

Family Center Concept

rainbowtrekkers Kita gGmbH



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It takes a village
to raise a child.

(African proverb)

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1. Mission statement

Families connect us to our past and to our future as well as to the society that surrounds us at present.

On a vertical axis, the family is the starting point of our journey back into human history. From it we learn about our roots. At the same time, it is precisely social connections and family bonds of various kinds from which the succession of generations - our future - springs. This ensures that a piece of us will remain when we are long gone.

This connection with the past and with the future is the reason why the family has played, and continues to play, an important role in all great religions and cultures. In the Jewish tradition, the family topos (an ancient Greek word meaning "place", or "theme") already begins with the story of the arch-father Abraham. His acquired material wealth was fleeting. What remained was the promise of a spiritual inheritance, namely that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand in the sea. In the Christian tradition, the Gospels not only give a detailed account of the "Holy Family" of Mary and Joseph, but also draw a genealogical line from the ancient King David to the new founder of religion, again in an effort to link past and present. In Islam, both the Koran and the Hadiths allow us to draw conclusions about family life in Muhammad's time.

The Muslim world and other traditional cultures such as India are particularly well known for the central importance they still attach to the family, for better or for worse. The reason for this is the horizontal axis of the family. Our family connects us not only with the past and the future, but also with our fellow human beings in the here and now. It is the fertile soil on which the individual grows into a social being. When we at rainbowtrekkers run our day care centres as family centres, it is precisely because we want to see the child holistically, together with the social context in which he or she is integrated.

Nuclear family, extended family - total society: All attempts in human history to base societies and states exclusively and directly on individuals and to negate people's family ties have failed. For this reason, the German Basic Law (Article 6) places the family under the special protection of the state order. Raising children is first and foremost the right and duty of parents, not the state.

In the decades since the adoption of the Basic Law, however, the traditional image of family has been considerably shaken. This is impressively demonstrated by high divorce rates. These changes have both internal and external causes.

Among the inner reasons is the fact, bitterly experienced by many people, that not every family is a safe haven of love, mutual respect and support. In his feature film "The White Ribbon" (2009), director Michael Haneke created a cinematic monument to such dysfunctional families. He has shown how religion and tradition - when misunderstood - do not build but break people, even in Western culture.

Added to this are the external influences, through social and technological change, which are shaking the foundations of the family system. An international imperialist culture of materialism and consumerism is invading the hearts of our homes through television, advertising and the social media. This culture not only alienates people from traditional customs and structures, but preaches an



ideology that is rather averse to human relationships and responsibilities that are especially nurtured in the family setting.

Against the background of these changes, the forms of family today are more complex than in the past. In addition to classic father-mother-child constellations, there are now rainbow and patchwork families or constellations in which children grow up with only one parent.

The coming centuries will show which of these constellations will prevail and shape humanity in the future. All these constellations are an expression of man's striving for (vertical) meaning and (horizontal) community.

The task of our family centres is to recognise and support this aspiration so that we succeed in understanding and supporting the child in its overall context.





2. Target group

The day care centres of rainbowtrekkers were among the first institutions in Cologne to approach parents with a dedicated multilingual childcare and education programme. For 15 years now, we have been firmly established in the Cologne day care landscape with our concept.

Special emphasis is placed on the immersive teaching of multilingualism in the day-care centre. The original focus was on German and English, which also grew out of the biography of the founders. In the past five years, however, we have developed from a bilingual to a multilingual institution that actively integrates the native languages of *all* children into the day care centre beyond language hierarchies. We belong to the project group "Multilingualismus in der KiTa" (Multilingualism in the Day Care Centre) of the University of Cologne.

A statistical analysis has shown that between 60 and 70 percent of the children in our care grow up in multilingual homes and speak at least two languages themselves. About 30 per cent of the children in our care even grow up speaking three or more languages. With regard to the distribution of languages, the constellations are very different depending on the family.

Multilingual language competence can be an indication of a migration biography of the child or its parents. Independently of this, however, it is also an expression of what is normal in classically multilingual countries such as Switzerland, Luxembourg, Canada or Israel: depending on the interaction partner, certain things can be expressed better in one language and other things better in the other.

The knowledge and experience we have gained over the years in the field of multilingualism were the reason for setting similar priorities in the conceptual design of our family centres. The family centres of rainbowtrekkers are aimed specifically at the *international community* of Cologne. Deviating from the common understanding as a social space-oriented offer, we understand our family centres rather as a target group-specific offer at different locations.

