

# mine newsletter

 summer 2006

## Welcome in the world of Mother Centers!

The Mother Centers International Network (**mine**) links Mother Centers from 15 countries. In this edition of our newsletter you will get to know some of the leaders of Mother Centers from around the world. They were interviewed during the Grassroots Women's International Academy (GWIA) at the World Urban Forum (WUF III) in Vancouver, Canada. We **look forward** to meeting and interviewing more of you at the conference : "How do we want to raise our children", which **mine** will be conducting in cooperation with the Union of Slovak Mother Centers in Bratislava in November. As you will see from **the interviews in this newsletter** we have very important messages, messages shared by mothers coming from very different backgrounds and circumstances. Messages that can help the

world to grow together. We **invite** your comments and feedback!

Monika Jaeckel  
Mine Chair

## Elena Bakosova, Union of Slovak Mother Centers, Slovak Republic



**Elena coordinates the Union of Slovak Mother Centers, a network of 83 Mother Centers in the Slovak Republic. The first Mother Center in the Slovak Republic was founded 1998. The centers vary in size and activities. They reach between 50 and 300 families per center.**

*What do Mother Centers mean to your communities?*

Elena: They mean a safe place for meetings, for developing as women.

What is special is that mothers can develop together with their children.

*What is your personal motivation to participate in the Mother Center?*

Elena: I was on maternity leave for six years. At this time there were no Mother Centers in Slovakia. I suffered from the typical symptoms of being at home alone with the children, so when the idea of Mother Centers first came to Slovakia it was a dream that can be fulfilled. When we read about it in a Czech magazine, we knew this is it! I loved the time I spent with my children, that I could be with them. But personally for me there was no development.

*What are the challenges mothers are facing in your communities?*

Elena: We are a special country, because we have such a long maternity leave, we have three years for a child. For many women this is a challenge, the decision to stay at home or to work. Many women would like to stay at home, but cannot afford it, and others stay at home, but feel they are standing still. With Mother Centers this time is not wasted, they can learn skills and develop as persons.



*What is the most important message you have as mothers and Mother Centers to local authorities in your community?*

Elena: Happy children need happy mothers. This is something politicians should build on, to find solutions that mothers and children are happy. In the

Mother Centers we can tell politicians what is needed for mothers and children. That it is worthwhile to support Mother Centers, that children and mothers need support and community. Mother Centers are a positive environment for children to grow up and happy mothers also have an impact on family relations. When mothers

are not stressed and nervous, they can be balanced and positive in the family.

*What do mothers have in common world wide?*

Elena: What we have in common are our children. This means a lot. We are all concerned with the future of our children.

## Felizitas Keller, Mother Center "EKiZ", Stuttgart, Germany

**Felizitas Keller works in the Mother Center EKIZ in Stuttgart, Germany, part of the Intergenerational House West, a partnership venture between the Mother Center, the municipality, a local Foundation and municipal institutions involved in child and eldercare. The House, which opened its doors in 2002, combines 10 apartments for the elderly, assisted living services, a municipal kindergarten for 120 children, open and flexible childcare and the Mother Center. EKIZ has 100 active volunteers and reaches 5000 families in the community.**

*What does your Mother Center mean to your community?*

Felizitas: The Mother Center is open for everyone in the community. Many families are integrated in our center that cannot find support or a sense of

belonging anywhere else. Other places are only for the youth, for troubled



children, for the disabled, for specific target groups. We don't ask any questions about your background, your qualifications.

**In the Mother Centers you can simply join and contribute your talents.**

It becomes clear in daily life, where each one can contribute the best. Each one has talents, love for children, ability to share

experiences, to spread joy, to be good with words. It is a pool of give and take where we all benefit.

*What is your personal motivation to participate in the Mother Center?*

Felizitas: I joined the Mother Center when I was a single parent with two young children. It was such a relief to meet other mothers, to be able to exchange on a daily basis. I became an active participant and built up many

programs in the center.

*What are the challenges mothers are facing in your community?*

Felizitas: In Germany there are currently a lot of cuts in social welfare programs, and more and more families, especially single parent families are facing poverty. In our center we provide services free of cost or at a very low price to support families and elders who do not have a lot of income to dispose of.

