

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

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Kartasidou Leukothea: Ms. Gena, you can speak now. Ms. Gena, please turn on your microphone. That's all.

Gena Aggeliki: Good evening, thank you so much for the invite to this exceptional effort of yours. Dear Leukothea, your choices, all four of them, the 4 documentaries that we watched, are truly magnificent and shocking to the core. So, if you want, I would like to give my interpretation of them.

Kartasidou Leukothea: Of course, absolutely.

Gena Aggeliki: So, yes, at first I will make some general comments for the films and then I will talk about each one separately. Firstly, I would like to say how obvious the absence of the fathers was. I think that this serves them right. Although at the last documentary we saw two dads that were involved, the main figure was still the mother, and that's the truth, but I would like to have seen a father that was more involved. It happens to be that I have done some of my most recent studies with the fathers along with the mothers. I am saying that to stress that an involved father is really important as well. So, I would have liked to see the fathers a bit more involved.

All four of these films, these documentaries, have a lot in common. It's like the same lines across all of them, from Hania to Ukraine. It's shell-shocking. None of the films, the narrations, caused you to pity people with autism. On the contrary, I think that the parents and siblings that we watched faced the situations with such dignity that can only cause us

to admire them. But, we will talk about each film separately and at the end, I will add some personal comments.

Gena Aggeliki: So, we started with the film “His shoelaces” about a boy from Hania, who is very quiet, calm, cute and a challenged one. We watched his mother raise him alone again, a boy, charming and taken care of. A mother and a grandfather with dignity, who stated their complaints, that I think all families with autistic children have, wherever are in Greece or abroad. And that complaint is that children with autism don’t have the correct support from the state, which means that they don’t get a sufficient amount of time in special education. Even the researches that have taken place in the last years in countries that spend billions for autistic children, like the United Kingdom, only 11% of the parents of the United Kingdom are satisfied with what is available for their children.

And the main problem that is underlined by the English researchers, not only in England but worldwide, is that there are not enough well-educated specialists on autism. It’s extremely difficult. It takes a lot of years and devotion in that cause for someone to be trained correctly in educating people with autism. So, still, to this day, the greatest challenge is to train competent people that are capable to work with autistic children. That is also shown in the films that we watched, especially in the first film, that along with parents’ concerns that the state isn’t there to support them. In the second film, “Très belle pour ce monde”, I am sorry, I didn’t read the Greek title, but I would translate it like “Too beautiful for this world”, we watched a little girl with autism, exceptionally challenged, a little girl that is in constant stimulation.

Gena Aggeliki: The film showed her changing moods, going from being challenged to being happy. We saw her difficulty concentrating and the problems she faces when she studies. We also watched how happy she was while she was swimming. I think that it’s important to keep in our minds that we should help a child, despite its difficulties, to succeed, but we should also remember that above all, a child is still a child and needs to be happy and entertained, even though it faces challenges. Yes, I believe that Luiz was the most challenged kid from the ones we watched. However, she still accessed the joy of life by doing an activity that really entertained her, that gave her joy.

The third film, from Portugal, the third documentary “A son like others” seems so familiar. I think that that depiction was the one that touched me the most. I mean that we have a boy that is smart, beautiful, and capable to live by himself, however, he faces quite a few difficulties that are related not only to autism but probably also to psychosis, as we came to call it in the recent years. Children with dual diagnoses exist. As the research states at least 10% of the children with autism also have a psychiatric diagnosis. 10% of autistic children. These kids are really challenged. We saw that Diny had high function autism, very high function autism. His difficulties didn’t come from autism, except the stigma of being autistic. And what impressed me the most is that that stigma had affected neither him nor his mother, they hadn’t internalized it, even though the mother’s friends had difficulties understanding his needs.

Gena Aggeliki: We saw how easily the restaurant keeper stigmatized him, put a label on a child, a young man who is also a client of his. Although that, neither the boy, Diny nor his mother labeled themselves. This means that they didn’t accept this social labeling, they didn’t marginalize themselves, they didn’t stay always at home, but they are going out, they are socially included. It also means that Diny dares to walk alone, to ask for his freedom and independence. Finally, it shows that he doesn’t identify with the label, with the stereotype that others try to give him.

