

# **60 years of FICE Switzerland**

**(Fédération Internationale des Communautés d'Enfants  
now: Fédération Internationale des Communautés Educatives)**

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FICE Switzerland is celebrating its sixtieth anniversary. In April 1951 the statutes for the "SCHWEIZERISCHE VEREINIGUNG FÜR KINDERDÖRFER UND JUGENDSIEDLUNGEN" (Swiss Association for Villages for Children and Adolescents) were agreed upon, laying the cornerstone for Swiss activities aimed at helping disadvantaged children growing up outside their families.

## **The history of the founding of FICE**

The fact that there were no standards under international law protecting civilians during the Second World War had grave effects on the youth of the war-stricken countries: In the course of assessing the impact of the war on children and adolescents, persons working in child and youth care recognized a specific client group, war-damaged children.

There were three types of damage: physical, psycho-social, and ideological effects of the war. One aspect impacting the psyche and affecting social behaviour was the destruction of social networks, in particular the dissolution of the family. Deportations, evacuation measures, and the events of war brought about a dissociation of family: maladjusted, neglected, and delinquent children were the consequence. The ideological effect of the war manifested itself in a high degree of uncertainty and a general dissolution of standards and values.

After the cessation of hostilities the wish arose to provide relief for the young war victims. In parallel with material aid a new form of help developed: socio-pedagogical institutions for children harmed by the war were established. They developed independently of one another in Switzerland, Poland, Hungary, Italy, France, and Germany. These were mostly children's communities with names such as, children's village, children's town, children's republic, children's house, youth village, and the like. The initiatives for these developments came from pedagogues in cooperation with relief organisations. They all had one idea in common: the care and education of children harmed by war called for investigating and applying new pedagogical approaches.

In connection with the material aid provided in the aftermath of the war the children's communities were supported by various aid and relief organisations. Once the new socio-pedagogical institutions – in particular the Pestalozzi Children's Village in Trogen - became more widely known the children's communities met with increasing international interest within the framework of intellectual and cultural aid programmes. The Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME) in London was the first to assess this pedagogical experiment. The Commission of Enquiry on Special Educational Problems in Liberated Countries considered children's communities a valuable effort for the resocialisation of children damaged by war. Since UNESCO partly took over and continued the work done by CAME, the interest in children's communities remained on its agenda. Eminent Swiss personalities

founded the "International study weeks for war damaged children" which also took an interest in children's communities. At two conferences they provided a forum for discussing these socio-pedagogical institutions and raising international awareness of them.

Widespread interest and international impact resulted in continued engagement on the part of UNESCO. It initiated the establishment of the international federation of children's communities. As the children's villages were in favour of an umbrella organisation, and this was in line with UNESCO's plans, the "Fédération Internationale des Communautés d'Enfants" (FICE) was founded. One aim was the exchange of professional knowledge and expertise, another the desire to influence the traditional forms of care outside the family through new ideas linked to the pedagogical era of before the War. UNESCO put an end to the problematic formula FICE = new education – which would have meant the continuation of reform pedagogy. It granted the organisation consultative status and at the same time defined its remit: an organisation for residential care and a family orientation for homes.

### **FICE and Switzerland**

The origin of FICE is closely linked to the founding of the Pestalozzi Children's Village in Trogen. Personalities serving on the Board of the Children's Village, such as Adolphe Férriere or Elisabeth Rotten, were the chief advocates of a federation of children's communities. Bernard Drzewieski, then Director of the Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Section of UNESCO, visited the Children's Village in Trogen in 1947 and recognized the opportunities offered by this undertaking. In consequence he summoned directors of children's villages to a conference in Trogen on 5 July 1948, during which the foundation of FICE was decided.

It had been the wish and dream of the founders of the Children's Village, such as Walter Robert Corti and Marie Meierhofer, to create and unite children's villages throughout the world with the help of FICE. A new spiritual and intellectual centre of peace and international understanding would have had Trogen as its "navel". But FICE's development took a different course, as the founders of the Trogen Children's Village had to accept, not without some bitterness. In its initial years the young organisation struggled with financial and thematic issues and had to limit its activities to organising conferences and international youth camps.

The revision of the Statutes of FICE Switzerland in November 2000 resulted in the new definition of thematic developments and in particular of changed objectives. Over time FICE has become an international forum of practitioners and researchers for the exchange of experience in the field of pedagogical care within and outside of families. FICE deals – across borders – with all aspects of pedagogical care.

FICE defends the rights of the child. It focuses particularly on children who cannot live with their parents or who, due to extraordinary events such as war or natural catastrophes, have lost their personal network and therefore require specific protection.

Current key areas of focus for FICE Switzerland are:

- Participation in the development of binding "European standards in out-of-home care" ( [www.quality4children.ch](http://www.quality4children.ch) / [www.quality4children.info](http://www.quality4children.info))
- Providing international contacts and information on exchange programmes for socio-pedagogical professionals
- Promoting partnerships among institutions/organisations in different countries
- Supporting in particular countries in south-east Europe through assistance for extended professional training and with the further development of services for education and care outside the family.

## The 2013 Congress in Berne

In 2013 FICE Switzerland will organise the International FICE Congress in Berne – for the second time in Switzerland, after the 1988 Congress in St Gall. In May 2010 the Federal Council at its meeting in Tallinn decided to entrust FICE Switzerland with the organisation of the 2013 Congress.

With a slide show of pictures of the Swiss capital, we were able to announce the Congress for the **week of 7 – 12 October 2013 in Berne** under the motto "Young persons in special life situations in the contradictory contexts of Integration – Separation – Inclusion". Initial information is already available on the Congress website

[www.fice-congress2013.ch](http://www.fice-congress2013.ch)

Professional discussions and debates will focus specifically on children and young persons with disabilities, with deviant and/or delinquent behaviour. The organising team has set itself the goal of designing and structuring these days right in the heart of Berne in such a fashion that participants will be able to perceive and feel the congress motto "the contradictory contexts of integration – separation – inclusion". We would be very happy to welcome you to the Congress in Berne and to experience and professionally discuss the Congress motto with you.

July 2011 / For the Board of FICE Switzerland, Roger Kaufmann

### Sources:

- Irene Knöpfel: "Die Gründungsgeschichte der FICE" (History of the foundation of FICE) (Degree thesis, Uni Zurich, 1987)
- Roger Kaufmann: "Marie Meierhofer und das Kinderdorf" (Marie Meierhofer and the Children's Village) (Degree thesis, Uni Zurich, 1991)