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## Documentation of the 1st preparatory Grassroots Women's international Academy (GWIA) at Mother Center 2000, Model of the Region for the Expo 2000



### **Grassroots Women's Work in Western Europe**

This week is the first preparatory workshop for the Grassroots Women's International Academy (GWIA) to be held at the Expo 2000. With this preparatory GWIA we are seeking to connect and find our voices as grassroots women's movements in Western Europe. Next year we will do a similar workshop with grassroots women's groups from Central and Eastern Europe. And then come together with grassroots women groups from all around the world at the Expo 2000.

What we want to do this week is exchange and analyse our experiences as Western European grassroots women's groups. What lessons have we learned? What are our issues? What strategies work?

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# I MOTHER CENTERS DAY

## The Concept of Mother Centers

The Mother Center concept emerged out of a study at the German Youth Institute in Munich that was assigned the task to find out, why so many parent education programs only reach a small segment of middle class parents. In this study we asked working class parents what they thought would support them in their every day family life. The concept of Mother Centers came out of what we were told in these interviews.

The model of the Mother Centers involves the following key concepts:

- \* Peer learning: The centers are not run by professionals , but by the mother's themselves, who are recognised as everyday life experts.
- \* Children are always welcome but it is the mothers who are center staged. Mothers can follow their interests and engage in activities without having to disengage from their children. Childcare is always available in the mother centers, but children can also take part in the adult events. A public culture is created that adults and children participate in together.
- \* Activities in the mother center are paid, mostly on an hourly basis.
- \* The centers are adapted to the rhythm and culture of family life and do not ask families to adapt to the rules of insitutions and public culture. Mother Centers are public living rooms that are sensitive to the comfort zones of grassroots women.
- \* The centers validate the work of women as mothers. They are places where women can own motherhood on their own terms. They support the strengthening of a female culture.

The research team of the German Youth Institute negotiated with the German Family Ministry to fund the first 3 model Mother Centers according to this concept and looked for women to initiate the first centers. Bridging the very different cultures of academia and community women's initiatives, including very different life styles and personal backgrounds sparked the magic that created the Mother Center movement.

After 3 years the women from the first three Mother Centers published a book of their stories. This book inspired a movement. Women across Germany read the book and showed two responses: „This is it!" and „We can do that too! Today there are more than 400 mother centers across Germany and Mother Centers have spread into 15 countries.

However, till today, the Mother Center movement and the feminist movement have continued to be two worlds, they have not merged. The feminist approach by and large involves an individualist approach, targeting on the individual woman to get education, into the labour market, into professionalism, into upward social mobility, often leaving their community ties behind.

The grassroots approach connects to community values, family and neighbourhood ties and networks. The work is community based, expertise is gained from everyday life experience and directed toward local governance, based on local resources and problem solving rather than professional channels. It is motivated by the wish to improve the life quality of the whole community, not by the wish to leave the community behind.

The Mother Centers have a resource rather than a deficit oriented approach. They are not about social work, they are about helping women unfold their competencies and skills by peer learning. They are about channeling the resources and leadership skills of mothers back into the community.

## **Multicultural Work**

In our experience with multicultural work in the Mother Centers we have seen that the family and community based approach, the respect for family ties, issues and values, the neighbourhood orientation and the focus on everyday life expertise is a strong bridge building and connecting element to women from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore grassroots women's groups in Western Europe often involve multicultural work.

Women from the Mother Centers in Germany and Switzerland will start off the presentations by describing their multicultural work.

### **The Multicultural Work of the Mother Centers**

**Beatrice Gartner (Venezuela) Lucie Schwenk (Colombia) and Reiko Sarkey (Japan) from the Mother Centers Hamburg**

When we followed our husbands to Germany, we could not imagine, what this meant. Here everything is different, the climate, the clothing, the food. When I went to the supermarket for the first time, I did not know what I should buy. The food was not familiar to me. I did not know what was in the packages. So I bought rice and beans, because that I recognised. The next day I was in the same dilemma, so again I bought rice and beans. And then I bought meat and was shocked that it cost three times as much as it did at home, so I couldn't buy that anymore either. And the clothing is so different. I never wore pants in Venezuela, but here you have to wear pants, because it is so cold.