We finished this film section with a shocking narration from Ukraine about two boys, Tima and Dany. In these two stories, we saw for the first time, the fathers being present. But the fathers had a secondary role in their children’s lives, while the mothers were fully involved, the mothers were the ones who supported the children. And of course, the mothers are the ones who posed the repeated parents’ of autistic children request: what will happen to my child when I die. In Tima’s case, the mother shared the deep agony she had when she was pregnant with her third child, she badly wanted it to be a girl. So, Mirosia, her young daughter, before she was even born, had the order to continue her mother’s doings by caring for her autistic brother.

Gena Aggeliki: This is a very crucial point for the family. Who is going to take care of the autistic member after the mother? Will he/she go to an institute? Will be the siblings the ones who will look after their brother/sister with autism? I would like to conclude my

speech with something Dany, the boy from the Ukrainian story, the one who connected to others through music, said. The song that he was singing said “I overcome the obstacles”. So, I would say, adding to that that life is an obstacle course race.

I think that all of us meet obstacles in our way, some are greater than others and we easily fall because of them. What matters the most though is to get up afterward and also to lend a helping hand to others that have fallen while they were trying to overcome their obstacles. And I believe that that is the specialist purpose and also the purpose of the society that wants to be considered civilized. Their role is to help the ones that have suddenly fallen to the ground when they attempted to overjump an obstacle.

I don't want to say more, because I want the rest of the time to be used for the discussion, I don't want to be the only one who talks. I will happily listen to what the rest of the speakers have to say and with much more joy I will listen to the audience and their thoughts, recollections, and questions and I will gladly contribute to the discussion. Leukothea thank you so much for this year's invitation and everything else. I wish you to be strong, like always, and all the best.

Kartasidou Leukothea: Ms. Gena, should I or are you going to give the floor to Ms. Kintoni, pardon me, I mean to Ms. Kintoni and Ms. Kintoni and Ms. Malkotsi? How do you want to proceed?

Gena Aggeliki: Of course, we should start with the beautiful Ms. Kintoni and Ms. Kintoni. One of them I had the great pleasure of meeting and I longingly recall it. The younger Ms. Kintoni I see for the first time and I am really glad to meet. I am also excited to hear them both. Thank you.

Kintoni Konstantina: I thank you, Ms. Gena. It's an honor, really an honor for me to be announced by a person with an academic and professional career like yours. And I also thank you as a mother for everything that you have offered to the field of disability and especially autism, until now. Of course, I would also like to thank Leuki for the opportunity she gave both me and my daughter to take part in this commonplace that art creates, and also to all the supporters of this project, which is called RoDi.

Pardon me, but I would like to make some comments about the films, to say five things that I have in my mind about them. Personally, I voted for the last film, the one that

I found more balanced but generally, I would like to say that this devastating realism is useful only when it is balanced out from the rest things we see from the child through the day. I don't question, at all, that this side to the story really exists. Although the photography of the film "Too beautiful for this world" was exquisite, to watch Luiz do one thing and then another and then to watch her younger sister, watching her, inflict wounds on herself.

Kintoni Konstantina: This scene made me feel compassion, sadness, and pity, at least for me, personally. In the other film, we watched with the {...} the little sister of that boy, the young man who in the end makes his rebellion and we saw him be equal in a group of his peers at the university, in which he so much wanted to go, so, I saw his little sister trying to calm him down. I would also like to have seen how the siblings with disabilities help and support their non-disabled siblings. I would like to have seen it more in the documentary because I am sure that it happens. I know it because it happens in my house as well. And I would also like to have seen how the non-disabled children exhaust their parents as well. Why not?

Every child, disabled or not, has his/her personality, needs, and difficulties. Being a parent has its rewards, rewards with a never-ending emotional depth, but it's not a trip to the Bahamas, it's really, really difficult. Now, lastly, but not my last observation, I would like to have seen a documentary with a disabled parent, a parent that resumes the role of the carer and not the role of the one being taken care of. I would love to watch that and we were discussing this with Maria. So, I am here today, I have come, to talk about family relationships and I will do so, even though I rarely do. I hardly talk as a mother of a disabled child, especially in public. And I refrain from doing so, because until today I have never been in a public discussion, not even once, that I mentioned that I met my daughter, Maria, in an orphanage for children with disabilities, when she was two and a half years old and I was 19, and that I adopted her and there are no comments afterward that state my heroic action of self-sacrifice, me being a fighter in life, me being a true mother with capital M, me being a human with capital H and all those things we say with a capital.

