

## Mother Center Start Up Training Materials VI START UP MATERIAL

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### Mother Center Training Materials VI

### Start up Package for Mother Centers

#### Introduction:

This packet contains a set of 15 tools that support the successful implementation of Mother Centers. If you are a Mother Center initiative, a partner organisation or a sponsor of Mother Centers, the following experiences, extracted from 3 decades of Mother Center movement in Europe can be used as guidelines in implementing and adapting the Mother Center concept to your communities.

The Tool Box is complemented with quotes and examples from existing Mother Centers to exemplify the concepts and to capture the imagination. The examples are taken from the Book: Mothers in the Center –Mother Centers, a collection of stories from women from the first Mother Centers, that played a big role in spreading the concept of Mother Centers.

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### Tool 1 Start-up phase

Mother Centers do not happen over night. They need a development and start.up phase. In countries like Germany or Slovakia it takes an average of 1 year until Mother Center initiatives have consolidated their group, found rooms and financial support. It takes at least another 2-3 years to get the Mother Center active and running smoothly, to be recognized and acknowledged in the community and to attain financial sustainability. In countries where municipalities have no resources to support Mother Centers this can take even longer.

For the initiators of Mother Centers it is important to know, that founding a Mother Center is a longer process that requires a lot of patience and perseverance. It is not uncommon to start small, to need several attempts, and to relocate rooms and locations several times in the beginning phase. The important thing is to start, be it only with a small group of 2-3 women or only in two small and temporary rooms. The main thing is, that you create something that feels like a “public home” to you, that inspires and energises you. The rest will follow.

For donors, partners and sponsors it is important to plan in a start-up phase of several years and to allow for flexibility and learning in the beginning phases. The main thing is to support access to self-managed and unrestricted use of space.



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### A bit of history

At first they were only an idea, emerging from the results of long-term studies in parent education. This was developed into a concept by dedicated staff members of the German Youth Institute (Deutsches Jugendinstitut, DJI) in Munich, Germany.

Meanwhile the idea has turned into a movement. From all over Germany and abroad we receive hundreds of inquiries from women eager to create their own Mother Center. Mother centers are a space for mothers to voice their concerns and find an open ear for all aspects of their lives.

There is no threshold to cross, no scrutinizing by specialists or experts. In the Mother Center the mothers are the experts. All work is organized and done by us. We direct and manage the operation of the Mother Center. Everything is based on the rhythm of mothers with children. There are no fixed schedules; the Mother Center is open during the day and mothers can come by whenever and however their own family schedules allow. Courses and seminars, services, and recreational activities are an incentive to visit the Mother Center frequently, but the core is a drop-in café. A crucial fact in all mother center activities is that children are always welcome and that there is no extra stress or cost involved in bringing your children.

Mother Centers receive daily about 30 to 40 mothers with about twice as many children. These mothers are mostly young moms with small children but also older women who have already raised their children, single-parenting mothers, or working women. Mother centers are open as non-stop cafes in the daytime during the week, but often also in the evenings and on the weekend. Work in the cafe and the child care center is paid on an hourly basis and all mothers who offer services and programs like flea markets, guitar courses, ironing, mending, sewing, massage, gymnastics, home work support for children, daily hot lunches, etc. receive an hourly compensation.

The active mothers together form a team that takes care of the ongoing operations and meets at least weekly. The task of the team is the organization and coordination of the Mother Center operations as well as the motivation and support of the participants. This team contributes a lot to the atmosphere in the center. The program of the Mother Center is designed by the participants. It can fluctuate throughout the year because each woman takes care of a particular activity only for as long as she is willing and able to reconcile it with the demands of her family. This form of organization offers women with small children the opportunity to commit as much time as their personal life allows or even to be "just a visitor" for a while and use the Mother Center services for their own needs. A monthly plenary gives room to discuss any questions or problems that have come up. These meetings as well as the team meetings are open to all mothers.

Mother Centers cannot function without subsidies. They need rent-free rooms and a basic budget to cover the expenses of equipment, utilities as well as the hourly fees for the active mothers.



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### Tool 2 Qualities of Initiators

Mother Center initiators are „social entrepreneurs“. They need many talents and qualities, including a lot of energy and drive, the capacity to take initiative, the capacity to listen, to have sensitivity, empathy and intuition, to be creative and inventive and even to be able to „break rules“ if necessary.

Mother Center initiators enjoy motivating others and bringing hidden talents and abilities to the light. They can be described as „pearl divers“ seeing capabilities and competencies in others that they might not even be aware of themselves.

