

Young Mum

Vienna, Austria

'Young Mum' in Vienna is a unique organisation. Its mission is to accompany very young mothers – under 20 years of age - during pregnancy, birth and the first years of their babies' lives.

'Young Mum' was founded by Mrs Uschi Reim-Hofer, a midwife at the 'Göttlicher Heiland' hospital. She saw that many very young pregnant women need to be encouraged to have their baby, to receive the special attention they require and to be taught all the skills necessary for motherhood.

A significant number of young women have difficulties with their parents to the point of being expelled from home, or else come from precarious situations or broken homes and have not learned the essentials to look after themselves, much less a new-born baby. Mrs Reim-Hofer recognised the needs of these young women and persuaded the hospital to let her use some rooms for a safe place to accompany these very young mothers-to-be. So 'Haus Lena' was created. In the past 19 years she and her team of nurses, midwives, social workers and psychologists have accompanied more than 1200 young women throughout their pregnancies.

The women receive all necessary medical care, learn about legal implications, attend pre-natal and post-natal gym classes, receive psychological care, have baby-care lessons, and acquire cooking skills for themselves and their babies during the first year after birth. Where advisable, contact with the parents of the mother will also be sought, and advice given on how to continue with her own schooling or education.

The average number of mothers who deliver their babies in the care of 'Young Mum' is around 80-100 per year.



Another important aspect of the centre is the opportunity to build supportive networks with other mothers in similar situations and to form friendships.

Public education is a further part of their work. The centre's midwives visit schools and deliver education on sexuality, contraception, pregnancy, and childcare. This also serves as a publicity tool for 'Young Mum' to become more widely known. This service is very popular with secondary schools in and around Vienna and is always booked up a long time in advance.

'Young Mum' centre has received the 'Health Award' of the City of Vienna for its achievements. Although their services are freely available and their premises are free of charge, they cannot cover all their costs and are continually in search of financial help and donations. When they addressed our Association, they were about to move to a different hospital, as the Maternity Department of 'Göttlicher Heiland' Hospital had to be closed due to re-organization. Their new 'home' is now the St. Josef Hospital in Vienna, which has a big, specialized Maternity Unit.

Funds for the furnishing of the new premises had to be found. Association Femmes d'Europe intervened, designating this to be an Austrian National project.

The money was used for:

- a new kitchen – to teach teenage mothers how to cook for their babies and for themselves



- 16 new chairs for the big meeting room – where they organize workshops for the teenage mothers but also staff meetings – and for the waiting room



- 5 new office chairs for the staff

After receipt of the kitchen and furniture, the centre put them immediately to use and continues to support the young mothers - with renewed energy - in clean, modern rooms.

Renate Smith,
Projects Committee