

A Better World for Mothers, Children, Families
A Study on Documenting Governance Practices written for GROOTS International, July 2007



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Coll. of Authors

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1. What is it like in Slovakia to be a mother? (socio - economic background of motherhood in the Slovak Republic)

≡ *“A lot of things in our society seem all right at first sight: we have nurseries, kindergartens (both state run and private), children’s corners in large shopping centers, a well-organized net of baby clinics, available maternity wards, a financial contribution at the childbirth, parental benefits, our shops offer abundance of children’s goods – form toys, prams, clothes to nutrition, at the municipalities we have offices of social affairs and family, there is the Ministry of work, social affairs and family and even the Research Institute of work and family... Nevertheless, as soon as you become a parent you learn the real state of things.”*

In the current Slovak legislative and social system the essential rights and substantial claims of women – mothers are guaranteed by several laws. An employed woman during her pregnancy has certain privileges at the employer (the employer must not dismiss her, make her work night shifts, and carry out tasks which might endanger her health or send her on a business trip). A woman starts her maternal leave 6 weeks before the supposed date of her delivery. From this day to six months after the child’s birth she is entitled to get her maternal benefit which is paid from the public insurance and presents 55% of her regular salary. Then she can return to work or stay on the so called parental leave up to the child’s age of 3. During this leave she gets from the state a monthly benefit of 4, 440 SK (Slovak crowns, about 178 USD). Due to family or health reasons the woman can claim a prolonged parental leave up to the child’s age of 5 but without getting the benefit. During the whole parental leave both the woman’s and child’s basic health insurance is funded by the state.

Nevertheless, the benefit does not cover the higher family expenses connected with the child’s birth and loss of one income in the family. Most Slovak households are dependent on incomes of both parents which cover basic needs of all family members. Some figures for demonstration: The average monthly salary in Slovakia is 18, 761 SK (about 750 USD), the minimum salary is 7, 500 SK (about 300 USD) and minimum monthly expenses of a family of four are 13, 001 SK (about 520 USD). If a woman with two children stays on maternal leave and her husband earns a minimum salary, they find themselves under the limit of poverty. They cannot maintain the family without further benefits. Such cases are quite numerous. What is more a woman – mother becomes financially fully dependent on her husband and together with certain gender stereotypes most frequently in the country she loses her freedom to make options except the sphere of child care which is in our country prevailingly a female matter. The Slovak environment is still not accustomed to au-pair service or domestic help thus the whole child care and household running is the woman’s chore and she even cannot afford a help due to the financial situation. At the same time women become socially isolated. The system of services for families with children and family friendly approach of businesses are not sufficiently supported by the social awareness of motherhood. Women on maternal leave have few opportunities of free time leisure and thus they are at a risk of **social isolation**. They lose their social contacts which leads to self-consciousness and if they lack the opportunity of purposeful activities, they are prone to **low self-esteem**. They face the risk of developing **socio-pathologic** syndromes, e.g. social phobia, susceptibility to addiction etc. After the maternal leave the problem is still acute, mothers often fail at

interviews, they are not wished by employers because a woman on maternal leave is not able to keep pace with the new information trends.

Within this socio-economic background the idea of Mother Centers gained popularity among Slovak mothers. Negative experience with staff approach in maternity wards and hospitals, solitude and isolation during the maternal leave, few accessible facilities and services for parents with little children, bad economic situation during maternal leaves, worries about the return to work, low self-esteem, employers' unwillingness to hire mothers with little children and unfavorable social atmosphere concerning motherhood (underestimation of the mother role and low position at the social ladder), these were the points that initiated mothers to set up Mother Centers. They needed to help each other, solve and change problematic spheres in the society.

The Union of Mother Centers (UMC) is a civic association, non-profit organization which associates and advocates for almost 100 local Mother Centers (MC) in the whole country.

Our task is to reach respect and acknowledgement of motherhood in our society and assist in the creation of supportive conditions for motherhood at the highest interest of the child and family. The UMC is an active member of the international Mother Centers networks **mine**.

