

BEST PRACTICES

from

MOTHER CENTRES

A collection of practical activities to improve parenting skills

Grassroots women in mother and family centres addressed the need for informal education of parents and caregivers to improve parental skills and ultimately become a better parent who is daily shaping children and changing the world for the better. This handbook is a collection of innovative programmes and methods which are successful in their local communities and has potential to be used in other countries. Parental programmes and courses in mother and family centres can amplify the common mission of partnership.

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Project

Better parents can change the for the better

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Aurora Mother Center
Belgrade, Serbia

A project that has changed our world.

Únia materských centier Slovakia was a coordinator of Erasmus+ project Better parents can change the world for the better. Partners created a strategic partnership of organizations focused on parental education. The core of the project was training of mother and family centres leaders from Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Bosna and Herzegovina and Serbia, which was done in partners' centres with their experts who passed their know-how and shared a sample workshop targeting improving parental skills. Participants of training sessions focused on working with all caregivers for example parents, grandparents, single parents, parents from socially disadvantaged backgrounds or parents of disabled children. These sessions were primarily offered for exchange of knowledge and practical skills, inspiration, sharing and demonstration of good practice in their natural environment. We have discussed the reasons why they have decided for a given type of education, what approach they have, what procedures they use, what methods have proven to them, where are the problems related to relevant type of parents and communities from national and cultural point of view. Parent education is an important part of partners' activities and there is a call for courses to gain better parental competencies. At the same time, mother centres are able to influence parents and caregivers to change their attitude to the upbringing and education of their children.

In 2020, our society and way of life has changed. We lived our life filled with joys, worries, stress and everything flowed so confidently. Suddenly, a tiny virus entered our lives and turned our whole world upside down. We had to adapt quickly and react immediately to changes. All parents and caregivers had a heavy burden on their shoulders to maintain caring for family members in the rapidly changing conditions. It was as if we were still expected to keep the family together, to calm down the children, to raise them with love, to remain parents and at the same time in addition, we also became teachers, psychologists, childminders, animator, mentors, etc. We had to cope with this new situation to preserve at least a bit of security in our lives, although we have lost it in ourselves.

On the other hand despite social distancing and isolating, we could find hidden abilities within ourselves and become better parents and show the children how to live and improve the lives around us even though we have limited options. We have somehow learned to accept that uncertainty and respond flexibly to changes, but not to lose sight of our goal. We have learned to stick together through thick and thin, to help and give advice to each other, to listen and support each other in challenged conditions. This ability of ours escalated even more in 2022 when the war in Ukraine began. This tragic event forced people to find deeply hidden compassion, and again, it was mother leaders and their communities, who suppressed their own fear and helplessness and showed the way out of despair with practical solutions and networking. Our children, babies, toddlers, teenagers or young adults, saw all this, brought us hope, made us laugh through tears and simply made us better people for them and for us. And above all this extraordinary situation made us to overcome everything and change the world for the better. We believe that this is what they will remember from these years of changes and tragedies that as parents they were able to live, care about others and manage life to our best abilities.

This collection of good practice is evidence of how grassroots communities can mobilize, identify current needs and find together quality solutions for parents' current difficulties. All partners successfully managed the travel restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, communication in the online space, and we communicated and distributed information clearly. Thanks to the time extension of the project, we implemented all activities in person, which strengthened personal and professional relationships.

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ACTIVITIES WITH CHILDREN

for leaders of Mother/Family centres and parents in home environment

Leading organization: Union of Mother Centres (Slovakia)

We can occupy our kids in two ways. We can put them in an overstimulated environment, let them play by themselves and make a mess they are unable to clean up by themselves afterwards. Then we get a moment of "peace" and can attend to other duties. Or there is a second option. We think and offer the child an activity we came up with that will help them develop and more importantly it will interest and entertain them. The difference between these two children's activities is that, while in the first case we are guaranteed to be cleaning up together at the end, with the second option we can be certain we will keep the child interested for a longer time, while they are purposefully developing a certain skill or area and can even clean up after themselves over time. Happily even.

How to achieve this? The answer is simple. It is mainly necessary to observe. Observe what the children like, what interests them, what they do repeatedly - despite prohibitions or lack of time, they return to the same activities. This is the hardest part. If you find that interest, you've won, because then it's simple. The child has shown you what they like, what they want to do, and that is the best premise they will learn the given skill well.

Maria Montessori developed the whole method this way...but more about it maybe another time. Let's take a look at some areas of the activities.

SENSES - the child develops in a sensory-motor way. If the child doesn't have enough movement, the brain is not developing sufficiently, the progress is hindered.

- The children are trying out their whole-body perception of their surroundings as well as themselves
- They improve their fine motor skills
- They learn to coordinate their movements
- They gradually train their abilities to concentrate
- They acquire skills such as pouring, moving, inserting, tucking, opening, attaching, sorting, matching...
- They train their senses
- They listen/activate the auditory centre, learn to work with the rhythm of words, nursery rhymes, songs, declamation (recitation), algorithms...
- They gain experiences in the field of sensorimotor perception, which benefits the strengthening of acquired knowledge



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WRITING IN SEMOLINA



TWEEZER GRIP



WHOLE-BODY PERCEPTION



EYESIGHT EXERCISES



GETTING TO KNOW YOUR BODY



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TOUCH



SMELL



HEARING



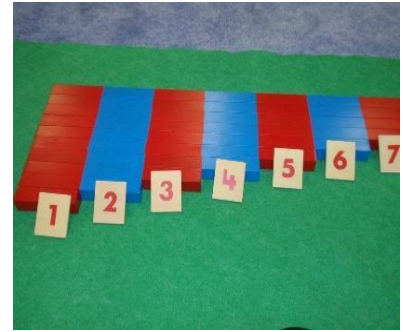
Activities of practical life - basically everyday activity

- self-service habits
- hygienic habits (correct hand washing, self-care, taking care of your room, cleaning shoes)
- plant care - watering, planting
- housework – washing dishes, setting the table, working with furniture (chairs), folding
- embroidering, mastering the secret of zippers, buttons, laces
- mastering how to peel and cut an egg, spread butter on bread, cut cheese into cubes
- clean up after yourself,
- self-knowledge - geography of the body



Language and communication

- development of the auditory centre and the centre of balance
- mathematic, geometry, the possibilities of colouring shapes,
- development of mathematical and logical thinking, working with geometric shapes and solids,
- development of hand to prepare for writing
- training the three-period lesson
- activating the speech centre and broadening the vocabulary
- assigning words to pictures
- acquiring knowledge of writing by touch, vocabulary development
- drawing and writing



Colours, colours, colours

Get to know the colours, experience each colour separately with all your senses, by physical activity, with clothing, with snacks, with tools in the colour, all visitors are dressed in the same colour.



By using the three-period method, by mixing colours, shading and experimenting with the use of colours etc. The child strengthens the experience and, thanks to their muscle, taste, sight, smell and hearing memory, they can supplement a wide range of knowledge about colours.

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The space

Thanks to the direct experience of the activities and by playing, the child will be enriched with knowledge that they will be able to follow up on at school. At the same time, they will be able to perceive the world beyond their body and be able to see and feel things globally.