Suddenly you sit at home with your child and look out the window. You say, oh it is too cold to go out. I'll go out tomorrow. You don't know the language, you don't have any friend's, your relatives are far away. I was so home sick, i wanted to go back to Latin America. It is terrible, you are so discontent and unhappy and that burdens the relationship to your partner, you want him to do something to change the situation, and you start to nag.

When we discovered the Mother Center, it was like a revelation. Very quickly by word of mouth in our small circle of women from Latin America the news spread. There is a place you can go with your children. There you feel welcome, you can learn German, you can meet other mothers and take part in a community. The Mother Center was like an open door in a world where all doors had suddenly closed down on us. You find everything there, you don't have to go across town to many different places if you need information, if you want to take part in a weekend activity, learn German,. or just have someone listen to you. It all takes place in the center.

What was important for me, is the warm atmosphere in the Mother Center. Everyone is considerate, speaks slowly. You feel that people from another culture are respected here. In the Mother Center people strive for a just world. They involve themselves in helping others, and it comes from the heart. If there were Mother Centers all over the world, in Asia and in Latin America too, that would be a better world.

In the Mother Center it is like a family. We eat together. If some machine breaks in my household I can ask in the Mother Center how it can be repaired. Also the men, also the grandmothers need this. To get out of their isolation. In our center we have a granny who loves to dance. She comes and dances and then goes home again. She loves that. The whole family needs the Mother Center. Everyone needs the kind of community the Mother Center provides.

In the Mother Center you can do what you love, what you are good at. You can sing, you can dance, you can discover and express your talents. I for instance love to dance. I do Salsa courses and Salsa parties in our center. They are always great fun. When one of our group wanted to go to the USA to join the group visiting the mother center in Little Rock we raised money for her to travel by throwing a big salsa party in our center.

### **Cordula Marineiio, National Association of Swiss Mother Centers, Bern**

We didn't notice it so much ourselves, but a group of social work students did a study on our center and one of the big results they came up with, was that we were doing multicultural work. It happens without our making any special effort or special program. As mothers of small children you simply have the same situation and common issues, so what we had in common is more up front for us than that we come from different cultures. We were not aware that we were contributing "to the Integration of ethnic minorities", it was just happening. We have German courses in our center too, but it is just one course among the many things happening in the center, that everybody is involved in. And on some afternoons you almost only hear Spanish, because that is the afternoon a woman from Spain runs the coffee-shop and on that day a lot of Spanish women frequent the center, but that is part of the Mother Center culture, that every afternoon is different, depending on the woman running the coffee shop that day.

### **Andrea Laux, Marti Nagy-Rothengass, Iris Kauffeld-Dontrauser, MC Stuttgart Veronika Erb, MC Offenburg**

We have women from the Ukraine, from Eritrea, from Italy and Greece. They do the accounting, they run the coffee-shop, they do the cleaning. They take part in the daily activities of the center. But like in Switzerland we did not really notice. When we came to this workshop we started looking at and thinking about what it is that is multicultural in our center and we realised that there is a lot really that we do. For instance one of the women who came from Russia wanted her grandson to go to kindergarden, but he was very shy and did not speak a word German. In our childcare we have a childminder from East Germany. She learned to speak Russian in school in the former German Democratic Republic. So she spoke Russian to little Jury, until he felt more comfortable and relaxed. Now he plays with the other children and it won't take long for him to learn German. His grandmother is so happy now, she says this experience really helped her gain confidence that they have a future in Germany.

What the women from other cultures say about our center is that here they are not confronted with well meaning ladies that see them as objects of charity. Here they can really take part and they can make friends. "These are women, who invite me home. I can see, how it looks in their kitchen, I can really learn about life here. I can see how they raise their children".

In our center we had cultural evenings, where women from different countries portrayed their cultural heritage. And when the Turkish women in our center said, they could not go out in the evenings, we did it during the day and had a wonderful midday Turkish meal with them.

We had a program "become aunt for a child" for the refugee camp near our center. In the camps the families are really isolated, because they are not allowed to work, they have no money. So we created the aunt system. Women from the center partnered with individual children from the refugee camp and did activities with them. Sometimes in the center, sometimes we visited them in the refugee camp.

Mother Centers are good for anyone who has been uprooted from their community. This is also true for German women, when they move away from their home town, because their husband found a job elsewhere. They often feel uprooted and do not know people in the new community, their relatives are far away, they sit at home, do not have friends. Mother Centers are wonderful places for any newcomer in a community to find contact and a new extended family.