Mother Center initiators need to be into the project with their heart and soul, they need to believe in the Mother Center concept and their ideas 100%. They are inspired and think positively, and are not discouraged by set backs. They have personal integrity, are able to make decisions as well as share responsibility with others.

All these qualities do not need to exist in one single person. But it is good if these talents come together in the initiator team. Therefore it is important that initiators build a group and a team, with whom to found their Mother Center as soon as possible and that they try to find women that combine as many of the qualities of initiators and “social entrepreneurs” as possible.

As many as possible in the initiating team should come from the community and should want a Mother Center for themselves as well as for others. They need to have good knowledge of the community and the neighbourhood. They need to enjoy spending time in the Mother Center. They should make it a home for themselves and their children. Tasks they assume in the center should relate to their talents and bring them joy.

It is very important that the initiator group reflect the same cultural, ethnic and cultural background as the women that are to frequent the center. Therefore if integration of different groups is a goal, it is important that there are members of all the groups that are to be reached with the center in the initial initiators group.

It is advisable that Mother Center initiators have the chance to get hands on knowledge and experience by visiting an existing Mother Center in the region and by participating in a Mother Center start up training.

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### **The essence of my Mother Center experience**

In the last few hours I have thought much about what was in the beginning and what is now. I have been able to recognize how much tolerance all of us in the Mother Center have learned. How much patience we were able to have with each other. How much women are really able to be generous and let differences among each other – even though it may be painful – simply be. Through this, many women have developed an entirely new confidence. Intermediately I had many moments of doubt. I believed that our limit of tolerance had been reached and that we would have to be authoritative, bureaucratic, and disciplining. But in the most difficult instances we have now, after three years, achieved exactly what we understand as tolerance. For that, all of us, including myself, needed, again and again, courage and support and people believing that living together peacefully is possible. That there is no need for rigid structures or hierarchy, to shape our center to what it is now. Many women in the center agree although they may express it differently. But it has taken a long time and it has taken women who were able to make it through the tough times and who had confidence in better times coming again. However, through our concept, we have also lost women: all those who are not (yet) able to deal with openness and spontaneity. Those who have a middle-class concept of education, performance, and structure and all those who can't or won't take the initiative to build or enter into relationships. All those who can't wait to let needs and wishes take their own shape and articulate themselves and who instead want a rigid program structure into which they can fit themselves without having to contribute any creative effort of their own. I'm happy that so many women have had the patience to wait, to bear with it, to always allow for the new and the unknown, in order to now be able to enjoy this quiet happiness in the end. It's true: it is possible for us to try out other forms of living together, based on our female values. The Mother Center concept has proven itself.

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### Tool 3 Starting with Values and Visions

Starting up a Mother Center begins with values, goals and visions. Defining the common values and goals collectively builds the community, induces a process of growing together as a group. The initiating group as well as the participants need to create time to reflect and discuss the goals, values and visions that they have in common and that they want to reach and achieve in the Mother Center. This includes creating a set of agreements on how the group wants to interact with each other and what "rules" are to be followed in the Mother Center.

Basic agreements are necessary to build an atmosphere of trust and safety. They should address how the group wants to work and communicate with each other and how to deal with conflicts. What agreements do I need to feel safe and at home in the Mother Center? (for instance need to feel listened to, respected, appreciated, right to free opinion, constructive dealing with conflicts, open flow of information etc )

It is important that these visions, agreements and rules are regularly reviewed and updated by plenary meetings, to which all Mother Center participants are invited, in order for them to be confirmed or changed and adapted to new situations and requirements and to keep the climate in the center cooperative and clear.



Part of vision building is to identify strengths in the community as well as issues the community is struggling with. What is causing these issues and what are the consequences of not dealing with them? Mother Centers are a place to gather and organise what the community can do themselves towards solutions.

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### Appeal

We need Mother Centers in every district and neighborhood, in every village, on every street corner, for women of all ages, all situations, whether countrywomen or town women, natives, migrants, or foreigners, young or old, first time mothers or those with experience, grandmothers or great-grandmothers, employed mothers or those working at home. Come out of your shells that you create so lovingly for yourself and your families. Those shells into which you retreat all too often to seek comfort or in irritation and confusion. Claim for yourselves and your children a place in public life.

Create mother centers!

Who, if not we mothers can provide our children with the wide and colorful range of experiences they need so urgently to find their way in today's society? Who can impart the culture and values of our traditions into society, into public life? Who validates the work we do? Who comforts us mothers after a hard day's work?

We mothers need to come together, with our skills, with our perspectives and support each other. We should create and allow ourselves spaces for rest and relaxation, for relating to each other and for taking action.

Mother centers are a first step, a public space, through which we can make our issues visible, through which we can overcome our powerlessness.

