

# Draft paper for E+ Family education

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## Introduction of the mother centers network in Baden-Württemberg and current situation

Mütterforum Baden-Württemberg e.V. is the roof organisation of the independent Mother Centers, Family Centers and Multigenerational Houses. As a network, we support solution and action strategies in family self-help. Our round 50 member centers are open houses for all generations and cultures. The centers are spread throughout all Baden-Württemberg, in big cities, average-sized towns or even in small villages. The social rooms as well as the personal settings of the centers are very diverse. That is why the activities of our member centers are manifold and differ from center to center. The centers accompany not only the daily routine of the mothers.

Mütterforum as a roof organisation functions as the missing link between family self-help and politics/administration. It has existed as a registered association ever since June 1992 and it has its headquarters in Stuttgart. The activities of the network are coordinated by a part-time headquarters director (Jasmin Horber, 23 hours/week), as well as currently by two further employees (each 5 hours/week). The 6-headed board of administration does purely volunteer work. One of the women on the board of administration is Andrea Laux, founder of Mütterforum Baden-Württemberg and of MINE (Mother Centers International Network for Empowerment). The networking work of the staffed office, as well as the on-site work of our centers has been financed for years by the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs Baden-Württemberg. In addition, the roof organisation finances individual projects with project funds.

Mütterforum is member of the regional network Family Education in Baden-Württemberg (with Andrea Laux as deputy speaker) and works amongst others in the work group STÄRKE (in English STRENGTH) of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration in Baden-Württemberg. STÄRKE is a state program that aims to strengthen parents' competence and improve the opportunities for development open to their children. The Baden-Württemberg network of Mother Centers, Family Centers and Multigenerational Houses is connected with Mother Center organisations in Germany and worldwide (for instance, with MINE - Mother Centers International Network for Empowerment).

## Expectations of the strategical partnership and goals

- well-trying and successful forms to access refugees and marginalised groups
- approaches to empower the parents involved
- approaches to bring the strengths of the weak to bear (competence approach)
- getting to know other concepts suitable for Mother Centers (Best practices in informal education)
- to increase the quality of our own training concept
- to strengthen the international network and install the institutional exchange of experience – to establish ties to grassroots movements in partner countries

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## Mother centers' contribution

### 1. Principals of the mother centers policy

- reach with their openness all levels of the population
- put very different people at the same table
- offer the framework for exchanges of experience, as well as learning from and with each other
- offer low-threshold access to family education
- are places of lifelong and drawn from life learning in the community

The core of a Mother Center is the open café that is available for people from the neighbourhood at all times and without registration. They can meet there, socialize, exchange experiences, get involved in community activities, ask for or receive advice and develop their own ideas and activities. Both Mother Centers rooms and the café are always open for all guests and the activities are available for everybody.

A Mother Center is an open neighbourhood meeting point for all inhabitants, where lost neighbourhood ties can be re-established and people can actively take part in the creation of their living environment.

### 2. Best Practice

#### **“Babycafé mit Gästen®” - “Babycafé with guests”**

“Babycafé mit Gästen®” is an open group for all parents, respectively child carers of babies during their first year of life – irrespective of their sex, age, education, income, origin, nationality, sexual and political orientation, skin colour, culture and confession. The participation is non-binding and requires no registration. Moreover, it is free of charge or the fees are very small.

#### **Goals:**

- low-threshold, intensive and reflected discussion on educational and development topics during the baby's first year of life.
- Parents receive understanding, advice and support without having the feeling that they are going to a counselling center.
- They get good strategies how to cope with everyday life, as well as fun and play ideas for their babies.
- They find in Babycafé a room for relaxation and relief.

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- Parents are encouraged in their relational and educational competences and trust their own gut feeling in a healthy manner. They get more self-confidence as parents.
- Parents socialize with other parents and with the café host and establish through these ties a supporting network, maybe even friendships.
- The need for attendance or counselling beyond the Babycafé framework is identified and the family is guided toward a suitable helpdesk.

## **Implementation:**

It is important for us to satisfy the basic needs of the attending families: eating and drinking. Parents must be provided for, so as to feel comfortable and be able to direct their attention onto their babies. Especially coffee is a means to an end, in order to start a casual conversation with the parents. “Babycafé with guests” has a fixed course of events and is conducted by one or two experienced mothers, that have been previously trained and qualified by Mütterforum Baden-Württemberg. Babycafé hosts are so-called everyday life experts. This means that, by means of this training, Mütterforum qualifies purposefully mothers that have no previous pedagogic training or studies.

Experts/speakers are invited on a regular basis to speak on parental educational topics. The speaker does not give a classical lecture, but offers the possibility of exchange in a discussion group. This lowers the inhibition threshold and stimulates the strengthening of parents as experts in their own lives and in the education of their children. The topics are specific to the baby's first year of life – sleep, nutrition, health, carrying, language development, toys, parental distress, etc. Parents/visitors decide on their own which topics are of interest, then the host selects the topics and invites adequate speakers. With their competences, parents are acknowledged as everyday life experts and encouraged to share their knowledge with the others. They are in this case givers and receivers in one person.

## **Special Babycafés:**

A center in Stuttgart has been offering “Babycafé with guests” in Turkish for many years. In another center in Stuttgart “Babycafé with guests” in Farsi will start in 2018. Furthermore, two Babycafés for refugees are currently being offered in Stuttgart and in Freiburg. In addition, Mütterforum also trains Mother Centers from the international network, for instance in Serbia, Argentina and Brasil.