- Learning about the universe, planets, stars and galaxies
- Creation of the earth and the life on it
- Geography, living and non-living nature, plants and animals, human body
- Mainland and water, maps, countries, continents...

Galaxies



Star constellations



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Young scientists

The child is also directly participating in finding and preparing the tools, which supports their self-esteem and at the same time helps anchor the acquired knowledge in muscle memory. The child will also be able to follow up on the knowledge and skills gained through the game at school and in life and through science, technology, brain-teasers, physical laws and their use, magnetism, optics, PH factors, static electricity, etc.

Change of states of elements



How to inflate a rubber glove? It's easy with a little help of baking soda and vinegar.



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Static electricity



Reflection – mirroring



Trust your children, let them help prepare & come up with activities and they will surprise you 😊
Katarína Jarinová, MC Nezábudka in Žilina, Slovakia

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Reading literacy, children's reading in early childhood

One of the tools how to spend time with children meaningfully and positively develop reading literacy in early childhood is through BOOKS and READING. In today's era overfed with information it is necessary to find reliable information about children's books and reading and not use the child's disinterest in books as an excuse.



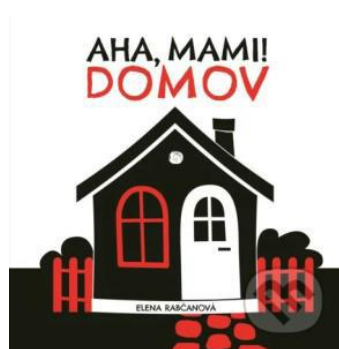
Books are also part of the prepared environment described by Maria Montessori. If they are not part of everyday activities, it is difficult for the child to develop a relationship with them. Therefore, most of the influence is in the hands of parents, educators, grandparents, but also mother and family centres, nurseries, etc.

"Children's books in individual periods" 0-1 YEAR

You're probably thinking, what would a baby do with a children's book when they are just starting to get to know the world they were born to. But when we talk about books, we all know very well they include illustrations and that is exactly what the childish soul of such a little one desires. In this period, it is best to follow our inner feeling, which will certainly direct us in the right direction; we just have to listen to it.

During this period, there is no need to overstimulate the child at all. We only need to make everyday moments more pleasant for them, in addition to singing, poems, and babbling also with pretty pictures from fairy-tale books, from which, after all, you can also take those poems or songs. From the beginning, the child likes to look at the black-and-white pictures of fairy-tale books, of which there are already quite a few on our market. For example:

Black and white books: [E.Rabčanová](#)



Later, you can add colourful picture books, which you probably can remember from your childhood, because book *Môj macík* still has no competition in this regard. *Môj macík* from M. R. Martáková [Kniha Môj macík](#)

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The book Ham-Ham (which also became the book of the year in its category in 2021) can be an excellent helper with the first snacks, and with the first words, the Kubko edition, which can accompany you up to the child's 5th birthday.

[Kniha Ham-Ham](#)

[Edície Kubko sa učí](#)

1-3 YEARS

This is the period of the first words, the first steps, discovering and getting independent for the first time, the first potty habits and simply a million first time things where a children's book can accompany you every step of the way. It doesn't have to be just a bedtime story, even if it is a beautiful ritual. But put away your inhibitions and try reading with your children in the morning after waking up, or after breakfast, before lunch, even outside on the playground... it will free you and prepare the best possible development for the child. Here it often happens that a child learns to like one type of book that they want to read about a million times, but don't worry, it's completely normal and the day will come when they will replace it and your hair will no longer stand on end at the thought of a book that you can recite even at midnight.

The variability of books for this age category is huge and you have to follow what the child likes, they can even choose a book themselves. Of course, it is important that YOU also have a positive attitude towards the book. In this period, you can also help yourself with "problem stages" and reach for books that will make it easier for you to handle them.

For example:

Problem with speech development: [Kubko sa učí rozprávať](#)

Movement problem: [Od hlavy po päty](#)

Eating problem: [Ham-ham](#)

Sleeping problem: [Nina ide spinkať](#)

External motivation influencing the child is also helpful in this age, for example when they see you reading (at home), when you read together in the mother center, when you visit a children's library for the first time, when the child receives a book as a gift, when you give them chance to pick a book in a bookstore for the first time.

By reading with your child you are giving them much more:

- you give them tenderness and experience the present moment- you are building relationship with each other
- the child expands their vocabulary and it's okay even if they can't understand all of the words, they will remember them later on when they need them
- the child is building their imagination
- child develops the intellectual, sensory and already mentioned emotional area

A FEW BASIC TIPS FOR QUALITY READING:

1. Compliance with the rules, helping tool: [IKONA](#)
2. The right choice of children's books: [Pomôcka - milníky malého čitateľa](#)
3. Proper storage of children's books: [tip na policu na knihu](#),
4. Create your own reader's card (where you stamp fingers, draw a picture...)
5. Make up your own stories, poems together
6. Complement the reading with creating or activities (creating a bookmark...)
7. Read often (not just before bed), it doesn't have to be a long read
8. Always pack a book with you (in the carriage, in the car, on a trip...)
9. Talk about books (remember when Kubko... just like you now)

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Here are some tips how we in the Sovička Mother's Center develop children's reading:

1. A children's library, which is full of children's books labeled by age and stored front to front. Books can be read in the center, but also borrowed to take home - with a reader's card.



2. Involvement in projects and regular addition of new books, following reader portals and news.
<https://citajmesispolu.sk/>
<https://krajinacitatelov.sk/>
<https://www.pampuch.sk/>
3. Organizing reading gatherings, workshops
4. Participation in the summer program "Prečítané leto", which is organized annually by the Land of Readers with the Martinus bookstore. Creating a "PLACE" for reading.
5. Promotion and advice on the selection of books during regular days in the center, as well as on B, IG.



An article about reading - my passion: <https://www.materskecentra.sk/2022/07/20/sia-uci-deti-citat/> This is the best start to children's reading in your mother centre too :-)

"Children are made readers on the laps of their parents" by Emilie Buchwald

Silvia Mokrišová, Mother centre Sovička, Sečovce

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School of civic life in mother centres for leaders of Mother/Family centres

Leading organization: Network for Family, z.s. (Czech Republic)

NETWORK FOR FAMILY, Z. S.

Network for Family, z. s. is an umbrella non-profit organisation for mother, family and community centers in the Czech Republic. For more than 20 years we have been strengthening the value of families in society, in mother centres and on the labour market. We motivate an active involvement in the local communities, promote the importance of a parental role in society, including equal opportunities for all, and support balancing of work and family. We currently have over 250 members whose work has a direct positive impact on 70,000 families.

www.sitprorodinu.cz, www.facebook.com/sit.pro.rodinu



Mgr. Irena Přibyllová, Director of the Network for Family, z.s.



Bc. Hana Šustrová, regional coordinator in the South Bohemia and Pilsen regions

Coordinator of the platform of municipal female politicians

MOTHER CENTRES AS A PHENOMENON OF A CIVIC SOCIETY

Civic Society

The term "civic society" dates back to the 18th century and is a very broad term. One definition refers to civic society as a collection of non-governmental organisations and institutions that express the interests and will of citizens. What is certain, however, is that without active citizens, no civic society would appear. Civic society is therefore made up of citizens who voluntarily participate in the governance of public affairs. They can do so in many ways, for example by serving in non-profit organisations, but also by creating political pressure on important social issues.