Women, mothers, unite! Demand funding, demand space, raise money, so that our children may see that our work and our culture are valuable.



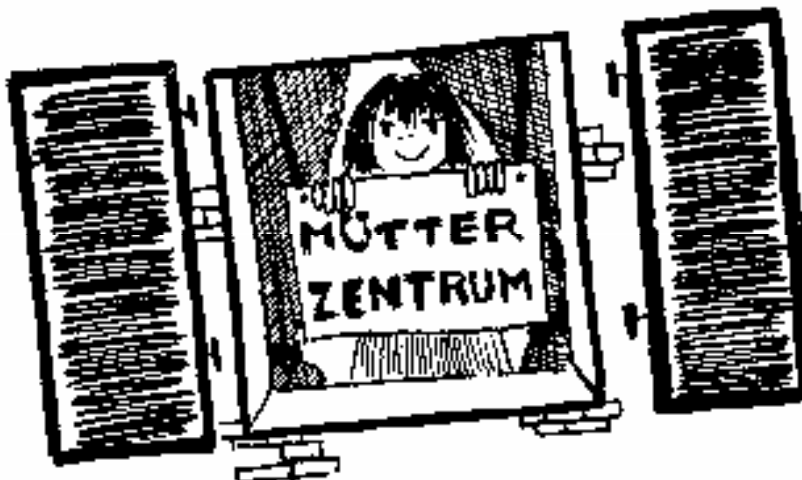
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### Tool 4 Claiming Public Space

Location and premises of Mother Centers are key to their success. In Mother Centers women need to have total control of the rooms. They need to be big enough, so that the different activities of mothers and children can happen in the rooms parallelly and independent of each other as well as jointly as common activities.

Mother Centers should be centrally located, highly visible and easy to reach in the community. It has proven to contribute greatly to an identification with the center, if participants themselves are involved in renovating and furnishing the Mother Center facilities. Practical opportunities to participate in the center start the moment rooms have been found, not only once everything is finished and has been created "to perfection".

Regular and reliable opening hours are crucial to anchor the center in the community. This can best be guaranteed by supplying many keys of the center to the active participants.



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### Control of Space

Appropriate rooms are essential for the success of a Mother Center. There are many groups who meet regularly in some borrowed room or other. Municipalities or institutions may give them a room once or twice a week to meet with their children. Such programs cannot be compared to a Mother Center. The Mother Center is open every day. Part time groups may not have to pay any rent and they are usually able to determine their own activities in the time that they have the rooms, but they have to leave the rooms as they found them. Such a group will never get any walk-in visitors.

In the Mother Center it's about not having fixed schedules. It is not a closed group of friends meeting, but any woman can just walk in and make contact with someone at any time. That's what defines Mother Centers. That's why Mother Centers keep on growing, because there are always new women who come and bring in new impulses, as well as new tensions, on which to grow. That's what keeps the centers alive and thriving.

This becomes evident especially in questions of daily operations. Of course it's obvious that you have to clean up after yourself when you're a guest in the parish rooms. Not in the Mother Center. There you will find a lot of arguments and discussions going on among the mothers about differing sensibilities regarding cleanliness, order, and the taking out of the garbage. This is important in order to find out where there are different needs, to see how diverse the backgrounds in manners and cultures can be. If you have fixed structures and can meet only once a week without being able to change those structural conditions, whether you fit in them or not, you can't have such a process.

In the Mother Center it is not about whether we fit together comfortably like a bunch of friends but whether we can learn to make compromises, to reach out to each other, to get to know each other even though we may be different.

When mothers in the Mother Center have their own rooms they can create this process and this personal culture, with all the inherent arguments about whether the kids can take the colored markers into the bathroom or not...

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### Tool 5 Self-Management

Mother Centers are a self help project, they are created, organised and managed by the participants. There is no professional leading or steering the group. Activities in the center are self-designed and self-conducted. Participants decide on how the Mother Center should be run. Decision making is worked out collectively, leadership is taken as a team.

Participation is facilitated through the concept of "host of the day". These are women who know how to encourage and bring out the skills and talents in others, and to fuel their visions. They take turns in being the host of the day in the Mother Center, in creating a welcoming, enabling and inspiring atmosphere.

Transparency of decision making and communication structures are crucial to create collective identification and ownership of participants in the Mother Center. This relates especially to the need of transparent information about the framework and operating conditions of the Mother Center as well as of financial structures and financial decisions concerning its management.



