

## Best Practice: Approaching Integration Through Education

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**CITY: BERLIN**

**POLICY AREAS: CITY PLANNING; EDUCATION**

### BEST PRACTICE

The Stadtteilmütter (Neighborhood Mothers) initiative improves access to educational, social and health services for immigrant communities by employing women within those communities as representatives to provide information and access to government services.

### ISSUE

As part of the City of Berlin's integration policy, Berlin launched the Stadtteilmütter initiative in Neukölln, a district of Berlin with high unemployment rates and a great part of population that does not finish high school. Many of these poor economic and educational indicators stem from a lack of integration of the residents in Neukölln with the rest of the city. The district has one of the highest levels of Non-German nationals, exacerbating the problem because of cultural and linguistic barriers.

Consequently, it has been identified as a district with particular development needs. Specific issues include poor nutrition, limited outreach to parents, high unemployment, and limited language competency. The implementation of the Stadtteilmütter project here is an attempt to tackle these issues.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The role of Stadtteilmütter is to introduce educationally disadvantaged immigrant families to educational, health, and social programs by providing supportive assistance. Specifically, this program concentrates on ten topics, in areas such as health, legal matters, and education. Stadtteilmütter does this by identifying women in the neighborhood who already live and possess networks in the community and train them to effectively transmit the topic information to at-risk families. The neighborhood mothers help families overcome initial fears and build bridges between the private and social sectors, ethnic communities and the majority society. They carry knowledge from German society directly into the living rooms of their community.

The goals are twofold: On the one hand, it seeks to educate parents about the importance of early childhood education and the structures available to them and their children. The communication between the parental household and the school is to be promoted, the self-help potential and skills of the parents from a migration background are to be strengthened and their motivation to integrate is to be developed along with their diversity competence.

On the other hand, it aims to incorporate children as early as possible into a German-speaking environment, in order to overcome the language gap which constitutes such a barrier to integration. Subsequently, Stadtteilmütter not just assists children but also forces greater integration of parents into using social services and interacting with the German state. Unemployed mothers from a migration background receive the opportunity to train to be a neighborhood mother. This opens up new life opportunities and strengthens both their self confidence and their status within their own family and respective communities.



Photo: Katharina Stillisch

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### IMPLEMENTATION

The project is modeled on a cooperative basis, so in addition to the Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment, partners include the Neukölln Borough Office, the Neukölln Job Center, and the Senate Department for Labor, Integration and Women. The agency is the Diakoniewerk Simeon.

The Stadtteilmütter initiative was launched as a pilot project in 2004. Following a six-month training course to become a "Neighborhood Mother," unemployed mothers are selected from diverse ethnic groups who are both native speakers of other languages as well as fluent German speakers. These women select other families from their communities and visit them ten times, usually for several hours, discussing topics like: day nurseries and the German educational system, bilingual education, children's rights, preventive healthcare, sexual development and education, physical development, German media, nutrition, addiction prevention, and household safety. Stadtteilmütter are paid an allowance for their engagement.



Photo: Katharina Stillisch

### COST

The model project Neighborhood Mothers in Neukölln:

2006 to 2008	€ 567,554.40 EUR (\$734,244.61 USD)
2009 to 2010	€ 339,511.23 EUR (\$439,225.38 USD)
2011 to 2012	€ 320,000.00 EUR (\$413,984.00 USD)

The intention is to continue funding the project after 2012 with the same constellation of partners and content.

### RESULTS AND EVALUATION



Photo: Katharina Stillisch

External researchers monitored the project between 2006 and 2008 as well as between 2009 and 2012. Both evaluations demonstrated that the project succeeds in reaching its target groups. It was established that the neighborhood mothers have a positive effect on integration; there was an increase in the number of children registered at kindergartens and there was greater participation of families from a migration background in diverse committees (parent and school boards, but also neighborhood committees).

### TIMELINE

The project currently extends from 2006 to 2012.

### LEGISLATION

The Social City Program falls under Section 171 of the German Town and Country Planning Code.



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### LESSONS LEARNED

The neighborhood mothers and their families frequently came into contact with the working world for the first time within the framework of the model project. This required a learning process which was supported by the agency and special coaching.

Futhermore, many large families were not served by the program because, with so many children, many women did not have time to complete the full ten sessions with a Stadtteilmutter.

### TRANSFERABILITY

The close cooperation of the partners and the low-threshold approach, together with the long funding period, has contributed to the success of the model project "Neighborhood Mothers."

According to external evaluations, in order for this program to work in other communities, though, it must be tailored to each individual district and their unique ethnic and linguistic needs.

### CONTACTS

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