By being independent of state power and its structures, civic society can also serve as a certain safeguard for the democratic functioning of the state. This is especially so when state power is too expansive and seeks to control the lives of citizens.

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School of civic life in mother, family and community centres

The mother centres are usually founded by women - mothers, who go through the so-called school of civic life when establishing them. Most of them are women on maternity or parental leave, whose original profession is quite different from that of a manager of a NGO. All of them have first to "go through" the legislative obligations and at the same time through a number of bureaucratic processes when establishing a non-profit organisation. When looking for a suitable place, they cannot avoid approaching the municipality, which should become an important partner in the future.

Thanks to their initiative, founders and managers of non-profit organisations often peek "under the hood" of what is going on in the community and become active and participate in the public affairs. They are therefore a typical example of active cooperation between the non-profit sector and the public administration.

Connecting these women with the municipal leadership is often the first step towards their active involvement in municipal politics. They have then no choice but to learn step by step the various participatory methods.

Methods of participatory democracy

The methods of participatory democracy are primarily based on the active involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. We choose those that we have tried and tested in the Network for Family and that probably fit the best to the conditions and possibilities of local non-profit organisations, which are the mother, parent, family and community centres.

The choice of method always depends on the topic you are addressing, the number of people interested in getting involved, and the time you want to devote to the problem. Methods can be combined as needed.

Let us now take a brief look at some of the participatory methods:

Open Day

The Open Day is one of the informal events for the general public, where visitors have the opportunity to learn about the activities of the organisation and the topics we want to address and also get more information about it. It is also a good opportunity to collect suggestions on the topics and to establish personal contact with important people who are relevant to the topic.

Round Table

The main aim of the round table is to allow different opinions on the topic to be heard. A roundtable can serve to find solutions or a plan for further action within a broader spectrum of opinions. Roundtable discussions are one of the most common tools for partnership and transparent cooperation, which is an important condition for gaining respect from partners at local, regional and national level. The symbolism of the round table represents the equality of all participants and helps to break down imaginary barriers. The roundtable should have an independent moderator.

Focus group

A focus group is a planned structured discussion of people who have something to say about the topic under discussion. It should be led by an experienced facilitator and aims to gather information about the preferences and values of the people involved in the topic.

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Panel of experts

This method focuses on collecting, summarizing and consolidating of information and data, which is then summarized in the form of a written output. This includes a set of recommendations for solving the problem under study and sub-recommendations. The method is suitable for solving complex problems requiring knowledge from different disciplines, so the general public is not the target group in this case.

Civil Jury

This is usually a one-off event through which members of the public take a common position on the issue or a project. It is a method of obtaining the public's views on a narrowly defined topic. In this method it is very important to produce an output which includes all the mentioned opinions and proposed solutions.

World café

The aim of this method is not only to share experiences and opinions, but also to seek answers to predefined questions. The method is more about exchanging views and broadening perspectives on a given topic. It is therefore not always necessary to reach clear conclusions.

Interactive exhibition

The aim of the interactive exhibition is to provide the public with comprehensible, illustrative and comprehensive information and at the same time to obtain feedback or opinions on the topic.

Working Group

A working group is one of the basic methods of involving the public, including experts, in co-decision on a given topic. The group usually serves as an advisory body to the public authority with decision-making powers. The objective of the working group may be, for example, to comment on a strategy document, to carry out problem analysis, to seek alternative solutions to problems and recommendations for their implementation, to develop concepts, etc.

The working group should be composed mainly of representatives of the public, NGOs, associations, entrepreneurs and other interested groups.



The working group

Public hearing

A municipal leadership which is open to the cooperation with citizens should allow to the public a discussion of all important plans and projects. In the Czech Republic, this is required by law for some projects. The aim of the method is to present an important project or plan, to discuss its key aspects and, where appropriate, to collect comments on its form. The essential output is a clear and objective record.

Participatory budget

Participatory budgeting is a tool to involve the public in the decision-making process through the formulation of priority areas of the budget, the creation of specific projects, their selection, choice and subsequent monitoring.

The basic principles and values of participatory budgeting include:

- Developing a culture of democracy and active citizenship
- Creating relationships and building trust between representatives and community members
- Redirecting funds consistently with public opinion and for the benefit of vulnerable groups
- Transparency
- Openness
- Public hearings and discussions
- Local jurisdiction
- Representative democracy
- Shared responsibility

Each city or state puts the principles into practice by its own means, reflecting local needs and context. Today, many municipalities involve the public in both the decision-making process and the implementation of activities.

Local to Local Dialogue

The Local to Local Dialogue method is a set of steps that need to be taken in order to achieve a positive result, i.e. a systematic and partnership-based cooperation with municipal representatives.

Step 1: Motivation - what and why do we want to change, what is our relationship with the municipality representatives

Step 2: Preparation - who will lobby, mapping the partner (who has what position and what are their views)

Step 3: Who we are - mission, goals, PR materials

Step 4: Lobbying tools - participatory methods versus creative activities

Step 5: Strategic steps - consultation with experts, cooperation with other organisations, what we can do to solve the problem/situation, common agreement and goals, keeping already existing contacts

Step 6: Documentation - preparation, minutes, reports, photos

Step 7: Evaluation of the steps

Networking

Connecting, sharing, supporting each other and working together brings benefits to everyone. One organisation will not cover a particular problem or situation from all angles. Finding ways to improve living conditions not only at the community level requires a comprehensive perception of problems and their solutions. So if we start working together in the community where we live, we can much more easily achieve the result that we need. Networking requires more than just working together on a given task. Networking should lead to open and effective partnerships. Networking can follow similar steps to the Local to Local Dialogue method. Networking is often combined with other methods.

Campaigns

Awareness campaigns are one of the creative tools for promoting our interests. It is an organised effort to achieve set goals.

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How to implement a campaign step by step:

1. Determination of the topic
2. Set up of implementation team
3. Campaign schedule - 4 phases:
 - Mapping the state
 - Collecting ideas for a change and raising awareness
 - Finding ways to implement the change
 - Presentation of results and good practice
4. Public Relations
5. Documenting the campaign
6. Evaluation of the campaign

The whole topic is elaborated in detail in the publication "[Behind One Rope](#)" by Rut Kolínská, the founder of the movement of mother centres in the Czech Republic.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES OF THE NETWORK FOR FAMILY

Networking as a principle of the Network for the Family

Networking is one of the principles of the Network for Family. We are an umbrella organisation for organisations (mother, family, community and other centers) that operate on the principles of the know-how of mother centers. This networking is advantageous because the organisations under the umbrella of the Network for Family can argue by the national Network in their place of work, and can draw experience and inspiration from each other. In addition, these organisations have a strong common voice in implementing the mission of the Network for Family, i.e. in strengthening the civic life of the community, the value of the family and intergenerational relations, the role of parents, maternal and paternal roles in society, in promoting legal protection of the family, motherhood and equal opportunities for all, and in the efforts to promote healthy living in a healthy environment.