Kintoni Konstantina: I also don't talk as a mother, because when you say that you are a parent of a disabled child, in this sweet country of ours, your ability to talk based on

scientific facts is automatically weaker. You become a very emotionally charged person, who is unable to see clearly. Everyone feels you and sympathize with you as a mother and sometimes as a victim of this life, but anything you say, even if it's well supported by research facts, always remains a cry of agony, the outcome of your difficult journey on a bumpy road that you climb every single day and all these clichés. And at the same time, something else happens. At least I feel that way.

When I talk as a mother, all the lights are shed on me, the parent, the parent who is a hero, a lion, a fighter, you can use whatever you like, I have heard it all and so has my child. My child, who was right there by my side, means that all of these comments were made while my kid was next to me. Those congratulations about me adopting the child with the problem, the one thousand bravoos for my good deed, have been stated many times, while my "good deed" was right there. I respond to them by saying do you know how many things has Maria accomplished with her fabulous personality and her skills?

Kintoni Konstantina: And again you hear them say congratulations, you are the one who helped her to be where she is now. This shows that the parent is always the one who gets to be the center of attention and the child that has achieved so much, with his/her powers and of course the support the family, how else, each and every one of us has the support of our families, this child gets to be in the sidelines, to be seen in the distance. That's the reason why I don't want to talk as a parent, but at the same time, I feel guilty and remorse towards my child, who is unique and I would not change for any other in the entire world.

So, the first thing I want to clear out, at least as long as I am considered, is that heroism and being a good person. I want them out of the way, because, like every other person, I am not one-sided. I have good and the inside of me, and I am capable to feel and to want to do the best for my fellow humans, the ones that I love and I am also able to do horrible thoughts and faint-hearted acts, to be unfair to people and to upset them. All these show that I don't differ from others. The second thing I want to make clear is that the only thing that I offered to my child, Maria, is that I was her mother and nothing more.

Kintoni Konstantina: All I ever wanted and I still want, for all three of my children, disabled and non-disabled, is for them to be balanced and happy and that applies to Maria

too. The third thing that I want to tell everyone who congratulates me because they believe that I am responsible for Maria's ability to live independently today, for her ability to study and work, is that I am not. I believed in her abilities, yes, I adored her and of course, I still do, and I took care of her as a mother, and I supported her as my parents did and still do for me. And everything she has accomplished, she has achieved them because she is one of the best and in her way smartest people that I have ever met. Because she is capable because she loves and trusts and connects deeply and truly with others. And that's all her, that's all her DNA, something that inherited from her biological parents, to whom I will be forever grateful for giving birth to her, obviously, and finally, Maria is what is going to show right after I finish talking.

Now, except Leuki and her effort, through RoDi Festival, to make people aware of disability issues, the other thing that motivated me to speak here, in public as a parent, to speak for something so personal, is that recently, in my workspace, we had a meeting, anyway, for the preparation of a public campaign about the promotion of foster care for children with disabilities, children that are currently live in institutes. So, the director of the company, who was a person completely out of the field of child protection, after listening to all of us talking, talked and somewhat hesitantly he said:

Kintoni Konstantina: "Guys, this campaign refers to adults from whom we ask to make excess and take on the responsibility of caring for a disabled child. Like it or not, don't take me wrong here, we have to say to them, how they will be benefited from that." That last part, he said it almost in a whisper. Not only I didn't take offense to it, but also I thought that in all its simplicity, this thought was brilliant. And that's the reason why, although I am not usually talking as a mother, I wanted to speak. I want to talk about how much I was benefited from my relationship with my child, and that's something that I want to say, something I want to shout. I'll only say a few more things and I'll close my speech because the list of things I could talk about is infinite, so I'll express just a few more of my thoughts.

Before I do it though, I would like to do, I would like to state that I am here to testify my personal experience. I am not representing anybody, and of course, I couldn't have. Also, I don't feel like I am represented by any parent who speaks publically with an official or not role. I feel the need to clarify that. Even though it should be common sense that every parent experiences the essence of being a parent differently and that's something

unique and special for each and every one of us. I cannot talk on behalf of other parents. So, I am going to tell you about how I was benefited from Maria. I will only tell you a few of my thoughts.