*What is the most important message you have as mothers and Mother Centers to local authorities in your community?*

Felizitas: Local authorities should really take a look at what happens in Mother Centers and how much our work there contributes to the integration of isolated

and disadvantaged parts of the population. They should invest in us, value and recognise our work. They should learn from us, take their cues for new programs and concepts from what we are doing on the ground.

*What do mothers have in common world wide?*

Felizitas: Mothers are interested in a caring society, in caring communities. Mothers are always conscious of the needs of their children, their families, their neighbourhood. Caring is a value that mothers share world wide.

## Rut Kolinska, Network of Czech Mother Centers, Prague, Czech Republic

**Rut Kolinska is the founder of the first Mother Center as well as the National Network of Mother Centers in the Czech Republic. The first Mother Center was founded in Prague in 1992. There are currently 200 Mother Centers in the Czech Republic. The centers reach an average of 150-200 families regularly.**



*What do your Mother Centers mean to your communities?*

Rut: For Czech women the Mother Centers are a place to meet, share their concerns and take steps to improve their lives and the lives of their children and

families. The Czech centers are now developing into becoming community centers for all generations, especially in the smaller towns.

*What is your personal motivation to participate in the Mother Center?*

Rut: I am very excited that the Mother Centers have so much success after these 14 years. They benefit the mothers, the families and the whole society.

**We have changed the legislation of maternity leave.**

It is now possible to have your child attend childcare, also when you are on maternity leave, which was not possible before.

*What are the challenges mothers are facing in your community?*

Rut: Generally in our country there is not much experience and know how on how to be an active civil society. The Mother Centers face financial challenges. Their funding is not sustainable, each center has to keep fighting for their funds. The women who work voluntarily in the centers often face burnout.

*What is the most important message you have as mothers and Mother Centers to local authorities in your community?*

Rut: Society belongs to all. Politicians are also citizens. Mother Center women contribute to the development of our communities, just like the local authorities. Local authorities should see them as partners. We do not want to fight, we want work together. We are very patient. It is taking very long for local authorities to treat us as partners. Even our patience has limits.

*What do mothers have in common world wide?*

Rut: Mothers across the world see the future through the eyes of their children and grandchildren. They try to find a positive vision for their children. Wherever I go, in Bosnia, in Vancouver, in Germany, in the Slovak Republic, Mother Centers create a common atmosphere, independent of the economic, political or cultural situation of the country. It is a welcoming atmosphere, regardless of who you are, what age, ethnic or social background you come from, if you are rich or poor. You are

accepted as you are, regardless if you are passive or active. There is

an open and welcoming atmosphere. Mothers can relate to each other

everywhere, they have many concerns in common.

## **Penny Irons, Aboriginal Mother Center Society, Vancouver, Canada**

Penny Irons is the director of the Aboriginal Mother Center in Vancouver, the first Mother Center in Canada. The Center was founded in 2002 and reaches 300 families monthly.

*What does your Mother Center mean to your community?*

Penny:

**A place to create sustainable livelihoods.**

It has re-created our neighbourhood and has moved women out of isolation. They realise that they are not alone, that there are many other women just like them with the same problems. We have now a strong collective of women. We have 50 women working for our social enterprise. These are women who were on social assistance, on unemployment insurance, on very small pensions.

*What is your personal motivation to participate in the Mother Center?*

Penny: I was a young teen parent mom, I wasn't single, but I was still a 16 year old mom, and even though I baby-sitted lots of kids I was lonely for adult women's company. That

keeps me going, because I think of all those moms that are in this situation.

*What are the challenges mothers are facing in your community?*



Penny: Lack of employment, lack of childcare, extreme poverty. 40% of the aboriginal children live below the poverty line. Most of these families are led by single parent moms. There is also women fleeing abusive relationships, there is sexual abuse, there is physical abuse towards women and children.

*What is the most important message you have as mothers and Mother Centers to local authorities in your community?*

Penny: They should focus on creating sustainable neighbourhoods. You can't have sustainable cities until

people become economically and socially sustainable. Creating women run space, spaces run by women, for women, controlled by women is a key piece to create sustainability. We are the most successful project of our kind in our country. Politicians can learn from us.

