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Mother Center Start Up Training Materials I

MOTHER CENTER CONCEPT POINTS

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1) The importance of claiming public space

The basis of **mobilisation** is to have a place to meet, exchange information and ideas and organise. A switchboard of information and exchange, a place where issues and talents can become visible.

Ownership. 24 hours control and self management allow for activation, identification and full participation.

A Mother Center is a public "home". Meeting only a couple of hours a week in "borrowed" venues does not do it, meeting privately does not do it. Being a host is different from being a guest.

Mother Centers need to have a low threshold in form of a "**drop in center**". It is important not to have to "make an appointment" and not to have to have a defined reason or role to visit the center. Mother Centers offer opportunities to just observe and just relax as well as get active.

Mother Centers as public living rooms offer a participative way of developing **social and decision making structures** in communities , both informally as well as formally.

Everything that happens in the community can be discussed on a daily basis. Anything that needs immediate attention or response can be dealt with there. This creates an openness, fluidity and transparency of decision making. Everyone is welcome in the center, can participate and be "part" of it. Things do not happen behind closed doors, or by invitation alone, but in a sheltered way "in public".

Mother Centers are a place to gather and organise what the community can do themselves towards creating **solutions**.

Rooms

Mother Centers are self managed public rooms in the community that are at the disposal of the participants **around the clock**.

What do the rooms need to look like?

Store front, easy access and good **visibility** in community are important criteria.

Several rooms for women, for children, for meetings, for office, for trainings, garden, decorated and furnished by the participants themselves, Family like culture. (**public living room**) Not to wait till everything is finished to open, have the furnishing and renovation be part of the project.

Regular and continuous **opening hours** are important.

Where are there rooms to be found in your town and how to go about it?
(From local authorities, for rent?)

Minimum requirements: 3 rooms: Mother's room, children's room and kitchen.

2) Self help and Resource Orientation

Mother Centers are based on self organisation and **self management**. There is no professional leading or steering the group. Participants decide on how the Mother Center should be run.

Activities in the center are conducted by the participants.
10 or more keys are distributed.

Decision making is worked out collectively, leadership is taken as a **team**.

Professionals are partners, but do not run the center.

Resource Orientation

In the Mother Centers participants are seen as **everyday-life experts**.
The focus is not on: What is your problem?, but rather on What are your **talents and skills**, how and what can you contribute? Everyone is good at at least one thing, which they can contribute to the center. The idea is to help women find out what contribution they would like to make.

How to create participation

Encouraging and enabling contributions and participation is one of the most important expertise and roles in the Mother Center. We call this role and talent: being the “host of the day”

Mother Center hosts know how to inspire and create visions, how to encourage and bring out the skills and talents in others, are sensitive and intuitive, have empathy and are good listeners. They are the pearl divers, they see the strengths in others.

Initiators

Initiators need to be people who want to use the Mother Center for their own needs. Their primary motivation is not, that they want or need a job. They spend time in the center to manage and support their own lives. They are also people who can inspire confidence in others. Their main motivation is to create a better life and a better future for themselves, their families and their communities.

3) Including the children

Mother Centers are **public spaces that include children**. Women do not have to leave their children to be active and children can be a part of adult activities. Mother Centers create the space to be together while apart, and apart while together. Children are welcomed and part of it, but mothers are the focus of attention. Mother Centers are both about the **Development** of the mothers as they are about the development of children.

In Mother Centers children experience other children and other adults and their parents in other roles. Children's development is supported and promoted, also before kindergarten.

In Mother Centers children are exposed to an environment that is both safe as well as gives a big range of impulses, a learning environment in itself.

Activities and courses for children (i.e. gymnastic courses, English courses) are integrated into an environment that is child-friendly and attractive and where they can play and meet their friends, as well as experience their family and community.

Mother Centers offer Mothers space to reflect on their own development goals and steps as well as on their needs for **peer parenting** support. In Mother Centers parent education happens through role modelling.

Mother child relationships are strengthened, while each part can gain autonomy in their own rhythm.

The difference to a kindergarten is that Mother Centers generate **collective self organisation of parenthood**. Women do not leave their children at the center, they come with their children to the center.

4) Starting with Values and Visions

Defining the common values and goals collectively is an important step in creating trust and building community in the Mother Center. The process focuses on developing an identification from “me” to “we”.

A major part of vision building is working out **basic agreements** on how the group wants to work and communicate with each other, how to deal with conflicts, and what “rules” should be applied in the center.

What agreements does each participant need to feel safe, emotionally welcome and relaxed while in the center? (i.e. being listened to, respected, appreciated, right to free opinion, tolerance, constructive ways of dealing with conflicts, open flow of information, transparency).

Mother Centers create a very safe space, an atmosphere of trust, women can say anything they like without repression or punishment.

Visions and basic agreements need to be revisited continuously as a **regular process**, like a kind of group ritual or group hygiene, to keep the climate in the center cooperative and clear. There are many methods that can be applied. In the Mother Centers we work with the **leadership support process** (LSP) that supports team building and collective leadership.

5) Activities

Activities in the center are **self suggested** by the participants and organised around their own interests, talents and issues.

An open program, in form of a **non-stop cafe** is the core of the center. Activities grow out of that core. Courses are additional, not the main thing.

Family services and projects that help relieve the family budget like second hand shop, toy library or hot lunches for school children, are important elements of the daily program.

Income generating projects and savings and credit groups further the economic literacy and development of mothers.

6) Paid Voluntary Work

Remuneration

Work in the Mother Centers is remunerated and voluntary. It is **not an either or**. The Mother Centers are not operated on a purely voluntary basis, nor is everything considered a job.

This works by **paying** for activities **by the hour**, which mostly are anyway embedded in voluntary work. As a rule of thumb for every hour paid in the Mother Center 2-3 hours of voluntary work are generated.

Remunerating activities in the Mother Centers is a way of way building **self confidence** and recognition for mothers, whose work often goes unseen and unrecognized. It contributes to the empowerment of the participants and to further developing their potential.

It is also a way of **spreading responsibilities** and activating larger groups.

Work in Mother Centers are not an alternative to the labour market, cannot substitute for paid employment. Remunerating activities in the Mother Centers creates a third way between unemployment and employment, isolation in the house and public engagement. For many women this creates stepping stones, step by step they build and develop their confidence, skills and experience which very often can lead to entering employment.