Kintoni Konstantina: I want to tell you that the adoption of my child was an exercise for me, an exercise to restrict myself. And still, I haven't achieved to wipe out my self-centrism and my narcissism. But Maria's existence, her view on things, despite the stupid things I've done while raising her, and her forgiving voice, Maria's forgiving nature helped me the most. She helped me to accept myself, assisted me to understand that I am not perfect and that I never was. This helped me to figure out that there is a clear difference between trying to improve myself as a mother, as an employee, as a partner, and being a perfectionist.

I got my self-esteem up because self-confidence I had plenty. However I believe that someone gets his/her self-esteem only by creating and giving to others, by giving himself/herself and only when he/she meets his/her fellow human, in the end, that's when you get your self-confidence. I also discovered the infinite capabilities of a person, due to seeing that in my child and myself as well. You know, a lot of people have told me "You are a strong woman, a really strong one", but people, I believe, don't suspect their real capabilities. They must really want to see them, to get them, and when someone gets them, must be prepared to take full responsibility for this discovery and what is he/she going to do with it. I am not saying that everyone is for everything, and at the same time, I don't see myself as something exquisite, like something special. Every person would be able to do his/her own choice and I believe that people, all people, are much more than we sometimes think we are.

Kintoni Konstantina: The other thing I would like to say is that evidently with Maria, we faced a lot of difficulties, and those not because of her disability, but because of ignorance, legislation blanks, and often from the enemy like social behaviors and inequality in many of the social environments that my child was in. And those difficulties made me angry, but I learned, by observing my child's reactions, she taught me how to manage my anger, that this anger, this wrath is a force that can swallow me, but at the same time, it can be a source of creativity as long as I express it correctly.

I never blamed my child's disability for these, but I often accused and I still blame all those who deprive her of her rights, and I push Maria to speak, to speak for herself and I think that that is the most important thing. Now, I am going to tell you about how Maria helped me. She shed light on my life, inside and out and she taught me how to love myself and the people around me. Through her, I got acquainted with the disability "world" and in this world, I met some of the greatest and most giving people in my life. She taught me another, liberating way of being and she took my hand and showed me a world that I didn't even know that existed.

Kintoni Konstantina: [00:23:48] She helped her siblings to become the amazing kids they are, Chloe and Thomas. I won't say more about it, because Maria knows, she knows very well that despite everything she has heard, she is my savior and not I, hers. I am going to finish now because I am aware that I can't fit everything into one single speech. I am only going to say something, that I think somewhat condenses what I have gained from my relationship with my child.

I have chronic asthma and when coronavirus reached Europe, obviously the first case, I was really really scared. That night I prayed to God and said "Please God, I don't want to die" I imagine a lot of people did something similar. While I was praying I spontaneously said "Even if I die, I lived a full life, a meaningful life, a life worth living for, and I have found my paradise in this life, so thank You, God", that's it. It's a bit dark for closing but sums up the benefits of choosing to be a family with Maria. That's all from me. Thank you very much for listening to me and thank you in advance for listening to my child.

Gena Aggeliki: So, we give the floor to Maria, we give the floor to the youth. Tell us, Maria, I am really excited to hear you, to hear your thoughts and emotions about those interesting films, about those very interesting documentaries that we watched. I really want to listen to what you have to say about them, thank you.

Kartasidou Leukothea: Konstantina, we can't hear her. She has to be a little closer to the microphone, a little bit. Yes, that's right. Thank you very much.

Kintoni Maria: Thank you so much for your invitation. I want to send a message to the audience, especially, most of all to the parents. If a child has a disability, it doesn't always

need to be in a bubble, to be overprotected all the time, because you are afraid that something bad is going to happen to him/her, that he/she is going to be hurt. It is good to learn. Unfortunately, I don't like for us to be hurt, but we have to learn how to live in the outside world, to learn how to behave when someone is underestimating us, what we should do, to speak or not. That's the best we can do. There is no need to exaggerate and say oh my child I don't want you to be harmed, you are ill, etc. People say a lot of stuff.

