

## **NFTO Symposium at the AFT-EFTA Conference, Glasgow, October 2007**

Reported by Mina Polemi-Todoulou, NFTO Board Secretary.

**Theme:** The NFTO chamber organized a Symposium, at the EFTA 2007 Conference in Glasgow, on: “**Breaking News 2006 – 2007: A Systemic View on Family and Youth Related issues as Portrayed through Head line News**”, convened by Mina Todoulou on behalf of the NFTO board and co-chaired by Corina Ahlers and Roberto Pereira.

**Goal:** The goal of the symposium was to instigate dialogue among participants from different countries in Europe on **current issues of public concern that made frontline news**, regarding **families and other contexts**, such as schools, universities, neighborhoods etc., in which **young people grow and relate** among themselves and with others. The event was proposed by the Greek NFTO, HELASYTH, which organized a whole day symposium in Athens on that theme during the previous year and thought that it would be interesting to create such a **dialogue on a European level**.

**Presentations:** All NFTO representatives who joined the event came prepared to discuss recent developments in their society as they are reflected in the media. A small core team from different geographical/cultural corners of Europe provided the stimuli for the discussion in the form of short films, slides, oral presentations and handouts:

**Austria:** Corina Ahlers and Dominik Maria Rosenauer showed a film with an interview of a young girl, Natascha Kampusch, and the way her story of violence and reclusion impacted people of all ages, inspiring pupils to write letters to her, creating an interest about her way of learning without having lessons. They presented slides from research into the impact on the public.

**Greece:** Mina Polemi-Todoulou presented a short documentary film on a) youth-related news concentrating on two critical incidents of violence and sexual abuse among adolescents in the school and in the neighborhood that caused concern amongst the public for a very long period, and b) videotaped discussions among 13 and 17 year old adolescents, expressing their feelings and views on the incidence of sexual abuse involving publicity through the use of cell phones and the internet, on the attitudes towards immigrants, and on their relation with the school context and their families.

**Spain:** Roberto Pereira presented the media concern for a new and disturbing social phenomenon: Violent attacks against parents by young adolescents, considered until that moment as “normal”. Such incidents increased 8 times over the last 4 years. Headlines reporting such an incident referred to the 7 year old as a ‘maltreater’. Another incident that concerned the media was that of a mother who asked the local authorities to assume the safekeeping of her 13 year old daughter because she could not cope with her violence.

**Switzerland:** Raymond Traube referred to public concerns as they are reflected in the media, public debates, police books and local conferences: teenage cyber violence, cannabis depenalization, a return to parental hierarchy, pedocrime, 3 speed society (public, network, private).

**United Kingdom:** Judith Lask and Helen Stead presented the array of different issues that the newspapers of one single day bring to the attention of the public,

relating directly or indirectly to the family, such as: stonings by thugs (teenage violence especially relating to gangs and gang warfare); family values we all share (what are those values); focus on couples with children and first time buyers in tax plans; red tape and cuts which see householders give up on Green Grants; stress at work which can increase breast cancer by a third; peril to children of 2 hour TV (effects of TV and video games); tax breaks for marriage, rescue funds for pensioners.

**Italy:** Rosaria Ponticiello & Rosella Aurilio shared newspaper articles referring to school boys' sexual abuse of their classmate in Foggia, and to Italian students attacking their teachers with vandalism, threats with guns and publicizing such events through the internet, which teems with videos in which Italian students give themselves up to wild behaviour in classrooms.

**Portugal:** Maria Isabel Fidalgo presented the case of British girl Madeleine McCann who went missing from her family's apartment in Portugal, while her parents were having dinner nearby. The story concerned European media for a very long time, involving Portuguese and British police, the launching of a website for help, creating special funds to support the search, even involving the Pope. In the process, the parents were depicted in different ways, from victims to murderers. The case of Esmeralda, a 5 year old adopted girl, made the country reflect on the way law and families relate, having become the center of a regulation process of paternal power and guardianship. It was pointed out that the psychotherapeutic perspective in this case was not respected.

**Hungary:** Julia Hardy shared a report on an interesting multicultural divorce story about a Turkish father who kidnapped his 6yr old son who was ordered by court to stay with his Hungarian mother. The mother, with the help a Hungarian civil foundation, found her son living with his father and relatives in a Turkish village according to Muslim ways and not going to school, yet quite happy. After he was brought back to Hungary the boy wasn't happy at all and he was unfriendly to his mother. The father, risking arrest, flew back to Hungary to retrieve the boy. And the story continued in full view of the media and the public, with no-one asking the boy in question, Mehmed Karcsika, about his future.

**Discussion:** Participants discussed in small groups what they see as emerging in the news that indicate trends regarding the development of the family system, the adolescent peer group, the school as an institution and what are the similarities and differences among countries as to the focus of concern and the way the public and the relevant agencies react. They focused on a) the effects of the media on shaping the views of people and groups and creating polarized and oversimplified thinking about important and complex issues; b) therapists' need to improve their relationship with the media, providing a better balance between therapy and the outside world; c) therapists' need to become more aware of their authoritative voice and to lend importance to their position; d) young people seeking through their behavior the re-institution of an old hierarchy in roles; e) gender differences on these issues.