

GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY (GWIA) IN BARCELONA 2008

Learning about Mother Centers through a GWIA

Mother Centers are self-managed community meeting places, providing support to families of often marginalised background. They are a social cohesion strategy and a rich setting for informal learning and empowerment.

Mother Centers address the everyday issues of families with young children. Experience has shown that the concerns of parents cut through religious, ethnic or socio-economic divides. As a community based, low threshold approach to self-organising parents, Mother Centers reach women with very different education or socio-economic status as well as nationality/migration background. Intercultural dialogues on issues of parenting and raising children, as well as on promoting equality and integration, are a regular part of the communication as women meet, work and learn together on a daily basis in the Centers. On an international level the Mother Centers International Network **mine** together with the Union of Slovak Mother Centers have recently coordinated an international debate on the issue: *How do we want to raise our children?* in which 20 countries participated.

Spreading like a wildfire –

The transfer of the methodology of Mother Centers

At the GWIA 2008 in Barcelona women from established Centers will transfer their knowledge to women interested in starting Mother Centers in their own country. Those will not be passive recipients of knowledge, but will actively shape their own learning through the Grassroots Women's International Academy (GWIA). This unique, field-tested peer learning format received the 2006 Dubai International Best Practices Transfer Award. The GWIA-methodology structures a process of peer learning, where participants learn to be owners of their knowledge on coping with everyday issues, to develop strategies based on their competences and skills and to transfer their knowledge to others. It is a basis to strengthen social and political participation, especially for women from marginalised groups.

• **The Nest! Foundation** has the objective of compiling grassroots knowledge on community building, stimulating the recognition of grassroots knowledge and making it transferable. In order to realize this objective, the Nest! foundation organizes programs, projects and activities to make grassroots knowledge accessible, and to network with like minded organizations. As such the **Nest! Foundation** harbours the coordination point and archives of the GWIA. Recent publications on the field of the **Grassroots Women's International Academy** (or GWIA) are the GWIA handbook and the GWIA website www.GWIA.net.

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Building bridges

The format of the GWIA is targeted towards building bridges across cultural divides, of which the difference between professionals and grassroots women has been a focus in former GWIAs. Part of creating intercultural dialogue and understanding, however, also involves working out the similarities between the learners, which might be larger than expected, despite cultural differences. An exchange on the intercultural work in the Mother Centers as well as on the intercultural lessons learned in the international dialogue campaign :How do we want to raise our children? will be included in the program of the GWIA.

At GWIA 2008 the Mother Centers approach will be adapted to different national and cultural settings. Peer learning between established Mother Centers will improve their educational programs.

Objectives: GWIA 2008 in Barcelona has the following major objectives:

Learning about GWIA

Experiencing the functioning of the Grassroots Women International Academy as a methodology for peer learning and peer dissemination of grassroots best practices and learning about peer learning and teaching

Learning about Mother Centers

- Allowing women interested in setting up Mother Centers in their own communities to follow a targeted programme about initiating Mother Centers, that is fine-tuned to their context .
- Gathering and exchanging knowledge on Mother Centers as informal learning places that promote intercultural and social competences, civic engagement, engendering governance, equal access to assets and services .
- Deepening and exchanging the knowledge of Mother Centers and their functioning in different contexts .

Products that we intend to deliver at the end of the project include:

- Start up Materials for Mother Centers customised to the countries.
- Guidelines and curricular elements for peer learning on issues like parental education, intercultural dialog and active citizenship
- Project Reports that document the lessons learned and the learning process.

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