### **Discussion:**

**Q:** If earning money for the activities women undertake in the center is a big part of the Mother Centers, how do you deal with the issue of women on welfare. Isn't their welfare money cut, if they earn money in the centers?

**A:** The regulations in Germany are also such, that you are not allowed to earn money if you are on welfare. However, we have found ways to do creative accounting, and the money earned in the centers usually does not amount to what you would earn if you took on a regular job. In some cases we even have built up a trust relation with the authorities, so that they turn a blind eye to this issue. They see that giving women a chance to earn some money even if they are on welfare jump starts them to find ways out of welfare. Otherwise they would stay home and never get out. We have many mothers on welfare in our center, and the experience of earning some money in our center for many has been a changing point in their biographies- They learn confidence, they discover their competencies and talents in the centers and they learn to take their lives back into their own hands. Many have found ways to get off of welfare again.

**Q:** In Ireland there are many programs run by the churches for women to meet and to knit and to sew together, but it does not go further than that. And issues like divorce or abortion are a tabu. That kind of work does not go anywhere. Do you also talk about political issues in the Mother Centers?

**A:** Everything that happens in the mother centers in a way is political, because women find their own minds and their own voices here. There is controversy about themes like abortion but there isn't anything that is not talked about. The mother centers do not have a special ideology that is presented, women can speak their own minds, there are no confinements. There have been women from mother centers joining demonstrations for the legalisation of abortion under the mother center banner. This was very powerful, because it was clear, that here were women who had born and who do bring up children, and still defend their right to choose. And there were women from the centers who did not join the demonstration, because that would conflict with their conscience. In the mother centers we have a principle that not everybody has to agree before action is taken: It is sufficient that you find other women who will join you to do any activity in the center you think is important. If others do not want to join that is o.k. Not everything has to be agreed on by everybody.

The anti-poverty add campaign we did with the very famous advertisement making company Scholz and Friends this year, which was election year, was a very powerful political action of the mother centers and brought us great publicity. Having children is the number one poverty risk in Germany. Sewing and knitting in the centers in a sense is connected to this campaign, because it helps women with low budgets to have

access to beautiful clothes.

**Q:** Are women from ethnic minorities integrated into the mother centers on an individual basis, or do they also come in groups, bringing in their culture into the center? In other words, do women have to adapt to the German culture in order to take part in the Mother Centers, or is there space also for their cultures in the centers?

**A:** In the main part women come individually and you have a mix of women from very different cultures in the centers. However, in some cases, as in the case of the Latin American women in the mother center Hamburg or in Switzerland, where some afternoons are conducted mainly in Spanish whole groups are integrated into the life of the center. This is a question, however, that we need to consider more carefully and we want to learn about this in this workshop. It appears that if there is a strong community from one country in the community the women have their own networks and activities inside their ethnic community. Women from other cultures come more to the Mother Centers, when they don't have strong ethnic networks. What we haven't done up to now and what we need to try is to make contacts with the migrant groups and organisations in the local communities and talk about ways to work together.

## II. AMSTERDAM DAY

### **Jaqueline van Loon, Emancipatiebureau, Amsterdam, Background Information:**

For the next generation under 20 years of age Amsterdam has ceased to be a „Dutch" population. In this age group 65% come from so called „ethnic minorities" and only 35% have a Dutch background. The migrant youth probably are more Amsterdammers in the sense that they were born in Amsterdam than the Dutch population, where many have moved to Amsterdam from other parts of Holland. This is the reality we are facing today.

If you, however confront these statistics with the statistics of who is doing the decision making in Amsterdam, you have a totally different picture. In the city council and in the institutions it still is an overwhelming majority of white, Dutch men making the decisions.

If we are a democratic society who is best fit to plan the future of the city of Amsterdam but the people from other cultures , because that will be the majority of the population of the future.

### **Lucy Goswit, Surinamese Women of Bijlmermeer:**

Surinam in itself is very multicultural. We have a population in Surinam consisting of Chinese, Jews, Blacks, Germans, Hindustans. In the Bijlmermeer, the South East part of Amsterdam, where the majority is from other cultures we have 60 different religious denominations. When you look at the videos we showed, you see what a contrast it can be to live the traditions and rituals from Surinam in the setting of the highrise buildings in Amsterdam South East.

