

Impressions of the First International Mother Center Conference: “How do we want to raise our Children”

17 – 20 November 2006 in Bratislava, Slovak Republic.



„It´s unbelievable, we are really here. It has really happened.” (Slovak organizer)

Yes it really happened.

End of last year an international group of 175 women from 20 countries all over the world came to Bratislava for the first international Mother Center Conference ever.

*It was the birth of a movement. All went home inspired and enriched, full of new **plans dreams and ideas.***

Below are some of the first impressions, quotes and pictures. More will follow on the websites, so keep checking them.

*The conference was the end of a year long campaign. About **30.000** women, men and children from over 75 local groups, Mother Centers and Mother Center networks world-wide participated in a series of debates on the subject of* ⇨⇨⇨⇨⇨⇨⇨⇨⇨⇨

“How do we want to raise our Children”

On the Campaign:

“The subjects of the campaign were close to peoples hearts and minds. That made the participants in the dialogues come closer to one another and get more understanding for each other.” (Presentation of Dutch Mother Centers)



- More info can be found on the websites of the organisers of the conference: •
- www.materskecentra.sk •
- www.mine.cc •

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Network for Empowerment**

On the conference

"I have participated in many conferences but I have never been anywhere that combines both such spirit and an inspiring and connecting atmosphere with such rich content, covering the complete spectrum of motherhood"
(Participant from Trinidad and Tobago)



"I find it easy to connect and exchange because we have communicated our view on how to raise our children and we have so many views in common"
(Participant from Bosnia)

"Definitely the Conference is very informative and empowering."
(Participant from Uganda)

"Very creative Conference, full of positive and warm energy, what only mothers from Mother Centres are able to bring".
(Participant from Slovakia)



"In my Mother Center the mothers come together to raise our children, and here we do the same across borders and continents." (Italian participant)



"My impression is very good, the atmosphere is really positive and so many things are coming up."
(Representative of funder)

"I am impressed of the diversity of cultures and opinions. And of the fact, that so many women from all around the world are here, in Slovakia, Bratislava, even maybe they have never heard anything about Bratislava."
(Organizer from Slovakia)



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**"We are all on the same page, as I hear the others and I realize world wide we have the same issues."
(Participant from Jamaica)**



"I've seen a presentation I've never seen before. I say this because I could see that it was made from the heart."

*It wasn't artificial. We are interested in children –they are the center of the universe in the family. It's important to make this the center of the public universe as well. **I am fascinated by Mother Centers because they are a connection between the private and the public realm.**
(Mayor of Bratislava)*



"We are often asked in Mother Centers, where are the fathers?"

*I can give an answer right here and now. They are at home, taking care of our children, so that we can participate in this conference!"
(Participant from Bulgaria)*



*„The freedom of expressing emotions is definitely incredible here. I have never been on such a conference with openness and freedom of laughing, singing and emotions."
(Conference facilitator)*

On raising children

"From the campaign we have learned that families need more acknowledgment in society. Families should be looked upon more highly."

*Child rearing work should be revalorized. Our children are our future, support their families!"
(Presentation of Italian Mother Centers)*



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"What we learned in our work is that many parents operate out of fear and anger. The most powerful parent education is sharing"
(Participant from Trinidad)

*"Family life expertise is not validated in our educational system. Child rearing is regarded as something that only highly professional people can deal with. **This needs to be demystified.**"*

(Participant from Turkey)



Research shows that when a child has problems, the best outcomes come from working with other parties, either parents or teachers, not necessarily the child itself."
(Panelist from Slovakia)



"During communist times the state had the responsibility of raising the children. That has changed now, but the institutions have not changed yet. After the uniformity of the communist times, meeting with such diversity is a value in itself. Meetings such as this one show new perspectives for your own place."

(Participant from Poland)

"I was surprised by the fact, that women from different countries wanted to follow exactly what I want."

(Slovak organizer)

"It is useful to see how mothers in different countries are able to share the experiences of dealing with children, even they are from different parts of the world."

