

Grundtvig Partnership Newsletter no 10, January 2014

Highlights of the discussion on Topic 3 -Crisis- in Ankara

The feelings of shame guilt and self-blaming that surround the issue make it difficult to address it, regardless of the country or culture. We discovered that being too direct (putting out posters, organising meetings) scares people away. **A more informal way to address the issue** (while drinking tea, in breast-feeding and other groups, in the second hand shop) worked well.

If an atmosphere of trust is created, taboos can be broken and people speak up.

The women in Gaziantep for instance were not shy to discuss the issue of domestic violence, they addressed and discuss the issue and accept help. Just sharing gives confidence, and the atmosphere of the public living room is key in that sharing. The Mother Center culture allows us to speak about things we normally do not speak about.

We noticed that in our societies violence "as an educational instrument" is making a worrisome come back. Many cultures give permission to beating as punishment. Still today many victims of violence believe "that it is their own fault". To break the chain of things happening again in next generations we need to speak up and make people aware of consequences. Violence is never excusable as resulting from a bad childhood.

What we can do in the Mother Centers is before all, create that trusting atmosphere in which people dare to speak up. We can raise awareness and provide access to practical information and professional help, without intending to substitute the support professionals can provide. We do not support "as a teacher" but talk from friend to friend. As such we can be the support base to build up a new life. Another point is that we can support on the practical level, like going shopping for the woman in trouble. Main point everywhere is the moral support that we can provide as friends in the Mother Center.

Just being in the public living room can be like a kind of family education. In one Center there is a woman who is the 'door-opener'. She has a low educational level, which makes it easy to approach her: she is not intimidating at all. Such a low threshold and an **unconditional acceptance is important if your self esteem is broken and you feel guilt and shame.**

Another characteristic of the public living room is the full cycle of give & take. Victims soon enough find the encouragement in the Mother Center to do some practical work and they turn into the most wonderful support people. It is these open arms and concrete practical support that people look for when they come to the Mother Center.

Professionals can give support, but **only when you feel ownership** over the tools handed to you, they work. That is the skill you learn in a good Mother Center, because there you are given responsibility, a task to do. That turns you from receiving to giving, builds up respect and the self-confidence needed to turn from victim to a support person strengthened by the wisdom of life.

During discussions we realised that we already do provide a lot of the required support. Still, the discussions do normally not go very deep. Through the work on this topic this has changed, there is now more awareness and more depth. By discussion the topic first in a safe setting with trusted discussion leaders in a small group, we made important progress. Now the issue has changed the atmosphere also in the larger Mother Center setting.

Planning the side effects well

Nobody comes to a Mother Center to discuss problems, to be educated, to be empowered or to have their awareness raised. Not at all. You come there because there are interesting activities, it is cheap, there is coffee, there is childcare and you can meet women like yourself.

A pitfall for starting Mother Centers is that they focus too much on the activities and forget that these are merely a means to an end. Creating a group, a safe atmosphere, starting a bonding process, may be a side effect for the visitors, it is a crucial side effect that should be a central concern for the key organisers. And the good news is: it can be planned if as organisers you are aware that this "side effect" is the key to the magic, the secret of a good center.

There must be a good balance between the primary offer of activities and the secondary effect in terms of process. The magic happens in the open space, the non programmed interactions, before or after activities in the public living room.

Differences in setting and communication with the outside world

We had an interesting discussion after a question of Professor Bertran about a typology for Mother Centers. After all it makes quite a difference for the access you have to support, if you operate in a small village or a city, if there are many men active in the center or just women, if it large or small, old or new, funded or not.

By definition a typology of Mother Centers is impossible because it is all about **process**. And we found out during our exchange that these processes are really very similar. This even if there can be hardly a larger difference in conditions than between, say, a village in eastern Slovakia and the urban environment of Gaziantep, where budgets dropped and problems surged with the massive influx of Syrian refugees.

In Stuttgart there was a classification between centers A, B and C at some point. It was a differentiation to communicate with the authorities. This was especially because the centers were getting money and the A B C determined what would fit, in order to avoid that the authorities would request an A-performance in return for a B- or even a C-budget.

Such ways of working can be of interest to connect to the structured way of the outside world. While looking at such systems it is of course important not to become bookkeepers and get lost in it. Such approaches can be explored further in our topic "tools and methods" as well as in "Partnerships". Does it work, can it be useful, for what purpose, does it fit to us?

Arranging practical matters, adjusting the program

This topic "tools and methods" will be the only subject that we look at twice. It is hosted by the Bavarians and by the Slovaks. The Slovak UMC will put a special emphasis on their "Academies of Practical Parenthood" which they developed after the discussion campaign "How do we want to raise our children?". This will be all the way at the end of the partnership project.

During the Ankara meeting we decided that it will be logical to start the second year of the partnership also with "tools and methods" in order to extract the lessons from the first year and see how they can be systemised and used by others. The resulting change in program is in the planning in the dropbox. On the next pages you will find a recapitulation of agreements on the upcoming mobilities as well as the planning till the end of 2014.