Networking in a different way

Campaigns of the Network for Family

In order to highlight the value of family for everyone, we have organised a number of campaigns during our existence, such as How to Live with a Stroller, A City for Children, Come and Stay, Caring for Families, Daddy's Cool Today, Healthy Living in a Healthy Environment, Playgrounds Today and Tomorrow, Dialogue among Locals and others. These campaigns highlighted the sub-issues of family life.

In the end, we decided to link the international days with a common theme of family: Mother's Day (second Sunday in May), the United Nations International Day of Families (15 May), International Day of Children (1 June) and Father's Day (third Sunday in June), and we established a new tradition, a Festival for Family.



Žofín Festival for Family, Prague

2018

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The Festival for Family was created in 2019 out of a need to collectively highlight the value of family for each of us. At the same time, we wanted to highlight the wide range of programs of mother centers in the field of prevention of risk situations in the family and in society, as well as to introduce mother centers as an essential pillar of community life.

Other organisations are beginning to sign up for the Festival for Family, and so our vision of an annual spring celebration of family across the country is progressively coming true.

www.festivalrodiny.cz

Žofín Festival for Family, Prague 2019



Regional Round Tables

The regional coordinators of the Network for Family regularly organise regional roundtables to which they invite representatives of the local government, state administration, public institutions, non-profit organisations and the general public. Many problems are well discussed and often solved at the round table. Among the topics often discussed are e.g. family or senior policy of the region, cooperation of individual actors in the field of family policy, social services, etc. However, the topics can be also partial, e.g. the topic of domestic violence, sexual harassment, the preparation of a specific concept or strategy.

Educational conferences

The Network for Family regularly organises conferences at the state and regional level. Their aim is not only to show the importance of the work of mother, family and community centres and the Network for Family, but also to promote topics related to family and working life, such as how Czech society perceives the value of the family, how it approaches child upbringing and partnership, or how family and working life can be handled.



(K)rok rodiny, České Budějovice, 2019



National Conference of the Network for Family, Prague 2017

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Membership of Network for Family employees in working groups and active lobbying

Employees of Network for Family are members of various working groups at the state, regional and municipal level. Through their work and participation in working groups, they promote pro-family interests and the interests of non-governmental non-profit organisations. They share their experience with each other and are also professionally guided to be active in civic society. Gradually, we have succeeded in gaining more interest from politicians and financial support in the form of grant programmes for family issues at state, regional and municipal level.

A platform of municipal female politicians raised from mother centres

In the Network for Family, together with mother centres from all over the Czech Republic, we are trying to focus attention on pro-family municipal policy. As a part of our work, we present to the municipalities examples of good practice - what can be done in the field of family policy in municipalities. At the same time, we encourage women from the mother centres to become active in public life and organise educational seminars on active participation in civic society. Last but not least, we support and methodically guide women from mother centres to run for local politicians. Thanks to this, we are able to influence communal life in the villages so that it flourishes and families can live well in these villages. And so a platform for municipal female politicians raised from the mother centres was created. The aim of the platform is to open up a space for local women representatives raised from the mother centres to network together and strengthen their competences for political practice. Members of the platform meet approximately once every two months and share their joys and concerns with each other. Each meeting has a different theme - e.g. family policy at local level, social policy at local level, cooperation with social unions, etc. At the same time, members of the platform can take advantage of educational activities focused on various topics: from soft skills (self-presentation, communication, argumentation and negotiation skills) to the field of labour law (legislation, financial and administrative management, etc.).

From a family centre to the municipal politics

"I started going to RC Pastelka in Brno - Líšně as a mother of two small children. Since Brno was completely new to me, RC Pastelka became a base for social ties and relationships. Here I found my safety nets when I needed help with the kids or just to relax. As time went on, Pastelka became my employer and I built a team around me that I could rely on. In 11 years we have not only managed to maintain a family center, but we have built a kindergarten, an infant-school, professionalised and implemented several European projects. I have personally mastered many work challenges and have progressed professionally.

The most important reason why mother and family centres are created is to work with and for the community, for the place where you live. It's an incredible series of ant-like steps to make someone's life more pleasant and beautiful. And you still have to do it with passion and faith. What we need for our work is support. It's support from both the parents who go to the centers and the politicians that are elected in that place. From this perspective, my entry into local politics was a logical extension of my previous steps. In this year's election, I defended my seat on the council, became vice mayor, and I would like to continue to influence the direction of our district so that not only non-profit organisations can live well here."

Alena Stejskalová, Chairwoman of the Council of the Network for Family, Director of the Pastelka Family Centre in Brno, Deputy Mayor of the Brno - Líšeň district



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Single parent families - invisible parents

Leading organization: Single Parent Families' Foundation (Hungary)

In Hungary a parent is absent in 300,000 families. Thus 500,000 children are brought up by a mother or a father alone. The Single Parent Families' Foundation has been helping single parent families since 2005.

The Foundation has set up Hungary's first Single Parent Center, which opened in May 2018.

Since then **28,000** families have been given help with services, assistance and access to a community:

- parents and children have benefitted from holidays and camps we have organised
- families have received donations of food, toiletries and computers
- 200 parents have found employment with our help
- 800 specialists have participated in our professional events
- 80 volunteers help the Centre
- 50 NGOs have benefitted from workshops and professional training sessions we have organised
- 220 children and parents living over the borders of Hungary have participated in our events

The *400-square-metre* communal and assistance space of the Single Parents' Centre provides single parent families with free *services and events, as well as support and donations*. The Centre is at the same time a crisis centre, a space for getting assistance and support, a play centre, a café and a venue for events. The Centre is developing a national network – at present there are 10 regional and 8 clubs over Hungary's borders. Our operation is regarded as a *unique social innovation internationally*, which we were able to introduce as good practice in the UN.

Our services include:

1. HELP IN CRISIS

- legal advice
- psychological, child psychological assistance
- mediation between parents
- donations (clothing, non-perishable food, school equipment)
- support groups

2. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- thematic and self-help groups, clubs
- art therapy groups for parents
- physical and psychological health projects
- community development projects
- art and craft sessions, events connected to holidays and important days

3. ASSISTANCE IN FINDING A JOB

- work placement
- job fairs
- individual advice, writing CVs, preparation for interviews
- "return to work" project for young mothers
- foreign language and professional training
- START business development incubator project
- guidance for business development

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4. PARENT HELPING PROJECTS

- Parents' Academy
- "digital parents" events
- family therapy

5. PROJECTS FOR CHILDREN

- daytime and overnight camping, holidays
- study groups based on the Krek method for children between 10 and 17
- extra school tuition for children between 8 and 17
- preparatory courses for entrance examinations
- "Adolescent Complaints": mediation between parents and adolescents
- drama education
- thematic art and craft sessions
- events for children

6. PREVENTION

- events for blended families
- self-help groups for those living in blended families
- mediation

SOME OF OUR PROJECTS

EARTH DAY - SUPREME PARENT AWARD - MORE THAN HEALTH – FAMILY EVENT - END PERIOD POVERTY – CAMPAIGN FOR DONATIONS - SUSTAINABILITY IN FOCUS – FAMILY DAY - FATHERS IN FOCUS – FATHER'S DAY ABOUT FATHERS, NOT ONLY FOR FATHERS - ANGELS DO EXIST – FULFILL A CHILD'S DREAM!