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### **Everyone contributes**

The principle of Mother Centers is that each woman can do something really well. She doesn't have to be able to do EVERYTHING equally well but she is an expert in at least one thing and it is the task of the Mother Center to help her find out what that might be and to support her to develop these abilities. But this is already the second step. The first step for many women is to put up the effort and bring themselves to make that first visit to the Mother Center. When they are finally there, they want to be able to just sit down and watch a while. It is important that women feel that they can take their time. It can be discovered later, in casual conversation, what they might like to do. It is all about letting-be, acceptance and finding your own rhythm.

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### Tool 6 Every Day Life Experts

In the Mother Centers women are the experts. They are qualified by their experiences in everyday life. They do not have to have formal qualifications or degrees in order to be active and take on responsibilities in the Mother Centers. What counts is talent, experience, motivation, dedication, passion.

It is important to recognise the resources and competencies women have acquired in informal settings, in managing every day life in their families and communities and to help women recognise them themselves. Often, since they are not formally certified, Women as well as society at large are not aware of the expertise and leadership skills they bring to community development. Mother Centers serve as laboratories to bring these talents out into the open and into public life. This requires a consistent focus on resources rather than on deficits and on personal and collective development opportunities of the participants.





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### Keys to Success

What I recommend, if you want to start a Mother Center?

First of all that women are approached first and foremost in regard to their abilities and skills. Each mother can contribute something to the center.

At the same time relaxing and “refueling” aren’t bad words in the Mother Center. Mothers need support as well as relief from the work load they are carrying.

What you can’t do without is having rooms 24 hours at your disposal. Children are always welcome, but mothers are the center of attention in Mother Centers. Also mothers are the experts, and their work is paid. Professionals support, if and when demanded.

What I have found very important over the years is to have regular reflective spaces in form of trainings and seminars to accompany the practical work and to process and reflect on daily experiences. Also Peer learning exchanges are very productive and stimulating as well as a lot of fun!

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### Tool 7 Non-Stop Café

The heart of a Mother Center is the non-stop café with daily opening hours. This makes a Mother Center a casual and informal meeting place with easy access. Here women cook together, make plans together and support each other. They meet on a peer level and all aspects of their lives find an open hear, attention and consideration. All activities, services, courses and programs arise from this source of informal exchange . They are meant to compliment, not to substitute this rich reservoir of ideas, schemes and dreams.

If this core piece is missing, Mother Centers do not succeed to the same extent. New strategies, creativity, diverse and unusual solutions arise from this melting pot of ideas, views and encounters, from the daily comings and goings , from the need for improvisation and flexibility as well as tolerance and capability to deal with a degree of “chaos” that such a lively meeting place requires.

What is important for founders of Mother Centers is to understand that this is “the program”, that everything else comes out of this source of creativity.



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### **Children are a part of it**

Children are as natural a part of the Mother Center as the mothers themselves. On some days there are many of them, other days are quieter. In the afternoon the older kids come and enjoy the play room for their sometimes wild games and large-scale building activities. Some even come without their mothers; they know the way and they know that they are welcome. We see this as a relief for the mothers. While the kids are playing here under supervision, their mothers can enjoy some quiet or do something by and for themselves.

There are lots of kids who have been coming to the Mother Center with their mothers since they were babies and who practically grew up here. Looking at these kids, you can see plainly how good the Mother Center life has been for them. They are more active and livelier, better able to stand up for themselves and socially. In the Mother Center kids are stimulated in many different ways. They have a choice of adults to talk to while their own mother always remains available. They have an ever-changing assortment of play mates to choose from and are incorporated in the most diverse ways into the Mother Center activities: a two year old helps the kitchen women with the dishes before going back to mommy's lap for a rest. One mother scolds her kids and some other mother may console them again, etc.

The children learn that their mother wants time and space to do something for herself. They on the other hand receive plenty of support and stimuli to develop, learn and create a world of their own.

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### Tool 8 Open Childcare

Children are part of every Mother Center and they are made to feel welcome. This requires a separate room for children's activities and childcare to be organised throughout the opening hours of the Mother Center. What makes childcare different in the Mother Center is its open drop-in character. Just like mothers can enter the center and join activities at any given time, so also the children can join the children's group and activities at any given time. There are always activities going on for the mothers as well as for the children. At the same time it is possible for both to join each other's activities. A mother can go and see how her child is doing and the child can come over to sit in her mothers lap for a while before rejoining the children's group. Both can go their own ways or come together in the center as it fits their personal needs and rhythms or their "mood of the day".

This requires a very flexible form of childcare. Childminders are dealing with groups that change every day in size, composition of age and duration of participation. Mothers, especially if they have several children can usually adjust to this form of child-minding quite well. Nevertheless it is good to spend some time in discussing and compiling activities that work for different age groups as well as ways to separate activities into different groups during opening hours.