Also, we, disabled people, may face difficulties, but we can make it. We need some support. It is difficult to do it alone. But we can do it if we have someone to support us, to help us. And we, disabled people, can accomplish anything. We are able to talk, to express ourselves, to make friends, and friends are really important. I wanted to talk about the boy who left and went to make friends. I liked that a lot because it showed not only to the world, but also to his mother that he is not useless and that he can succeed even though he has autism, even though that means that he gets hurt, but that does not mean that he is never going to make it. He told his mother, "Mother don't be afraid. I can do it. Don't be afraid". And what he did was the best for me, because he made his mother understand that he is fine, that he is with his friends, that he is nothing like they say, that he is not a psychopath. That was the best for me. It took him a while to do it, but he made an action that showed to the world that we, the disabled people, can do many things, like {...}

When I was in the institute, I didn't know what family relationships meant. I was alone. I had just a little love to say. And when my mother came into my life, I started to learn a lot of things, I may be slow to understand most of the time and I maybe need some extra time, but slowly I can learn a lot of things. Since I was young, my mother always told me "Maria, you will be independent", because that's how my mom taught me, to be independent, to have friends, to do a lot of things, and to do whatever I like. And so my mother accepted it and I did it. I also have an amazing family, my grandma, my grandpa, my whole family, my mother, I really wouldn't change the family that raised me with so much love and support and patience {...}.

My sister is really very good. We may fight, but we are sisters and she always supports me as the little sister did to the boy, to find a way to calm him. My sister does the

same for me. For example, she assists me with math. I can't understand them at all. I am like a ton of bricks as long as math is concerned. That does not mean that I am useless, ok? My sister also helps me with other things. Sometimes, my sister feels isolated, because she sees me being a disabled person and yes, she supports me a great deal. She feels bad about me because she feels that I am alone. On this subject, I would like to add for the children, for the siblings that I don't want them to feel inferior. We are equals, we are family {...}. That was all I wanted to say on that matter. Let's just keep that in mind. I am so very happy to be here and see you all and I am really glad that you gave me this opportunity.

Gena Aggeliki: Thank you so much, Konstantina. I think your testimony is the most important one because firstly you talked to us about the value of family, which is a value of great importance for us, Mediterranean nations, and the love, strength, and freedom we can experience through the family. I am also glad that you talked about Diny and his independence, his freedom. It's not a coincidence, I think, that we were all affected by him, because to be alone, to be free, to be independent, are some things that we all ask for, but most importantly it's the fact that you described that within your family you are able to feel free, loved, and independent because I believe we all start from a family, wherever we may be.

It's difficult to feel free if your family keeps you bound. Sometimes parents may be in another hemisphere and they still hold the ropes on their son/daughter too tight. So, yes, we all carry within us our parents, our siblings and when there are so great people with such great love, we also carry within ourselves all this love.

We thank Maria and Konstantina very much for their beautiful speeches and their thoughts on what we had watched. Now, I am going to give the floor to Ms. Malkotsi, so she can tell us her thoughts about the four documentaries that we watched, thank you.

Malkotsi Triada: Hello. I really had decided that I will watch these four documentaries and that I won't be affected by them, because I am a mother of an autistic child, I have a girl, Eve, who is the sweetest kid. A few days ago, on the 14th of November, she had her birthday, she is now 21 years old. So, I had decided that I won't be affected, but as you can see, I shed a few tears. Ok, maybe it's because of the memories that are many and

have flooded in. And we said some things previously. I think that the thing that struck me the most is that we all liked Diny and his attempt to be independent very much, which is something really really important. Moreover is something that we are fighting for the last 20 years since we learned about Eve's problem.

I believe that we all fight and struggle to be independent and autonomous. Of course, at the beginning half of us, parents, don't understand it and until we figure it out, we just want to make this problem go away, we don't want it to exist, we are in denial, terrible denial and due to this, we lose a lot of time. Afterward, it downs on us, we understand our child's disability and we try to figure out what is this that we are suddenly faced with and why we are facing it. Because every parent, when we are expecting a child, what are we doing, we are building castles, aren't we? Suddenly, we realize that these castles were made of sand and our castles are shattered.

Malkotsi Triada: And what should I do when I understand or learn a few things, what I should do when I realize that my child has autism, I start to build bridges. Building bridges is not an easy job, is not easy neither within the family nor, of course, within the society which means our extended social environment. It's really difficult. Of course, I am not sure how within a family we can conceive, understand and finally accept the fact that a member of us has a disability. That is very obvious in the last documentary, in which I saw a very coherent family, real cohesion, which is probably due to deep emotional bonds. Otherwise, this cohesion can't be achieved. And this cohesion leads to something that I believe is really important for us, families with disabled members.