THE SINGLE PARENTS' CENTRE'S AWARDS

- *"Communal Space of the Year"*, special prize
- *"Highlights of Hungary"*, special prize
- *Family Friendly Workplace*, certification at bronze level
- *Family Friendly Services Provider*, certification at bronze level
- *Female Entrepreneur of the Year* awarded to Anna Nagy for establishing the Single Parents' Centre
- *Magyar Brands winner in two categories in two successive years*

The Single Parents' Centre works with 13 employees and more than 80 volunteers on several areas: lawyers, teachers, psychologists, experts of various fields, many of them with international experience. We have six colleagues working on the field of administration and three working with international projects.

The Centre has an intensive international life with broad network of foreign institutions and organisations. Some moments of the last three years on the international scene include:

- President of the Single Parents' Club Foundation, gave a presentation about the activity of the Single Parents' Centre as good practice and the situation of single parents at the two-week session of the *UN Commission on the Status of Women*
- Warsaw – the Single Parents' Centre presented itself at the Polish Ministry of Labour, Family Affairs and Social Policy.
- Berlin – presentation of the Single Parents' Centre as international good practice at the international conference of the German AGF.

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- Brussels – Anna Nagy, head of the Single Parents' Centre, gave a presentation on single parent families in Hungary and Europe in the European Parliament.
- Online forum of experts with the cooperation of COFACE Families Europe and Hungary's National Association of Large Families for the experts of more than ten countries
- Besides the good practices of the United States, Australia, Hong Kong, South Africa, Germany and Italy, the Budapest Single Parents' Centre also presented its activity at the series of events of the German AGF.

The professional exchange program took place in Budapest between 25th and 30th September 2022. During the visit the following programs were completed:

1. „Single Parents Morning”

- Single parents in Hungary and in the world
- characteristics of single parent families
- challenges and solutions
- „this is how we help”. The work of the Single Parents' Centre

2. Visit to the Never Give Up Foundation

- workshop about the first Hungarian restaurant run by disabled people

3. Ringató - music program for children aged 0-3

4. Introducing Hand in Hand Foundation

5. Workshop with Réka Hegedűs, head of Helping at Home Foundation, who used to lead the single parents group at our centre

6. Art therapy workshop - introduction of the program designed for single parent families

7. Visit at the Downtown Community Centre

8. Visit at Childrens' Home for the Blinds

9. Walk the mothers' path

- nature connection program led by Emese Dömösi, facilitator, coach, Mother Nature Association

Co-facilitator: Liza Baranyai, Mother Nature Association

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How to handle difficult and stressful situations for leaders of Mother/Family centres

Leading organization: Mother Center 'PLAMEN' (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

OUR BACKGROUND

The inspiration behind the establishment of Mother Center 'Plamen' in Bosnia and Herzegovina came from Senada Dzankic. Namely, as a refugee in Stuttgart, Germany, Mrs. Dzankic was in dire straits. She often had to stay alone with two young children due to her husband's busy working schedule requiring him to travel a lot. In addition, living in foreign country, not speaking the language, facing exclusion and xenophobia, and experiencing great homesickness and worry for her friends and family who stayed back home, was tremendously stressful and painful. But not everything was dark and gloomy as she soon found comfort and support in the 'Eltern Kind Zentrum'; a place where she met women in similar situations and was offered many helping and welcoming hands. Mrs. Dzankic was ecstatic to take part in various activities the 'Eltern Kind Zentrum' was offering. She started to build connections and friendships with members and leaders of the center, learn about the charming and fulfilling world of NGOs, and most importantly, experience all of those with her two children.



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Mrs. Dzankic returned to her home country in the year 2000 and found it in devastating conditions as a result of the Bosnian War (1992–1995). During the first two years of her return she met a lot of unemployed women and housewives. These women, and Bosnian women in that time in general, were facing poverty, strong patriarchy, and very few or no opportunities to work on themselves. Relating to her experiences in Germany, which allowed her to empathize with these women as well as knowing what a supportive group can do to a person's outlook on life, and having gained a lot of experience in the area, Mrs. Dzankic, greatly supported by the Mutter Forum BW, established the Mother Center 'Plamen' in 2001 with the belief that:

“Being challenged in life is inevitable, being defeated is optional.”

– Roger Crawford

OUR MISSION & GOAL(S)

The mission of Mother Center 'Plamen' from day one was to empower women, help them regain their self-confidence, and provide them with opportunities to be active members of their communities. Moreover, gathering mothers with the purpose of sharing experiences and offering informal education, improving the lifestyle of the community by providing help for minorities and marginalized groups such as single parents, physically and mentally abused women, and elderly, is an integral part of our mission.

The goal of 'Plamen' is creating a support system among women and mothers, a safe place to feel appreciated and loved, to express opinions, worries, and share ideas and views on life freely without judgment. Similarly, organizing creative workshops, seminars, different types of informal education outlets, and providing workshops for different crafts in order to encourage unemployed women to get a basic knowledge of a certain field and provide them with an opportunity to stand better chance while applying for a job, are goals 'Plamen' tries to accomplish every year.

OUR ACTIVITIES & PROJECTS

To succeed in its mission and goal(s), the Mother Centre 'Plamen' has



been organizing a great number of activities such as children's corner, baby cafe, hairdresser's corner, aerobics, cooking courses, masquerades, dancing festivals for children and women, fairs, parties for women, and language courses.



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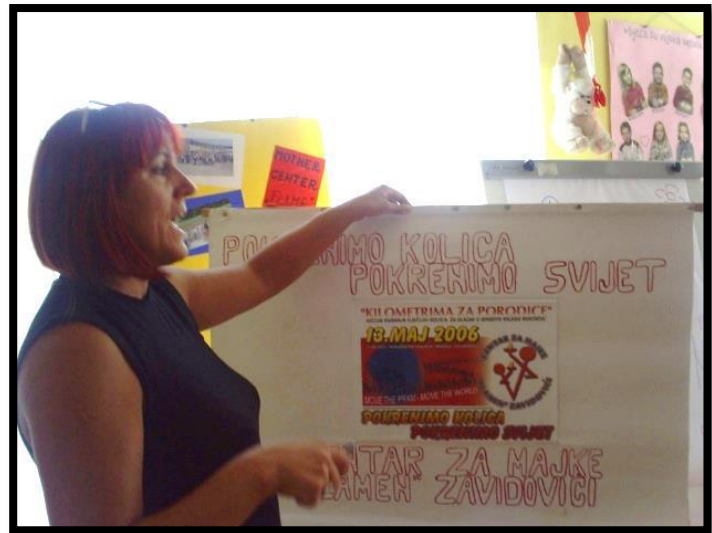


After gaining experience and wider recognition and support, 'Plamen' started implementing big-budget projects mainly focusing on addressing the burning issues in our community that affect marginalized groups of women (single mothers, unemployed women, housewives, Romani women, and women living in rural areas). Those issues were unemployment among women and their exclusion from decision making offices. Successful examples of such projects are 'Move The Pram, Move The World' that saw 'Plamen' enter the Guinness Book of Records, 'Empowering Women in Politics', 'The Economic Empowerment of Marginalized Groups of Women', 'Start-up Project', to name a few.



