AIMS For a better birth...

Conference Report: ENCA Meeting 2018, Sanski Most, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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By Debbie Chippington Derrick



Ceri and Debbie at ENCA

ENCA, the European Network of Childbirth Associations, was founded in 1973 on the initiative of our German partners, with the aim of sharing experiences of campaigning for improvement to maternity services across Europe. The first meeting was held in Frankfurt that year, attended by representatives from 13 countries. AIMS was a founder member and the second meeting was held in the UK in 1974. Beverley Beech was the original AIMS contact with ENCA, and has attended meetings each year, with other AIMS members also attending the meetings from time to time. I had the privilege of attending two previous meetings, the first in Paris in 2015 and then in Portugal in 2017. This year, Ceri Durham and I

represented AIMS at the meeting, and we were pleased to be accompanied by Beverley, who attended and spoke at this 25th Anniversary set of meetings.

The meeting took place over three days, and we made good use of our time together, starting on the meeting agenda on the drive to the conference venue from the airport (shuffling seats on the bus so we could reach the microphone and make sure everyone could hear!) Most of the ENCA representatives were accommodated at the Centar Fenix (*www.centar-fenix.com*), an NGO which has been supporting pregnant women and their families, and the elderly, since 1997, and this arrangement enabled lively discussions to continue throughout the weekend.

Attending the meeting were representatives from 14 countries: the UK, Ireland, Greece, Netherlands, Germany, Croatia, Luxembourg, Spain, Czech Republic and Poland, from Slovenia and Serbia (both new ENCA members) and from our second-time hosts, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Representatives from other ENCA member countries (Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Turkey) were unable to join us this year. We had also thought that the Hungarian representative, Agnes Gereb, was unable to join us, but during the conference on Saturday the door opened and in she walked! The proceedings of the conference came to an abrupt stop and dissolved into rounds of applause and cheers, with people rushing to hug her. I think there were quite a few people in the room with tears in their eyes. For so many of us, of course, Agnes symbolically represents a key *raison d'etre* for such international collaboration.

ENCA meetings generally take place around a conference or event on the Saturday, organised by the host country. Member countries provide country reports in advance of the meeting, which prepares the ground for a good discussion of issues of concern to different countries, and for a discussion about how we should collaborate further.



The conference itself comprised many interesting presentations, including a focus on just how we disturb human birth and the consequences (Elisabeth Geisel), on whether birthing autonomy might be associated with a shorter labour (Fatima Klempić Dautbašić), on the short and long-term impact on women and babies of the cascade of intervention (Beverley Beech), on the culture of 'either episiotomy or c-section' in Europe (Daniela Drandić), and on women and power (Anna Zdral). A choice of workshops followed, covering Rebozo, butterfly touch massage and birthplans.

During the further ENCA meeting on Sunday, we made plans for better sharing of news across the network via social media, and discussed how we might better share information and statistics, as well as campaigning information and strategies. We also decided that the topic for the next International Week for Respectful Childbirth (IWRC) (13th-19th May 2019) would be "The power for birth is in you". For more information see www.enca.info/international-week-for-respecting-childbirth

There was so much of interest and importance during the weekend. The conference and meetings certainly provided lots of inspiration for our own national campaigning efforts. One highlight for me was to hear about the recent Spanish campaign, 'My body is not a toy!' I would wholeheartedly recommend a look at the set of powerful images developed for this campaign on the Spanish association's website (www.elpartoesnuestro.es), a website that incidentally translates well into English using Google translate!

The next ENCA meeting is planned for 24-26 May 2019 in Zagreb, and we are looking at whether we can host the 2020 meeting in the UK which would also coincide with AIMS' 60th Anniversary. Meanwhile, the AIMS trustees and volunteers will ensure that we continue to collaborate with our European colleagues, and we look forward to contributing to the International Week for Respectful Childbirth in 2019. I would also encourage readers to take a few moments to look at the ENCA website (www.enca.info), and to get in touch with AIMS if you have any thoughts about how we can make the most of our membership of this vital European network of childbirth activists.

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