



THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON COUPLE AND FAMILY RELATIONS

58th International ICCFR-Conference

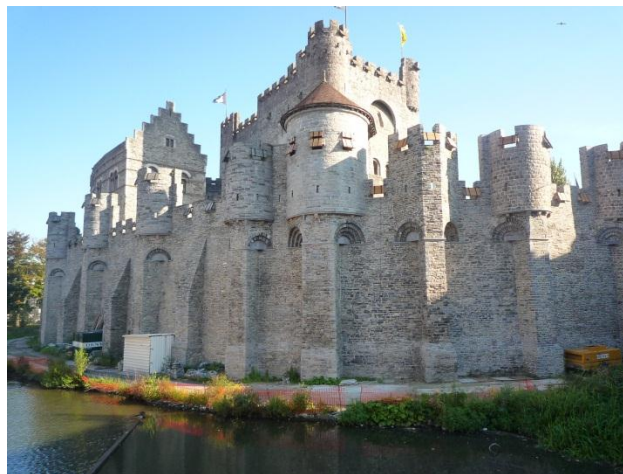


In collaboration with:



The Flemish Government - Department of Welfare, Public Health & Family

The province of East-Flanders



KEYNOTE PAPERS AND CHAIR'S REPORT

Ghent, Belgium

27th – 29th May 2011



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EDITOR'S PREFACE

The writing of this report gave me the opportunity to reflect on the annual ICCFR-conference, to review all presentations and topics, and to relive a range of beautiful memories of the recent conference in Ghent, Belgium.

I am pleased to share this mixture of impressions and findings with many of you who will read this report and who were present, as well with those who could not participate. However, one thing is crystal clear: the conference in May 2011 was a great success. It demonstrated to us again that our annual ICCFR-conferences continue to count on a varied and interested public from all over the world - whether ICCFR-members or new attendees - willing to share a huge amount of professional and personal experience with each other. And that is great!

I sincerely hope to continue the well-known tradition within ICCFR – which is offering and maintaining an international platform for sharing knowledge on the subject of couple and family relations - for a long time, together with my colleagues and with all of you.

Marc Morris

Chairman ICCFR/CIRCFC

Editor





A report from the Chair of ICCFR/CIRCFC

While the previous conference in March 2010 brought us to the Mediterranean island of Malta, where a splendid conference programme was offered to us, we launched the idea for this year's conference edition to go back to Belgium.

'Back', as the 50th edition was held in Belgium, Flanders, in 2003. Some of you might remember that special edition of ICCFR's 50th anniversary, which we celebrated in the historical university city of Leuven.

As the new chairman of ICCFR, I am delighted to have organized the recent event of May 2011, now eight years later, in Belgium again. We chose for the beautiful medieval city of Ghent, East-Flanders.

As many of you have discovered during their stay in Ghent, there is not a single word exaggerated in the well-known travel guide Lonely Planet calling Ghent "the best-kept secret in Europe". It placed Ghent in its 2011 list of cities that must be seen, as seventh city in the world. Quite rightly!





This year's edition of the annual conference took place from May 27 to May 29.

The venue of the conference was the historical building of the *Provinciehuis* in Ghent.

We were grateful for the support of the province of East-Flanders and the city of Ghent to help host the conference in Ghent. Having the complete conference programme organized in one central place, the *Provinciehuis*, was this year's set up. (More information about the history of the venue is enclosed on page 15)

Three centrally located hotels, close to the conference venue and situated in the heart of the city centre, were chosen for all conference visitors.

Theme of this year's conference was "*The family and social work: a successful 'marriage'?*" .

All over the world, the family is the foundation of society, something very important to focus on. Encouraging the cohesion of families is necessary for further development of countries.

The support given to families in difficulties deserves a central place in the Welfare & Social Affairs policies. Offering adequate help, finding solutions, helping people handle their problems are themes on which governments have to focus. The organisation of professional help is determined to reach these goals. The pressure on couples, the support of parents regarding the education of their children, violence in families or the behaviour of young people are but some of the reasons leading to an intervention of social workers in the families. But what are the effects of professional help on families ?

The Ghent conference focused on the relationship between the family and social workers, giving support on a voluntary basis or on a compulsory basis.

Similar to the successful edition in Malta, we were very satisfied to see the huge turn-out for our annual conference with around a hundred participants. Delegates from all over the world, from Canada to Russia and even South-Africa and Australia, came to Ghent to attend the 58th edition of the ICCFR-conference.

One day before the official opening of the conference, on May 26th, we started off with a preconference day in the *Provinciehuis*. After a welcome lunch, some colleagues of the Flemish Ministry of Welfare, Health and Family gave a presentation to situate Flanders within Europe and to present an overview of the current policy on Welfare, Public Health and Family in Flanders and in the province of East-Flanders. The preconference day turned out to be a pleasant informative afternoon and a good opportunity to meet the first attendees of the ICCFR-conference in an informal atmosphere.

The same evening, all participants were invited for an official welcome drink at the Town hall of the city of Ghent. Mr Geert Versnick, President of the Public Social Welfare Department of Ghent, welcomed everyone in the splendid setting of the historical town hall of Ghent.

We even had the privilege to admire some historical town hall rooms. In one of them the



Pacification of Ghent was sealed. (*Pacification of Ghent*: this peace treaty was signed on November 8, 1576. It was an alliance of the provinces of the Habsburg Netherlands for the purpose of driving mutinying Spanish mercenary troops from the country, and at the same time a peace treaty with the rebelling provinces Holland and Zeeland.)



Back to our conference: for the next three days, from Friday 27th of May until the closing day on Sunday 29th, we had quite a busy agenda with each day a presentation given by an international key note speaker, several workshops and discussion groups and a lot of social and cultural activities during the evening.

The mixture of presentations, workshops and discussion groups is quite typical for our ICCFR conferences so we surely wanted to keep this 'tradition' going on. We were pleased to hear that it was, again, very valued by all our participants.

The working language of the conference was English but translators were available to translate into French for all the keynote presentations and best practices. There were also mixed language discussion groups. On the closing day, Sunday 29th of May, the floor was given to several attendees, to present their best practices.

We can conclude that this 58th edition of our annual conference was again a very fruitful event, full of inspiration and interaction from people all over the world, sharing thoughts and experiences concerning couple and family relationships with each other.



Keynote presentations

Friday 27th May 2011 - Day 1

On the first day of the conference, after the warm welcome of Mr Eddy Couckuyt, Deputy of the Province of East-Flanders, we were pleased to have a Belgian journalist among us, Mrs Veerle Beel. She was introduced by board member Mr. Charles Hoare.



Mrs Beel presented the first keynote presentation “Help. I do not understand that language!” in three languages: English, French and also in Dutch, her mother tongue. It was a rather special start of this year’s conference: an eye-opening presentation on how journalists and the media perceive us. Having a journalist invited to our annual conference, was a precedent for ICCFR. And it surely was an opening that gave some fruitful and interesting dialogues, questions and answers.

Well, it can only encourage us to deepen and expand our relations with and our attitude towards the media and the public in general. We should be aware of the fact that the language we use and which is so *normal* for us, is not always clear to the public or the media. It is always good to remember that clear communication is needed in order to avoid misunderstandings and in order to help people find their way to the various kinds of support we provide. Furthermore, as Veerle Beel proved with a few newspaper articles, press indeed focuses on the exceptional and sensational news, not on the ‘good’ stories or results we have. But if we can combine our good practices, successes and results with a real family story, in other words an interesting interview for the reporter instead of ‘dry material’ as Veerle called it, then we might have the chance to make the headlines, and, which is even more important, to be in the news in a positive way!

For more details regarding the presentation “Help. I do not understand that language!”, I would like to refer to the complete text, included in this report.



Saturday 28th May 2011 – Day 2

Continuing on this year's theme "The family and social work: a successful marriage?", Dr. Cathy Aymer, Sr Lecturer in Social Work from Brunel University gave a very vivid presentation about social work with black and ethnic minority (BME) families in the UK.



Cathy Aymer talked about social work with BME Families in difficult times in the UK. The context of social work is going through a number of changes nowadays, for example public service cutbacks, bureaucratisation, a high level of unemployment, a growing number of ethnic minorities and a low trust society, in addition to keeping in mind all the legislations and procedures surrounding us. We all had the feeling - for various issues she addressed - that they were not only applicable to the UK only, but recognisable for all of us, in many countries.

National statistics in the UK are indicating the growth of ethnic minorities (from 8% to 20% from 2010 to 2051). They form a mostly young population, economically disadvantaged and with high birth rates. How should young students in social work prepare for working with these groups? It is indeed worth thinking about household and family structures. Many people of ethnic minorities live with separation and loss through migration. This can lead to broken attachments affecting the ability to have good relationships with their own children, later in life. There is a struggle people have to engage in order to leave those experiences behind. Cathy Aymer also stressed the fact that the intrapersonal and interpersonal part of the family is not often mentioned and that social workers should manage to balance between control and care. They have control, although they sometimes don't realise it. Empathy is necessary and we have to ask ourselves how it would feel to be in someone else's cultural shoes? This was an interesting reflection on the new political realities in UK and other EU-countries, which are likely to impact disproportionately on BME families. These economic realities may provide the conditions for the rise of stereotypically right wing ideologies which might pose a potential threat to these families. Social workers must therefore continue to promote the values of social justice and equality in order to work in partnership with BME families.

The PowerPoint presentation of Cathy's keynote is also included in the report.



Sunday 29th May 2011 – Day 3

The third keynote presentation “The family models held by social workers and their clients: critical remarks on gender & class perspectives” was delivered by Professor Dr. Barbara Thiessen. She is a professor of social work at the University of applied sciences in Landshut, Germany. Her main interests are gender dynamics in intersectional perspectives, gender competences in social work, family life in late modernity, especially under conditions of migration and social deprivation.

Professor Thiessens’ presentation opened the discussion on family models and their embedded gender and class construction. The ability to reflect on what we think of as a ‘normal family’ should be part of the professional toolkit of social workers.



One of the main tasks of social work is supporting families. Which models do social workers employ when they think of a ‘normal family’ and what do they expect from mothers and fathers? What is in their eyes ‘successful’ parenting? On the other hand, how does the family experience itself as a client? Are there discrepancies between their own understanding of the notion family and what they think social workers expect of their family life?

Empirical studies on the family model ideas held by social workers and their clients illustrate differences, e.g. the different parenting models of ‘natural growth’ vs. ‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau). They also show us how gender and class perspectives are integrated in the different family models.

The detailed text of the keynote presentation of Professor Thiessen is included in the report.



Workshops

Several international specialists, working in different countries and disciplines, presented a total of ten workshops on varied subjects, during Friday 27th and Saturday 28th of May. The presenters were from Belgium, Russia, Malta, Italy, Hungary, Germany and the UK. They focused on specific aspects of the conference theme. The working language was English. There was a high level of interest for all of our workshops. A summary is listed here below.