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In addition, the Mother Center 'Plamen' has played a significant role in helping and supporting flood victims that were affected by the natural disaster in 2014. Food, clothes, toiletries, and financial aid was provided to thousands of victims and our team has worked tirelessly for a month to ease the suffering of materialistic loss many families have suffered. Similarly, during the pandemic of coronavirus "Plamen" had a big role in supporting local people by delivering necessary supplies to elderly and offering medical protection masks to citizens on our beloved Zavidovici.

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OUR BEST PRACTICE



'How to Handle Difficult & Stressful Life Situations'

Considering the motive and means of how 'Plamen' started, we believe that our organization was destined to cover and plan activities related to the assigned topic of dealing with difficult and stressful situations in life. In a way, our whole journey has led us to this moment and we approached this task with sincere dedication and confidence.

The activities 'Plamen' planned and delivered spread over a four-day course where each day proved to be more fruitful and fulfilling than the previous one. Those included:

Workshop: 'Creating Art with Non-Conventional Materials'

Here, we found inspiration in abandoned, left-behind, thrown-away items to make something that would put a smile on a child's face. We used plastic bottles, cans, strings, paper, carton boxes, and similar items to make toys and while doing so we all had the luxury of making the children in us smile as well. We believe it is crucial to surround yourself with positive people and environment as it affects our overall demeanor. We aspire to fill our lives with positivity, uplifting people, and inspirational ideas and that will make us unstoppable in our mission to better our minds and lives.



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Book Talk: *Hasna Vatres 'Teacher'*

Hasna is a retired teacher whose book is based on her personal experience of losing her son in the terrible war. She offered us a profound insight into her struggle dealing with her trauma and how she found comfort in organizations similar to ours. We got to listen to excerpts of her book, discuss particular points, ask questions, share stories and experiences, ask for and offer advice, and most important of all, remind each other that we can find support and a warm welcome if we know where to look.



*Photo of the book 'Teacher' is taken from: <https://radio.olovo.ba/blog/2020/07/29/online-preporuka-knjizevnih-djela-izdanja-centra-za-kulturu-sport-i-informisanje-olovo/>

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About Hasna Vatreš:



Hasna Vatreš-Memagić was born in 1949 in Olovo. She completed a teacher training in Sarajevo. She worked as a class teacher, bookkeeper, and a Bosnian language teacher in Olovo. Starting from May 1995 in besieged and destroyed Olovo, she organized classes in basement rooms and improvised classrooms as the director of the Elementary School "Daniel Ozmo" Olovo. After forty years of work, she retired and got into the literary field by writing the first book 'Teacher' about her life including authentic events and characters.

Visiting 'Medica' Zenica

'Medica' Zenica is a specialized women's organization that has been in operation for almost three decades. It aims to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged groups in society. These are women and children who have survived sexual violence and rape during war, as well as survivors of rape during peacetime and other types of domestic and community violence, as well as survivors of human trafficking. Here we got the chance to talk to the amazing workers of the organization, see their amenities, and learn about the ways they try to offer sanctuary and help to those in need, as well as talk to victims of abuse and rape that only strengthen our will to make a change and fight even more heatedly.



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Book Talk: *Vildana Stanisic 'Mejrem, My Daughter'.*



This autobiographical book consists of 10 motivational stories that may at first seem fictional, but unfortunately, they are not. Vildana in her book tries to answer some of life's fundamental questions: 'How to deal with life's challenges and resist temptations?' and 'How to get back up after life knocks you down?'. Our group of women was mesmerized by her and not one eye remained dry after listening to her stories, read by Vildana herself. She is an excellent example of how to find faith, strength, will, and power to overcome the many challenges life throws at you. Having her there was truly inspirational. *How to get and more information about Vildana Stanisic's 'Mejrem,

My Daughter' book can be found here: <https://in.facebook.com/vildanastanisic/posts/3160426634203812/>

*The photo is taken from: <https://radiodonjivakuf.com.ba/uprilicena-promocija-knjige-kceri-moja-merjem-autorice-vildane-stanisic/>



*Photo taken from: https://warchildhood.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/WCM_og_twitter-1-scaled-1.jpg

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Visiting: 'War Childhood Museum' in Sarajevo, B&H.

The museum's goal lined perfectly with this project's aim and that is the belief that the only way to improve comprehension of competing viewpoints, bring about a significant change, and establish lasting peace is to share and exchange lived experiences. We saw an extensive collection of personal items, papers, photos, letters, and other artifacts related to wartime experience, as well as an audio-video testimony archive narrated by people whose childhoods were impacted by armed wars. Although heartbreaking, it was an experience that reminded us to appreciate and enjoy the simple things in life and find strength to fight for what makes us alive. This day will forever be imprinted in our memories.



Visiting: The Ancient Pyramids in Bosnia

A fun and relaxing outing we wanted to expose our participants to was visiting the town of Visoko where some formations, very reminiscent of pyramids, are found. However, it is a mystery whether they are actual pyramids or simply pyramid-shaped mountains. We had a blast and talked, laughed, and enjoyed your way up and inside these beautiful and fascinating natural formations.





All in all, being part of the project “Better parents can change the world for the better” through the experience of our partners, their advice and examples of good practice, we learned many valuable and precious lessons. It has taught and reminded us that by engaging in group activities where we are forced and encouraged to face previously pushed and neglected feelings of loss, shame, sadness, trauma, and disappointments, we work through the unresolved issues that we were perhaps scared of confronting. Facing those feelings in a group environment with people dealing similar troubles and burdens ultimately leads us to a better, safer place where we can come to terms with our past and realize that it is perfectly fine to move on with our lives without feeling guilty. We have learnt that speaking your truth carries a strong message and effect on the people around us, but most importantly that uttering those heavy words out loud is a form of a therapy and a challenge we must overcome in order to move forward. The greatest part is experiencing all this with other participants as they are ready to lift you up in moments when one might feel as if there is no way but down the rabbit hole of triggering feelings that do no good. Our group was our safety-net and we from ‘Plamen’ feel privileged to have had the opportunity to meet these amazing women who we will strive to keep in our lives.

We believe it is imperative to know how to mobilize women in difficult times, help them control their worries and fears, inspire them to be positive role-models and the best parents they can be for their children regardless of the injustice, troubles, and sacrifices they unfortunately often have to deal with.

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Our team



Senada Dzankic

Founder & President



Nada Crljic

project manager, trainer



Begzada Starcevic

hairdresser's corner



Nihada Sojkic

children's corner & baby cafe



Contact

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SÍŤ PRO RODINU



Aurora Mother Center
Belgrade, Serbia

Working with Roma women – mothers

Leading organization: Aurora Mother centre (Serbia)



Jelena Brkić

My name is Jelena Brkić, I am a mother of two sons, president and co-founder of Aurora Mother Center. I am committed to making changes that will ensure a better future for our children and mothers. As a visionary, I have big goals that I want to achieve with the help of my team at Aurora Mother Center, because I want Aurora to leave a mark. Contact details: fcb: www.centaraurora.org or facebook.com/czmauroramine/.

