

Multidisciplinary Child Abuse Centre opened

Nov 18, 2015

November 18 was a special day, I was a guest at the LOCK education, the academic workplace and the MDCK in Hoofddorp. There we participated in a fruitful afternoon symposium of substantive collaboration among professionals from several social fields, inspired to achieve higher quality of work among the center treating sexual violence, focused on complex distinctions and the effects of conflict and violence on children 4 to 12 years old and their parents. Children need comfort, reassurance, and recovery, explained Margaret Visser, but in complex family situations, such as a single parent after a divorce, it is the parent who can have difficulties to see and hear the children. The availability of the parent to the children is then under pressure. Professor Catrin Finkenauer discussed the emotional pain and impact of social exclusion of children by their parents, which should be considered a form of emotional abuse.



At the newly opened MDCK center, I could still smell the fresh paint brightening the beautiful and functional room appointments. The photo shows boxes containing messages for achieving a safe home for every child, stacked like a wall of wishes near the entrance, which was opened officially by HRH Princess Beatrix. The center includes a study room and a studio for interviews, along with tasteful areas where children, parents, other family members and professionals can quietly carry on a conversation. There is also an area where children can find comfort or are able to play. The research and support the center's work requires is provided by a multidisciplinary team capable of accomplishing the investigations required to direct appropriate help to those in need. This means asking less questions or just asking the questions once. I enjoyed the explanations of directors and team members of their vital work during the tour of the new facility, noting their dedication to fully coordinated cooperation between professionals of different fields, considering and being aware what such cooperation can mean for children and their families. Many people have worked hard for years to get the center off the ground. In the late nineteen eighties there was already a forerunner of this facility in Groningen, a diagnostic center to investigate suspicions of sexual abuse. Years later Anneke van Duin authored a stunningly practical book, *The Knowing Witness*, born from this pioneering work. In those years such social services in the hinterland were still weak. Years later we know more, and therefore we can do more: we can do better in providing appropriate assistance, thus gaining precious

time. Thus we can strengthen the quality of life and at the same time help prevent re-victimisation of children and spouse. This is truly a “one-stop shop”, similar to the Family Justice Centers developed in the U.S. Now funds are needed to perform a comprehensive follow-up study of the MDCK and its strategy for deployment and reinforcement of interdisciplinary cooperation in the 21st century. That study can make clear what is necessary for effective joint efforts. Such efforts give meaning to Richard Sennett’s idea of 'good work' as the needs of vulnerable children and their parents are effectively addressed.