≡ *"My children were three and five years old. My health condition was not very good and so my children did not go to the kindergarten. I wanted them to keep in touch with their peers. I felt like doing something about it. To find a place, where infants could draw, sing, do exercises and at the same time their mothers could relax, get to know new friends, gain new experience but above all they would feel fine. When my third child was born, I realised that a place like this had already existed. That was the mother centre."*

≡ Eva Poláková, MC Klbko, Bratislava

What do Slovak mother centers represent?

- A working community model of social prevention

The local MCs are meeting places for families with little children, unemployed women, retired people and other groups no matter what their race, social status or health condition are. They organize and participate in mutual events uniting the families and community – cultural, social, sports events, voluntary work, projects. Through participating in interesting activities, strengthening awareness of their own abilities, having the opportunity to do things MCs in Slovakia and abroad achieve unique results in prevention of socio-pathologic problems mostly of women on maternal leave.

- Flexible responses to issues concerning families with little children

MCs are rooms especially adapted and decorated by mothers and their husbands in order to fill a huge gap in the infrastructure for families with children. MCs – these are groups of enthusiasts – volunteers (again mostly mothers on maternal leave) who provide each other essential services – courses and trainings aimed at skills acquisition (e.g. languages, PC, handicraft, trainings related to an easier

comeback to professional life, child care etc.) Local MCs recruit professional experts whose free counseling, e.g. social, legal, psychological, medical, is very important for young families and otherwise quite rare – see appendix 2- MC model activities which are an example of a large number of activities performed in most MCs.

- Readiness and capacity to help to solve problems concerning public issues and activate public awareness

MCs became in their communities a kind of “avant-garde” and managed to awaken sleepy neighborhoods or little towns. Meeting the natural and essential needs of children and their parents they initiated arrangement, cleaning of their locality. Through their activities, events accessible for all interested they brought “excitement”. MC initiators are aware of the necessity to participate actively in public issues because they concern them. MCs can identify what should be improved in their neighborhood, they want to contribute to positive changes and their activities are inspiring. Through their parents also children are becoming more sensitive, keen on the needs of others and want to learn “how it works” in the society. Since MCs are open spaces, also the “neglected” groups – Roma families, retired people, the unemployed etc. can find here sense of purposeful integration.

- Capacity for social and professional integration of mothers on maternal leave

In our society they are almost exclusively woman who after the childbirth go on maternal leave. To enjoy and commit themselves to this wonderful role, favorable conditions are inevitable. Conditions, that would reduce the sense of isolation often leading to mental disorders; conditions that enable them to be good mothers and at the same time an equal member of society during and after maternal leave. MCs are mostly made up of women – mothers and these are places of their integration. Women mutually build the environment, learn from each other and help each other through activities. Time spent on maternal leave is thus not time of stagnation – professional or human – but to the contrary. Involvement in MC activities contributes to acquire and develop skills which strengthen not only their self-confidence but also integrity of families.

- Know-how on the effective utilization of resources in preventive family policy and parental upbringing which has been working abroad for a long time

The MC model was born in Germany in the 1970s as a scientific-sociologic concept from where it quickly spread into other countries mainly in Western Europe. At present about 800 MCs work all over the world. The UMC closely collaborates with the international MC net **mine**; extremely challenging is the cooperation with German MCs. Their cooperation with local authorities is very inspiring. It is based on the fact that **MCs are an element of “the government preventive policy”**. To create favorable conditions for healthy family life is the state more advantageous than exhaust funds on “damage restoration”.

2. Some history and present

≡ *“I found the idea of Mother Centers appealing from the moment I heard about it. Voluntary*
≡ *work in the Mother Center taught me a lot and I met many wonderful and enthusiastic*
≡ *people. People who found the courage to come out of their shells and do things for others.*
≡ *People who realized that “it’s better to switch on a little light than curse the dark”.*
≡ Elena Bakošová, UMC