Workshop 1 : ‘How culturally sensitive social work can make the difference: a best practice in youth care in Brussels’ (Belgium)

Chaired by Martin Wiklander, ICCFR Board

Presenters:

Farid Mokhless and team ICB (Inter Cultural Mediation Foyer)

Sigrid Arents (‘Home of families’)

Hendrik Van den Bussche (Integrated youth care)

Due to a multicultural context, social workers are facing new and rather complex challenges. This workshop was interactive, presenting some tools to provide an answer to that question, and aiming to experience real practice via role playing with mediators and two types of cases. Social workers always start from the needs of the clients. The dialogue between social workers and clients is crucial. More specifically, this means developing a culturally sensitive basic approach, the use of intercultural ‘mediators’ and active client participation as a focus.

Workshop 2: ‘Care for the elderly in modern Russia. Senior citizen and social worker’ (Russia)

Chaired by Marc Morris, ICCFR Board

Presenter:

Oksana Parfenova, postgraduate student at European University in Saint Petersburg. Managing editor of “Laboratorium. Russian Review of Social Research”.



This workshop, presented by a young Russian postgraduate student, focusses on constructing the idea of care in social services for the elderly in modern Russia (for example in Saint Petersburg), and on developing ways of interaction between senior citizens and social workers.

Workshop 3: 'Creative ways of reaching out' (Malta)

Chaired by Claire Barnes, ICCFR Board

Presenter:

Mrs Vivien Cassar MA (Ed.), Dip Guidance and Counselling - Counsellor

A storytelling approach: chaotic and dysfunctional dynamics within groups of people can be helped when a coherent story is built. The participants use stories to build relationships with families and especially children in an attempt to enable them to organise their experiences, feel more in control and thus more secure, while creating meaningful interaction among the participating stakeholders through activities that are non-invasive, dynamic and fun.

Workshop 4: 'Parental engagement in family support programs: an indispensable but risky business for families and practitioners' (Belgium)

Chaired by Charles Hoare, ICCFR Board

Presenters:

Assistant Prof. Rudi Roose, Department of Social Welfare Studies at Ghent University and Sabine van Houte, PhD Student, Department of Social Welfare Studies at Ghent University (Belgium)

Although many positive values can be attributed to the engagement of parents, in this workshop it was argued that specific conceptualizations of parental engagement can generate non-intentional and undesirable effects. Parental engagement may generate a risk for selective access to interventions and for the construction of different taboo areas for families and practitioners.



Workshop 5: 'The outcome of the family platform project' (Belgium)

Chaired by Anna Vella, ICCFR Board

Presenter:

Anne-Claire de Liedekerke, President of MMM Europe (Mouvement Mondial des Mères - Europe) (Belgium)

Initiated by the European Commission, one of the family platform 's

overarching objectives is to increase the wellbeing of families in Europe. This workshop introduced the research recommendations on this subject that have been presented to the European Commission.

Workshop 6: 'The family Mandala-labyrinth of peace' (Italy)

Chaired by Claire Missen, ICCFR Board

Presenter:

Rita Roberto, President of A.I.C.C.e F. (Italian Association of Family Counsellors) - Family Counsellor, Pedagogist – Italy

In this workshop, led by Rita Roberto, family counselor and pedagogist from Italy, participants were asked to shape a labyrinth on the floor, and to walk in it, following their path to self-awareness. Walking through the 'sacred space', seen as a metaphor of life, the individual, the couple and the family can find their own way to establish authentic relationships.

Workshop 7: 'Experiences of a voluntary family assistance program and its effects on families' (Hungary)

Chaired by Charles Hoare, ICCFR Board

Presenter:



Judit Medvey, English teacher, coordinator of Home-Start Hungary

The workshop started with a presentation on Home-Start Hungary's past and present and showed via interactive activities the advantages of training based on personal experience and limits of volunteering.

Workshop 8: 'Children's Education Biographies and the Focus on Ethical Values in Family Education' (Germany)

Chaired by Marie de Blick, ICCFR Board

Presenter:

Dr. Charlotte Giese, German Red Cross - National Headquarter, Project Coordinator, Cultural Scientist – Germany

As the parents' self-concept can be understood as part of the family's individual values concept, skilled professional Parents Coaches will be starting (as part of the Federal Ministry's program) to support families on the children's education biographies and especially on the transitory processes. Within the German model project Values Formation within Families, run by the Federal Ministry, the development of special 'values modules' is included to ensure that those professionals will be able to deal with the families' entire structures, responding to their family values.

Workshop 9: 'Working with parents and children together in divorce mediation sessions' (Belgium)

Chaired by Anne Hollands, ICCFR Board

Presenter:

Anne De Keyser (child psychologist), Diana Evers (mediator), Belgium

A worldwide Canadian inquiry among divorce mediators shows that mediators don't know if they should or how to involve children in mediatory discussions. They balance between a position of neutrality and one of pleading the child's interest. A range of concerns, both about their own position as well as about the impact of involving children in mediatory



discussions, make them doubt. The workshop presented five models offering different ways of involving children in divorce mediation.

Workshop 10: 'Leave to Remove From the Jurisdiction' (UK)

Chaired by Anne Berger, ICCFR Board

Presenter:

Deborah Eaton QC (UK), Fellow of the International Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers [IAML]

The courts are frequently called upon to determine applications for permission to remove children from the jurisdiction on a permanent basis. These applications can arise because a parent wishes to return home upon the breakdown of a marriage or relationship in order to be nearer to their own family support network, because a parent has met a new partner whose life is based in another country and where it is impossible for the new partner to relocate, or for other lifestyle choice reasons for example in relation to employment. This workshop will examine some of the issues in these harrowing cases, where the stakes are always high and the emotional complexities very difficult to navigate.

Discussion groups

Discussion group sessions are a special and unique feature of all the ICCFR-conferences. They give the opportunity to everyone to reflect on personal experience and to give detailed consideration to all themes and topics, raised by the keynote speakers and during the workshops, along with colleagues from other countries, cultures and professions. This is a great opportunity to learn from others, in a small group of people.

The contents of the individual group discussions is not disclosed outside the group itself.

A facilitator was appointed to each discussion group. The task of the facilitator was to help to ensure that the experiences and viewpoints of each conference delegate were heard. *Claire Missen was leader of Discussion group 1, Marie De Blic for group 2, Martin Wiklander for group 3 and Jean Pierre Van Hee facilitated for group 4.*



The venue of the conference

The entire programme of the ICCFR-conference was held in one central location, the *Provinciehuis* of Ghent, a venue with a rich history and located in the heart of the city centre. I would like to put in a word of thanks to the province of East-Flanders and in particular Mr Eddy Couckuyt, Deputy, Province of East-Flanders and Mr William Blondeel, Head of the Welfare en Health Departement of the Province of East-Flanders for their hospitality to host the conference in the *Provinciehuis*.

On the first conference day, after lunch, all delegates were offered a guided tour in the building. They could admire some beautiful Flemish works of art and typical old Flemish tapestries.

The *Provinciehuis* is fairly new, having been built after the Second World War. It was designed by the architects Valentin Vaerwyck and Jean Hebbelynck to replace the nineteenth century *Provinciehuis* which had been set on fire by German troops in 1944, putting an end to the building's rich history. In the 16th century one of the rare stone houses owned by nobility in the Gouvernmentstraat was laid out as a residence for the first dean of the Saint Bavo chapter. Through subsequent various transformations and extensions it was converted into a vast episcopal palace, stretching as far as the river Scheldt, the site of the current F. Laurentplein. In 1794, at the time of the French revolution, the bishop was chased out of the palace, which was confiscated as national possession.



The administration of the Scheldt department, the forerunner of the current provincial administration, moved into the building. In the course of the 19th century the building complex was redesigned and adjusted for functional reasons. Since East Flanders became part of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands from 1815, the building had to accommodate the 96 members of the Provincial States, the institutional forerunner of the current provincial council. In 1890 the architect Jules-Jacques Van Ysendyck was entrusted with the design of a completely new building for the provincial administration and government. This building in neorenaissance style was completed in 1896-1897 but was severely hit by the flames in 1944 to the extent that it had to be demolished and replaced by the current *Provinciehuis*, which was inaugurated in 1957.

(Source: www.oostvlaanderen.be)



Social events

At the end of each conference day, we were happy to offer all international delegates a variety of social events, at different locations in the city. As mentioned before, at the evening of the preconference day, the participants were invited for a welcome drink at the Ghent Town Hall. The reception was offered by Mr Geert Versnick, President of the Public Social Welfare Department of Ghent.

In the evening of the first conference day, on Friday 27th of May, our guests were taken for a trip to explore Ghent by boat. Two boats left for a one hour tour on the charming canals of Ghent. A city guide explained some interesting facts about several historical buildings and places, seen during the boat trip.



Afterwards, everyone was guided to the Aubertus Church for a dinner.

The Aubertus Church is an ancient beautiful chapel belonging to Monasterium Poortackere hotel, the hotel where some of our guests were staying.





On the second conference day, Saturday 28th of May, we were very pleased that our Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family, Jo Vandeurzen, was hosting a formal conference dinner for all the ICCFR-participants in the castle of the counts, Gravensteen. For this occasion, one big room of the medieval castle was turned into an imposing dining venue. The castle of the counts is situated in the heart of the city centre : a charming beauty of stone and history to visit before the dinner.

All delegates were invited by two guides for a historical visit within the castle walls. Needless to say that this was a beautiful evening for all of us. I would like to thank our Minister Vandeurzen for his support and interest in ICCFR.



The last day of the conference, Sunday 29th of May, we ended our programme with an invitation by the province of East-Flanders to a lunch with typical regional dishes, such as the famous *Gentse waterzooi* and typical Belgian beers. The province also hosted a guided tour through the city, before our guests' departure. A last look at the vibrant city of Ghent... as all good things come to an end.

The recent conference brought back to me many good memories while I have been writing this report, but it is also time to look at the near future, so up to...

The next conference

I am pleased to inform everyone that the ICCFR-conference in 2012 will be hosted in the Marriott Burlington Hotel and Resort in Boston, Massachusetts, USA.



Called ‘the hub’ and ‘the cradle of liberty’ since colonial times, Boston boasts almost 400 years of history and tradition, including the freedom trail, the U.S.S. constitution (the oldest commissioned wooden sailing warship in the world), the Minuteman National Park and much more. The 2012 Conference in Boston will take place from 15th to 17th of June 2012. The focus will be on the following subject: “ Collaboration instead of collision. Family law, social policy and joint practice” .

I would like to invite all of you to the next international ICCFR-conference in June 2012. To view the facilities of the venue, please visit the following link:
www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/bosbu-boston-marriott-burlington

The board and myself are very much looking forward to meeting you all again in Boston for another successful and interesting international exchange like the one we have just experienced this year.

Marc Morris

Chair ICCFR

August 2011



Overview programme 58th International ICCFR-conference 27th – 29th May 2011, Provinciehuis Ghent

The family and social work: A successful ‘marriage’?