There are many problems in this area connected to the fact that 2/3 of the children living in the Bijlmermeer live in single headed households. And the majority of these single headed households are headed by women.

**Mildred Zuidveen: Surinamese Women of Bijlmermeer;**

It is the women who traditionally deal with the daily problems in our community. But in the new setting they are often not familiar with the way skills are required, how to fill out a form for instance. It is important to raise their self confidence in dealing with a foreign culture. We show them how the dutch society works. There are many problems in school Often the Surinamese parents don't go to the school meetings, there is little interaction and communication with the teachers.

We have one group we work with which are women who have had breast cancer. For them support in daily things, i.e. finding new bathing suits that they feel comfortable to show their bodies in is important. We also do things to keep our tradition, i.e. we have a 'cooking cafe' for youth where they learn to cook the traditional dishes.

An important activity we did was to bring the eider Surinamese people together with the architects to plan their apartments. Out of these talks resulted housing that integrated single apartments in a way that eider people still stayed part of a community.

**Alice Bhagwandash, Hindustan Women Vikaash:**

We represent the interests of the Hindu population in the Netherlands. We still live strongly according to our tradition, even in Holland. For instance, in our culture you don't put old people into old peoples homes. So Hindustan women have a lot to look after in their every day lives, they take care not only of the children, but of the eider people as well. They hardly have time for themselves. Also this means a lot of social control. When you have your parents in your home, it is impossible to go out and follow your own path.

In our tradition you do not talk with others about your problems. You don't ask for help. So in our work we need to read between the lines. We focus on working with young girls, making them aware that there is more than a life at home. We do this by integrating the traditional culture. We offer courses in traditional hindu dance i.e. and many have found ways to make a profession out of that, teaching courses i.e.

**Elsie Gumbs, Foundation Mama:**

I come from the Antillians and we represent this group in Amsterdam. We work mainly with single mothers. Single mothers in Holland are very isolated, do not find jobs. We teach them how to break their isolation. How to talk to the teachers at school, how to use birth control methods, how to talk about their lives, including intimate issues, like sexuality.

We teach them the Dutch culture. For instance in our tradition, if you arrive at work at five after eight, you are on time. In Holland you have to calculate to arrive a quarter of an hour early, in case there are delays in the public transport system, otherwise you come too late and this is a problem in the Dutch culture.

**Elsie Blijd: De Doorzetters (the PerSisters):**

We focus on..persistence courses" for women, raising their confidence in dealing with the foreign culture, that they keep their pride. We help them develop their skills and competencies. We also do courses as childminders, so they can work as day care mothers. We want integration in another way. Not foreigner's becoming Dutch and adapting to the Dutch culture. We want it to be a two way street, that the Dutch culture also adapts to the fact that they now have a multicultural population.

We also work together with the „Stay away from my skin house" in Amsterdam, a shelter for battered women.

**Discussion:**

**Q:** When I looked at the video I felt that the women were so confident, in the way they walked, in the way they move their bodies, they look so strong.! was surprised that you focus so much on issues of self confidence.

**A:** In our culture you don't show your problems. You show pride, but inside you are sensitive and you suffer. We feel the same pain as you. Our culture however does not allow for it to show. The way we live with pain is different. The slaves were always singing and dancing. They rejected their pain for survival. But that does not mean they did not feel pain.

**Q:** How do you go about empowering women in your empowerment network? What are your approaches to strengthen grassroots women?

**A:** To motivate the women is very difficult. An important strategy is to approach the informal leaders of the communities.

## III. Evening Program:

### **From Beijing to Expo 2000 • (Monika Jaeckel and Andrea Laux)**

#### **Mother Centers participating in global UN Conferences.:**

Mother centers spread from 3 to 300 in a decade and became one of the fastest growing women's movements of the eighties and nineties in Germany, quickly spreading also over the borders.

So we became more and more interested in international links and networks. We found, however, that our approach often differed from feminist groups. Dealing with issues of the everyday lives of mothers was usually not on the agenda of feminist groups. However on international level we found a network called GROOTS (Grassroots women organising together in sisterhood) that were mobilising to make the work of grassroots women visible at the UN Conference on Women in Beijing 1995.

There have been 3 UN World Conferences on Women before and there was a feeling that the voice of the community based grassroots component of the women's movement was missing. This was the goal for Beijing - to make the grassroots women's movement visible and the voice of grassroots women heard. At the Beijing Conference for the first time there was a grassroots tent linking the groups dealing with women's issues on local and community level.