Founded by Jelena Brkić and her small team in 2016, Aurora Mother Centre has been instrumental in improving the lives of Roma mothers in its community. Aurora Mother Centre (Centar za majke Aurora) is taking the lead in providing the needful space for vulnerable families with local and international partners to create a fostering surrounding and an inclusive society. It is a non-governmental organization that operates in Serbia and has a seat in Belgrade. It took over the concept of mother centres in Germany, which represents an innovative form of organization. The fundamental mission is to improve the position of women in society and the proper upbringing of children. Aurora Mother Centre pays special attention to the local community, because it believes that the essence of the problem at the national level lies precisely in the weak capacity of the local community to initiate changes.

Through our work, we want to create equal conditions for all members of society. We encounter the problems of the Roma community, depicted through Roma women, whose struggle requires a battle on two fronts, due to double discrimination. The first form is sown on the basis of gender affiliation, while the second form of discrimination is justified by the society on the basis of national affiliation, i.e. Roma origin. In Aurora, every woman is equal regardless of nationality, religion or any other inherent affiliation. Aurora's visitors are also women of different ages and financial status, but Aurora brings them together and makes them a strong community, eager and motivated for change. I have to admit that the community was not always like that, we encountered many problems at the very beginning, one of the problems was the skepticism of the husbands, which caused some women to experience violence. We successfully coped with this problem, by talking with husbands we convinced them to give Aurora a chance, now husbands, after noticeable changes in their wives in the form of motivation, mood, education and harmony in marriage, often ask the question "when will you visit Aurora again?" which we are especially pleased about.

Our centre organizes various workshops and activities in accordance with the needs of the community. Some of the activities are: various courses, educational workshops for women, tutoring for children to help them with homework, baby cafe and others.

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SÍŤ PRO RODINU



The average literacy rate in Serbia according to data from 2010 is the 6th grade of primary school. A noticeable problem in the local community is unemployment, due to lack of education, which causes additional problems, such as poverty, insufficient resources for children's education, early marriages, vicious cycle of poverty, etc. In the local Roma community on whose territory Aurora operates, more than 88% of the women did not finish high school, which means that they do not have the skills for any job, except cleaning, for which fair-skinned women were once again privileged. The low level of competitiveness on the labor market is an extremely big problem that this community has been facing for many years, for the reasons mentioned above. Aurora decided to dedicate its efforts to this problem and in cooperation with "Business Women of Serbia" (www.poslovnezene.org.rs/) and the municipality of Zvezdara (www.zvezdara.rs) managed to motivate women and include them in various programmes that have as their goal training for a specific job, after which they receive a recognized certificate from the previous employer.

We opened the courses in accordance with their interests. Some of them are: manicure course, massage course, catering course, cooking course and sewing course.



Picture 1. Awarding of the certificate for the manicure course, conducted in cooperation with the municipality of Zvezdara

So far, we have managed to motivate more than 56 women, of different ages, to complete a certain course in accordance with their interests and thus become more competitive in the labour market. After achieving competitiveness on the labor market, another need followed, which we learned because we stayed in touch with some participants, the need for job search training was created. Job search training included: writing an elaborated resume, simulating a job interview (a role play), using job search sites, as well as assigning shoes and clothes for business interviews, i.e. shoes, jackets and pants, made according to personal measurements for each individual. Self-employment training was also organized for 15 candidates, targeting those women who wanted to open their own salons or start their own business.

Of the total number of women who attended various courses, approximately 26% managed to get a job, for which they were trained by attending the course, or spent more than 3 months in that job position. More than 40% of the total number got a job, but not in the positions for which they attended the course, but the acquired certificate helped them achieve a certain level of education for different jobs (e.g. call center operator, cashier, seller in a bakery, etc.). Also 5 women started their own business, usually they were women who had completed a massage or pedicurist course. One participant managed to open her own salon, in which the Aurora Mother Centre helped her when applying for grants to secure funding for equipment for the salon (picture no. 2). Aurora's policy is to mentor all women who want to train for a specific occupation. We have good examples of support, such as the women who attended the course practiced manicure and nail art in Aurora's premises and the customers provided a symbolic compensation 2 or 3 Eur to cover costs for used material.

Picture 2. One of the winners of the manicurist certificate (current owner of a manicure salon, in the picture you can see the received clothes and shoes)



Aurora Mother Centre also plans to establish a social enterprise that will deal with sewing products from eco-materials and thus provide women trained in sewing with the opportunity to earn some money, but also to make a personal contribution to the protection of the environment. There is currently only one product in the offer, which is a handbag made of eco materials, which can be ordered immediately via our Facebook page or Aurora's email (jelena.brkic73@gmail.com).

Picture 3. Awarding of certificates for some of the successfully completed courses



Picture 4. sewing handbags from ECO material

What speaks once again about the importance of Aurora's existence is the picture above (Figure 4). There are three women in the picture, but what is specific about this picture is that all three women have overcome cancer and are not capable to maintain any job. Sewing ECO bags and earning a small income so far gave them a sense of usefulness, because after battling with a serious illness, they felt useful for their family, and not a burden. As they say themselves, this is a pleasure for them, and in Aurora they can escape from their problems.



Picture 5. Bags made of Eco materials, ready for sale

Due to the pandemic of COVID-19, which affected the whole world, there was a shortage of masks in Serbia. The Aurora Mother Centre came up with the idea to sew protective masks together with its team, trained in sewing, to distribute for free. The Aurora team sewed and distributed over 100 masks, proving once again that they care about their community. Every woman brought home a sewing machine because of the epidemiological measures prescribed by the Government of the Republic of Serbia.



Figure 6. Protective masks sewn and ready for distribution



Picture 7. One of Aurora's members, who attended a sewing course and contributed to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic

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Another one of the numerous courses is the course for catering and making small cakes. This course was attended by 8 women, it took place online, originally it was planned that each woman would follow the course from her home, but because of the children it was not possible, so they followed the course online from the premises of Aurora, while one of our volunteers entertained the children in a corner with a children's playroom. Aurora also runs a cooking course where older women teach younger women how to prepare specific and healthy food for their children or exchange recipes.



Picture 6. Course of catering and making small cakes



Picture 7 Cooking course in Aurora - traditional dishes for the winter "Pickles"



Picture 8 Traditional products "Pickle"

In addition to the trainings that we conducted in cooperation with the Municipality of Zvezdara and the "Successful Women" organization, we also organize various educational and psycho-social workshops. Some of the topics of the mentioned workshops are: alcoholism in the family, domestic violence, the importance of female examination, what I want for my children, what makes me happy, etc. The total number of women who visited our workshops at least once exceeds the number of 100 women. We are proud of the workshop on the importance of women's health care, because in it we initially received information that a significant number of women had not visited a gynecologist for more than 15 years. This knowledge caused concern, after which we reacted urgently and provided a free women's examination in cooperation with the Voždovac Health Center. More than 30 women of different ages were examined in several days. Also, due to the importance of the topic, we chose a healthcare worker, who is also a visitor to Aurora, to volunteer a couple of times, in accordance with the agreement with the women, to hold a workshop on the topic of women's and children's health. The influence of making such a decision is that, after a while, women lose their enthusiasm and forget to go for regular examinations and self-care, which is why it is important to be constantly reminded by a professional person, in our case it is our dear volunteer and a healthcare worker they trust.