PRECONFERENCE DAY THURSDAY 26th MAY 2011

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|-------|---|
| 12.30 | Welcoming of the participants + registration |
| 13.00 | Start of the sandwich lunch |
| 13.45 | Short introduction in the Provinciehuis by a guide |
| 14.30 | Start of the presentations by Flemish Government representatives :
Flanders in Europe : Fabian Dominguez |
| 15.00 | Presentation regarding the Flemish Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family: Policy
Paper 2009-2014, Welfare, Public Health and Family: Els Dufour |
| 15.30 | Flemish facts and figures: Fred Deven |
| 16.00 | Presentation by Province of East Flanders : introduction movie |
| 16.30 | Questions by the public |
| 18.00 | Welcome drink in the Ghent Town hall by Geert Versnick |
| 19.30 | End - free evening to discover Ghent |



FIRST CONFERENCE DAY FRIDAY 27th MAY 2011

- 9.00 - 9.15 Welcome & Conference opening by ICCFR-chairman **Marc Morris**
- 9.15 - 9.45 Introduction by a member of the Executive of the province of East Flanders
Deputy Eddy Couckuyt
- 9.45 - 11.00 Keynote presentation "Help, I do not understand this language!" **Veerle Beel**
Chaired by: **Charles Hoare**, ICCFR Board

Veerle Beel is a journalist of the newspaper The Standaard. She is a national news reporter and mainly writes about social and family topics. She is married and mother of two young adult sons, whose tricks and blunders she now and then describes in her twice monthly column.

- 11.00 - 11.30 Coffee break
- 11.30 - 13.00 Discussion groups: session 1
- 13.00 - 14.15 Lunch
- 14.15 - 15.30 Workshops 1-5
- **Workshop 1:**
How culturally sensitive social work can make the difference: a best practice in youth care in Brussels (**Farid Makhless and Katrien Lauwereys** (*Inter Cultural Mediation OTA-team Brussel & Vlaams-Brabant*), **Touria Aziz** (*D'Broej - youth work*), **Sigrid Arents** (*Huis der Gezinnen: 'Home of families'*), **Hendrik Van den Bussche** (*Integrated youth care*) - Belgium)
 - **Workshop 2:**
Care for the elderly in modern Russia. Senior citizen and social worker. (**Oksana Parfenova**, *Russia*)
 - **Workshop 3:**
Creative ways of reaching out (**Vivien Cassar** – *Malta*)
 - **Workshop 4:**
Parental engagement in family support programmes: an indispensable but risky business for families and practitioners (**Assistant Prof. R. Roose, S. Van Houte** - *Belgium*)
 - **Workshop 5:**
Family platform project (*Mouvement Mondial des Mères, Belgium*)
- 15.30 - 16.00 Coffee break
- 16.00 - 17.00 Discussion groups: session 2
- 18.00 Departure to boat trip (1 hour) and dinner in Monasterium Poortackere - Aubertus church



SECOND CONFERENCE DAY SATURDAY 28th MAY 2011

9.00 - 9.15 Welcome & Conference opening by ICCFR-chairman **Marc Morris**

9.00-10.15 Keynote Presentation

“Social work with black and ethnic minority families in the UK: partnerships in difficult times” **Cathy Amer**

Chaired by **Martin Wiklander**, ICCFR Board

Cathy Aymer is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at Brunel University where she has worked for many years. She is concerned about how we educate social workers to understand and intervene in a variety of difficult situations that arise in increasingly, ethnically diverse societies. She will explore the lessons that have been learnt over recent years in order to suggest some pointers about how this might be achieved in these difficult times.

10.15 - 10.45 Coffee break

10.45 - 12.00 Discussion groups: session 3

12.00 - 13.30 Lunch

13.30 - 15.00 Workshops 6-10

- **Workshop 6:**
The family mandala labyrinth of peace (**Rita Roberto, Italy**)
- **Workshop 7:**
Experiences of a voluntary family assistance program and its effects on families (**Judith Medvey, Hungary**)
- **Workshop 8:**
Children’s education biographies and the focus on ethnical values in family education (**Dr. Charlotte Giese, Germany**)
- **Workshop 9:**
Working with parents and children together in divorce mediation sessions (**Ann De Keyser, Diana Evers – Belgium**)
- **Workshop 10:**
Leave to Remove From the Jurisdiction (**Deborah Eaton, IAML, UK**)

15.00 - 15.30 Coffee break

18.00 Visit of the medieval Castle of the Counts (Gravensteen)
Dinner hosted by the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Health and Family, **Jo Vandeurzen**.



THIRD CONFERENCE DAY SUNDAY 29th MAY 2011

9.00-10.15 Keynote presentation

“ The family concept held by social workers and their clients: critical remarks on gender and class perspectives?” **Prof. Dr. Barbara Thiessen**

Chaired by Insa Schöningh, ICCFR Board

Prof. Dr. Barbara Thiessen has been a professor of Social Work at the University of Applied Sciences in Landshut, Germany since March 2010. She studied social work at the Protestant University of Applied Sciences in Reutlingen and the University of Bremen. She was a researcher and lecturer at Bremen and Luenenburg universities and published her first book on “Individualisation and Reproduction. Analyses of Precarious Jobs in Private Households”.

10.15-10.45 Coffee break

10.45-11.45 Best practise briefings

11.45-12.30 Conference closing:

Closing address by ICCFR-chairman **Marc Morris** – reflections and official invitation to the 2012 conference

12.30-14.00 Lunch

15.00 Guided tour, hosted by *the Province of East Flanders*



Keynote presentation

“Help, I do not understand that language!”

Veerle Beel, Journalist of the newspaper De Standaard

“Ladies and gentlemen,

My presence here before you is somewhat of an oddity, for as a journalist I feel a bit like a stray goose in the duck pond. My thanks then to the organizers of this conference for having me.

All of you are, in your individual qualities as care givers, policy assistants, judges at the juvenile courts, or otherwise engaged professionals, deeply involved in concerns about the welfare of children, youths, and families. You are trying, night and day, as it were, to find solutions to problems and to answer to societal needs: you are providing child day care for families that have both parents working, you are finding ways of providing care for the growing number of children that are experiencing problems within the environment in which they are being raised, you have to decide what remedies to apply in cases where young folk have strayed from the straight and narrow, or you are trying to assist struggling families in the hope of preventing the really serious problems lurking up ahead.

In a nutshell, what you are engaged in is extremely important. Even though it may often not receive the deserved appreciation and be regularly criticized instead. But it *is* important in as much as it contributes to the well-being and the welfare of our youngest generations, thus being the reflection of hope in, and for, a better future.

My own work is not of the same depth or import. I’m on the sidelines. I belong to the guild of journalists writing about this so-called ‘soft’ sector. I am not amongst those aboard the ship; rather I’m the armchair sailor on the shore, ready with pen and notebook to note down how successfully all the ships in your fleet are negotiating the winds, or beating against the waves, as the case may be. And I, together with my colleagues, give expression to all of this, and devise suitable ‘headings’.

And that we, from our armchairs, are not always seeing the reality that is obvious to you, the true sailors, should actually not come as a surprise. It is quite normal. If the fleet peacefully sails on in the same direction as it always has, we, as journalists, get quickly bored by it all.

It is only when something out of the ordinary occurs – when the fleet alters course or one ship decides to take a tack different from the others, or when there is a collision, or a man falls overboard – that we again pay full attention: hey, what’s going on out there? Then, everybody springs into action, wanting to know all of the details.

In brief, we are all focusing on the exceptional, the abnormal, the ‘something not quite right’. I think you understand my drift. It’s the conflicts, the fault lines, and also the new trends in our society that interest us most. This, so I have been told, often leads to frustration on your side. And, indeed, the fact is – to give an example from the field of child day care – that the hundreds of child minders performing their tasks to great all-round satisfaction are never mentioned in the media; it’s only when one of their baby charges dies, because of negligence and neglect or rough treatment, for instance, that they make it into the national news. And in our newspapers and on TV, we keep on whining about waiting lists: there is shortage of day care, there is a



shortage of care for the handicapped, there is a shortage of places for juveniles that have committed a so-called 'criminal fact', and there are waiting lists galore for youngsters needing psychiatric care and attention. And we now even have waiting lists for school enrolment – but never mind that, that's altogether another department!

Stating the problem

Time for some clear problem definitions:

1. The press focuses on the exceptional, the special, the out-of-the-ordinary. Hence, sometimes also on the negative.
2. The media do not always report what the sector would like them to report.

I hope to explain and clarify these two statements – which are inextricably tied to one another – by way of some examples, so that you may derive some benefit from them. And I further hope to provide some counter-arguments; we are really not always that negative. But we *are* stubborn and persistent and make our own choices.

Examples from the practice

Allow me to illustrate the statements by using some paradigms.

1. The Nazi child minder

Photo of 7 newspaper articles /headings about the Nazi child minder in the papers of 8 September 2009.

HLN: Child and Family tolerates Nazi-child minder

DS: Child Day Care amongst Nazi symbols

DM: Accredited Antwerp Day Care family openly professes racism

DM: Accredited child minder flaunts Nazi sympathy

GvA: "I find Hitler's views phenomenal"

Belang van Limburg: Portrait of Hitler on the wall in the home of child minder

Het Nieuwsblad: With Hitler as model: child day care with Nazi sympathizer

The Flemish amongst you know all about this. But let me summarize for the others. A TV reporter with 'Terzake' found out that a child minder in Hoboken near Antwerp displayed Nazi symbols inside her home, amongst which was a photo/pen sketch of Hitler, and that she also clearly sympathized with Nazi ideas. He filmed her with a hidden camera. The woman didn't mince words: she confirmed that her husband was not a neo-Nazi but one cast in the old-guard Nazi mould (!) and explicitly stated her disagreement with the child-rearing principles of Child and Family, even though this organisation is the overseeing authority that issued her official accreditation. She opined that children ought to be brought up in a much stricter manner than is common today.

A lot of ink flowed over this in the days that followed. At least, this is the impression amongst many people, maybe also amongst you. Too much? I looked it up via the online database Mediargus: the Flemish press published altogether 79 articles about this "Nazi child minder". What mileage the Francophone press got out of this I don't know: their data have only been stored via Mediargus from 2010 onwards.

79 articles in the Flemish newspapers. Is that really a lot? I personally find it not bad at all when you consider that there are some eight papers. I am counting the free paper *Metro* in this number, but not "*De Tijd*" since, at



least according to Mediargus, it didn't devote one iota to the story. If you consider Mediargus reliable - as I do – then there are also newspapers that did not find this incident worth reporting on.

But all other newspapers did. Not only the so-called tabloids but also the serious press, amongst which my own paper.

The search titles 'child minder' and 'Nazi' dish up even more articles in *De Standaard* (16), and in *Het Laatste Nieuws* (13). With the search titles 'child minder' and 'Hitler', *De Standaard* even goes one 'better', with 21 hits, which points out that the authors of at least five articles steered cleared of the hated term "Nazi-child minder", possibly because they wished to give a nuanced reportage.