This form of open childcare can be complimented by childcare programs for employed women or by more structured groups like after school homework support. This again, however, should not substitute the open childcare, but be an additional program.

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### **Mothers are the center of attention**

In play groups mothers often say that the children are of central importance. But Mother Centers are about the mothers. They are to be supported, they are to develop their interests. The children are part of it, but they do not play the lead.

In our society we are used to ask, "Who is the boss? It is new and unusual to be in a situation where nothing is given. In the Mother Center you learn to ask, "What are my ideas and my vision? How can realize my ideas in the Mother Center?". But that is also a learning process the mothers have to go through. They are not able to do that right away. Sometimes it also seems to be a contradiction inherent in the women themselves. Although they are attracted to the Mother Center because things are done differently there, they still get there and ask, "What's the program?". It's as if they were afraid of their own power.

As a mother you need a space where you are encouraged and where you are given the opportunity to unfold and develop your competencies. At first all mothers need support to get started. Because it's always a big step from a private to a public setting. That's the real work of initiators: helping women find out what they want and what they're good at. That is the role of the women that take on the role of hosts in the Mother Center. When we say that everyone has competencies, there's sometimes an expectation that we are all the same, that we can all do the same things well. It's important to make clear that "each one is competent" does not mean that there are not different levels of experience and skills. Mother centers are about dealing with differing levels of ability. It's a maternal skill to let another's competencies grow and develop. This is what is learned and applied in Mother Centers.





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### Tool 9 The Role of “Host” in the Mother Center

Just like childcare needs to be covered during the opening hours of the Mother Center the role of “host of the day” needs to be assigned to someone everyday. This can be combined with the task of running the “Non-stop-Cafè”. It is a good idea to have a team of “hosts” who share this task, so that a different person does this job every day. Every woman has different talents and a different personality, which usually combines with different preferences and personalities of Mother Center participants. In this way you can make sure that there is a diversity of styles and atmospheres present in the center and a wide range of women are reached and attracted to the center. Each „host” usually attracts her specific crowd, and this way no particular personality of style dominates the whole center, but there is room for all.

The role of the host is to make the participants feel welcome, to explain to new visitors the concept and the functionings of Mother Centers and to encourage their active participation. welcome participants, to explain the functions of the Mother Center, to explain the functions of the Mother Center, to explain the functions of the Mother Center. It is their task to create a warm atmosphere in the center, that participants feel at ease and at home, that they make it their “public living room”. Mother Center hosts need to convey a welcoming and open attitude, a climate of interest, empathy and respect. They must make the center a place where women feel secure, where they feel accepted and where trust as well as self confidence can develop.



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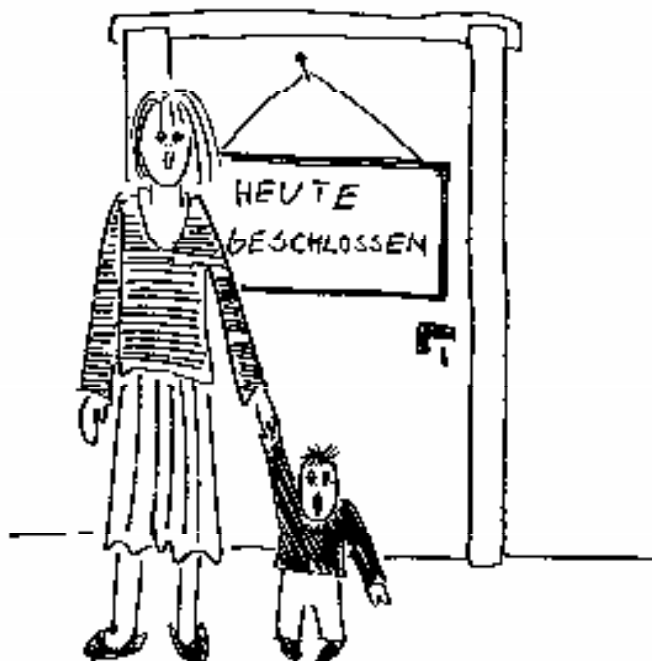
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**mine**

### Why it's important to be open every day

It was in the first year. I had already heard a lot about the mother center and on a Wednesday I finally went. Actually I had to push myself quite hard to get going. The day was sunny and warm, I could walk with the kids to the mother center. On the way I mentally played through all the possible situations that I might encounter on my first visit there. I was dripping with sweat when I arrived. The sign "mother center" at least gave me confidence that I had found it.