(Participant from Uganda)



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Children are being taken out of homes by social services in what they call risk families. In the Mother Center the moms will take care of children of another mom who are going through a hard time with drugs or alcohol. Children are between worlds when raised in non-aboriginal homes. Indigenous populations have a "village" model for caring for children. The social service model is hostile to that. It is a racist notion that aboriginal families are not as capable of raising a child."

(Participant from Aboriginal Mother Center, Canada)



On Mother Centers

***"Mother Centers are pioneers
They are paving the way for
caring communities."***

(Participant from Germany)

"In the Mother Centers children find new toys and they also learn how to share them."

(Presentation of Slovak Mother Centers)

"The three generation model has broken down, but now the Mother Centers fill the gap. Mother Centers are like a big family for the mother and the child"

(Participant from Italy)



Lenka basically feels at home in all Mother Centers.

"Everybody knows what a kindergarten is. Our goal is that everybody also knows what a Mother Center is."

(Participant from the Czech Republic)



"Mother Centers are often ahead of their time".

(Mother Center presentation, Germany)



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*"The biggest strength of the Mother Centers is that they have created an accelerated movement of women who are committed to **raising the future generation**"*
(Slovak Participant)

*"Women coming together is vital. Physical space is strategic. **There should be a Mother Center in every community.**"*
(Participant from USA)



"People need to feel that they belong, that if they are not there, they will be missed. Mother Centers seem to be that kind of place for women and children."
(Panelist from Slovakia)



"Mother Centers are like sun and rain and together they result in growth"

(Participant from Guatemala)

"Mother Centers are a unique prevention tool against social pathology."
(Panelist from Poland)



On Motherhood

"Parenthood is like a road into the unknown which still we should follow."
(Slovak participants)



"Motherhood is not just something private, but it is something that is public."

(Mrs. Rdichova, former Minister of Family and Social Affairs, Slovakia)



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"The first teacher of compassion towards me was my mother, my mother took fullest care of me and I survived from my mother's milk. This old body still feels the impact of that care and affection today. Some forget this and that is a mistake."
(The Dalai Lama)



"The attention paid to children is an indicator for the civilization and progress of society"
(Slovak Participant)

On the Mother Centers movement



"There is so much connecting us. We are moving out of isolation, we are strengthening our self esteem, we are moving into development and creating employment, we are building new partnerships. Because of this international movement, we feel stronger."
(Participant from Argentina)



"Don't worry, be active!"

(Slogan from the Association of Czech Mother Centers)

"Mother Centers are the drops that move the ocean"

(Participant from Slovakia)



New Mother Center initiatives

"I am going to mix a (non-alcoholic) cocktail of all the solutions I hear here and take it home."

(Participant from Argentina)



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"In our country there is much racism, the only language to use is Spanish, it is compulsory from the first day in school where the only white person is the teacher. In our Mother Center we want to use the local languages and keep the culture of the people. That way the children see their mother as a person who can teach something"



Presentation
of Mother
Center
Guatemala

"We do not have a Mother Center yet, but we used the campaign questionnaires as a tool for organizing and starting discussions. Mother Centers would be a great contribution to spreading a culture of peace. The situation in Burundi is very unstable, people have been violated and hurt by armed groups. Hygienic conditions are very bad and we try to help them with just the most basic necessities for survival. Our intention is to support them to have their own Mother Center as a base for security and survival. Now when the women go to the market to sell things they lock up their kids at home and they are in constant fear that the kids are raped in their absence. It would be wonderful if there is a place where the children are safe and can learn something and where the women can find support and trust."

(Presentation of Mother Center Initiative, Burundi)



"Mother Centers are a new concept for our country; I think it will work very well. The groups in the rural areas would be able to find space to make a Mother Center and there is definitely a need for it; the women who do not have jobs do barely come out of the house now. I think my work in health and education will be easier too, when there are Mother Centers."

(Participant from Guatemala)

"The word mine means mother in my language. I feel pregnant with the soon to be born Mother Center in my home town of Kisumu. It will be born as soon as I get back home."