This important element, I think, is adaptability, which means the ability, let's say, that usually we have it, or not, but sometimes it can be developed under certain circumstances. If, of course, the members of the family are emotionally bonded, if there is an emotional bond amongst the family members, adaptability is the only thing that will help the couple, the family to overcome the different situations and crises that will face through their lifetime. Because, what do we literally do? A child with a disability comes to our home, we try, we try to adapt, to keep the balance despite everything that has changed in our lives, and of course, the center of all of these is our child, as long as my family is considered, it is Eve, and that's why doing something wrong is considered a grave mistake.

Malkotsi Triada: I think that the child, the special child needs to experience that he/she lives within his/her family, that the family lives with the child and not that he/she simply exists within the family, or that the family lives for the child. I can say that I was really shocked by all these crises. That is because, as a family and especially as a mother memories are many. And as we understood through the films that we watched the person that defies the child's life, every child's life of course, with or without disability, within the family, is the mother and her attitude, because most of the time she is the closest person to the child, it's in woman's nature to do so, let' say, generally we, mothers, are closer, more close to our children.

And of course, as I said previously if the emotional bonds within the family are strong, then the father is not absent, on the contrary, his presence in the family is really important, it's extremely important. While watching all these documentaries and thinking that somewhere in there is my child, I think were we able to raise our child in a way that she will be capable to be in the company of her peers on her own. Because, until this day my Eve is always accompanied, there is always someone beside her, who will assist her with her friends, with her company, with whatever she may need.

Malkotsi Triada: You can say that it may be the fear that makes us not to let her on her own, or that she hasn't made it yet. Of course, her efforts are great. Something that we constantly hear and something that I think, especially Maria will appreciate, is "I can do it on my mum, I can do it by myself", and this is very important, really important. We listen to this phrase since that she was very young and we are actually glad that we do and we try to do everything that we can to enhance it. Because that's the parent's role and that's the reaction that Eve has to have.

In reality, what you said before Ms. Kintoni, is that we do not seek to be heroines, to be characterized as heroines or the society's pity, because I think pity is coming from fear, the fear towards disability. It's the fear, that makes people when they see something to say "Oh dear, how lucky I am that something like this didn't happen to me", it's the fear and this fear leads to pitting. It's something like this that I have experienced the last 21 years, 20 years, because the first year we were still, ok, we were still flying high and gradually afterward we came down and then up again and down again. What I am trying to say is that the only thing that we have to do as parents, as mothers of children with

disabilities is to follow our children, to push them forward, and not to suppress them. Our children are capable up to a point, we have to make a small step forward, to try and to always take into consideration the limitations of our children and not to push them to exceed them, only just to reach them.

Malkotsi Triada: I started somewhat abrupt and I didn't thank first of all Ms. Kartasidou, thank you so much Ms. Kartasidou for your invitation, it was an honor for me. Secondly, I would like to thank Ms. Gena, who with her views on all the films and each film separately and with knowing her work all these time, I have watched you many times Ms. Gena. And I would like to say that actually the last time that I watched you was last year on your project with Onassis foundation considering {...} and needless to say it was something that we at the hospital at least, the doctors and the nurses, we promoted a lot.

Also, I would like to thank Ms. Kintoni, because really, I would say it simply, I could relate to many things that you said in your speech. Of course, another thing that I would like to say is that we need to live with dignity, as Ms. Gena said previously. Ms. Gena, do you know how difficult this word is for a family that has a disabled child, or any other disabled member? Unfortunately, it's a very difficult word, because prejudice is great. Let's say it as educators state it most of the time, the social beliefs considering disability and especially autism, which is not obvious, autism is not apparent on a person, are so deeply rooted and many will say that the child is fine, that nothing is off with him/her.

Malkotsi Triada: Our children are beautiful, they are very beautiful, they are angels and as I often say, God gifted me an angel. Am I capable to hold it in my arms, how far can I go, how far, am I emotionally strong enough, am I courageous enough, do I have the strength? And in reality, we, parents, are searching a lot for something/someone that can give us the strength we need. It's the strength that Ms. Kintoni mentioned before, that even we can't realize that we have it inside of us, and it's quite enough. The only thing that we need to do is to unveil it and to reveal it, based on our love for our children and generally for our families because these children are members of our families.

Our children need to belong to our families and not just to exist within them. That's our goal, to make our children understand that they belong here, they don't just live with their families and that they also belong to this society and that they don't just live in it.