The first Slovak MC was established in 1998 and the good idea started to spread with the speed of light. Many new centers were set up and we felt the need to unite, get to know each other and be better organized. The first step in this process was the conference “Help us in order we could help” held in Poprad in 2001 with the aim to promote the MC concept to authorities and businesses. A part of the conference was a happening in front of the building, a public performance – a show starring a clown and the minister of work, social affairs and family. The minister’s task was to maneuver a pram loaded with shopping through a rotating entrance door. The conference launched the mothers’ campaign “Let me enter with my child”. An example of MCs’ enormous agility, togetherness and enthusiasm was the creation of the campaign’s title, logo and poster. The campaign responded to a survey outcome on most frequent mothers’ difficulties. The survey was distributed through Slovak MCs. At that time the Union of Mother Centers was officially set up (2003). We came into first contacts with the ministry and looked for stakeholder among Parliament deputies. A lot of appointments and discussions were held, both formal and informal. The minister of work, social affairs and family attended the UMC beneficial concert in 2004 which was a huge achievement of lobbying activities and it opened the way to a better promotion of our interests and the first formal negotiation on the needs of our target group – mothers and families with little children. The political exchange of ministers meant to start at the ministry from the beginning which was achieved quite soon. On the International Women’s Day we managed to welcome the new minister at the big international event “Move the pram, move the world”. This event was widely covered by the mass media. There were launched the negotiations about the inclusion of MCs into the public funding system within the framework of social system. An important milestone in our mutual relationship was our press release during the process of discussing the modification and supplementation of acts on the parental benefit. The proposed draft act would discriminate mothers who in spite of their child care do a part-time job. Our proposals were taken into consideration and the law was passed. This meant a certain acknowledgement of the UMC legitimacy in matters of lobbying on behalf of families with little children and women – mothers. In 2006 the UMC built a solid basis for purposeful communication focused on achievement of our goals – we gathered a great number of data, opinions, stories, assessments. We already have and keep working out theoretical analyses, survey data, assessments and recommendations in the sphere of public policies. We proved we can influence public opinion, activate citizens, provide social and legal counseling, organize events, campaigns, petitions, we can lobby. Since the election and change of political power in Slovakia in autumn 2006 the legislative initiatives of our new government have been intensified. There appeared for us a new chance to enter these legislative processes, participate in creation of

draft acts, contribute our experience, and lobby on behalf of parents and primarily mothers.

In 2007 our government will modify and supplement 3 laws pertaining to parents on parental or maternal leave and the position of MCs in the Slovak social services system. Our effort at national advocacy level will be focused on the promotion through our own and public mass media so that the public opinion would support and strengthen the UMC's effort to achieve the proposed proceedings. Our effort will be focused on negotiations with the Slovak National Council's parliamentary clubs and sponsor committees representatives, persons in charge of a detailed discussion on draft acts, so that at these discussions, by the latest, we would achieve the acceptance of our proposals and their implementation into the acts. Our effort will be further focused on the presence of our UMC advocacy team representatives at the discussions on the draft act.

||| *"I will never forget my experience at the ministry. We arrived to consult the agreement on the project EQUAL. A lady in an office introduced us, 'these are the mothers...' to a manager who just scowled at us, overconfidently sat down and fired terms he believed only HE understood and we had no idea about their meaning. And when he finished, I self-confidently fired a number of questions and terms, he was taken aback not able to answer 90% of my questions. So we gained satisfaction. He should learn who 'these mothers are!'"*

||| Martina Adamkovičová, MC Mymamy, Prešov

3. General advocacy strategy and tools

||| *"The organization's power of advocacy is connected with the target group. In the case of the UMC our advocacy ability does not originate from the mere existence of mother centers but from the ability to meet the demands of a large group – approximately 150, 000 mothers with children aged 0 – 3 and in the larger framework all mothers and families in the society."*

||| Saskia Repčíková, UMC PR and lobby coordinator

The UMC advocacy strategy is based on the mutual coordination and **public relations** synergies, **lobbying** and **advocacy** (see *Glossary*) and the fact that separately they cannot efficiently work.

In the spirit of this strategy the lobbying at highest levels (ministries, parliament, the ZMOS – the Slovak Association of Towns and Villages) runs alongside with the lobbying at local level (local authorities, the VUC – higher territorial units) (see *below Chapter 4*).

A strategic decision within the framework of advocacy strategy was the creation of the PR coordinator post in 2005.

Our goal is to help to create the environment supporting family life, raising children, to minimize the impact of the mothers' and parents' unfavorable social and economic situation, raise knowledgeableness, make formal and informal parents' and children' training accessible, inform the public about current problems and their social impact, propose taking measures that might solve these problems and try to implement them where it is possible to put them into practice through legislative regulations.