We decided to send a delegation of women from the Mother Centers to Beijing. 20 women went. We prepared for 2 years. Women asked donations for every birthday and Christmas to raise their travel funds for China, organised fairs and second hand markets to raise the money. We printed flyers on our work in English and in Chinese, printed balloons saying: "The women from the German mother centers greet the women of China" in Chinese, created beautiful banners on sheets ( some of them also in Chinese) and put together „THE QUILT'.

In China the mother centers encountered a lot of interest - Claiming public space in the communities for women and focussing on the needs and views of women as mothers

sparked a lot of enthusiasm for women's groups around the world. We extended the motto of the Beijing Conference: Look at the world through the eyes of a woman to the motto: Look at the world with the eyes of a woman with a child at her hand.

At Beijing we realised that the issues grassroots women were dealing with, which center around community development were much more up front and central at another unit of the UN - the unit dealing with Human Settlements - UN-Habitat. So at the last day of the Grassroots Tent in Beijing the Huairou Commission was formed, focussing on creating principled partnerships for grassroots women's groups and to set up a program for grassroots intervention at the UN global Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat II in Istanbul 1996.

Like the Women's Conference, Habitat II brought together representation from all the countries of the world, both on government as well as on NGO level to deal with the future of our cities. Habitat II introduced a new element to the UN process of global conferences, the creation of partnerships with civil society, Hence not only national governments are evaluated in their performance on implementing the Habitat Agenda but also local governments, the private sector and NGO and grassroots groups evaluate their contribution to bringing the Habitat Agenda home.

One of the principles of the Mother Center movement is to require childcare as an integral part of any public decision making process. Therefore at Istanbul, together with a local grassroots group, the Turkish Foundation for the Support of Women's Work we organised on site childcare during the Habitat II Conference - the first childcare ever to be available at a global UN Conference..

We are asking grassroots women's groups around the world to come forward and be counted. We are putting together a task force to help identify and document the work of grassroots womens groups around the world for the UN Best Practices Program.

When the Mother Center 2000 was selected as model of the region for the Expo 2000 we decided to make the work of grassroots women visible at the World Exhibition and to highlight our Best Practices by conducting the „Grassroots Women's International Academy" (GWIA) at the Expo. The Grassroots Women's International Academy will be conducted four times during the summer 2000 as week long events. Each week will consist of five 1 day workshops open to the public, highlighting the work of five different groups, where grassroots women's projects from around the world will teach, demonstrate and exchange their methods that work, their lessons learned and their strategies for the future. We believe that taking a whole day per group will intensify our communication and understanding of each other more than forums, where groups only have a half hour to present. Day six is planned as a collective harvesting, pulling together joint analysis and conclusions and planning further learning transfers and collaboration. On the seventh day a structured and principled partnership building dialog with partners from all sectors of society will round off the event.

The goal of the Grassroots Academy is to make strong links between grassroots women's groups around the world and to build partnerships that work with professional partners, including the media, foundations, researchers, local, regional and national governments, international agencies, the private sector, trade unions, and other professionals.

## IV: IRELAND DAY

### **Community Women's Education Initiatives, (CWEI) Cork**

#### **Mary O'Sullivan: The Women in the Community Course:**

Our work is about targeting the needs of women who fall out of mainstream society. You need to listen and analyze carefully, why do they fall out, what is it they need? We designed our community courses according to these needs. There were lectures in the university, but we also had tutors coming from the community conducting learning groups in the community, discussing the lectures, helping with the essays. The important part of our work is that we build on the learning that women have in their daily responsibilities in the community. And we design learning that involves the community and benefits the community as a whole. Our courses are not about individuals getting credits to move on with their life. It is about how to empower communities.

We work with different tools. With the apprenticeship method, where women pair up in teams and the less experienced learn from the more experienced. We also work with journals. Participants keep journals of their learning. We learn how we learn and we evaluate the process of learning.

Community education is linked to action. It is about finding out what is needed and then taking collective steps towards solutions. We often say we are creating our path while we are walking it.

We have created many community projects out of the courses. Alternative health care methods for instance. Many families are too poor for mainstream health care. Alternative health care methods like reflexology or homeopathy are easier to access and also involve a different and more empowering attitude towards ones own body.