*What do mothers have in common world wide?*

Penny: As a mother you experience this whole connection to children and caring. There are men that are devoted to the Mother Center movement, that have that caring, and also single women can be caring, but mothers are the center of the family, its like that all over the world. That makes them the center of the world.



Aboriginal Mother Centre, Vancouver

**Edina Karabeg, Mother Center: „Klub Prima“ , Sanski Most, Bosnia Herzegovina**

**Edina Karabeg is initiator of "Klub Prima" in Sanski Most, Bosnia, which was founded in 2005. The center is unique as a citizen's self help initiative after the war. 35 women of all ages are active in the center. "Klub Prima" reaches 200 families in Sanski Most, also through cultural activities they organise in the ruins of a movie center in the center of town. "Klub Prima" started a women's and a children's choir, which constitute the only cultural projects Sanski Most has in their municipality since after the war.**

*What does your Mother Center mean to your community?*

Edina: Our Mother Center means a lot. We have a difficult situation in Bosnia, a transition situation from a different social system as well as reconstruction after war. We need something like a Mother Center to hold our energy together. We are all burned out after the war, things are not getting any better, there is no

employment, people are losing their hope, their energy. Mother Centers are a support, it makes life easier when you have a place defined by friendship, by consideration and care for each other, by mutual help. We do things together that bring us joy, like singing, like helping each other, like making a change in our community.

*What is your personal motivation to participate in the Mother Center?*

Edina: I have a mother, I have children. They are welcome in the Center. We need to rebuild our society. We need a better future for our society. When I help others, that will also help for a better future for my children. In the Mother Center the whole person is seen, with all parts of her life and her situation, with all her feelings. Only if you include emotions you can really connect.

*What are the challenges mothers are facing in your community?*

Edina: Mothers in Bosnia cannot help their children. In the Mother Centers they learn languages, computer, the way things work in our society now, so that they are able to help their children. They learn to deal with conflicts, to live together and do things together, to accept others as they are. In our difficult situation there is so much

conflict, things erupt so easily, and we try to learn and support each other in creating cooperation, community, that we continue together, that we don't separate after conflicts.

*What is the most important message you have as mothers and Mother Centers to local authorities in your community?*

Edina: That it is important to create community, that we can do a lot from the bottom up, and that the local authorities recognise this and support us, to do things for the family, for children, for the development of our society.

*What do mothers have in common world wide?*

Edina: Motherliness.

**Mothers care for children and for the future.**

You can only create a positive future if you care about others. If you come from an angry or negative place you cannot create change. To create peace you need positive visions. Children need positive role models and authorities. Authority should not be negative, intimidating, but positive and caring.



**Mirelle Tchapchet, Ghaife Mother Center, Ntankah Village, Cameroon**

**Mirelle is part of the Ghaife Mother Center in Ntankah Village, Cameroon. The center started in 2005 and is run by 45 active grassroots women. Ghaife Mother Center reaches between 60 and 80 families in the community.**

*What does your Mother Center mean to your community?*

Mirelle: A place where mothers come and share their common interest, share their joys and sorrows together, and show their various talents together, and help each other in bringing up children, taking care of children together.

*What is your personal motivation to participate in the Mother Center?*

Mirelle: I teach women to tie and dye cloth, to do handicrafts, make cakes, do decorations that bring income to the women themselves and to the Mother Center. We have a kitchen in the Mother Center.

*What are the challenges mothers are facing in your community?*

Mirelle:



There is a lack of training, a lack of income. Most men don't want their women to come there. They think when women know their rights they will know what is right and what is wrong, so they fear the women will not listen to them anymore, that they will be stubborn. For instance the custom is, when your husband dies that you get married to the brother of your husband, but now most women refuse that.

Also we face the challenge of HIV Aids and the challenge that most of our young people leave the village to go to the cities to look for work, and they come back with aids.

The Mother Center helps us to be able to create a life for ourselves, so that we do not have to go to the cities.

*What is the most important message you have as mothers and Mother Centers to local authorities in your community?*

Mirelle: They should encourage women to go to the Mother Centers, they bring so much for the women and the children. They should promote that we can stay in our communities and make our lives better, that we do not need to go into the cities, that we can stay in our villages and our families, that Mother Centers support that.