We strive for legal and social acknowledgement of Mother Centers as institutions carrying out prevention and publicly beneficial activities and for their inclusion into the system funded from public local resources.

We simultaneously focus on **several target groups**:

- o mothers and parents (We know what we talk about, we know the problems and want to be at their solution.)
- o the mass media and through it the wide public (The problem is what is written about. If our problems are not publicly discussed, they would not exist for our society and they would not be solved.)
- o lawmakers (They have power, tools, administration and they are represented by concrete persons. A concrete person also means a personal opinion, point of view, attachment or misapprehension. If they comprehend and we gain their partiality, they help us put the changes into practice.)

Our tools

External

They are all direct and indirect means of both public and personal communication (**media, direct communication with authorities, personal meetings, participation in counseling and executive bodies**).

Letters

We dispatched countless number of official letters proposing collaboration in the process of draft acts discussion, directly concerning Mother Centers as institutions and the life of families and women. Each letter apart from concrete proposals (often in expert legal language worked out by a cooperating expert on law) contained arguments on our legitimacy, the right to express our opinion on the given issue and collaborate on the law modifications and present the interests of a large group of people. We also pointed out the number and activities of mother centers, their impact on communities they work with and also their size.

Personal meetings

We attended a lot of business and preparatory meetings, however, with no concrete results so far, but from the strategic point of view this process has been launched very successfully and in several months we may enjoy first attainments in the parliamentary law proceedings.

Motherhood ambassadors – our supporters, influential personalities, familiar with the issues of children, mothers and families and their status in our society, promoting the UMC – Iveta Radičová (the former minister of work, social affairs and family, expert in sociology, mother centers stakeholder for more than 2 years, at present a parliament deputy – in the opposition, in essential issues ready to submit a proposal), Silvia Gašparovičová (the first lady. The conference How do we want to raise our children was held under her auspices, after the conference's positive respond she accepted the role of the international MC ambassador and on her official trips abroad she lobbies the support of MCs in given countries and spreads their idea and mission), Viera Hanuláková (a division director at the Ministry of work, social affairs and family, MC stakeholder, dispenses the concept of MCs enclosure into the public funding system).

Communication through involved third persons – volunteers, helpful experts, close stakeholders (we have many mainly in other powerful NGOs who promote our activities and projects though their communication channels).

Involvement of experts in the UMC counseling committee (in our counseling committee, UMC counseling body, there are involved experts on law, NGO legislative and we close partnerships with other NGOs).

Efforts to achieve participation of UMC representatives in Parliament, government and ministries' counseling and executive bodies – the latest achievement is the invitation of UMC chairperson to the government committee for NGOs which is the Slovak government counseling body.

Campaigns

A. The campaign “Allow me to enter with my child”

The long-term goal of this campaign is to contribute to the children and family friendly society so that the consideration of their needs would be a part and commonplace of social and business thinking in Slovakia. Parents and children are at present still at the margin of the society's interest and during the child care they get more or less into social isolation. Many Slovak entrepreneurs do not take into consideration the needs of parents with little children. Barriers at institutions, offices, transport, badly organized service at health care and other centers are a part of everyday life.

The campaign *Let me enter with my child* is comprised of 2 independent projects according to different spheres:

- 1. Children friendly facilities** – looking up and awarding baby friendly facilities according to adopted criteria.
- 2. Children friendly local authorities** – the aim of this project is the collaboration with authorities in the field of pro family strategies and policies and the motivation to put them into practice. The UMC worked out the criteria proposal according to which an authority can be awarded. The criteria have been discussed with the Slovak Association of Towns and Villages (uniting 95% of Slovak mayors) and we together made up the mutually acceptable version of assessment criteria. We would also like to start the collaboration with the Ministry of work, social affairs and family because of their intention to give similar awards to the local authorities. At present we are in the process of negotiations on our collaboration, assessment strategy, tasks of individual partners and the project launching. UMC's active role in the project is to enhance the MCs credibility, improve their position with local authorities, improve their access to local funds and strengthen the importance of MCs' preventive activities.

