her hand?

The Mother Centers challenge the exclusion of children from public life, which is one of the factors contributing to the exclusion of women.

Our highly industrialized societies have developed social structures which avoid encounters between adults and children other than in highly specialized children's islands (like childcare institutions) or inside the walls of the family home or car.

Where is a child's natural vitality structurally acknowledged and defended in public life? Where are social resources really directed towards integrating children as part of life?

When children can have meals with their parents in company canteens, when town halls, department stores or other public buildings offer childcare and play rooms, when public meetings, seminars and conferences generally provide flexible childcare, when political parties take on the responsibility to provide childcare for the parents participating in party sessions - then perhaps mothers and children will begin to feel acknowledged and as welcome members of society.

We lack social space for adults to interact with children and participate in social responsibility for children, whether they have children of their own or not.

For children, on the other hand, it is becoming more and more difficult to move on their own in public.

Owing to the increase in the number of families with only one child, children are increasingly isolated. To meet other children they depend on the initiatives of their parents or caregivers, who basically control their mobility. They remain on social islands provided specially for them, but apart from public environments, which they have no chance of exploring on their own.

Contemporary society's concept of productivity and current public values have firmly established hostility towards children in the basic structures of society, for instance in traffic laws. Children learn on our streets that they are the weakest part of society.

Children are run over by cars daily. The majority of these accidents do not occur outside towns nor on the main city streets, but in residential areas.

Streets used to be one of the most important social places for children. Today this has been sacrificed to the adult priority of car traffic.

From an early age on children learn that the omnipotent vehicle is more important than their natural and spontaneous desire to move.

Children need to be reintegrated into public life, to own and to be safe in public space.

Mothers who deal with children on a daily basis learn much about what an environment must look like in order not to destroy the vitality, creativity, autonomy and confidence of children.

Because of their daily experience with children they are well aware of the consequences of political decisions in fields like transport, architecture, urban development and community infrastructure on the lives of children.

This competence and sensitivity to children's needs requires political channels in order to be considered in society.

Mother Centers provide space for new forms of lobbying, of creating political platforms for the expertise of those dealing with the concrete aspects of everyday life in the communities, an expertise, not based on professionalism, but on practical involvement in care-giving in the family and in the community.

This expertise is devalued in society because it is developed outside the channels of professionalism and labor market participation.

The unwaged character of family and community care-work makes this work invisible as work, and with that also comes an invisibility of the expertise and qualification acquired by engaging in care work.

This devaluation of women's work, women's values and women's qualifications leads to the marginalisation of women in society and to the neglectance of their leadership potential.

Making these qualifications visible, re-owning them collectively and re-integrating them into public life is the implicit and explicit agenda of the Mother Centers movement.

Mothers' Demands

Mothers into politics

Mothers centers demand recognition as a political factor on a national and international level. Mothers centers challenge the Federal Government of Germany to allot sufficient means to state and local governments to enable their support of mothers centers on a long-term basis.

Mothers centers in their capacity as neighborhood oriented self help organisations with peer counseling and preventive social functions need funds for: premises, administration, childcare and the remuneration for the women working in the centers. Jobs in mothers centers must be paid according to the work and effort involved, not as so-called expense allowances. Mothers centers require resources to enable them to support the setting up of new centers and participation in the Mother Centers network.

The work done by mothers in their centers has to be considered in the calculation of old-age pensions.

Certificates acknowledging the work accomplished and the new capabilities acquired by mothers working in the centers are needed. We propose the installation of a "Mother Center academy² with the certificate "certified community worker" after training and networking in the Mother Centers movement.

Mothers need training and education openings in the areas of office management, public relations, business management, bookkeeping, social politics, rhetoric, pedagogic for child care and social work, group dynamics, conflict mediation, supervision and the general management of Mothers Centers.

Mothers centers themselves are able to fund a maximum of 20% of the cost of their daily functions. The rest has to be covered by public founding.

Mothers centers demand that the criteria and guidelines for funding be adapted to the practices and experiences in the area of family self-help.

Mothers centers wish to be represented as advisory members in all planning boards of local politics.

Mothers centers request resources for international exchanges between mothers centers in different countries. The national bureau of mothers centers serving as point of contact for all German centers and for contacts abroad, needs increased support and funds for this work.

Mothers centers wish to be represented in the official delegation of the UN World Conference on Women 1995 in China. they request that participation in this event be made possible for their representatives.

Social housing politics

Mothers centers request of the Federal Government to link public funding of social housing to the willingness of the building companies to fulfill the requirements for child- and family friendly housing. This includes the demand for enough reasonably constructed playgrounds for children in every neighborhood.

It also includes the demand for family-size apartments in sufficient numbers, building plans for housing units that are really adapted to family needs, for development of housing areas that end the division between residential and business areas, and for the continued expansion and development of public transportation.

Before construction of a new housing project may begin, a body of experts has to meet, including experienced women from neighborhood and mothers centers, proclaiming the project "appropriate for children and families".