21 articles: you may find that a lot and there were indeed readers that after merely one week openly reacted negatively to our site. "Has this subject not yet been milked for more than it's worth?" one of them asked. Somebody else wrote: "The press is eager to condemn and blows everything out of proportion just for the sake of being sensational. Alas, poor *Standaard*". A third writer did not actually reveal his own sympathies when he wrote: "the big difference between Churchill and Hitler is only that the one came up a winner and the other a loser".

I consider these readers wrong. Just think what could be said about this topic and how many questions it raised.

- there were the facts as reported on the first day.
- there were the indignant reactions of the minister of Welfare, Jo Vandeurzen, and of the Anti-Racism Centre on the day after, that quickly and unambiguously held that child minders embracing Nazi sympathies ought never to receive accreditation.
- there was Child and Family, the overseeing organisation, which in the end rescinded the accreditation.
- there was the child minder herself, who was not in the employ of Child and Family but operated as an independent from inside her own home. To the amazement of many, she was able to continue in the job even after losing her accreditation. Such is today's legislation. Parents only lost the tax cut.
- and had the woman's views become known to Child and Family already before this incident? Had the organisation already received complaints about her or not? Unfortunately, the organisation handled the communication about this incident very badly. The version on Day One differed from that on Day Two and that one again from the version on Day Three, all of this providing new fuel for more articles.
- experts picked up their pen to register their opinions about this affair. Michel Vandenbroeck, for one, wrote in an opinion piece: "When a child minder once again hits the news, she appears to be a Hitler fan!"
- there followed a hearing in the Flemish Parliament.

But rest easy, I do not intend to give you a list of all of the articles. The idea behind my summary is to point out that this unique fact transcended the borders of the 'fait-divers'. Van Dale defines fait-divers as: a remarkable yet trivial fact, something briefly catching the attention, but of little import.

But this news fact actually had true significance. It evoked questions about the organisation of our child day care system: Child and Family does conduct inspections but these inspections, or controls, are not carried out by the organisation itself. This is the responsibility of a separate agency: the Inspection Agency. And that



Agency apparently works strictly by the book, ticking off the items on its list of absolute requisites when it carries out its inspections: are the toys clean enough and is the place properly dusted? Is there enough individual free room per square metre and are not too many children all crowded too closely together?

All important matters surely, but a general estimation about the quality of the service, a feel for whether things are as they should be, that 'gut feeling' which guides parents when they choose day care for their kids... no, that doesn't fit on the inspection check-off list.

Child and Family, as a result of all of this, announced after consultation with the competent minister that the regulations would be upgraded by the addition of a new item on their inspection list: Nazi and racist symbols will henceforth be banned from child day care centres. It appears to have been put down in black and white on paper, otherwise it doesn't count.

But, already, this latest decision does not actually apply to this particular child minder since she, as an independent operator, simply carries on in her own sweet way as before.

I find all of this really fascinating. It leads to an interesting social debate about the future course we need to take with child day care, and how we ought to organize and re-organize this.

Granted, the debate starts out from a very painful incident that has not been brought about by the sector itself. It stands to reason that this is not something one, as sector, likes to have to deal with. Result: the sector reacts with surprise and, at first, very awkwardly to the news. Luckily, the competent minister acts very quickly and appropriately.

And, by the way, there are also the occasional reports about child minders appearing before the courts, as I referred to already earlier, because a baby in their care has died, sometimes through neglect or maltreatment.

And one year after the Nazi child minder controversy, there followed a whole debate about the subsidies for independent child day care, which would make it possible for poorer parents to take advantage of the service. Those discussions were unexpectedly and hurriedly shelved, threatening to fold young starters before they even had a chance to get started. And this while we are still faced with a shortage in child day care facilities!

No, all of this is hardly pleasant news.

But the fact that child day care keeps continuously popping up in the news proves how important we consider this field. It is extremely relevant, since practically all of us have had children in day care, or have grandchildren in it.

We've come a long way in our travails along that road. We are actually only one or two generations removed from the time when the child in day care was regarded with some feeling of pity. In previous generations, mothers stayed at home, or aunts or grandmothers, or neighbours used to lend a helping hand. In this manner, the idea of child minders was conceived. But in those days, everybody knew everybody else, and there was also a lot of social supervision and attention. You knew beforehand you could count your child to be in good hands; no need for inspections and controls by the administration.

This is different now. We no longer all live together in the shadow of the same church spire the way our parents did. We no longer know our neighbours all that well and, besides, they too are all away at work themselves. We now have to rely on the authorities to ensure qualitative child day care. We impose great



demands on this. Because we still carry within ourselves that primal fear that things will go wrong when we entrust our child into the hands of somebody else, an “alien” in that respect.

In most instances, professional child day care functions smoothly: over 90 percent of all parents are satisfied to very satisfied with the care given to their children. And, yes, this little item also made the news. It is not really true that good news is not news. But that study dates back two years.

On the regional pages of the newspaper we also regularly find news about child minders that receive high praise from ‘their children’ for their extended years of devoted service. The media do not invariably display ill-will.

Nevertheless, when occasionally something does go wrong, our age-old fear gets overblown in the newspapers, which then function as megaphones to generously disseminate the news. That is not likely to ever change. This is a reality you have to take into account and to which the new media make their own contribution. Just Google a bit and find out how many hits you’ll call up for the term Nazi child minder. Far more than 79.

2. Juvenile delinquency

Let’s move on to a completely different sub-sector of youth care. Likewise a controversial subject to which litres of ink have been devoted: juvenile delinquency. Which, officially, must not be called like that: according to our legislative provisions in casu, minors cannot commit a crime. They are only capable of committing a “fact or deed described as a crime”. Because of their youth, they are entitled to protection and screening from the public eye, which is exactly what makes it so difficult for us, journalists, to write about these youngsters.

I recently attended a study day of the ‘Broeders van Liefde – Brothers of Love’, where the organizers made a statement about changes in our society that cause more and more youngsters to run afoul of the law. It behoves us to point out that society is co-responsible for increasing problems and insecurity amongst young people. And it is certainly worthwhile as well to point out that youngsters who are just guilty of some misconduct are not so different from youngsters that are growing up inside a troubled problem environment. That the line between the two is hardly a straight, well-defined line. This is a message that has not yet penetrated sufficiently amongst journalists, with their preference for plain talk.

The few journalists present during the study day were sent off with the message that they should not always focus on the criminal aspects, the ‘criminal facts’ of youth, but that they ought to check out what drove the youngsters to their delinquent behaviour, what life they are leading, in what family environment they are being raised. In brief, one ought to listen more to the young themselves.

According to the organizers, this act of listening is practised all too infrequently.

I was happy to announce there and then that one of my colleagues at De Standaard was going to publish an article on exactly that topic in the paper’s next day edition. Under the telling title ‘De schrik van Zelzate – The Terror of Zelzate’, Lieven Sioen gave the floor to the youth gang responsible for causing a lot of trouble in the region, and which had become known as the ‘Colruyt Gang’, because they were operating in the areas of that supermarket’s stores. It turned out to be a hard-hitting reportage:

(slide 3 – of 9: Saturday 12 February 2011, pp. 18 and 19)



On the other hand, there are also good reasons for not going overboard with this. In the said article, I read that the members of the Colruyt Gang get a great 'kick' out of the wide coverage they are given by the media. Thus, they are actually being rewarded for being who they are, while every educator knows one should ignore misconduct and reward only proper conduct.

Then there is likewise the question of privacy: a minor under supervision of the youth care services must not be mentioned, either by name or with his or her photo, in the newspapers. One must also be careful not to publish other recognizable photos, e.g., of their homes, since also that sort of information would reveal their identity.

I give you this relevant example.

It's taken from reality, as you can see from the following slide. It concerns a newspaper article from *De Standaard*, which subsequently elicited a lot of comment and was much discussed amongst news editors. Much more even than had been the case with the publication of the notorious child minder. It was discussed before its publication and also after it.

(slide 4 – of 10: Tragedy in the perfect family + photo of home, next interview with expert Peter Adriaenssens: 'In just a few seconds, your whole life's course collapses')

It concerns a tragic accident in Rotselaar whereby a girl of 16 years old was arrested because she had severely beaten her younger sister. The sister was seriously injured.

For some people, this is a private affair. It should remain on the inside, within the family, and it has no place in a newspaper. But is this opinion not identical to what people used to think about sexual abuse within families or incest, and likewise about partner violence? Whoever covers up on this does not help the victim, rather assigns him/her to a deeper misery.

Yet, it is not only for that reason that we devoted an article to the incident. The point is that for days there was great uncertainty about what happened: a girl of 12 or 13 was so-called attacked by a person unknown while she was alone in the house. Somebody would have forced his way inside. Her parents were at the school for parent night, her older sister was out jogging with a boy from the neighbourhood. This boy found the victim bleeding inside the house when the two joggers returned. Speculation about what happened was rife. Not only in the media at the time of the assault, but mostly in the street and in the municipality where the family lived. The victim could not tell: she was unconscious. Everybody got the jitters: if there happened to be a violent maniac on the loose in the village, the same thing could happen somewhere else, anywhere else, the next day.

Hence, when the policy eventually picked up the sister as a suspect, it could not be kept silent. The story had grown too big, even without exaggerated media attention. It meant people could now put a period behind a week of fear in Rotselaar. It was, not surprisingly, one of the main topics on the radio and TV newscasts that day.

In addition, that degree of violence between two sisters was hardly normal. The development had not followed in line with the expectations. It had come as a complete surprise and a major shock.

Hence, it was hardly illogical for our paper to devote an article to this incident. My colleague who reports on crime and court cases wrote an article about it, as neutral and serene as he could, without mentioning any names or street name. We deliberately steered clear of trying to find photos of the girls, though these days they are easy to find via Internet and Facebook. Other newspapers acted differently. They put a screen over the



photo and drew a black stripe across the eyes, but we did not believe that kept their incognito. We therefore refrained from this.

There are not, at this moment, any rules directing journalistic practices how to deal with photos of social network sites, whether you can pick them off the net and print them in the newspaper. We think not; others figure otherwise.

We decided to publish the photo of the family's house. I admit that this too is a choice you can argue about. My colleague, the crime reporter, states in this regard: the house has not been chosen just because the family lives there. It is published as the location of the crime. If the facts had happened somewhere else (a school, a playground, a youth club, a market square) we would have published that instead. He furthermore ensured that the house number was blanked out so that a reader not familiar with the house cannot from our photo find out where it is located. For readers that know the house in the first place – people from the neighbourhood – it made no difference: they would identify the house in any event.

On the afternoon TV newscast, the house was also shown, but with the house number legible. Other media named the street. We did not do this. I believe we may conclude that our paper acted with commendable discretion, although I know from a reliable source that the parents in question also found our reportage very painful. I can sympathize with them.