(Participant from Kenya)



"Beautiful, interesting, clever women met here".
(Slovak organizer)



"I was deeply impressed by the stories of the African women and I will remember my happy life daily". (Slovak Participant)



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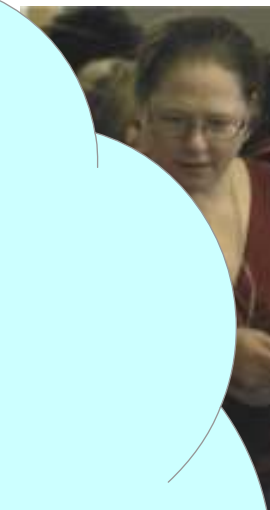
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Participants of the conference were asked to write down any dreams they had of what could be done together. The following list was compiled:

- ✘ A conference in 2 years in Bulgaria
- ✘ A conference in 4 years in Argentina
- ✘ A Caribbean network of Mother Centers and conference by 2010
- ✘ Recognition of Mother Centers as a peace promoting entity by the UN
- ✘ Exchange visits to Uganda next year
- ✘ AMAHORO (peace) in Burundi
- ✘ NGOs in Trinidad revitalized by "How do we want to raise our children campaign" - 2007-2008
- ✘ A wish to have a Union of Mother Centers in Russia and to welcome Mother Centers from abroad in Russia
- ✘ Full funding for all Mother Centers from the state and the private sector
- ✘ Mothers movement in Poland soon
- ✘ Come to Freiburg
- ✘ To stay in touch and see you next time maybe in Africa
- ✘ Support and accompaniment of our new Mother Center in Guatemala. That there be more Mother Centers in Latin America and that they also make a network and union!
Much peace and harmony for everyone in Guatemala.



Why not have a special celebration of Mother's Day?



Dear Friends,

Thanks for the opportunity to meet some of you at our conference "How do we want to raise our children" in Bratislava.

At one of the workshops, focusing on possible joint work in the future, we came to an interesting idea: to have a world wide celebration of Mother's Day.

Actually, something similar we had this year on May 13th in 7 countries – only in Europe.

It was a simultaneous attempt to set up a new Guinness World Record in a category: Pram pushing – mass participation; simply the most number of people pushing their prams within one mile and one hour. The whole event under the name: "**Move the pram, move the world**" was successful - altogether we had more than 2 thousand prams with big media coverage and an excellent public response. Yes, the GWR was a good tool how to promote parenting issues. However, if we would like to include

mothers all around the world, we do have to forget about prams and look for more universal symbols of parenthood.

The idea to do something together is definitely more important than setting up any new records. We never forget the feeling of being as a part of a big movement from our May event. It was thrilling.

Thus we would like to invite you to join an idea from Bratislava's workshop – to have a joint celebration of Mother's Day - to **march a mile for mothers**, or for Mother Centers. To be able to join also far away countries, e.g. Canada, Jamaica, Argentina etc. we suggest to have it as something as "**a relay race**", when we will be doing that at the same time in different countries – let's say at **4.p.m. on Saturday, May, 12th** – just an evening before the Mother's Day in 2007.

Because of time zones, we can symbolically run/march around the whole Earth.

We would like to know your opinion about that – yes, it is not much time to organize such a huge movement, but why not to try at least? When we forget about Guinness, we can have rules as we will create – very easy – people will walk a mile with children either in a pram, in arms, in baby- scarves etc.; any way it is good for participants.

Each participant can sign at the start just for registration. The whole event will last one hour at each place.

There are still a lot of questions and tasks – we do have to have a slogan, a logo and the "**higher idea**" – why we are going to do it. This we can never solve without you. Your ideas and experience have to be heard. Therefore let me invite you to join an e-mail discussion group, where we can create a whole background of the event. If interested, don't hesitate to sign up at my e-mail address: elena@materskecentra.sk.

Looking forward very much for all your contributions! Everyone is welcomed! I hope that we will make a plan together.

Because: "If we want to move the world, we have to move our minds first" 😊

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