Abortion rights and day care

Mothers Centers are for the cancellation of the law prohibiting abortion without any subsequent substitution.

We demand the long over-due protection of born life! This includes: immediate measures to ensure the right of all children to day-care. This involves the demand for continued and improved quality of childcare. Increase in the required number of personnel, no increase in the number of children per group. Increased flexible, time-variable childcare offers and hot meals for children and parents.

For the care of infants we Demand the installation of high-quality public daycare institutions as well as financial support for innovative and flexible forms of childcare that meet the real requirements fo parents and children. Such forms are being practiced already in the mothers centers. For example: small day care groups, vacation programs for school children, babysitter and day-care mothers resource and referral centers, age-mixed groups, sleep-over services for children.

We also see as important the integration of foreign children of handicapped children into kindergartens, day-care institutions and schools.

We request the Federal Government to share the resulting costs with state and local governments and to ensure that these costs are not being off-loaded onto the families.

Ecological politics

We demand legislation to ensure a dense, overall network of ozone measuring stations and nationwide monitoring, ensuring that air-quality improvement measures come into effect, when the ozone marks reach 120 micrograms per cubic meter. These measures include for example a ban on driving vehicles with combustion-engines, a drastic lowering of the NO2-output of industrial plants, a general speed limit on all streets and highways.

The reason for this demand:

The ozone pollution in the first months of 1994 had already reached the levels attained in the summer months of the previous year. Medical professionals are confirming our observations that for most of us our children are suffering more and more from conjunctivitis, infections of

the respiratory system, sore throat pains and a general weakening of the immune system and that these symptoms occur mostly in fair weather situations.

Local Governments refuse to take concrete measures for the improvement of air-quality, since no nationwide legislation exists. This calls for immediate action. We therefore demand of the legislators to take immediate, drastic measures to lower the ozone-content of our air.

Training politics

We request the Federal Government to adapt retraining and job-qualification programs to the real-life situations and requirements of women with children, especially single parents.

We therefore deem necessary:

- decentralized education and qualification programs and places
- child-care or financial assistance for privately organised child-care during participation in educational programs
- a raise in the funds for employment promotion
- recognition of the qualifications earned through child-raising and voluntary work in view of retraining and job-qualification programs.

We demand that the work done in Mother Centers be regarded as qualification for the participation in job-training programs.

This should involve possibilities of cross-entries, reduced length and adapted training programs.

1. Training should be adapted to the family situation, through part-time programs for example
2. Any age limits of publicly funded education guidelines must be dropped.

Work politics

We find it indispensable that reconciliation between family and work life be supported through the following measures:

- * Development and expansion in the areas of qualified part-time jobs for women and especially for men. This includes financial incentives for taking part-time jobs, as is being practiced in France. The extension of working hours is family unfriendly and puts especially women at a disadvantage. the expansion of part-time work has high priority. Part-time work in this context is not synonymous with half-day work, but can mean any degree of work hour reduction and can thus easily at this point in history also be taken on more often by men.
- * We also see improved flexibility of working hours as an important requirement.
- * The strict division between "work person" and "private person" has to be overcome. Not only performance but also personality and individual differences must be seen and valued.
- * We demand the dismantling of hierarchical structures in work situations.
- * New trade centers need proof of sufficient child care capacities and link-up to public transportation to receive their permit.
- * All childcare facilities in local communities should be opened in the afternoon and during school-holidays for use of the community. Schools need regular and reliable schedules, lunch facilities and a diversity of after-school activities for the children, provided by local clubs and associations for example.
- * Businesses and administrations need new guidelines to value cultural diversity. This means the recognition of the needs of mothers, fathers, foreign employees, older employees, etc. as different and equal. It also means that the common idea of the "average male employee" can no longer be considered as valid.

Equality

- * Mothers centers demand that all women be able to choose freely between family work and work outside the home. The prerequisite for this is the equalisation of family, home and caretaking work with the paid work outside the home.
- * We demand the recognition of society at large of all persons taking care of children, invalids or seniors in form of a financial remuneration, a proper pension insurance, and in form of, for example, tax-deductibility of children's rooms as work rooms.
- * We demand legislation to ensure that the reproductive sector be put on an equal level with the productive sector as the object of holistic family politics.
- * We demand an adequate raise and dynamisation of the federal childcare allowance as well as an extension of the duration for parental leave.
- * We demand security for women's life patterns and life-styles by an old-age insurance including children's insurance.

Coping with daily life

- * Mothers centers demand the installation of childcare facilities, for instance play-corners in doctor's offices, public institutions, business and administration buildings for the facilitation of daily tasks.
- * We require sufficient neighborhood-oriented playgrounds, parks, swimming pools, ball-playing fields etc.
- * We demand playgrounds instead of parking garages and golf courses.

Final demand: Family Nobel-Prize

How about a Family Nobel-Prize for Mothers Centers worldwide for their exemplary preventive social work and their excellent model of recreating alive and socially integrated neighborhoods and a rich grass roots culture in the communities?!

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