Nothing could be seen from the outside – everything was quiet. I didn't know how to interpret that. My insecurity increased. I took the little one from the stroller, breathed in deeply, and pushed the door handle. Closed! The door was closed! I couldn't believe it but it was really closed. I stood in front of the door for a moment, totally confused. Then I saw the sign "Closed today". Normally it would have been open but today it was closed. Today of all days!

I collected my kids again and went back home. I hadn't felt this disappointed for a long time. It took a while before I went back for another visit. I needed a lot of time to get over this experience.



"Closed today"

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### Tool 10 Paid Work

The budget of Mother Centers is composed of finances for renting rooms, utilities, equipment, toys, communication costs and a post to pay for the work of the active Mother Center participants on an hourly basis. Tasks like childcare, the role of host, coordinating a course or an activity, running the second hand shop, cleaning, doing the book-keeping etc. need to be paid. These monies do not constitute salaries and are not equivalent to paid employment on the labor market. They do, however, create a form of additional income for the participants and their families. It is good if the money paid through these hourly fees is spread among as many Mother Center participants as possible. This is a way of creating a wide range of activities and active participants.

It is also important to constantly expand opportunities for paid work in the centers. By creating income generating projects the sum that can be handed out as fees for Mother Center activities can be increased and more women can be incorporated into paid work in the centers.



It is also a good idea to apply the principle of equal pay in the Mother Centers, that all activities are paid the same, no matter what they are.

This reinforces the principle that everyone can contribute to the center, no matter what their talent is, and that each contribution is important and appreciated.

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### **My little dream is coming true**

My dream of opening a small arts and crafts shop is more and more becoming a reality. In the Mother Center I will soon be able to realize everything I have been dreaming about. Women will be able to give me their handmade works of art and I will sell them for them.

I love to look for bargains and really unusual or special items. I also do crafts, sew and knit myself, but business was somewhat slow, because I don't always feel like being productive. I actually prefer selling to making stuff. Now I want to work increasingly towards the goal that women who like to do crafts or sew, to produce something, can bring their works into my Mother Center store and that I can be their sales representative. That way all of us get something out of it. I'll be offering and selling their stuff whenever the Mother Center is open. If necessary, I'll also organize sales promotions on the weekly market so that we get more walk-in customers. And my bargain finds will also be a special part of "my" store.

I really like this whole idea because in the Mother Center I save myself shop rent and all the tax worries too. After all we do these activities together for the benefit of the Mother Center. And I don't have to invest a lot of money. My child is also taken care of when I don't have time for her. And if I don't feel like working I'm sure I'll find someone to take over for me. I really like having my store in the center. I would have never dared to do something like this on my own.



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### Tool 11 Income Generating Activities

Mother Centers can and should engage in income generating activities. To encourage economical and entrepreneurial thinking and acting is an important part of the development practice in Mother Centers. Participants are guided and supported to discover and reflect on their own resources, talents and capacities and how they can apply them towards income generating activities.

However, Mother Centers are not employment agencies. It is important that the character of the Mother Center as a place to meet, a place to reflect, to recharge energy and to develop collective solutions to community issues does not get destroyed by too much focus on economical profit.



If participants for instance become seen primarily as economic assets, as customers that are to bring income to the center, then the concept of income generation has been overstretched. It is also important to keep a consistent focus on collective benefits, that income generated in the Mother Center benefits the Mother Center and the group as a whole as well as the individuals and their families.



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### **Income for the Mother Center**

The Mother Center receives part of what is taken in through the income generating commercial activities. There are several methods of calculating the split depending on the situation in the centers. If the women's earnings are under a certain limit, a case-by-case decision must be made on how to split up the proceeds. In our center in the case of knitting, for example, no commission is taken, because such work-intensive products would become too expensive and would leave little in the way of earnings for the producing women. There is also no commission when a "business" is just being started. In most of these cases the common pot for hourly fees is used until income from the business has stabilized. After all, the entrepreneurs are carrying a lot of personal risk .

The following are some of the current methods we use for calculating the share of the Mother Center:

#### **Second hand store.**

Here women have the possibility to sell or buy used clothes at reasonable prices. The mother center receives a commission of 20% on each sale, the rest goes to the woman who supplied the merchandise. The two women who operate the store are paid by the hour.

#### **Flea market**

Women produce wares at their own cost and sell them in the Mother Center. The Mother Center receives 20% of the total turnover, the women keep the rest. Their earnings depend on the demand.

#### **Cosmetics and hair care.**

Women offer their services like hair-dressing, cosmetics and massage in the center at fixed prices. The prices are discussed and decided on jointly and also depend on the demand for the services. The mother center receives 20% of total earnings.