B. The campaign *With Love into Life*

The goal of this campaign is a wide discussion the outcomes of which are to influence the conditions in which the Slovak mothers give birth. Many of them are not satisfied with the care and treatment in maternity wards before, during and after the delivery. They and their newborn babies missed a kind, affectionate approach in maternity wards, help and support both in labor and newborn care. Many of them feel they can pass on their personal experience to others.

C. The campaign *How do we want to raise our children?*

The long-term goal is the acknowledgement and acceptance of MCs as natural “universities of parenthood” in the system of prevention and parental self-help. There are some partial goals:

- o make the practical experience visible (connection of academic and practical life)
- o strengthening parental skills
- o balance traditional values and modern life demands
- o advocacy activities (family and children friendly society)
- o ways out how to combine family and professional life

Events with controlled media promotion

Events on the International Women's Day: *Move the pram, move the world, A Mile for mum*, public fund-raising campaign, beneficial concerts

Other external tools

Other efficient external tools in our advocacy are our own web site (www.materskecentra.sk) issuing our magazine *Materské centrá* (a UMC quarterly) and regular press conferences on projects and activities.

Internal

High quality database compilation

Unlike our internal information tools – the external ones provide less opportunities when, how and what will be publicized or utilized. Hence a high quality database is needed.

Following this reason we worked on our own surveys, e.g. a research study on mothers on the job market, another one on the MC impact on children and mothers is being made and its outcomes will be known in autumn 2007. We made or participated in several questionnaire surveys – *Parental skills internationally, Satisfaction of mothers on maternal leave, Health care of pre-school and schoolchildren, Range and kind of available services in Mother Centers etc.*

Lobbying communication – training of local MC persons lobbying (we organized several trainings for our members in order they can communicate with local authorities and other state institutions, we instructed them about the complex system of local authorities, higher territorial units and state administration, we organized 2 trainings on communication with the media as important elements in the general advocacy strategy).

Creation of electronic space for sharing and spreading information – independent email conference of all MCs (for this event in the collaboration with a big business company we made a project on technical equipment of MCs and internet connection) and **space for UMC members meetings (we organize regular personal meetings).**

4. Lobbying and advocacy at local level: - from Letters to Memorandum

≡ *“Space – one of the most frequently uttered words in Mother Centers: we have a new space; we have none; we are going to move to a new space; we have just lost our space... How big should our space be to survive? For us, people, to survive... possibly not big. And for the Mother Centers to survive?*

≡ Katarína Griffin, MC Srdiečko, Trenčín

It is more than natural that the first steps of women establishing a mother center lead to the city or local council. They hope to find help and support at the beginning but

above all to find a favorable room. The outcome of these first discussions, interest to listen to each other and to find together solutions is very important because it influences further relationships and activities in the partnership of the Mother Center and the local authority.

It was obvious at the beginning of the UMC that our attention will be paid to the collaboration of the UMC and the ZMOS - the Slovak Association of Towns and Villages because the establishment and activities of a MC is very dependent on the local authority's approach and support. The first target activity organized by the UMC for the member center (and it is still done), was a supportive **lobbying** at the local authorities carried out by means of **letter to mayors** (*see a copy in the appendix*). The most frequently asked help is the assistance with getting appropriate rooms, reducing the rent or energy bills or other financial and non-financial support. In three years we have dispatched 28 letters to local authorities; the successfulness of this kind of help is about 70%, we helped 16 MCs to get their rooms or reduce the rent or energy fees.

||| *A lobby letter addressed to the mayor and local deputies helped us a lot, I believe. They seemed to be happy that in our village someone launched an initiative but after reading your letter and learning where and how much other local authorities contribute to MCs, we could see that:*

- ||| *1. They are proud that there would be a mother center at Košecké Podhradie.*
 - ||| *2. They feel they are the good ones who mercifully GAVE us an unused room for a symbolic rent of ONE CROWN.*
 - ||| *3. Also our village will be positively mentioned in lobby letters.*
- ||| *So we have a mini room, the rent and energy are for one crown, in the first year we got a contribution for establishing and partial furnishing our mother center.*
- ||| *Saša Tomanová, MC Stromček, Košecké Podhradie*

The mini conference with the title *How to build good relationship with local authorities* (held in 2005) and attended by Michal Sykora, chairman of the Slovak Association of Towns and Villages, helped to develop these relationships. The mini conference was held in the atmosphere of an open discussion and effort to find answers in the field of relationships between MCs and local authorities but mainly the UMC and the ZMOS - the Slovak Association of Towns and Villages. MC representatives from all parts of Slovakia presented their activities, talked about their experience on the collaboration with the local authorities providing conditions for running of MCs and expressed their interest in the collaboration at projects on training and social issues, making and fulfilling plans of economic and social development of the towns and also the interest in the participation in the local committees.