Of course, I have no illusions in this respect. If something that dramatic should happen in my home tomorrow, whereby the immediate reaction is to think of an outside intruder, my house will be in the newspapers. And no, I will not find this very pleasant.

At this point, I want to introduce something completely opposite: the girls that were kidnapped by Dutroux, and the great contrast between the limited attention paid to that affair when no one knew of their whereabouts and the enormous publicity after Dutroux was found out. By extension, this story is also applicable to all youngsters that disappeared before 1996, who had to be satisfied with a brief mention in the newspapers – and that was all. Their parents were wholly left out in the cold.

In the summer of 1996, I, as reporter, visited the parents of Melissa Russo, for a lengthy interview. Melissa was one of the girls kidnapped by Dutroux, abused, and murdered, after he first had locked her for weeks inside his cellar and made her starve. The parents asked me point-blank: what took you so long? Why didn't you show up here when our daughter was missing? Why was this not important to your paper at that time? All I could do was feel greatly ashamed. The questions by Gino and Carine Russo were more than relevant.

And just like so many parents before them, parents also of a missing son or daughter, then and even today, they had to be satisfied with a brief 'fait-divers' in the newspaper.

And I cannot for the life of me figure out why the media at that time paid so little attention to these happenings. Girls have disappeared? Oh, they probably ran away... Journalists thought exactly like the police at that time. The police was occupied with more weighty matters, like ourselves: with politics, the economy, cultural affairs, foreign events...

Domestic news? Only if it qualified as a matter of state interest.

An anecdote from my early days as a journalist – quite a while back then. A colleague who was working at the then domestic news desk received a phone call from someone who alerted him to a major train accident. Almost one quarter of a century ago that colleague answered: 'Sorry, but that's nothing for us, we are the



domestic news desk with De Standaard.' 'But this IS domestic news!', the caller said. At that time, the domestic news desk was exclusively occupied with politics.

Now, so many years later, everything has changed, and a good thing too. These days there is a political newsroom and a separate domestic newsroom. Events that in the past were summarily and incorrectly treated as fait-divers are now receiving much more attention. We now also find ordinary life events important. As a consequence, we have become a newspaper with a much broader range of interests, paying attention, or trying to pay due attention, to everything that is relevant within a societal context. As a result, we have become a much *better* newspaper, with a larger readership than ever before. And this tells us that our readers, on the whole, are in agreement with our choices.

We also offer extensive space to opinion pages where readers that do disagree with us are offered a forum, and where the debate about social and societal topics sometimes rages fiercely. And where you, as professionals, also are invited to express your opinions, if you feel like doing so. The condition is that you be capable of fluid expression, refrain from too much jargon, and discuss subjects that are current news. You need to treat topics that have been newsworthy lately, in other words, not the agenda of your own institutions, for the news that you have been around for already 20 to 30 years may be interesting fare to you internally but to us it's rather a stale dish.

Given the great interest in everything to do with children and youth, it can't be all that difficult to dig into your own experiences and come up with something interesting about today's world?

Jargon

And, yes, we also have to say a few words about the language that you and I are using. As a young journalist, I was constantly told to make certain that everybody understood what I was talking about, even our own mother. And I have to tell you that you are not exactly making it easy for us.

Minors that are placed under the supervision of the juvenile court are divided in two groups: the 'moffers' and the 'possessers'. Come again?! Families that are seeking help should direct themselves to CLBs, CKGs, CAWs and CCGs? At least, if they happen to know what these abbreviated institutions stand for... And there is much ado around PABs and PGBs – if I didn't know better I would put them down as noxious substances in the environment instead of financing systems for people that suffer from a handicap. These selfsame people with a handicap need to seek assistance from the 'vap', which actually should be the VAPH, or the Flemish Agency for..., oops, I need to go googling again to make certain I got this right.

Then there is the famous IKG system in Child Day Care and likewise the IBOs where you can take your kids. There are committees and consultants, and the crowning glory is the Integral Youth Care, which has the responsibility to ascertain that inside this maze of all those facilities – and I've left out a lot of them – we manage to actually find our way more easily. That we all get to enter by that one entrance door. Really now? I wouldn't know where to find it if I had need for it.

Now you can, of course, tell me: never mind that, it's all just letters and words, and agreements amongst people. Once you get familiar with them, no more problems. True enough. But please don't forget that new kids keep coming, new youngsters, and new parents. New families, all of them baffled by these weird words and letters, and that are not yet familiar with the agreements.

People that have to start from zero every time, and quite frequently are left with the feeling they are entirely on their own.



This I find too crazy in a country where the welfare facilities are so broadly spread out? How is this possible? It is a question that undoubtedly deserves more concentrated attention on your part. Our former Chief Editor, who is now employed in the Netherlands, would get very annoyed with the fact that in the composition of the paper we failed to pay enough attention to what the readers wanted most. The reader had to be our guiding spirit, not our own agenda or our own interests.

I believe that this mantra can also serve you well: let the questions from the families be your guide. Not the traditions of your own establishments or institutions. In fact, you ought to ask yourselves continuously the question: what can we do differently and better? How can we even better accommodate the new requests for help from parents and children?

And as I, as journalist, have to assume that for every article I write there will always be new readers that have never heard about a person-related assistance budget (PAB), in the same way you also will have to ask yourselves if what you are saying is sufficiently clear, lucid, and accessible to everybody reading it... and if you actually are on the right track with what you are doing.

Ask the families

I want to conclude with a final article. It concerns a conversation I once had with three mothers, each with a child for whom they were seeking help. They did not only talk about their own persons, but had with the assistance of 'Vormingplus' and the University of Ghent mapped out the plus and minus points in the youth care service, this based on the experiences of several parents like themselves.

(slide 5 – of 11: Finding the right kind of assistance is difficult, DS of 18 November 2010)

These mothers had had a very positive experience with the STOP programme, wherein they and their children were coached once a week for ten weeks on how to deal with their problems. It pertained to young children that sometimes reacted quite explosively to ordinary, banal happenings. Some of them even destroyed furniture in their rage. For some families, ten weeks proved adequate; others had to be referred onwards to seek more intensive help.

That they sometimes had to travel quite a distance to get to the STOP-programme lessons was not something that bothered them. What all three of them told us is that they happened by pure chance upon this assistance: "We were fortunate that somebody told us about this". They thought there ought to be one central information point with all the information needed and that you can contact. That feature is missing.

One of the mothers had her daughter examined for autism. The result was negative. A pity, the mother thought, not because she would have liked her child to be autistic, but because such a diagnosis opens doors: you then are eligible for assistance, for instance, also at school. It is thus possible that the enormous increase for such diagnoses is connected to the way in which our care services are organized; not, in the first place, to the desire of the parents to shift the responsibility for non-conform behaviour upon some other 'disorder', such as is often proposed by critics. The label opens the door to assistance.

And then there was the observation by a mother that people with money can send their kids to the child psychiatrist, and those that have none wind up in youth welfare, where, as a parent, you run a far greater risk of losing custody over your children. Indeed a painful matter, certainly given the fact that poverty in our country is steadily on the rise.



Fifteen percent of children are growing up in families that at the end of the month are suffering from hunger. A girl of 13 that I interviewed at the start of this school year told me she had no proper satchel for her books. She relied on a somewhat too large handbag from her older sister. Her father is employed but his wages are low and not adequate to look after the needs of a large family and at the same time pay off debts. At the end of the month, they gathered as many Euro cents as possible together to go and buy bread. The brothers had been placed with some other families. The girl often lay awake in fear of their being evicted from the home. The mother was powerless: others were deciding which of her children were allowed to live at home and which not. She had no further say in this. I think this sort of sad tale is not unknown to you.

(slide 6 – of 12: We deserve respect, DS 3 September 2010)

It probably does not come as a surprise to you that this mother is not complimentary about the youth care service. ‘I don’t like going there’, she tells me. ‘In effect, we have no longer any say over our children. Every decision we take needs to be submitted to the committee for special youth care. They don’t take account with what we would like or what the children would like. We are reduced to just standing there, like fixtures, dumb and mute.’

The daughter expressed it even more graphically. She said: ‘I find that Belgium – excuse me for my non-couth – sometimes acts like a horse’s ass. One could surely take more account of what our needs are, as a family! The point is that without money we don’t eat, and when we don’t eat we fall ill. And the result? More stress at home and that leads to disputes and everything and everybody becomes very miserable.’

I cannot summarize it more forcefully. Respect for families like this one, that are deserving of the best possible assistance. As much as needed, but not beyond what is needed. And I fully realize that every day must be a challenge for you, just to find that golden mean.

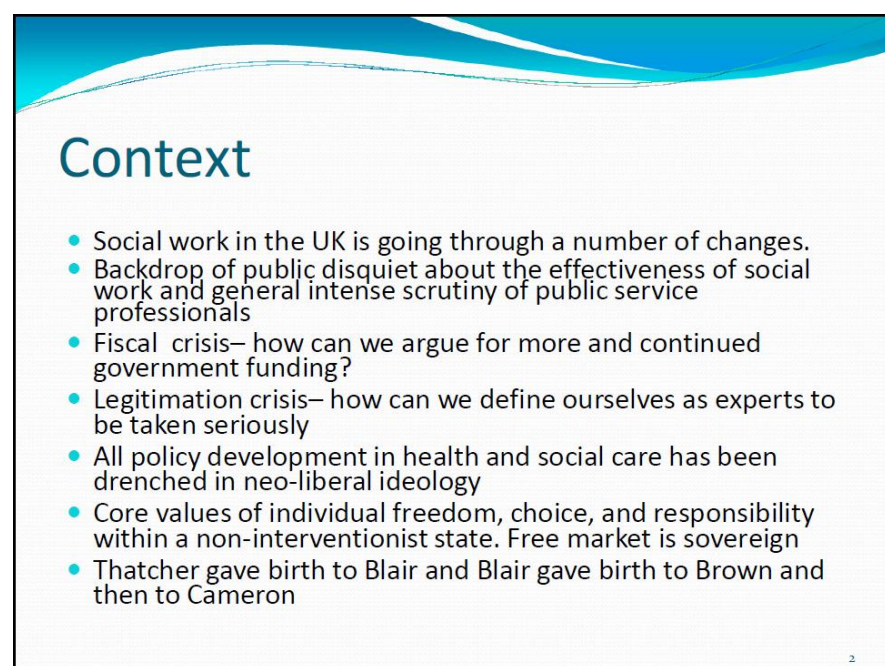
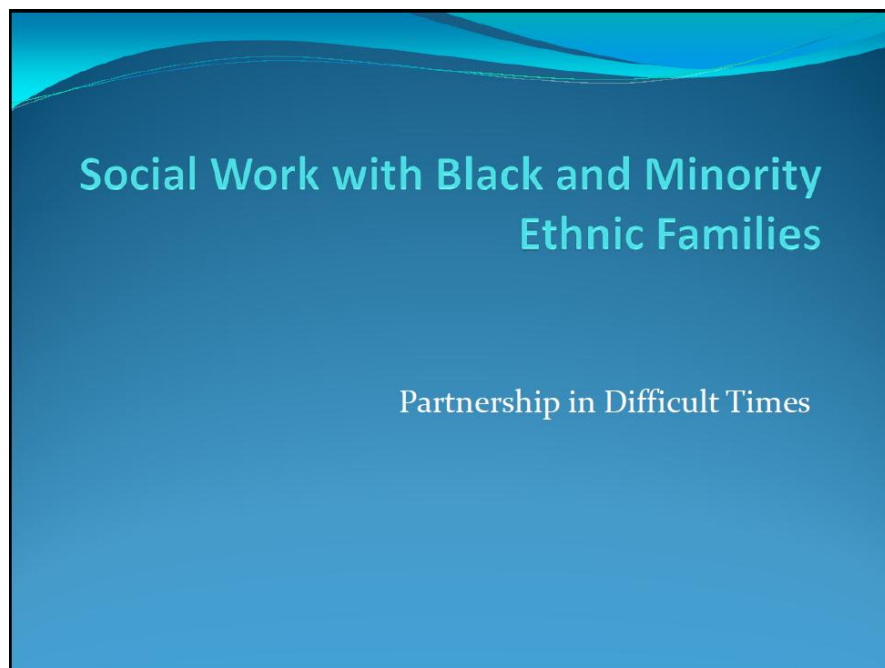
I wish you a lot of success in your tasks, and a safe and favourable wind to guide you!”