By *international community* we mean both people who have learned multilingualism in a family context and those who have acquired multilingualism through migration. It does not matter whether the migration background has ended or begun in Cologne. In defining our target group, we are guided by the principles of the Association of Binational Families and Partnerships:

*The association [...] advocates for the interests and concerns of binational/bicultural couples and families as well as for all people living in intercultural contexts in Germany. [...] Our target groups are people in intercultural living environments. These include couples of different nationalities - including same-sex couples - immigrant families with and without German passports, single parents with bicultural children and people who unite different cultural influences in their biographies.*¹

The core of our target group is therefore the families whose children attend our day care centres. This includes not only the core parent-child family, but the entire extended family network with members of all generations and genders. This core is surrounded by a sphere of friends and contacts of the

¹ https://www.verband-binationaler.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/PDF_2021/Grundsatzprogramm_April_2009_Version_2012.pdf



families who are also invited to participate in the offers of our family centres, even if their own children do not attend one of our Kitas or have long since left home. In the broadest sense, our target group includes all multinational or multilingual Cologne residents who can resonate with our services, regardless of which “Veedel”, or neighbourhood they live in.





3. Goals and needs

Families from Cologne's *international community* have needs that correspond to those of all other families in the city. However, they also have very specific needs that result from their social profile.

Reconciling family and career

- Reconciling family and work is an important issue throughout the city. Unlike in the past, families today often rely on both parents contributing to the household income through their own employment. When both parents work, a childcare problem often arises. Multinational families are particularly affected by this because there is often no family support network to rely on.

Family education and educational partnership

- Multilingualism and/or different nationalities can be considered as an indication of different cultural socialisation experiences. In this context, it should be noted that expectations of early childhood education institutions can be shaped by migration experiences and can be very diverse. Here, parent experiences within the framework of our family centres can build important cultural bridges and promote understanding.

Counselling and support for transitions and migration

- People who move from one country to another often need help. This applies to migration for work reasons as well as to migration for family reasons. It applies equally to immigration to Germany and to intended emigration from Germany. The support needed can relate to everyday matters as well as to emotional or educational issues in this context.

All rainbowtrekkers staff are at least bilingual themselves. Many of them have personal experience in an intercultural, multilingual context or live in bi-national partnerships. This is a huge wealth of experience that enables our staff to serve as role models. Where special support is also needed, our family centres can provide qualified initial counselling and refer to cooperation partners for further needs.

Promoting community and conviviality in a multilingual setting

- If multilingualism is taken as an indication of migration, then the question always arises as to whether migration has strengthened the individual in his or her relationships with fellow human beings, i.e. whether he or she has found a new home, or whether he or she has been weakened and lives isolated and without social contacts. The latter is a danger in both family-related and occupational migration.

Even in cases where we do not associate multilingualism with migration experience, protection from isolationist tendencies or loneliness is an important issue in a particularistic world. This applies, for example, to the question of shared cultural identities and aspirations.



Against this background, the main goal of our family centres is *community building*. The services offered by our centres are tailored to the families' need to network and make new friends across language and cultural boundaries.

- **Preservation of cultural identities**

Intercultural and multilingual encounters help to broaden our horizons. But they also help us to reassure ourselves of our own cultural roots. Migration should not lead to the abandonment or negation of one's own self through pressure to adapt and conform. In our family centres, human diversity is not a worldview or an end in itself, but simply a fact to be valued. No one should suffer any disadvantage or advantage because of belonging to a certain social group. In our view, diversity ends where homogenisation begins. We do not want to create another, new "us" out of "them".

For rainbowtrekkers, diversity is rather based on the communicational principle of the German-Jewish religious philosopher Martin Buber, according to which every human being needs a counterpart who is different from him or herself, so that he or she can define himself or herself in distinction from the latter. Without otherness, no true encounter is possible.



4. *Community building as a foundation*

With our family centres, we want to build a bridge between institutionalised childcare and the children's home environments. From our point of view, both the children in the facilities and the families as a whole benefit from such openness and permeability between the systems.

Our basic attitude is that, first and foremost, parents are the experts for their child. Where desired, we offer our expertise and many years of experience as a family centre to support parents in becoming more aware of and accompanying their child's development.

We do not judge parents' approaches to education. Rather, we are convinced that through the networking among parents initiated by the family centre, a community is created which creates space for the exchange of experiences and which can itself act as a support system.