Michal Sykora, chairman of the ZMOS - the Slovak Association of Towns and Villages, expressed his readiness to cooperate with the UMC at several levels. He offered the opportunity to present the UMC activities at their board meetings and Assembly and through contributions to local press. He also offered help of their representatives at communication between MC and local authority representatives and proposed to compile a mutual plan of activities to present the UMC at the association. The mini conference outcomes became the key material at officiating the relationship between the UMC and the association and launched their systematic

collaboration. After a year of intense communication and looking for solutions there was ceremonially signed the **Memorandum of collaboration between the ZMOS and the UMC** (see appendix).

It is more than symbolic that this memorandum was signed during the conference *How do we want to raise our children?* organized by the UMC and the international network on November 17th – 19th, 2006 in Bratislava. The conference was attended by over 200 participants from 21 countries of 3 continents.

The memorandum was released in the Municipal newspaper (a weekly of towns and villages), at present it can be found in the internal zone of MCs and also in the section Collaborating institutions (professional associations at local authorities). The memorandum is available for all MC members and so they now keep a new communication tool. Its completion had a very positive response not only in Slovakia but also abroad. The memorandum means a new stage of collaboration between the UMC and the ZMOS and also MCs and local authorities at level of a mutual partnership.

Since the year 2006 was the year of the election of local authorities' representatives and the following creation of municipal and local administration, the MC representatives had the first historical opportunity to run for the posts of deputies or committee members. Our candidates might have attended the training *Mothers and the local policy* organized by the UMC in June 2006. Due to this initiative the MCs have their deputies in many Slovak towns and villages. Thus they can put into effect the Memorandum of collaboration, participate in the execution of public issues and assert themselves in the local policy. Unfortunately, we have also information on places, where in spite of a sincere interest and professional competence, some MC representatives were not accepted as committee members.

≡ *"Should they push you out through the door, return through the window."*
≡ Mária Kohútiarová, MC Bambuľkovo

But still there are more towns (and also villages) in Slovakia which realized the advantages of the partnership with MCs mainly in the social and cultural sphere. Due to subsidies (project funding) but also non-financial support (reducing the rent, reimbursing energy bills, lending furnishing, creating a job for the MC coordinator, doing mutual activities) the authorities through MCs supported in their towns and villages a number of initiatives aimed at the target group – families with children. The Memorandum of collaboration between the ZMOS and the UMC opened the door to new communication and cooperation. One of new activities will be the campaign *Children and family friendly local authorities* (see above).

≡ *The UMC submitted the town of Levice their application to issue their contribution in the weekly Municipal newspaper. I would like to ask you for a brief description of a mother center and their activities since the establishment. We are familiar with some of them but we suppose there are many more, maybe smaller but for mothers and children very important and useful. In the conclusion let me express my gratification and thank over the mother center Medulienka which achieved a high recognition with the UMC. I will with pleasure contribute a story into the Municipal newspaper about your center, their activities and the good thing it serves to.*
≡ Ing. Štefan Mišák, mayor of Levice

Advocacy at local level requires hard work, persistence and patience of MC initiators. It is due to frequent changes in the local legislative which determines individual fund spending of NGOs. All supportive activities of institutions at this level stand in for the state policy. They are called the Higher Territorial Units. In Slovakia there are 8 – one in each district. The main task of these executive units is to meet the demands of local communities and provide funding, counseling including legal counseling in all activities legally assigned to state institutions but also supply practical and creative projects of towns and villages.