PowerPoint of Keynote presentation

““Social work with black and ethnic minority families in the UK: partnership in difficult times. “

Dr. Cathy Aymer, BSc, MSc, PhD Brunel University UK





Context

- In the UK social work has been a profession under siege
- There has been a struggle between the employers and the universities for the heart of the profession.
- Competency speak → managerialism → actions are philosophically, morally and politically neutral
- We began to behave in apolitical and atheoretical ways
- Students question whether what they are learning is valued in practice

3

Is there light coming through?

- Following enquiries into child deaths, the government commissioned Professor Munroe to examine the child protection system in particular (but this can be for all social work)
- Key finding: critique of the bureaucratisation of social work and a call to return to relationship building with families and service users.
- I have seen over the years less focus in some areas on social work core values and ideas of social justice and equality
- My question: how can educators enable students to keep these in focus and particularly when dealing with minority ethnic families?

4

Migration and statistics

- The minority ethnic population of the UK has its origins in relatively recent migration from Third World countries, growing from 74,000 people in 1951 (Rose, 1969) to 4.6 million in 2001. The first period of mass immigration from these countries lasted from the early 1950s to the mid-1970s, involving mainly the New Commonwealth.
- Since the mid-1990s, levels of net immigration to the UK from all parts of the world have revived, increasing to reach around 200,000 per annum by 2003 (Salt, 2005).
- More recently due to upheavals in own countries (refugees and asylum seekers)

5

More predicted numbers

- July 2010 BBC report on new research by Leeds university
- It says that the proportion of black, Asian and other ethnic minorities will rise from 8% of the population, as recorded in the 2001 census, to 20% by 2051.
- Prof Rees said the number of people identifying themselves as being of "mixed race" would rise from 1.2% to 4.2%.
- the "white other" ethnic group would be extremely fast growing.
- This was because of expected high levels of immigration from Europe, Australasia and the US.

6



UK born descendents

- Naming has been a constant struggle
- Asian or Asian British, Black or Black British or Chinese or Other ethnic origin,
- Changes between 1991 and 2001
- For example, children of Mixed: White/Black Caribbean parentage fell into the 'Black- Other' category in 1991, and the Mixed: White/Black-Caribbean category in 2001. A variety of mixed categories.
- The minority ethnic groups whether immigrants or UK born share the same colonial legacy

7

Legislation and Govt action

- Earlier migrants and their UK-born descendants have continued to face disadvantage and discrimination (to varying degrees).
- Legislation spanning three decades has sought to protect the rights of minorities
- 1976 Race Relations Act
- 2000 Race Relations Amendment Act
- 2010 Equality Act
- Strengthening communities: 'increasing life chances for all is a fundamental element of building strong, cohesive communities and a dynamic society and economy' (Home Office, 2005, p. 19).
- Low trust society – imposes a tax on its members – legislation and procedures

8



Characteristics of Minority Ethnic groups

- 2001 Census – National statistics
- Generally speaking a young population
- Generally speaking economically disadvantaged (but clearly now an identifiable and growing middle class)
- Generally highly concentrated geographically - large cities -however prediction of moving from disadvantaged to more advantaged areas
- Generally speaking growing population and high birth rate
- Most advantaged – East African Asian
- Lesser disadvantage – Caribbean and Indian
- Most disadvantaged – Pakistani and Bangladeshi

9

Household and Family structures

- Asian groups, some African: ‘Traditional ‘ family structures – marriage, large and multi-generational households
- Caribbean and some African groups - Lone parent families usually female headed
- However fathers do exist and many have contact and strong emotional ties to their children
- Separation and Loss through migration . Arnold (2006) has drawn our attention to the issues of broken attachments and how reunion difficulties can affect the ability of women who were separated, to have good relationships with their children

10

Power and power differentials

- Racism and colonialism are real concepts that impact adversely on a group of people. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital is important here. He argues that different social groups possess different sorts of knowledge and skill, they share different cultural histories, and so I would suggest, they experience their contexts differently (Bourdieu, 1971, 1991).
- It is more than a truism to say that black and white people bring different perspectives to the same situation.
- Where you stand affects your point of view!
- Social work is not an objective enterprise. Your world view affects the meanings you make of human situations

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- Power dynamics do exist within the social worker and family/service user relationship
- Professional power (Bhatti Sinclair, 2011). The perceived status of the social worker by the family/ service user. What is the effect on the relationship?
- What do families/service users have to say about this?

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How social workers become involved

- Number of looked after children is still high for black and mixed race children - disproportionate numbers –substitute families
- Child protection – Victoria Climbié and others
- Number of people receiving psychiatric services
- Number of BME in psychiatric hospitals
- Number of people (young men) in prisons or youth offending
- Disability – hidden number of families caring for learning disability without making full use of services
- Ageing population – those who had always hoped to go home – dementia – Loss of homeland
- Traditional caregiver ideology: care giving is natural, expected and virtuous
SWs can get caught up in Control discourses versus care discourses when dealing with minority ethnic families

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Working in Partnership

- Student learning is a journey – relationship of trust
- Ontology – leads to helping students to ask certain questions such as:
 - What does it mean to be human?
 - How do we know we exist?
 - What makes me certain that others are human like me?
 - How would my knowledge of myself help me understand others?
- Leads to accepting the messiness of human interactions
- Learning to live with not knowing
- The use of the self and relationship building

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Cultural competence v respecting diversity and difference

- There is a move for us to return to a colour blind approach
- Best to learn how other cultures live, what they eat etc
- To speak about racism might make us inconvenient people with inconvenient truths - always seen as a social threat
- To understand both the structural and the intrapersonal and the interpersonal aspects of BME families speaks to a politics of recognition and of social justice
- BME families experience the world through particular lenses and inequality is one such lens

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Conclusion

- The importance of the context to make sense of social work interaction with BME families
- The importance of empathy
- Not just about doing - it is about thinking in order to do together
- Completing the form is not the same thing as making an assessment
- Remember the core values such as respect for humans

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Keynote presentation

““The family models held by social workers and their clients: critical remarks on gender and class perspectives”

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Abstract

Supporting families is one of the main tasks of social work. Financial support, health or psychological assistance: social workers have to deal with families. But what are families? Which models do social workers employ when they think of a “normal family”, what do they expect of mothers and fathers? What is in their eyes “successful” parenting? On the other hand, how does the family experience itself as a client? Are there discrepancies between their own understanding of the notion family and what they think social workers expect of their family life? Empirical studies on the family model ideas held by social workers and their clients illustrate differences, e.g. the different parenting models of “natural growth” vs. “concerted cultivation” (Lareau). They also show us how gender and class perspectives are integrated in the different family models. Furthermore, empirical reconstructions of the different family models held by clients and social workers show growing feelings of uncertainty among clients about their way of living family. This constrains contact and evokes shame. The presentation intends to open the discussion on family models and their embedded gender and class constructions. The ability to reflect on what we think of as a “normal family” should be part of the professional toolkit of social workers.

Preliminaries

Today the girls from the Youth Club in Reutlingen, South Germany, are going in a day trip. They're off to the Swabian Alps where they plan to explore the Bear Caves and then have a barbecue. The parents of the seven to ten year old girls were given a handout with information about the trip. They were requested to ensure that the girls were appropriately dressed and to provide them with food suitable for a barbecue. The bus is waiting for the girls as they arrive with their mothers. Some make their way to the bus station alone. A Bosnian mother accompanies her two daughters to the bus. She's looked out their best dresses for the trip. The social workers who greet the mothers and girls exchange a meaningful glance: “How are the girls going to explore the cave in those dresses?” The mother catches the glance and is upset. She wonders why the social workers look so scruffy and asks herself whether her daughters are really in good hands. She hopes they'll come back in one piece.

Later on the group prepares for the barbecue. The girls unpack the food they've brought: sausages, chops, vegetables, bread. Mandy, the daughter of a lone mother who holds down several low-paid jobs in an attempt to keep her head above water, opens her rucksack and finds a packet of crisps,



coke and marshmallows. She's pleased because she loves toasted marshmallows and her mother packed her favourite crisps. But Silke, one of the social workers, gives her a hard stare. She asks, "Didn't your mother give you any meat or vegetables for the barbecue?"

Family models are negotiated everyday in the small encounters between social workers and mothers, fathers, children, grandparents and other relatives. Small comments, a look, things that remain unsaid all transport preconceptions of "right" and "wrong", "good" and "bad", "normal" or "deviant". If these explicit or implicit negotiations about "proper family", "healthy eating" or even the "right clothes" in the sense of "modern gender roles" intrude into the foreground, then the emotional interaction between parents and children in client families is not receiving enough attention. The pleasure of the child who realizes her mother packed her favourite crisps becomes denigrated and irrelevant in negotiations about healthy eating.

The examples show that the relationships between social workers and clients of social work have to be analysed. I propose that negotiations about models of good parenting are currently taking place between the professionals and their clients. Even though social work has historically always dealt with families, in late modernity society has new expectations of social work. The future of highly-developed service and knowledge economies lies in education as a natural resource. Therefore, the upwards social mobility through educational attainment of even the lower social milieus is of great economic significance. As I will show with the example of early prevention programmes ("Frühe Hilfen") there is a trend towards implementing new family models in deprived families. A basic distrust of poor families is becoming visible that undermines the fundamental role of advocacy in social work. At the same time a trend towards retraditionalization with respect to gender is becoming evident.