Figure 9 Conducted action of women's examination for all women



Picture 10 Action "Importance of female examination"

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The Aurora Mother Centre also provides free legal support to all its visitors, who apply for help. Usually our support is a provision of information and the necessary documentation for obtaining social assistance and drafting an application for immediate financial assistance. Free legal assistance is provided by our volunteer and activist student of the Faculty of Law in Belgrade. Also, due to the interest of the local community, he held 4 workshops with 5 participants each, on the topic "History and culture of the Roma", due to the epidemiological measures of the time, prescribed by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, we were forced to hold the workshops in smaller groups. Support in the form of refreshments for the participants was provided by the National Council of the Roma National Minority (council link <https://romskinacionalnisavet.org.rs>).



Picture 11 "History and culture of the Roma"



Picture 11 "History and culture of the Roma"

In addition to numerous workshops with women, Aurora pays particular attention to children and their education. The workshop of learning and providing homework has brought certain results, so far more than 50 children have managed to finish primary school and improve their average, thanks to this workshop. We are also proud that more than 12 children of primary school age up to 14 years of age managed to transfer from the programme for children with intellectual disabilities to the programme for children without disabilities and attend the same event together with them. In question were Roma children with whom someone should have worked, but primary school teachers did not want to deal with such matters, Aurora provided them with support, sometimes even up to 3 times during the week, and so Roma children regularly attend classes managed to catch up on the material and continue to attend school for the children without any problems. We followed these children up after they were transferred to a programme for children without disabilities and their educational success showed that they just needed a little more attention.

The learning workshop is currently actively attended by eight children, it is realized in accordance with the needs, usually once a week. If we notice that some children have certain difficulties in mastering the

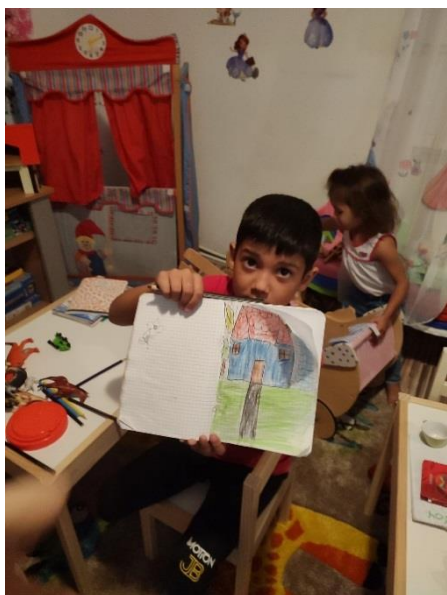
learning material, the workshops are held more often. In our active communication with the community and the local school, we know that Roma children from poor families are not sufficiently digitally literate, and at the same time they are about to finish primary school. The need was more than urgent, our team came up with the idea of holding a digital literacy and laptop use workshop. This workshop is actively attended by six children, it takes place from 3 to 5 times a month. At the same time, children learn basic programs such as Word, Excel, Power point for 25 to 30 minutes, followed by a 15-minute break for refreshment and rest for the eyes, after which the children are free to use the laptop as they wish for 25 to 30 minutes, they usually play games or continue to practice operating the mentioned programs. Our laptops are also at their disposal for schoolwork.



Picture 13 Learning workshop with elementary school students



Picture 14 Digital literacy workshop



The drawing and colouring session are open in our center 3 to 5 times a month. This activity helps children develop their creativity and have fun. The group includes currently up to 12 children of primary school age.

Picture 15 One of the works



We hang children's artworks on the walls in our centre, so that the children feel proud of what they have done, or we take pictures of their artworks and then hang photos.

Picture 16 Drawing and colouring section for elementary school students

We are very proud of all the children from Aurora Mother Centre. We managed to develop empathy for their mothers and for people in general. We are especially proud of one of their initiatives to organize a workshop on the occasion of International Women's day celebrated on 8th March. The children expressed their desire to buy flowers for their mothers and neighbors, but unfortunately they do not have money to buy flowers. We were delighted with this gesture and explained to them that a greeting card is very important and characteristic gift, but we also decided to allocate some money for their flower initiative.

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Picture 17 Distribution of flowers for IWD 8th March



Picture 18 Distribution of flowers for IWD 8th March

Our youngest members also have their own activities, preschool children up to 7 years old have their own playroom where parents can bring them every working morning from 6 a.m to 12 a.m. This time can also be changed if a couple of parents want to bring their children in the second term. When playing with children, we all participate and it serves us to absorb positive energy, because as they say, "children are the decoration of the world." More than 20 children visit our playroom every week.



Picture 19 Playroom for children

Baby Cafe is an activity that we all enjoy, a place where we talk about proper nutrition and raising a child. The Baby Cafe workshop is especially important for young mothers with no experience, because they can listen to older mothers on how to properly care for their baby. On one occasion, at this workshop, one of our participants stated that she fed a 2-month-old baby with biscuits and milk, due to poverty and ignorance. We were amazed and managed to prevent the tragedy, we provided food for the baby and the necessary education for the mother at our workshops. The Baby Cafe currently is visited by 4 mothers with young babies, but more than 15 have toddlers, who left the Baby Cafe and now visit our playroom. We hope that in another 10 years of work, first children of Aurora would create a new generation of better parents who were as young children at the Baby Cafe, then attended the playgroups, the drawing and learning workshops, and finally could become Aurora's volunteers and activists.



Picture 20 Baby cafe



Picture 21 Baby cafe

Child marriages are present among the general population in Serbia, often among the poorer population and in rural areas. Although, according to the current laws of Serbia, the practice of child marriage is prohibited, among women aged 20 to 49, almost 6.8 percent of women from the general population entered into their first marriage before the age of 18, while 57 percent of women from Roma communities get married before the age of 18. This qualitative research confirmed the widespread existence of the practice of child marriage in Roma communities. At the same time, it was established that the modalities, causes and very representation of this practice vary significantly in relation to the communities where the research was conducted. This indicates the complexity of the factors that influence the existence and character of child marriages. A patriarchal model of community functioning in which the position of women is subordinate, and their gender roles include the role of wife, mother and housewife. Aurora Mother Centre can recommend as a best practice to organize debates, lectures and discussion about this sensitive topic and give information to Roma adults and young adults, so that they can start to make changes and be more aware of their own rights. Aurora

activists are experts how to communicate and spread the truthful information to wide public and within Roma communities. Aurora cooperates with Marina Simeunović from „Initiative of Roma women students“. Another partner who is dealing with topic of discrimination of Roma children is Slavica Vasic from nongovernment organization „Mali Princ“. There are numerous reasons for dropout of Roma children from the education system – poverty, lack of parents’ interest, distance from schools, learning difficulties, being forced to work. On the other hand, Roma children that do stay in school face a lot of learning difficulties, including how to read or write and how to read with comprehension.



Picture 22 Child marriage workshop



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