#### **Mending and Ironing service.**

Orders are paid on an hourly basis at Euro 5.- per hour. The women get half, the Mother Center retains the other half for electricity, heat, etc.

Whichever method of sharing proceeds is used depends on the project and the women involved. We are interested in using the 20% rule for as many of our commercial activities as possible. That ensures independence for the women and fills up the Mother Center's funds to pay hourly fees for other necessary services. The task of the Mother Center is to support women in deciding on and developing their commercial project, to encourage them to bear with the inevitable start-up problems, and to help them find appropriate markets.

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### Tool 12 The role of supporting organisations

Some Mother Centers start as self-help initiatives. A group of women in a community hear about the idea, get together and found a center in their own neighborhood. Most Mother Centers have spread this way. Other centers start as a project initiated by existing NGOs for a specific target group for whom they act as a partner organisation. In this case it is important, that the partner organisation nurture and do not interfere with the self help character of the project. The following guidelines can help to keep this balance:

- ✓ It is important that the Mother Center has its own rooms. If they share premises with their partner organisation, very careful agreements need to be made to ensure grassroots leadership and self management in the Mother Centers.
- ✓ The center needs to be run by the participants. They decide how many keys there will be and who will have them. They decide opening hours, activities, refurbishment and the governing rules of the center.
- ✓ Finances need to be transparent and decentralised. The Mother Center leadership team needs to be in control of the finances regarding their center. Resources must be divided and provided in a way, that an autonomous functioning of the Mother Center is possible.

It has proven to be very beneficial if contracts are made along these guidelines in order to create transparency and security for all persons and groups involved.

## Mother Center Start Up Training Materials VI START UP MATERIAL

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**mine**

### **The 10 commandments of Mother Centers**

- 1) Be tolerant
- 2) Stay calm
- 3) Do not exert pressure on nor accept it from others
- 4) Do not be envious
- 5) Endure gossip, even if it is about yourself
- 6) Love chaos
- 7) Recognize that other children are special to their mothers too
- 8) Be spontaneous
- 9) Do not be afraid of anything
- 10) Come back



## Mother Center Start Up Training Materials VI START UP MATERIAL

### Tool 13 Accompanying Measures

Starting and running Mother Centers can be greatly supported by technical support and accompanying measures. Seminars and retreats, where the active participants of Mother Centers have time and space outside of the daily operations to reflect on the developments in the center, to confirm or adapt visions, to address challenges and develop new strategies are indispensable for Mother Centers to develop their potential, to grow and to expand. Organising outside facilitation often provides extra support and inspiration.

Especially in the start-up phase peer learning opportunities through study visits and trainings by seasoned and experienced Mother Centers from other countries can be very beneficial. New ideas, encouragement and confidence are gained through exchanging with other mothers in other Mother Centers.

Trainings, technical assistance and know how are especially needed on subjects like fund-raising, media and public relations, marketing, communication and conflict resolution. The opportunity for capacity building on these issues greatly contributes to the sustainability of Mother Centers and the quality of their work.

An important part of the „corporate culture“ of Mother Centers is the capacity to engage in festivities and to celebrate. This contributes greatly to a positive atmosphere in the centers. Finding occasions and visible ways to appreciate the work and successes of the Mother Centers as well as their individual participants is an important area to focus attention, as it can generate a lot of motivation, participation and enthusiasm.

Accompanying measures as they are described here should be included and incorporated in the Mother Center total budget.

## Mother Center Start Up Training Materials VI START UP MATERIAL

### **Friendship, Fights, and Fits of Laughter : Our Workshops**

Seminars, trainings and workshops have been great opportunities to learn more about ourselves and to strengthen our group feeling. During these seminars and retreats we can.

take the time to collect all existant problems, address them, and look for solutions together. How to criticize constructively and without hurting someone's feelings? How to learn to voice uncomfortable feelings? How to deal with gossip? How to learn to accept our differences? How to deal with women we don't like? How to learn to evaluate and change our opinions, attitudes, and prejudices? How to integrate outsiders into our groups? These are some of the important questions and problems that we deal with in our seminars and workshops.

Mother center seminars are experiences that give mothers a boost, give them some energy back. They build our self confidence and they work to dismantle blockages in communication.

We select conference sites where mothers and children can both feel comfortable, where there is a family-friendly and relaxed atmosphere. To have time to oneself, to get served for a change, to relax, to find oneself again, regenerates energy, curiosity, motivation, and courage to be open for new experiences.

Having gone through such a positive experience together provides energy and strength and a feeling of connection that is projected into the daily life of the Mother Center after the seminar. In the seminars we experience each other in different circumstances, away from the daily grind, something that contributes to a melting down of barriers and communication blockages and adds to a better mutual understanding that continues on after the seminar.