Because there is no need to lie. I won't say the word demand, but we would like society to be a little closer to us, a little more understanding, I believe that as the years go by we make progress referring to this and also the education of the specialist and the parents. Because a parent is trained, no one is born knowing neither how to raise a typically developed child, nor a child with a disability, he/she is always learning. I have nothing else to say. Thank you very much.

Gena Aggeliki: Thank you so very much Ms. Malkotsi, your speech was very interesting and to the point, it couldn't be different from a person like yourself. I would like to say a couple of things, a kind of feedback if you may, based on what I have listened to, and to talk a bit about the concept of independence because it's a concept that we place high, how important is to be independent. West world was highly based on this concept, to be independent, to be productive, to be able to stand to your own feet and of course, all of these have their value, but are also a utopia, something unrealistic, because in reality we are all depended on each other.

So, I would say that the concept of independence shouldn't be the ultimate target, instead, the aim should be a loving interdependence, to be dependent on one other lovingly. That means that our relationship should be a dependent one but based on love and not on possessiveness because to depend on someone owing to the fact that he/she wants to control you is different from you feeling dependent on someone due to your love for him/her. I can't recall in which book Dostoevsky had written that "It's amazing to be absolutely dependent on a person that you can't do without, to be dependent on someone that he/she can't live without you". That is, I think, the concept of loving dependence, the fact that I accept that I mean nothing on my own and that I only materialize when I relate to others and gain value and these relationships are the ones that we should fight for in our lives.

Gena Aggeliki: And because you thank me that I work on autism, I'll say that like Konstantina, I was and still am a person with deep existential issues and if I am not existentially empty I actually owe it more than anything else to autism that I encounter for the first time in a very productive scientifically and professionally age and I would like to say that from the moment that I met the first child with autism that I worked with, an Afro-

American boy named Kynan, who I thank deeply, all my existential problems were solved, I know that I have something to do in every minute in my life. Personally, my biggest dilemma is not what to do with my life if I am bored, but it is how to better utilize every minute of my life to help people that can't do it by themselves, from the begging of their lives. So, my great thanks are to Kynan and every child that gives meaning to my existence and every minute of it. I have nothing more to say. Leukothea, how would you like us to proceed?

Kartasidou Leukothea: First and foremost, I would like to thank you, to thank, I would say that you were the magnificent four, firstly. I don't know if there are any, Vasileia will tell us if there are any questions, any comments in the chat, so we can make things easier.

Stamouli Vasileia: Of course. Firstly congratulations, your viewpoints were very good, and thank you for sharing your experiences with us. Now, about the chat, there are some viewpoints and comments. Ms. Antonia Trikallioti writes "We love both Ms. Kintoni, but Maria should talk in every conference that takes place here and also in Europe if we want to change things someday. She is the living proof that disabled children are a member of the family that not only receive care but also give care to the other members and that they are not a burden for the family. Ms. Patty Sotiropoulou says that you are exquisite like always. Ms. Doxa Papakonstantinou writes that your viewpoints are shell shocking and that we really thank you for sharing. And lastly, Ms. Aikaterini Kotanou says that that's why we need more people with disabilities and their families at the forefront, congratulations.

Stamouli Vasileia: We have a question from Ms. Marianthi, I can't see the surname.

The person who posed the question: Karatsiori, Marianthi Karatsiori.

Stamouli Vasileia: True Words, filled with love and hope for a better tomorrow, thank you so much. In the fourth film, says Ms. Victoria Kyriazi, the assistant from the state wasn't of any real use, we watched how the inclusive classroom worked. I would like one of the speakers to answer.

Gena Aggeliki: Ok, I won't say much about this, because the child we watched, Tima, had so many potentials that really if he had received from the begging substantial help,

now he would be a child that needs no help at all. Today, we know that half of the children with autism can overcome it if they receive the appropriate assistance, it's not true that autism is incurable. Today, we have all the necessary means for an autistic person to overcome his/her autistic characteristics/behaviors, when the treatment starts early, before the age of 4 or 5 years old. What usually remains is a deficit that is related to mental disability and cognitive deficits that are beyond autism, but the autistic characteristics/behaviors, when autism is not coexisting with mental disability, can be treated fully and the autistic person is able to overcome his/hers difficulties that are related to autism when the treatment is taking place at the right time, is intensive, is based on behavior analysis, is applied by experienced professionals and the family assist the process.