#### **Mary O'Connor: The Traveler Community**

I come from a tinker family. The tinkers are traveling people. They originated centuries ago during the big famine when the potato crop failed for years in a row and people were forced to leave their land. They got jobs as postmen, carrying messages from town to town, as tinkers, making and mending things from tin and copper or as farm hands. My father was a tinker, a coppersmith.

For the children of the travelling people it was difficult to get a good education, because they always moved on, always came into new classes with new children and new teachers. At one time the Irish system set up special classes only for the tinker children, that meant there were children from age 4 to 12 in one class. This was bad education and mothers protested so it was changed.

But our children were always considered second class. There is even an official paper defining the children of the travelling people as backward and retarded. When I was 4 my parents decided to settle down, so I grew up in more stable settings. When I saw, however the second class status of my people I became active to change their lot. And that is what I joined the Community Women Education Initiative, so that my people can have access to education.

I am proud to be a tinker.

## V. Conclusion

### **What stood out for you in the exchanges of this week? What made a strong Impression on you?**

- \* Women around the world have common issues, sometimes we forget that, because we come from different cultures. But what women face around the world is isolation, lack of self confidence, lack of self esteem. Networking, creating a grassroots movement is the way to go forward, to be visible and to be heard. Coherence, being friends and solidarity in the group is powerful. Everyone contributes, is a part of the puzzle that gives the whole picture. What we are all searching for and are also ready for is basic human warmth, human contact.
- \* I felt safe, that I can speak about women things in this house. I could speak loud what's on my mind. When I traveled here what I first encountered was the male world. I was controlled by about 6 conductors and policemen on the short way from Holland to here. But what I encountered when I came to this house was a women's culture. What a contrast.
- \* I used to think women can only look at the world through a small looking hole. This week it has become a whole portal. I have felt content to be a woman and a mother.
- \* The openness and willingness to reach out to each other stood out for me. We came from such different heritages. I counted twelve different origin cultures: Irish, Tinkers, Dutch, Surinamese, Hindustan, German, Swiss, Hungarian, Colombian, Japanese, Venezuelan, Anthillian. And yet we are all intertwined, It was impressing to me that this has been a place for women who have a lot of experience and have been in the movement for a long time as well as for new women. The Academy is a place for all. We started with a party. Usually the party comes at the end. That was a good symbol.

### **What did you learn personally and as a group?**

- \* You need powerful grassroots women as role models. Also I learned that it is possible to be independent of the government and the local municipality. In Holland we sometimes get too connected with the government programs and strategies. The Irish presentation deeply moved me. You are all Irish and we are from different heritages. I hardly could believe we have the same sufferings. That people from one country can discriminate and do this to each other.
- \* It can work! Yes, we can do it! I learned a lot from the creative accounting. The preconditions for working together is openness and information and to go against the mainstream rules.
- \* We were made to feel very welcome and made to fit in. It was good to experience that we got across what we wanted to say. That we were understood. We will need to include more ethnic minorities in our work in Cork.
- \* I learned that you may focus on knitting and sewing and still women will go beyond that in their exchanges. That the coffee pot is the most important thing in the center. We will definitely expand our drop-in coffee shop to take on a more central part in our resource centers.
- \* I always thought I am too young, I have nothing to contribute. I learned this week, I am not all that young, I can do something too, I have something to say. I have

resolved to learn German. I will start this year. Next year, english!

- \* We need to be more careful in our preparation to contact the groups we invite ourselves, not just by sending out letters, but more personal contact in the preparation process.
- \* I have found new additions, for my personal women's hall of fame. I learned about new countries, regions and culture's. I learned how important it is to think creatively, that all borders and limitations can be flexible, I learned to be more enterprising.
- \* Multicultural work. It can happen. We did it. I learned that speaking different languages need not be a barrier, if we try we can understand each other. Also on other levels.
- \* Every mother and child has the same needs and issues. A mother is a mother all over the world.
- \* I want this to spread. Here I see eider people, I see children, men come in , all at the same time in the same place. When I eat a child comes over and shows me something. We all can use a center like this. People work together, come together here and lean on each other. Different ages don't have to be a barrier.
- \* One bee does not scare anybody. She is squashed. Many bees form a swarm and people run away. We are building a bee hive that people will learn to respect.
- \* It does take time to really get to know each other. Time for personal contacts is important.
- \* To listen to people, learn from their experiences. You need not reinvent the wheel each time.
- \* It is important that we pass our strength on to other women and also to our daughters. The centers are places where this can happen.