Of course, we participate in the Early Help Network and take on a guidance function in the referral to professional counselling facilities. However, we are convinced that civil society commitment and grassroots initiatives of the parents concerned should have at least as much weight as a "caring state" and the professional services of the welfare organisations. Against this background, we see the *community building* of our family centres as an important contribution to the empowerment of parents.

An African proverb says: "It takes a village to raise a child." In a city like Cologne, where every second person lives in a single-family household, our family centres create such "villages" for the city's multilingual families. We will not be able to compensate for the loss of family support networks, which was a consequence of the socio-political upheavals of the past decades. But we hope that we can draw inspiration from other cultures on how child-rearing can continue to be a community task and not either rest solely on the shoulders of parents or have to be delegated to the state.

In this sense, it is our aspiration to create offers that lead to a better reconciliation of work and family, to strengthen the educational partnerships in our facilities and to support families of the *international community* in Cologne in creating a social framework that makes such experiences possible.



5. Offers

The offers of our family centres complement the offers of our day care centres - both during the opening hours of the day care centres and regularly in the evenings and on weekends. The focal points of our programme are:

Community building

- Parent cafés (during the day)
- "After kita hangout" for parents and children (in the afternoon after the end of childcare)
- Parent-child offers at the weekend
- Events for grandparents
- Fathers' programme
- Social activities for adults
- Provision of premises for children's birthday parties
- Parental leave meeting for zero- to one-year-olds and their parents

Educational partnership

- Parents' evenings on educational topics
- Support in the search for babysitters and day carers
- Participation in empowerment programmes ("Mut-tut-gut" - courage does good)

Early help

- Application of in-depth procedures for early detection in the day care centre
- Initial consultation "in house"
- List of counselling centres

Health protection/integration

- Participation in health programmes
- Making rooms available for external therapists

Expertise

- Trained professionals on the topic of health protection
- Trained professionals on the topic of child protection
- Trained professionals for intercultural issues

Literacy

- Reading mentors

Music offers

- Music and nature

Cooperations

- Primary schools
- Paediatricians
- Senior centres



6. Framework conditions and resources

Participation in the services offered by the family centres is usually free of charge. Only if high expenses are incurred, a contribution towards material costs is occasionally collected.

This is made possible by the basic financial support of our family centres by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia based on the Child Education Act NRW (Kinderbildungsgesetz NRW).

The guiding idea of the "Family Centre NRW" funding programme is to offer family support and counselling services "from a single source" and, to this end, to link the educational and child-rearing services of the day-care centres with counselling and assistance services for families.

Thanks to this funding, we were able to create a staff position in which the management of all three family centres is based and which is completely released from the group service.

7. Reflection, evaluation, quality assurance

As part of the funding through the "Family Centre NRW" funding programme, an evaluation of the content of the services offered by our family centres is also carried out by the state. The official seal of quality "Familienzentrum Nordrhein-Westfalen" is a quality assurance tool that defines the services of the family centre and makes their realisation visible to the public.

During the start-up phase, our family centres were closely accompanied and supported by an external coach. ²Quality assurance includes further training and peer exchange between colleagues. Specialist advice can be obtained from the Deutscher Kitaverband (Association of German Day Care Centres).

The services offered by the family centres are planned by a steering committee, which, in addition to the recommendations of the centre managers and pedagogical staff, also takes into account the results of the parents' needs and interests survey.

Cooperation and exchange in the inter-agency Cologne district working groups "Family Centres/Early Help" are intended.

Our family centres are integrated into the quality management of the provider and into the intended certification according to the standard PQ-Sys, which is based on the quality standard ISO 9001:2015.

² Uta Reuter: <https://www.familien-zentrum-gruenden.com/ueber-mich/>



8. Locations

rainbowtrekkers Family Center Lindenthal

Address Dürener Str. 220, 50931 Köln (Cologne), Germany

Public transport Bus no. 136 + tram no. 7 (H) Brahmsstraße

rainbowtrekkers Family Center Junkersdorf

Address Ulrich-Brisch-Weg 1, 50858 Köln (Cologne), Germany

Public transport Bus no. 143 + 173 (H) Eichenstraße; tram no. 7 (H) Stüttgenhof

rainbowtrekkers Family Center Widdersdorf

Address Auf der Vierzig 2, 50859 Köln (Cologne), Germany

Public transport Bus no. 149 + 172 + 962 (H) Zur Abtei; bus no. 145 (H) Blaugasse





9. Contact



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Gemeinnützig nach § 52 AO | Non-profit status approved acc. to the Fiscal Code of Germany (Section 52)

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