*What do mothers have in common world wide?*

Mirelle: The feeling we have as women and as mothers.



**Arlene Bailey and Kaydian Whyte, Fletchers Land Parenting Association, Kingston, Jamaica**

Fletchers Land Parenting Association is a self help group working in the inner city neighbourhoods of Kingston, Jamaica, founded in 2003. There are 20 people in their group, six committed women hold up the work. The group reaches thousands of families in Kingston.

**Arlene Bailey, street Parents**

In our communities, there is a big concern about the proper way to parent. We came together because we felt the need to do something. We saw an amount of neglect of the children in our community. We checked with the exam passes of primary school children and it was not good. We felt that was because they were not getting enough rest. So we created the concept of street parents and assigned an adult female and an adult male to every street in our neighbourhood. We defined a curfew, that children were not allowed on the streets after 9 pm any night before school day, and the street parents made sure children seen on the street after that hour were sent home. Now also the parents are taking care that their children are home at night.

**Community Parenting**

We call what we do "community parenting" because every community person is a sponsor for the other person's child. We see every child in our community as our own. You must not walk past a child in any difficulty, regardless of colour, class or creed or who it is related to. What would you do if it was your son or daughter? We do that. We don't think who the child belongs to. We are trying to save the next generation. We are losing our youth to crime, jail and drugs. To some extent this generation is a lost cause. We have not



given them up, we must save them. We want to get back to where we started in our tradition. It takes a village to raise a child. We need a wide-spread city vision that integrates community parenting. Right now for Kingston and Jamaica, we are the pilot project, this needs to spread throughout our country.

**Breakfast Program**

When we did our research we realised that many children were not in school because of economic problems. They had no money for lunch, breakfast, they were hungry, so they went to beg rather than going to school. So we started a breakfast assistant program.

**We took the initiative and then the government supported it.**

**Kaydian Whyte, Homework Assistance**

We are from two different communities, we basically do the same thing. One program we have is that we assist children with their homework and we do workshops to empower the parent child relationship. Parents don't have enough knowledge to assist their children with their homework and we find that they often come back to school without

having done their homework. They don't relate to the teachers, because they are ashamed. It was getting out of hand in our community. So we organised a homework assistant program. We started without any funds. Children sat on stones, they did not have seats, they did not have books, they did not have pencils, but they came with their

homework and we helped them. Then the municipality saw what we were doing and they sponsored chairs, and they also give the children something to eat in the evenings, because that motivates them more to come. We have children with learning disabilities, we help them all. It has amazing results. Children who could not write are making an effort to write. We have over 80 children. It has been a success. Parents make sure that their children come to our classes. And the children come forward and tell us, Miss, I can't read that, Miss, I don't understand that. Now they trust us, that they can ask us anything.

We need more sponsors for our programs. We have a community center, that we want to build up. It needs to be painted, the roof needs to be repaired, we need equipment to

use, we need pictures to hang up to attract children's attention. We are not doing this because we want money, we do it because it comes out of our hearts. I love children, I believe in education for children. It hurts my heart to know that there are children out there who are willing to learn and who can't get help elsewhere.



## Anne Wanjiru, Mathari Mothers Development Center, Nairobi, Kenya



**Anne Wanjiru is one of the initiators of the Mathari Mothers Development Center in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya. The center was founded in 2001 as first Mother Center in Kenya. In the center 35 children are taken care of every day. 45 women are active daily in the center and the center reaches 150 women in the community.**

*What does your Mother Center mean to your community?*

Anne: The Mathari Mothers Development Center means

a lot to our community, because for us women it is a space we call our own space. In the slums it is very rare to find a space where especially women can socialise. In our Mother Center where we have space for women to meet. In the community it is a space where the communities bring their children, leave them there and at the end of the day come and collect their children. We take care of these small babies, who used to be locked in their houses and might be burnt in their houses, because we have a lot of fires in the slums.

*What is your personal motivation to participate in the Mother Center?*

Anne: I feel very proud because we have our own space for women. It is a place where we come and relax and release our stress as women in the community.