In the first section, I will give a short description of class differences and the influence of ethnicity on the ideas of family models and approaches to child-rearing. Secondly, the role model of a "good mother" and a "good father" will be discussed together with their impact on gender constructions. In a third step, I will use the example of early prevention to show how new role models are currently being negotiated. Finally, I invite you to rethink family models and good parenthood. My suggestion for a new family model is – in line with Winnicott – captured with the notion "the good-enough family".

1.) Unequal conditions for everyday life of families: the impact of class and ethnicity experiences

When we think of families today, we have to bear in mind the enormous changes in the societal framework surrounding families. For several decades, Europe has been facing changes captured by the term "Late Modernity": from an industrial to a service economy, from Fordism to Post-Fordism and from societies with strong social institutions to individualized societies (Beck, 1986; Sennett, 1998). In many countries this goes hand in hand with rising unemployment, big changes in demands of vocational qualification and also social inequality (Christiansen/Koistinen/Kovalainen, 1999). The driving forces behind these processes are, firstly, changing gender relations, which lead to higher



female and maternal employment rates and, secondly, the tendency to flexibilization in the work sphere, i.e. 'blurring boundaries' (Jurczyk/Lange 2007). Depending on cultural and structural patterns, we find different employment patterns of parents. The range goes from the male breadwinner model to the modernized breadwinner, very rarely to an egalitarian adult worker model, but increasingly to the single-earner lone mother model. Because of structural interdependencies, it is obvious that these transformations change the context of private lives. The '24/7 society' (Presser 2003) is a huge challenge to organizing everyday family life. Additionally, the rising demands of education are passed down to families. The changes highlight that family life does not simply occur by itself. More and more we have to consider family life as an active process of construction – the "doing family paradigm" (Jurczyk/Lange/Thiessen 2011). Historically this is not really new. But today the traditions and institutions that organized and stabilized the process of constructing family life are no longer plausible or have even decayed. I propose that in our negotiations on ethnic minority and lower class families we are creating new models of "the right family".

Families are not, however, defenceless victims of social and economic transformation. Rather, they try, within the limits of their imagination, goals in life and resources, to contribute to the shaping of the social and economic transformation. One result of greater competition is that parents are more aware of the importance of education. And in surveys we can see that all parents, regardless of class or ethnicity, want higher education for their children. But their opportunities are very different and we can see growing inequalities between families. Annette Lareau, who interviewed children and parents of different classes and ethnicities in the United States, summarizes her results under the title "Unequal Childhoods" (2003). Through her observations she discovered differences in parenting styles that related to class distinctions. Specifically, she observed how different family circumstances influenced the children's performance and interactions in and out of school. Her findings allowed her to draw a major distinction between the parenting styles of working class / poor parents on the one hand and middle class parents on the other. Here are the frantic families managing their children's hectic schedules of "leisure" activities; and here are families with plenty of time but little economic security. Lareau shows how middle-class parents, whether black or white, engage in a process of "concerted cultivation" designed to draw out children's talents and skills, while working-class and poor families rely on "the accomplishment of natural growth," in which a child's development unfolds spontaneously—as long as basic comfort, food, and shelter are provided. Each of these approaches to child-rearing brings its own benefits and its own drawbacks.

The aim of the "Concerted Cultivation" type of child-rearing – in the extreme variation you have probably heard of parents like the "tiger mom" – is that children are taught lessons through organized activities that help prepare them for a white-collar job and the types of interactions that a white-collar worker encounters. Social workers can be included in this milieu. Parents with the "Natural Growth" type of child-rearing have less education and time to impress the values upon their children that will give them an advantage in school. Their children have fewer organized activities and more free time to play with other children in the neighbourhood. In an economy founded on industrial production this way of raising children was indeed understandable and successful.



However, with the demise of unskilled jobs in industry, “natural growth” child-rearing has become less conducive to successful employment prospects. The typical clients of social work are recruited from this milieu. I have to remark that parents in all classes pursue the strategy to keep their children close to themselves: The middle-class parents want their children to be in same positions as they are. And so do the poor families as well. All parents want the best for their children. The practice of greater parental involvement is what perpetuates inequalities from one generation to the next. Bearing in mind the class differences between social workers and client families, we can see that the ideas of what the “right”, decent way of child-rearing should be (“concerted cultivation” or “natural growth”) are totally contradictory. And remembering the little scenes I began with, we can consider that looking at “the right” way of child-rearing sometimes obstruct social workers’ view of the emotional quality of the parent-child relationship.

A further differentiation between approaches to child-rearing is visible between autochthonic and immigrant families, particularly families who have migrated from rural regions where traditional agricultural subsistence communities are common and the welfare state is rare. In this situation, families depend on a high degree of solidarity and tribalistic (i.e. community-oriented) systems of rules and exchange (Nauck 2007). The production of welfare in the family is based on a highly segregated division of labour according to generation and gender (Mansfeld 2006). Whereas modernization processes are leading to change in the country of origin, the family bond gains importance in the new country of residence and is further strengthened by experiences of rejection, dismissal and discrimination (Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 338). The collectivist attitude is expressed in child-rearing in scepticism towards strengthening children’s autonomy or their individualization. The migration situation and coming to terms with a foreign country is a “multi-generational project” (BMFSFJ 2000) that initially promotes family solidarity. This explains why, as Uslucan (2008) has shown in his empirical work, Turkish families in Germany, for example, practice a more protective and controlling style of parenting than Turkish families in Turkey. This can have an inhibiting effect on the children because they have to be encouraged to be independent in order to gain the education they need to capitalize on the employment opportunities offered by the modern service and knowledge economy. Simultaneously, in an environment marked by everyday racism (Leiprecht/Lutz 2009) they need the security and support of their family. An understanding of these parenting questions is not necessarily to be expected from social workers. The proportion who have either personally or through their parents experienced migration is below average. Professional publications call on social workers to critically examine their own cultural clichés, but outside of large cities this rarely occurs in practice.

Before looking at empirical data on interactions between social workers and client families, we will take a look at a special German case: the notion of the “good mother”.

2.) The notion of the “good mother” and the “good father”: The impact of gender constructions

Colleagues from other European countries working in West Germany for some years are often very astonished when they look for daycare for their children. The persistence of the housewife is comparatively amazing. And there would be a lot to say about the historical development of this



German case, the influence of Luther and his ideas of “The Protestant family” (Vinken 2007). Here I would like to briefly mention two German peculiarities: The denigrating expression “Rabemutter” for working mothers only exists in Germany. And secondly, in the rural areas of conservative southern Germany (Bavaria, Baden-Wuerttemberg), pre-school daycare was practically unknown before the start of the 2000s. This makes the most recent development even more astonishing: a new law guaranteeing daycare for all under-threes from 2013 onwards. Daycare facilities and capacities are being expanded across the country because family policy is now considered a new, hard location factor. Economic development requires an increasing number of women in paid employment and highly skilled specialists. Today, one-third of mothers with at least one child under three are in paid employment as are two-thirds of mothers with school-aged children (Statistisches Bundesamt 2008). The increasing educational demands placed on children are a further reason for the considerable changes to the role model for the “good mother”. She is no longer the homemaker and wife but the working mum who encourages and stimulates her children and – not only in the event of a separation – can financially support them. It is remarkable that the assumption of an ostensibly instinctive and natural motherly love is no longer sufficient and plausible for a successful upbringing (Thiessen/Villa 2008).

The emotionalized discussion of “right” motherhood can be followed in afternoon television in the daily talk and reality shows. These programmes regularly pillory mothers, primarily from lower social strata, who cannot “offer” their children anything. This does not mean that they cannot give love, security or joy, but that they cannot offer economic security, good education and training, and educational toys. The one-sided orchestrations of such formats are particularly insidious because they take people who are overwhelmingly structurally disadvantaged and make them individually responsible for their situation. Being a “good mother” means being in paid employment, being self-reliant and not being a burden to the state (Thiessen/Villa 2008).

What about fathers? In the last two decades there have been signs of an astonishing new orientation among men: fathers no longer want to be just an “earner” but also a “carer” in their children’s lives. At the same time, there is hardly any evidence of changes in the practice of fathering, apart from the surprisingly high rate of participation of fathers in parental leave since its reform in 2006 (19%, Statistisches Bundesamt 2008). Even if two-thirds of fathers on leave have only used their minimum entitlement of two months up until now, they are increasingly perceiving the problems of reconciliation. In addition to their unchanged full-time paid employment, they are aiming for active fatherhood. However, young men and fathers are especially caught in the model of the “modernized breadwinner” (Zerle/Krok 2008) that does not question the full-time employment identity but extends it with active fatherhood. Until now there have been neither political nor employer-based measures to support this model. In particular, the increasing blurring of spatial and temporal boundaries of fathers’ paid employment makes it even harder for them to reconcile it with family activities. But precisely this point implies great potential for pressure on families.

Furthermore, the “new father” is still searching for an appropriate role that does not undermine his construction of gender. This undertaking can be observed in advertising, soap operas and films. Like clownfish father Marlin in “Finding Nemo”, fathers can provide for their children, take care of them,



be affectionate and comforting. But this requires the absence of the mother. And a further motif arises to save the hegemonic patterns of masculinity: the new role models for fathers retain the old masculine template of ingenuity and heroism and expand them by adding the element of care. But only through the absence of the mother does this extended space for new stagings of fatherhood and the expansion of role concepts arise. The “new father” is sensitive but remains the hero in his child’s life. Precisely how he manages to connect his successful paid employment, which still has to feed the family, with his care work is not explained in the new constructions of fatherhood. Changing fatherhood is even more precarious if there is no paid employment. It is therefore no surprise that in deprived families traditional gender patterns predominate.

Excessive demands on both mothers and fathers are becoming clear in the new role models. Women’s and men’s individual options for action can easily be overestimated if the contemporary framework for family life (blurring boundaries, intensification, precariousness) slips from sight. Here I would like to refer to a well-known concept of parenting that Winnicott developed back in 1951.

Winnicott’s starting point was the basic needs of infants and children that change during the course of their development. The infant is dependent for its existence on the skills of an attachment figure to satisfy its needs so that it never feels abandoned. Nevertheless, the attachment figure has to extricate themselves from this close attachment so that the child can learn that they are not a part of the attachment figure. As Winnicott wrote (1953), “The good-enough mother ... starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her infant’s needs, and as time proceeds she adapts less and less completely, gradually, according to the infant’s growing ability to deal with her failure ...” From this perspective, motherhood can be viewed as a continuous balancing act between attachment and separation in the relationship with the infant. This is not only valid for mothers but for every attachment figure of a child. After giving birth and breast feeding women have no other exclusive function or significance for the child. The figure of the “good-enough mother” – and we can add to it the “good-enough father” – shows that beneficial conditions for children to grow up in are those in which there is a balance between security and developing autonomy through separation and are not related to gender or an exclusive devotion to the child.