If we want to characterize the VUC (Higher territorial unit) and MCs collaboration we have to consider our practical experience, reported information and outcomes. We all share them in our net. We learn to understand administrative work of clerks who execute segments of legal activities and we try to persuade them about practical steps which may be hard to fit to their charts, standards and long-term practiced cycles. Our arguments are the children's joy over experienced events, healthy life style in the family, partners' understanding which nowadays are so rare even in a core family. We teach our administrative to work and not only order. Results of our centers demonstrate the applicability of laws and help us identify the needs of a healthy but at present also threatened family. All these little steps gradually, quietly mobilize civic initiative and encourage mothers to struggle for a better parental life. Our access to budgets and exhaustion of accessible funds also belong to our little successes. We have achieved respect through lobbying and we respond to processes as partners. We feel ready and able to guarantee the expected result.

5. Examples of positive practice

- o **The UMC supportive lobbying** at local authorities (*see the Letter in the Appendix*)– letters on behalf of the UMC are sent to local authorities. They inform on helpful authorities and their concrete help to MCs.
- o **The memorandum of collaboration** between the UMC and the ZMOS (*the text of the memorandum see in the appendix*)
- o **lobbying** initiatives in Parliament and at the ministry – thank to our supportive opinion – **press release** – they passed the law enabling parents on parental leaves to make money and at the same time get the parental benefit
- o **promotion** of mothers' and parents' issues on a web site, collaboration with the media. We have compiled a detailed database of the media and their contacts. We regularly provide them information and press releases. We cooperate with the national press agency SITA. The UMC nominated SITA for excellent collaboration and information release for award ViaBona and it was given the Honorary award for media contribution in non-profit sector. In the national parents' magazine *Mama a ja /Mum and Me* we have our own column on the UMC and MCs activities.
- o **organization of big events** for wide public on the International Women's Day – a MC concert, Guinness' Book record, *A Mile for my mum* (this year more than 5, 000 parents in 23 Slovak towns)
- o **a research study** *Women on the job market* – within the project *We perceive life differently and therefore we can achieve more* (supported by EQUAL)
- o **the campaign and conference** *How do we want to raise our children?* (more than

30, 000 parents from 24 countries joined the discussion). The representatives of the Ministry of work, social affairs and family accepted our invitation and since then we have been involved in legislative processes

- o **in the discussion process of draft acts** on social issues we lobby for MCs enclosure into the social service system which would create conditions for their sustainability due to the opportunity to gain funds from the budgets of local authorities and higher territorial units
- o **submitting a Collective proposal on the Social Law modification** which in a legal form proposes such modifications of the Social Law that introduce and reconcile alternative forms of jobs and enable a better balance of family and professional life – teleworking; a shared job; flexible work - claim for time off in compensation for overtime work for parents with children up to the age of 15 in the duration up to 3 months mostly during the school holidays; ban the term “holiday” when the parent is off work due to child care. The long-term collaboration with the media proved to be very fruitful also during the discussion process on the Social Law modification. During a very short proposal process (10 work days) we managed to write a relevant collective proposal and in 3 days to collect 900 signatures including eminent personalities from NGOs.

6. Glossary:

Communication –*The task of the institution’s communication is to persuade the involved parties about the purposefulness, usefulness, ability to meet the demands of the society in which the institution works. The essential attributes are: their clear vision, strictly maintained mission, rigorously protected mark embodying both individuality and diversity but also integration and link of all communication activities.*

Public relations – *are a part of communication aimed at utilization of information for creation of positive public opinion on the institution.*

*The term public relations evoke in most people press release, newspaper stories or TV broadcast. But public relations stand for more than mere media outputs. They involve research, counseling, planning, communication and feedback. They require fairness, credibility, openness, willingness and “charisma”. To build them takes a long time. Good communication and building good partnership with involved parties are the preconditions for **advocacy** development, e.g. defense of a group’s interests for the welfare of which the institution works. It is connected with lobbying and rights protection, influencing or direct participation in execution, efforts to improve the life conditions of a certain target group and to achieve effective changes, e.g. creation and influence on various public policies, rules and regulations.*

Public advocacy in the effort to achieve the goals uses a combination of several tools – from theoretical analysis, researches, assessments and recommendations in the field of public policies, efforts to influence public opinion, mobilization of citizens, providing legal counseling to activities, campaigns, petitions or lobbying.