*What are the challenges mothers are facing in your community?*

The challenges we face as mothers is that we are the heads of most of our homes, despite of the fact that we may have husbands, they drink the whole day, and at the end of the day they don't have anything left to buy food.

Also we have lost most of our relatives from HIV Aids, and we take care of many orphans. The other challenge is that there is a lot of violence in the slums. Women are raped, women are beaten, women are stripped of their properties.

*What is the most important message you have as mothers and Mother Centers to local authorities in your community?*

Anne: To create a Mother Centers is each and every local community, to provide land for women to construct a Mother Center, because it benefits the

women and the community at large.

*What do mothers have in common world wide?*

Anne: One of the communalities for mothers in the whole world, is that women are the ones that take care of their families and relatives. Women are

the ones who really hold the world. Everything the government is doing let it involve women and let it involve a bottom up approach.

## **Mother Center Conference: "How do we want to raise our Children"**

17 – 20 November in Bratislava, Slovak Republic

The conference is planned for 3 days and 120 – 150 participants, including representatives of Mother Centers and Mother Center Networks from 15 countries and representatives of public stakeholders including policy makers, administration, media, foundations, churches, private sector, academia, childcare institutions, as well as international agencies.

### **Languages**

Conference languages are English and Slovak

### **Childcare**

Childcare is provided throughout the Conference

### **Exhibition**

Exhibition Space for Photographs, Posters and Materials of the Mother Centers from the different countries is provided



### **Program:**

#### **Friday, November 17th : Arrival of participants**

**16.00 – 18.00 h:** Registration

**18.00 – 21.00 h:** Getting to Know Each Other  
Informal gathering in the Mother Center Bratislava

**Saturday, November 18th : Introducing the Theme**

- 7.30 – 9.30 h:** Registration
- 9.30 – 11.00 h:** Welcomes and Introductory Speeches  
Municipality of Bratislava  
Prominent Personalities of Public Life from the fields of family policy, child psychology, and pedagogy
- 11.00 – 11.30 h:** Coffee Break
- 11.30 – 12.30 h:** Goals and Structure of the Conference  
Union of Slovak Mother Centers  
Mother Centers International Network (**mine**)
- 12.30 h** Lunch Break
- 14.00 – 15.30 h** Hearing from Each Other  
Country Reports on Content and Process of the Mother Centers How do we Want to Raise Our Children Campaign
- 15.30 – 16.00 h** Coffee Break
- 16.00 – 18.00 h** Country Reports continued

The country reports will address the following issues:

- What are the main concerns of parents and how do Mother Centers deal with them
- Experiences of peer learning around parenting in the Mother Centers
- Issues addressed in public debates and advocacy activities
- Main effects of the How do we want to raise our Children campaign
- Successes and Challenges
- Conclusions and Further Perspectives

**Free Evening****Sunday, November 19th: Harvesting Our Work**

- 9.30 – 12.30 h** Workshops
- 1) Visions and Values on Parenting: Commonalties and Cultural Differences
  - 2) MC as Universities of Parenthood
  - 3) Recognizing of the place of MC in the system of Public Administration
- 12.30 – 14.00 h** Lunch Break
- 14.00 – 15.30 h** Summarising Results of the Workshops and Preparing Creative Reports for the Plenary
- 15.30 – 16.00 h** Coffee Break
- 16.00 – 18.00 h** Reports and Results of the Workshops + Panel Discussion I. with Professionals
- 20.00 h** **Traditional Slovak Evening**

**Monday, November 20th: The Way Forward**

- 9.00 – 11.00 h** Workshops
- 1) Elements of an International Mother Center Policy Paper
  - 2) Strengthening Mothers Movement
  - 3) Publicity and Advocacy : Raising Public Awareness of Grassroots Voices on Parenting
- 11.00 – 12.30 h** Summarizing Results of the Workshops and Preparing Creative Reports for the Plenary
- 12.30 – 14.00 h** Lunch Break and Press Conference
- 14.00 – 16.00 h** Reports and Results of the Workshops and Panel Discussion II
- 16.00 – 16.30 h** Coffee Break
- 16.30 – 18.30 h** Conclusion, Statement and Mission of the conference
- 20.00 h** **International Party with Talent Show**

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