3.) Coming together: The interaction between social workers and clients

Social work always deals with families. At the start of the 20th century the newly constituted youth and family welfare primarily addressed parenting skills (Bauer/Wiezorek 2009) and developed the concept (particularly in German social work) of “spiritual motherhood” (Allen 1991). Social workers as ‘super-moms’. Even if many historical conceptual approaches, like Jane Addams’ for example, aimed at an empowerment-oriented strengthening of mothers and community structures, an ideal of the “competent parenting family” oriented on the role model of the middle-class family can still be proven (Bauer/Wiezorek 2009). The significance of the mainly (upper) middle-class origins of the protagonists of social work has not yet been investigated thoroughly enough. The parenting skills of the (proletarian) client families was and still is measured by criteria like the cleanliness of the home, the domesticity of the mother and the moral behaviour of the family members (Bauer/Wiezorek 2009). In fact, significant historical parallels can be identified: it could be postulated that at the start



of the 20th century social work served to make proletarian families fit for industrial modernity and today, at the start of the 21st century, social work is concerned with optimization processes for the service and knowledge economy.

I would like to use the example of 'early prevention' to show how new role models of parenthood are currently being negotiated. Since 2006 in Germany is improved a child protection system by better preventing neglect and violence against infants and children. It is aimed to support practitioners in recognizing risks and burdens in families at an earlier stage more effectively and in providing appropriate support for families with high-risk of child neglect. The interventions should help to improve parents' attachment capability and sensitivity. Whereas youth welfare has for a long time tended to overlook pre-school children, in recent years early prevention programmes have been developed and expanded at a great pace in western societies. The catalyst was not a rising number of child murders but a shift in the media and political treatment of the abuse and neglect of infants and children. These appalling and emotionally charged events were picked up on by the media and politicians at a time when the structural consequences of poverty became visible in a growing social divide. One reaction (e.g. in Germany) is the "activating welfare state" with its principle of supporting but also challenging the individual (or in the UK, "The Third Way" of "New Labour").

Political programmes and concepts for early prevention contain a negative image of deprived families that brands them as "dysfunctional" or a danger to others. Featherstone (2006) cites one such example from the "White Paper Respect and Responsibility" which was to result in the Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2004): "There are a small number of families that can be described as 'dysfunctional'. Two or three families and their wider networks can 'create havoc' in a neighbourhood or estate. It is always in areas of greatest disadvantage that this 'corrosive effect' is seen and felt most clearly. Sometimes it occurs where there has been considerable family breakdown; multiple partners can pass through the house; children do not have a positive role model; little in the way of a predictable orderly routine; and the lifestyle is such that it makes the lives of neighbours a complete misery. Some professionals have refrained from demanding changes in standards and behaviour from such families, in an effort to remain non 'judgemental'. This stance alienates those living alongside chaotic families and who legitimately complain that professionals can go home to areas not beset by this kind of misery. It also fails children in dysfunctional families by not asserting their need for care and discipline." (Home Office, 2003, p, 23)

In Germany too early prevention programmes focus on developing parenting skills. They follow concepts of parental competence that have been formulated for parents in general, for example by the Scientific Advisory Board of the Federal Family Ministry (2005): "Competences related to the child: parents should be able to respond sensitively to the child according to her/his stage of development; Personal competences: parents should be able to reflect about parenting, to acquire knowledge about child development, control their own negative emotions and not behave impulsively; Action-related competences: parents should develop confidence in their own self-efficacy, keep their promises, not be contradictory in their dealing with their child and adapt to new circumstances; Context-related competences: parents should be able to make arrangements for the



positive development of their child outside of the family” (Wiss. Beirat 2005). High expectations which idealize families. It seems to me that they can only be disappointed.

When early prevention programmes attempt to improve parents’ competences then the terms “attachment” and “sensitivity” – well-known from attachment theory – enjoy a prominent role. In spite of claims to the opposite, the programmes in reality address almost exclusively mothers. The experts’ aim is to get the mother to put the child and her or his needs first. My intention here is not to discredit attachment theory. Studies inspired by attachment theory have just recently proven again the significance of primary relationships. Furthermore, by studying the actual behaviour of carer and child this approach opens up the mother-child attachment to critical reflection as opposed to mystifying it and veiling it in the cloak of instinct. For example, Crittenden’s “CARE-Index” (2005) is an instrument that makes sensitivity measurable which means it can furthermore be operationalized and ‘degendered’. It is therefore all the more surprising that the professional debates and the practical approaches to early prevention almost exclusively address mothers. Against the background of a division of labour based on gender hierarchies, mothers are primarily responsible for the child and therefore more readily available as clients and subjects of investigation. In addition to this justification from the view of project and research efficiency, it can be surmised that assumptions of a traditional responsibility of women for infants are being resurrected without further thought. Hellbrügge, for example, explicitly refers to the mother as “a unique person for the child and her/his development and an institution” (2008: 8). Fathers are frequently mentioned rhetorically in early prevention programmes. In reality, they are rarely involved (Liel/Kindler 2009: 9f.). One reason might be that the content and framework of the early prevention programmes are not designed for fathers and do not correspond to their gendered ideas of being a father.

A further core issue for early prevention programmes is gaining access to the so-called “families at risk”. Considering how debates about child murder have been whipped up by the media it is easy to understand how the fantasy of being able to reach all children at risk arises. In doing so the focus of the prevention programmes shifts from open offers for families to an offensive intervention opportunity for professionals (e.g. home visits for missing a regular health check-up for the child). The term “high risk family” is very telling: it is not the risks arising from poverty and deprivation that are named but the risks that the family apparently creates by its way of life. More discussion is required on to what extent families’ self-determination can be preserved with the new focus on outreach work. The question of access is also a question of gender: pregnant women and new mothers can easily be reached by midwives, maternity clinics, gynaecologists and social workers. It is then up to the mothers/parents or the experts to which extent the father is involved. Furthermore, with the phrase “child protection starts in the womb” the rights of children to well-being and of women to self-determination are being renegotiated. For example, if imposing restrictions as opposed to offering support is proposed as an appropriate measure for pregnant women who drink alcohol and/or smoke, then this becomes a political controversial issue for women.

Finally, the example of early prevention programmes specifically shows what the professionals consider to be normal with respect to families, fatherhood and motherhood. These ideas determine the conception and direction of social work interventions without themselves being explicitly



articulated. Here I would like to give an example from my research project “Teenage Mothers”: in an advice centre for pregnant women a pregnant 17 year old asked about how she could continue her schooling. She was referred to a midwife. Her same-aged boyfriend was being motivated to focus on completing his education and occupational training by a social worker. The example (more details in Theissen 2007) illustrates how social work frequently propagates traditional family role models without any further thought. These are neither helpful in keeping a family together nor in the event of a separation. Since the father would be absent from the family for his education and training, he would have few opportunities for establishing an attachment to his child. If the relationship broke up, the young mother who had been stuck at home would be likely to be dependent on benefits. Why not part-time vocational training for them both? The question of what distinguishes a family and which skills are necessary to successfully share responsibilities when living together are still controversial. Milieu specific considerations colour the answers. A risk assessment is more likely to take place if both parents are unemployed and in a deprived situation than if they are two full-time “high potential” parents with over-long working hours. What do the professionals consider normal and where does a risk for the child’s development start?

The common practice in the middle class is to organize family formation and child-rearing by means of rational planning and acquisition of expert knowledge, and expending considerable cognitive, financial and emotional resources. The aim is the social placement of their offspring by means of education and cultivation. Is it not an insult to them when the “disadvantaged” seem to simply live from day to day, have unplanned pregnancies, hardly think about child-rearing and to top it off live from benefits? Possibly a “moral panic” (Cohen 2002) is running its course when a “sexual depravity” is assumed for the underclass. Even experts are not completely free of such attitudes. In dealing with teenage mothers they can project what for them is impermissible behaviour onto their clients, for example, living in the here and now, the desire for a child at an inappropriate time or demanding help and support.

Client families are very sensitive towards the denigrations of professionals. Helming found this out in her interviews with clients of family social work. For example, one woman said, “They think, ‘what sort of a family has six children?’ – first off the stupid answer ‘selfish’. But I’m not selfish.” (Helming et al. 1999) Different experiences of successful interventions could also be reconstructed. “And ‘cos she just treated us as normal people (...) not like the others who say ‘look at them’.” (ibid.) A significant key to a successful intervention seems to be promoting self-confidence and perceived self-efficacy. As one mother said, “She didn’t say – like others do – ‘you can’t do it, go away’. She said, ‘try, try and try again’. And she could see what I can do and she said it again and again. ‘Cos back then I was trying to get a part-time job or just a few hours and ‘cos no one wanted me she kept saying ‘give it another go’. And that always gave me self confidence.” (ibid.)

I’ll come now to my concluding remarks.

4.) Rethinking family models and good parenthood: “The good-enough family”



All too often, experts are looking for mistakes. In doing so, they often allocate mothers the sole responsibility for bringing up their children well. They measure them against the norms of the middle class. One problem with concepts based on attachment theory – as they are applied in early prevention with remarkable success – is the narrow focus on the behaviour of the primary carer. Other factors, such as income or living conditions, which in my opinion are at least as important, are not considered. With respect to the long-term effects of advisory and training programmes for promoting parenting competencies I would like to point out that improved sensitivity and attachment behaviour can wither away if the circumstances of the family do not change (Jungmann 2010). This primarily refers to attaining independent economic security by means of training and paid employment at a living wage. In this context it should also be mentioned that improving long-term employment prospects through occupational training can also lead to an improved mother-child attachment (Thiessen 2007). In addition to the sensitivity of the parents, sufficient self-confidence and the belief in self-efficacy among mothers; parents who do not have to worry about securing a livelihood and a successful partnership are all further factors contributing to a good childhood. The introduction of a minimum wage could do as much to ensure child well-being as programmes to promote parenting skills. This implies a refocusing of the political dimension of social work. The advocacy position of the “human rights profession” (Staub-Bernasconi 2007) merits further discussion. It becomes clear that the role models of families, motherhood and fatherhood held by the experts need to be fundamentally reviewed and should be discussed openly. A good mother is also one who recognizes the limits of her possibilities and has a well-founded hope that she will find someone to talk to who respects her limitations and considers her gender.

In my opinion, social work with deprived families should not be put into a position where it is expected to deflect all risks from children at risk. Social work has to clarify how it treats fears and ambivalence in order not to succumb to one-sided concepts and simple screenings. It’s all about being in contact with people who possibly have different ideas of what is normal. Borrowing from Winnicott I would like to suggest developing a role model for the “good-enough family”. This means an adequate – if possibly unconventional – mutual provision for the family and a style of child-rearing that is not aimed at achieving optimal employability. Family would then be understood as an intergenerational, long-term care relationship. So the focus is on function instead of form. The significance of family lies in assuming enduring responsibility for another person with an intergenerational perspective, not in the form of living arrangements (such as marriage, heterosexual or mono-ethnic relationships). Consequently, the professionals should be looking at the real care constellations in the everyday life of their clients. At the same time, it is the task of social work to demand an adequate public infrastructure that provides compensatory inclusion conditions for families and appropriate employment structures. The “good-enough family” needs “good-enough” respect and life conditions.

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