Legitimate advocacy is assigned by a target group and their trust which is impossible to gain without previous communication and building good relations.

Lobbying *is a tool for implementation of concrete provisions focused on solving problems. The goal is to influence legislative and other decisions. Diversity of advocacy and lobbying lies in the target group, goals, strategies, processes and result assessment.*

7. Appendix

Lobby letter – a sample

Municipality... (address)

Re: request

Dear Mayor,

I wish to approach you on behalf of the Union of Mother Centers which at present provides an umbrella for over 100 mother centers in all parts Slovakia and their activities.

Also your town can boast of one active **mother center FRAŠTÁČIK** which has been performing activities since 2006.

I believe you are familiar with a lot of activities initiated by this center. I would like to remind you that the MC FRAŠTÁČIK has a high capacity to work with a specific group – mothers with children and makes effort to further develop and raise the quality of activities in accordance with the town's plans in this region.

Nevertheless, the non-profit character of mother centers is dependent on understanding and help of those who make decisions. To have appropriate space for performance of publicly beneficial activities is an essential precondition for a mother center.

At the moment the MC FRAŠTÁČIK possesses no room. The space you offered requires a massive investment and that is why the mother center could not accept your offer.

For this reason we would appreciate if you could meet our request and allocate an appropriate room with a symbolic rent and thus enable the performance of their activities. We hope that your understanding will solve the situation.

Your helpful approach and support of MC FRAŠTÁČIK activities will set a model for local authorities in Slovakia and will demonstrate a real fulfillment of the **Memorandum of cooperation between the ZMOS and the UMC**, signed in November 2006. The full text of this memorandum is attached.

We believe that MC activities performed in this room will benefit not only the young families in Hlohovec but also the whole town.

With best regards,

RNDR. Eva Fiedlerova
the UMC chair

Agreement on cooperation

between

Association of Municipalities of Slovak Towns and Villages /ZMOS/

Bezrucova 9

811 09 Bratislava

Slovakia

On behalf of chair Michal Sykora

and

Union of Mother Centers /UMC/

Baštova 5

811 03 Bratislava

Slovakia

On behalf of chair Eva Fiedlerova

Article I.

The goal of this agreement is to provide and improve conditions for real support of motherhood in our society, cooperate in providing complex support to mothers according to legal, social and political laws within legal, material and economical conditions of towns and villages.

The purpose of the agreement is to create a background for Mother Centers through the support of material, human and financial resources for activities focused on social prevention, and providing services for women – mothers, small children and families with small children.

The agreement is signed for the purpose to achieve a closer cooperation between municipalities of towns and villages, members of the Association of Municipalities of Slovak Towns and Villages (ZMOS) and Mother Centers, members of the Union of Mother Centers, at the local level.

Article II.

Association of Municipalities of Slovak Towns and Villages will:

- influence their members to create material support for needs of Mother Centers within their capacities,
- influence local authorities to involve Mother Centers as partners in preparation and implementation of plans of industrial and social development of cities and villages especially in social and cultural field,
- influence municipalities to create conditions for the support of establishment and existence of Mother Centers in the most effective way
- influence their members to support functioning of Mother Centers in the social field,

- advise their members to support population policy of towns and villages (e.g. contribution to increase of childbirth),
- ZMOS will be supporting inclusion of Mother Centers to the system of social services within the framework of a new law in social services

Article III.

Union of Mother Centers will:

- cooperate closer through their members with ZMOS member towns and villages,
- motivate members of Mother Centers to delegate their representatives to professional commissions of municipalities for the purpose of participation on issues of public management,
- provide participation in organizing cultural and social events in ZMOS member towns and villages through individual Mother Centers,
- create conditions for mutual cooperation on projects in social and educational areas.

Article IV.

- any changes, adjustments, and termination of the agreement can be made only by written form with the approval of both agreement parties,
- the agreement is signed for an indefinite period,
- the agreement is effective from the day of signing by representatives of agreement parties,
- the agreement is an open document and will be evaluated annually according to possibilities,
- the agreement is made in four originals, each of the agreement parties will receive two copies.

Bratislava, November 9th , 2006

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Eva Fiedlerova
Union of Mother Centers chair

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Michal Sykora
ZMOS chair