

“Centers for Families”

This document is part of a larger collection of examples of current policies for young people in Europe. The collection is an outcome of a European research project called “UP2YOUTH – Youth: actor of social change?”

The basic idea of the “current practice” collection is to see how current practices and policies relate to young people as active agents in shaping their lives. Therefore, our intention is not a collection of “good” or “best” practices. Rather, it includes also practices, which are interesting because of their relation to young people’s agency but which involve problematic aspects, such as restricted financial resources, a very thin spread, or no clear evaluation criteria. We have applied a searching pattern which asked for “strengths” and “weaknesses”. This explicitly opens space for your own evaluation, because also policies are included, which definitely do have weaknesses, but are highly interesting for specific reasons. Therefore we have to stress that the researchers did not evaluate these practices themselves.

The whole collection can be found at <http://www.up2youth.org/content/view/192/60/>

Section	Indications of contents
Title of programme/ practice	Centers for Families (Centri per le Famiglie)
Location	Italy – Regione Emilia Romagna
Main theme	The main theme is without doubt “young parenthood”, but – as you can see below – the Centres try to enhance forms of “participation” of parents and to help families of immigrants
Practice/Programme-related keywords	Family; Childhood; parents; counselling; pedagogic and pediatric consultation; time bank
Summary of programme/ practice	The aim of the Municipal Centers for Families is to offer practical help to families with children to face the problems in everyday life and the difficulties of reconciling family commitments and working time and care with a focus on support for parents in difficulty, young couples, single parents and immigrant families which are not easily integrated in the municipal social reality. The Centers are also meeting places for families and groups of families who wish to bring together and build innovative projects to enhance the <i>work-life</i> balance of <i>working</i> parents.
Target	Parents in difficulty, young couples, single parents and immigrant families which are not easily integrated in the municipal social reality.
Objectives of programme/ practice	In particular the Centers for families offer: – Information on institutional and non formal services, resources and opportunities offered by municipalities to children and families (educational, social, health, education and leisure

services), with particular attention to the needs of information and counseling of young parents, single-parent families, immigrant and disabled children;

- Services and initiatives to support parents, including the creation of groups, courses and meetings with experts, counseling services and targeted support for the several problems of families (with little children, preadolescents and adolescents); i.e. Educational Counseling for families: suggesting paths for further development and improvement of educational styles and communication within the family, through a concrete and active involvement of various actors. In Bologna, for example, "*Magic Years*" is a service of pediatric consultation, educational and psychological support aimed at preventing psycho-emotional and relational development disharmony. It is addressed to parents of children under school age.
- Family Mediation for couples of parents undergoing separation or divorce, to overcome conflict and regain a positive relationship in the interests of children;
- Information and help in applying for economic assistance to families, such as:
 - "loans on trust", i.e. credit for small sums of money to be returned without interest for parents in temporary economic difficulties and for projects like "*1 year in the family*" and "*Part-time working*" for parents who wish to stay longer next to their children;
 - allowance in support of motherhood: it can be required within the first six months after the birth or after the entrance in the new family (adoption);
 - allowance for large families is an economic contribution to families, paid annually for costs related to education and the maintenance of children for families with three minor children.
- Initiatives to promote family volunteering, custody and adoption, in collaboration with associations working to create a real "welcome culture" for children in the cities. The "*Progetto Balia*" ("Wet nurse Project") is an experimental service aiming at supporting mothers in the management of practical tasks related to daily life (shopping, paying bills, etc..) through the work of properly trained volunteers. It is addressed only to mothers with children in the first six months of life.
- Participation in projects promoting further relations and solidarity between generations and experiences of self and mutual-help, as the *Bank of time*, a service managing the exchange of time and expertise within a network of solidarity and mutual willingness to help.
- In collaboration with the municipal services for early childhood, management of centres for parents and children placed in targeted neighborhoods and aimed at enhancing social aggregation of parents, families and children education.