Minimum requirements of our trainings are:

- ✓ A family-friendly conference site in comfortable and relaxing surroundings
- ✓ Enough highly motivated and well paid child-care personnel
- ✓ Trainers who believe in the competencies of mothers and who are able to give them confidence in and awareness of their own abilities
- ✓ A financial budget that is large enough to allow for the subsidized participation of women who cannot afford to pay for the seminar themselves



## Mother Center Start Up Training Materials VI START UP MATERIAL

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**mine**

### Tool 14 Public relations, communication and reaching out

Mother Centers spread mainly by word of mouth. Nevertheless it is useful to create information and pr material such as flyers, brochures, or Mother Center newsletters. This is an important tool to make Mother Centers known and publically visible. This is important both to reach new mothers and families as participants as well as to become known to municipal authorities and the community at large.

A regular part of Mother Center work needs to involve communication beyond the doors of the center, to let people know what the women are doing in the center. This applies at the level of individual family relations as well as at the level of the community as a whole. Husbands and partners usually are less threatened if they feel they know what is going on in the Mother Center. Being invited to events, taking part in family activities gives them the opportunity to experience and understand the Mother Center as well as feeling included and part of it.

It is also important to create regular occasions for the community at large, for local politicians and informal leaders in the community to experience and cooperate with the Mother Center. Reaching out to other groups and members of the community needs to be a conscious and active process in order to gain the support of the community, to build partnerships and to gain allies.



## Mother Center Start Up Training Materials VI START UP MATERIAL

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**mine**

### Just a Bunch of Gossiping Women?

One day one of the council women called me on the phone. We had applied for a subsidy from the municipal government for our Mother Center.

She said: "We don't really hear good things about the mother center."

"Oh?," I said, "What do you hear?"

"Well, we hear that the women are just hanging out, drinking coffee and smoking..."

"Oh," I said, "what actually happens is that women talk about what their concerns, with their kids, relationships, with housing, the school, health care, ..."

She replied, "That kind of housewife prattle they could do just as well at home. They could invite their neighbors over for coffee. I see no need to waste public funds on something like that!"

"Maybe you should go and take a look at the kind of tiny apartments most people live in around here. Maybe you can figure out how many women and kids you can get in there for a meeting, especially if you live in a house with people who work night shifts. There's always someone sleeping and needing quiet."

She didn't say anything for a moment and I began to think she'd gotten my point.

But then her next argument came: "The women learn things there they'd be better off not knowing."

"What on earth do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, they come home with a whole different idea of themselves and they start to talk back to their husbands, who don't know how to deal with that. It creates a lot of troubled marriages and families. And what good does it do them? There's nothing they can do about their lives anyway."

I was quite shocked, but knew that many others in the community had similar misconceptions and prejudices, so I patiently explained to her about the very real growth I had seen in women, and along with them their families, through the Mother Center. How much more thoughtfully they deal with their lives and their families, how they have improved the lives of their children, how neighborhood has been created.

At the end of the conversation I had managed to convince her to come and look for herself. That usually works the best to convince opponents anyway. When they see it, they get it!

## Mother Center Start Up Training Materials VI START UP MATERIAL

### Tool 15 Local Governance

Mother Centers are places where mothers can collectively think about what kind of conditions they want to create for their families and their children. Over time this does not stay limited to what happens inside the walls of the Mother Center, but is directed also to the conditions and issues they and their children face in the community and in society.

In the Mother Centers women find a place where they can exchange experiences and views about what they want for their children, what changes and improvements they would like to see and what could be steps they could take to make these changes happen.

An important part of the potential of Mother Centers is that they serve as organising space for mothers as a group to become a player in local governance and take initiative in creating improvements in their municipality. If encouraged and supported they offer women a chance to take part in shaping their communities and participate in local decision making.





## Mother Center Start Up Training Materials VI START UP MATERIAL

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**mine**

### **I was never much interested in politics**

I was never interested in politics. I did not know much of what was going on in my city or country. That changed when I had a child. All of a sudden the environment and what was surrounding me became more important. A child is so vulnerable, all of a sudden, things begin to matter, how safe the streets are, how clean the air is, how much room there is for pedestrians, how many parks there are in the neighbourhood, how welcome you feel with a child in public life. In the Mother Center we talk about these things, we start to want changes, we start to organise to make them happen. Not until I was asked to run for our local council did I understand that this was politics. I still am not that interested in politics. My home base is the Mother Center, not a political party. But we have become an important player in our city. We have become a force to be reckoned with. We have been able to make changes in our community, and we continue to do so.