### **Is there anything from this week you want to transfer to your work at home?**

- \* We have young girls from Russia, Turkey and Libanon in your youth program, I will focus more on also getting into contact with their families.
- \* We will think about more in the Mother Centers how to bring in and integrate not only individual women from different ethnic groups, but also whole groups of minority cultures, and allow for their culture to have space in the Mother Centers.
- \* Even as a leader you need to carefully listen to the community. Not only do negotiations with the government but listen to the women and together with them define the issues and the strategies.
- \* We could make project partnerships like they have city partnerships, i.e. the Mother Center Stuttgart with the empowerment center Amsterdam or the resource center in Cork and do exchanges, live and work together for a while in the partner project.
- \* In Venezuela companies support groups by printing on their products that one penny of every product sold with the label of a certain group will go to the group. We could ask companies like pampers or Alete to do this for the Mother Centers. Beatrice has contacts who have negotiated this in Venezuela.

## What do we have in common? What differences have you noticed?

### Commonalities:

- \* Women have the same issues as mothers all over the world.
- \* We all see the importance of claiming public space as women. Whether called a Mother Center, Empowerment Centers or Resource Centers, it has different names, but it is all about having public space for community women. A place where women feel understood and comfortable and where our skills are assembled.
- \* We all see the competencies that women gain from their everyday life experiences in their families and in their communities and we all see the need to channel this expertise into local governance, urban planning and the decision making processes at community level.
- \* We all are confronted with the fact that the formal education system excludes grassroots women, because their skills are not acknowledged and are devalued. Therefore we all see the need to find ways to accredit community women for their skills and knowledge.
- \* In a high tech world we all believe in face to face contact and exchanges.
- \* We all believe in solidarity, in building a movement, in giving grassroots women a voice.
- \* We all believe in grounding our roots in the community.

### Differences:

- \* The Mother Centers have different ages at one moment. When you organise in ethnic groups to get together with all the groups is difficult. Everyone is fighting their own battle. In sports the boys from Surinam, from Turkey or from Marocco play together. They all want to make a goal for their joint team. We have to learn how to do this more in Holland. To organise as ethnic groups can be a barrier. It makes the government have it easy to apply the strategy, divide and conquer. Also it makes it easier for them to select individual women and lift them up. These women start promoting themselves against each other, to attack each other instead of as a common tool of learning, making themselves feel important and this can be used quickly. A destructive culture begins, where conflict and competition is used.

## What are strategies that work?

- \* Poverty is planned. Poverty is an industry. Social workers, welfare agencies, doctors etc. live off of it. We need to make women aware of this and empower them to contest this. We won't live like that anymore.
- \* The coffee shop is a strategy to come into contact with many different kinds of people from the community.
- \* We need to create our own "safe places". The importance of targeting key people, informal leaders in the community. Build networks, learn from each other. The importance of personal contact.
- \* First look what is good for me, usually it will also be good for others, or at least then it is easier to negotiate and be tolerant towards what is good for others and make compromises. Create optimism and good feelings.

- \* More stress on media work and public relations.
- \* Never go alone to meetings or negotiations. Staying rooted in your community is the source of strength. It is important to find ways how what you give out to people and what you invest in them comes back to the community and to your group.
- \* Constant evaluation and reflection is a powerful learning method. We will write in our Journals what we learned and do a workshop at home passing on the learning experience of this week. The questions we ask ourselves for this kind of evaluation and reflections are: What did we do? What was our goal? Was what we did effective? How could we have done it better? What were the learnings. With the evaluation method you can turn every failure into a learning experience, create gold out of every disappointment or upsetting situation. We work in a constant spiral: act -reflect-analyse-act.
- \* The apprenticeship model, shadowing is very effective, even if it takes hard work. Never let one person be figurehead of a group or organisation. That person could die or leave and what then?
- \* Act from a vision. Reflect the effects today's decisions may have 5 years from now. Always keep your vision in mind.
- \* Rotating role's and getting everybody's contributions and opinions before making decisions is important.
- \* The importance to define common goals and keep them in awareness. The importance of lobby work, internally as well as externally.
- \* We are promoting women's ways of doing things, validating a female culture. We want to network worldwide and put women on the public agenda.