Yes, the criteria are many, but when these criteria are met autistic characteristics/behaviors can be overcome. What remains is not autism, but cognitive deficits, and when we do not face it on time when we delay, there are more chances that the deficits will remain. The earlier we start, the better the outcome will be, the condition of an autistic person will be better, this person is born with a lot of difficulties, but these difficulties can be surpassed, except for the mental deficits, when the intervention is early, intensive and behavior analytical, so that's it, considering the question.

Kartasidou Leukothea: Would anyone else, maybe one of the speakers, Ms. Malkotsi? It's difficult, your microphone if you want the floor, Ms. Malkotsi, your microphone.

Malkotsi Triada: It's difficult, really very difficult. Of course, I can't speak generally, but talking only about my experiences, I think that we approach good professionals. The interventions were very intensive, to the point that we were exhausted, my daughter was also exhausted. I remember, that they brought her down to the entrance of our building around half past three p.m. when I got back from work, and we returned home at 10 p.m., occupational therapy, speech therapy, music therapy, therapeutic horseback riding, anyway. We reach the point that we are today.

Eve is a quite high-functioned child. Ok, now she goes to special vocational high school (ΕΝΕΕΓΥΛ), and she doesn't talk much. She hasn't overcome this, it's not possible to surpass it. At least, what I have seen, not only from my child but from other children as

well, other moms and children that I meet every day are that the children reach a certain point. Of course, there are always cases that more than one disabilities coexist like Ms. Gena said before. You can't surpass the cognitive factor and mental disability especially when other psychological disorders are present, you can't overcome them. When we have a child that has Asperger, let's say, I believe that with the correct intervention, especially with an intervention that starts around 18 months old, if the parents don't lose time and are able to perceive it and not only that but also to accept it and to begin, to begin the treatments, the children are able to reach a very good level.

Malkotsi Triada: We have children that are studying in universities, who, I am sorry, but Eve is out and I have to keep my mind on my phone as well, who reach a very good level. We have children with autism that are in universities in a variety of schools and they are finishing their studies. Still, some behavioral problems remain, but which one of us does not have behavioral problems, let's say, some behavioral problems persist. If we look ourselves in the mirror, we will think why I am talking about the children with special needs, have I no problems, am I not into the spectrum of special needs, not the autistic spectrum, but the special needs spectrum, isn't it that correct?

And I would like to add something lastly and I would like with this to state, that we must never forget, owning that this day is devoted to family relationships, that the family is truly really important, I would compare it to the rails on which a train is moving, that means that the rails are the family that supports the child to continue walking forward and not to be derailed.

Malkotsi Triada: Family is like, I can't recall exactly, maybe Ms. Gena could help me with this, how we call this, the ancient Greeks, the thing that was used to calculate, oh the philosopher's stone, yes, the philosopher's stone is the family, that was used to touch gold and it changed its color this metal and in this way they understood, I think that family works similarly, family is like this metal. And if the family starts the early treatment immediately, now there are so many tools to track any signs of a disorder, and universities also try their best for early treatment, for example about the weighting of these tools that help us make a diagnosis and of course in the course after the diagnosis.

I think that an autistic child, especially if it is a high functioning one with mild autistic behaviors and without any other disorder or disability present, can, yes, reach a very good level of social integration. If, of course, is given the chance to do so by the state, because I think that we also need a lot of help from them, so if the state permits it, I believe that a child can achieve reaching a very high level. For instance, let's say, the 5% that hasn't yet been applied to autism. Thank you very much.

Gena Aggeliki: I think that we agree on quite a few points, and the audience gave us great feedback. I would like to thank Leukothea again for this wonderful opportunity that she gives us every year to reflect in a different setting, not a sterilized scientific one, but in a more emotional one and you really offer us food for thought in a more emotional way for everyone through this festival that is 100% bases to volunteer work and you shower us with emotions, thoughts, and everything. Thank you so much.

Kartasidou Leukothea: Human is always our inspiration, nothing else. I would like to thank you for the honor, as a team, to be here today. Of course, we have to also thank Mr. Spiro Kouzeli for interpreting in Greek sign language, who follows us and supports us and it is another way of communication for us that always satisfies us and allows us to communicate some information. Good night everyone, thank you very much.

Gena Aggeliki: Good night.