Content of programme/ practice	See above.
Time scale	The development of the first Centers for Families in Emilia-Romagna goes back to 1990 as a result of the Regional Law 27/1989 "Guidelines for the implementation of policies to support procreation choices and care commitments towards children." In less than two years between 1992 and 1993, nine cities opened a Center for Families: Bologna, Ferrara, Ravenna, Forlì, Lugo, Modena, Reggio Emilia, Parma and Piacenza, followed by five other municipalities at the end of the Nineties: Rimini, Carpi, Imola, Faenza and Cesena. In 2003 new realities have started, i.e. Centers for families carried out by groups of municipalities. Since 2003 thus five other regional centers have joined the group: Val d'Enza/Cavriago (Reggio Emilia), Forlimpopoli (Forlì-Cesena), the Terre di Castelli/Vignola (Modena), Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna (Ravenna) and the Center of the 'Inter-Association of Municipalities Argenta, Masi Torello, Portomaggiore, Voghiera based in Argenta (Ferrara).
Programme/ practice design	The Centers are part of the municipal system of social services.
Resources involved	They are coordinated and financed by the Region Emilia Romagna. Following the Second World War, a number of local administrative bodies developed some form of municipally sponsored child care for pre-primary children. Among them, several cities in the wealthy region of Emilia Romagna, including Bologna, Parma, and Modena, were also engaged in the provision and development of pre-primary schools for young children. The successes of these local experiences influenced the growing public sympathy for high quality out-of-home care, particularly for children of working mothers. This attention for pre-primary school was part of a general political attention towards health and social/care services for families and children in this region. Through the decentralisation law of 1975 which allowed regional governments to distribute national resources, the Italian state contributed to the establishment of several strong regional and local governments and initiatives, particularly in the north and central parts of the country. Devolved government has proven useful particularly in Emilia Romagna, whose citizens have become accustomed to participating in the establishment of local social agendas, school management, cultural and social care activities.
Evaluation	Evaluation process: Every two years a monitoring process has been executed by the Documentation Unit GIFT - Unità di documentazione dei Centri per il famiglie Centro per le Famiglie Isola del Tesoro - Piazza XXIV Maggio, 1 Ferrara - tel e fax 0532 207894 - 241365 e-mail: gift.unitadoc@comune.fe.it The purpose of the Monitoring process is registering, in a unified and homogeneous way, the main operative modalities of the Centers for Families in the region. The aim is primarily to

	make available information and analysis of elements, which allow a more current knowledge and depth of activities and actions taken by the Centers. More specifically, the main objectives of monitoring are: - a detailed mapping of the regional network of services for children and families, indicating type and location of different experiences; - the organizational design of key services and resources at their disposal, including spaces and staff; - a more detailed picture of the activities and initiatives of the Centers for Families, recording at the same time, the complexity and the quantitative aspects of their activity.
Lessons to be drawn from programme or practice implemented	It helps to implement women's procreation choices and care commitments towards children and could be transferable
Contact information	GIFT - Unità di documentazione dei Centri per le famiglie Centro per le Famiglie Isola del Tesoro - Piazza XXIV Maggio, 1 Ferrara - tel e fax 0532 207894 - 241365 e-mail: gift.unitadoc@comune.fe.it Site by the Centers for families in Emilia-Romagna http://www.informafamiglie.it/
Other doc related to the programme/ practice	- Aa.Vv., <i>I servizi per genitori e piccolissimi</i>, in "GIFT – Quaderni dell'Unità di Documentazione del Progetto Centri per le Famiglie", Ferrara, settembre 2003. - S. Busciolano (a cura di), <i>Politiche familiari e servizi : i Centri per le famiglie in Emilia-Romagna</i>; direzione e presentazione di Pierpaolo Donati. - [Bologna] : [Comune di Bologna], 2002. - Aa.Vv., <i>I Centri per le famiglie</i>, in Barbagli M. (a cura di), <i>Famiglie e politiche sociali in Emilia-Romagna</i>, Comune di Bologna, Bologna, 1998. - Busciolano S., Bassi A., <i>Un vicino per il Grosso Tasso. Indagine sulle famiglie che frequentano il servizio integrativo e sulle aree di intervento dei Centri per le famiglie</i>, Comune di Bologna, 1994.