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Neighbourhood mothers in Neukölln

Integration through peer learning

Launched in 2004, the project 'Stadtteilmütter in Neukölln' (Neighbourhood Mothers in Neukölln) has grown into a large pilot project serving the entire inner city area of north Neukölln and Gropiusstadt. The project has already been copied in other parts of Berlin, Germany and abroad.

The aim is to facilitate the integration of mainly Arab and Turkish migrant families into their local community and society.

The Neighbourhood Mothers project has won many prizes, including the 2007 Berliner Präventionspreis (Berlin Prevention Prize) and the 2008 Metropolis Award.

About Neighbourhood Mothers

The aim is to train migrant women, usually of Arab or Turkish origin, on the essentials of life in Berlin, such as how the German education system works, healthy nutrition, physical and mental development and parenting skills. All of the women are mothers who can speak German. These women then go into their communities and share this knowledge with other immigrant families. They help their protégées with learning the German language, which helps immerse the migrants into German society. Because they share a background, they quite often succeed in integrating others into German life. In the last two years alone, a total of 109 women completed training.

Through their training, the women grow in self-confidence and take on a role-model function within their communities.



The Neighbourhood Mothers has received ten national and international awards. The women are a living example of hands-on integration work. Four thousand families, with over 10,000 children, have received advice and guidance from the Neighbourhood Mothers. What's more, the idea is easily transferable to other districts and cities all across Europe, and beyond.

*District mayor Heinz Buschkowsky,
initiator of the Neighbourhood Mothers project*

Working methods ensure long term impacts

Until 2009, the women worked exclusively with families who had children up to six years of age. Since then, the 12-or-under age group has been included, with the Neighbourhood Mothers receiving further training on primary schooling.

The Neighbourhood Mothers are able to open doors for families that have withdrawn into their own communities and hence have little or no access to local childcare or the education system and cannot be reached in other ways. Close cooperation with the local childcare centres, 'parent cafes', school-based youth centres and teachers is essential for the success of their work. Close cooperation with early education professionals and teachers facilitates cooperation with the parents.

Over 2 000 families were visited in 2011-12. Many Neighbourhood Mothers showed an interest in starting a job career or in resuming their studies after their experience as tutors. For most of the participants (77%), this project was their first work experience and many had only little formal education. The project helps them enter the job market and a significant number have gone on to other jobs or inspired them to continue their education and get a degree.

Reliable partners

The project needs reliable partners. The district office Neukölln, the senate department for urban development, the senate department for Integration, labour and social affairs, and the JobCenter Berlin-Neukölln have committed to providing funding until 2013. The project sponsor is Diakonisches Werk Neukölln-Oberspree e.V. (DWNO).

Total expenditure since 2007 amounts to around €9.2 million.

Achieving objectives and sustainability

An evaluation of the Neighbourhood Mothers project in late 2010 showed that:

- the project is sustainable, as migrant women will always need to learn about life in Berlin. The trainers also appreciate the opportunities the project gives them;
- the project shows that different city council departments are capable of interacting and developing activities together;
- the project is highly adaptable to other areas either in or outside the city of Berlin.



Recommendations for the project include developing long-term cooperation with kindergartens, schools and non-school partner organisations. The project should also recruit and train more Neighbourhood Mothers, with the training focusing on developing employment opportunities.

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