

The 13th ISPCAN European Regional Conference on Child
Abuse and Neglect, Dublin, Sept. 2013

The CAC/Barnahus Response to Child Sexual Abuse and the Council of Europe Standard Setting

Bragi Guðbrandsson, Gen Director

The Gov. Agency for Child Protection, Iceland

The CAC/Barnahus Model

- A Child- friendly response to Child Sexual Abuse:
 - Multiagency
 - Interdisciplinary
 - Comprehensive
 - Under one roof
- Originates in the 1980's USA, implemented in 1998 in Iceland followed by other Nordic countries under the name „Barnahus“ or Children's House
- Principles now embodied in the Council of Europe standard settings in the programme „Europe for and with Children“

Few facts to remember

- The vulnerability of the child victim
 - The “silent” crime, secrecy of the abuse
 - Child victims difficulties in disclosure
- The absence of evidence other than the child’s disclosure
 - Medical evidence in less than 10%; conclusive less than 5% o
 - Other hard evidence, or other witnesses than the child victim, are limited or do not exist

The Key to unlocking the abuse

- The Child's disclosure is the key for:
 - Ensuring the safety of the child
 - Providing appropriate services for physical and psychological recovery
 - Successful investigation, prosecution and sentencing
 - Preventing the perpetrator from reoffending
- Dealing with Child Sexual Abuse is therefore the responsibility of many agencies in society

Multiple interviews – Harmful to the Child Victim

- All the different agencies: the Child Protection Service, the Medical Profession, the Police etc. need to have the child's account
- Repetitive interviews by many professionals in different locations can have very harmful effect for the child victim
- Retraumatization – re-victimisation
 - Refers to painful/stressful re-experiencing of trauma as a consequence of sexual violence

Violation of the “best interest of the child”

- *Investigation often generates painful experiences for the child victim*



Multiple interviews –

Harmful for the Criminal Investigation

- Repetitive and unstructured interviews can distort the child's account
- Discrepancies in the child's narrative due to
 - Suggestibility
 - Leading and misleading questions
- The Absence of a child-friendly facilities
 - High level of stress precludes optimal expression
 - Police stations or Hospitals: Wrong messages!

“In the best interest of the child”

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 3.1 states that:

“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration”

Barnahus Iceland; the background

- Increased international awareness following the first World Congress on commercial sexual exploitation of children (Stockholm 1996)
- The first research conducted on the incidence of child sexual abuse in Iceland in 1997
- The rate of child sexual abuse higher than imagined
- The research outcome created a public demand for improved strategies in handling of child sexual abuse cases
- The CAC response became the role model

Multiagency Collaboration

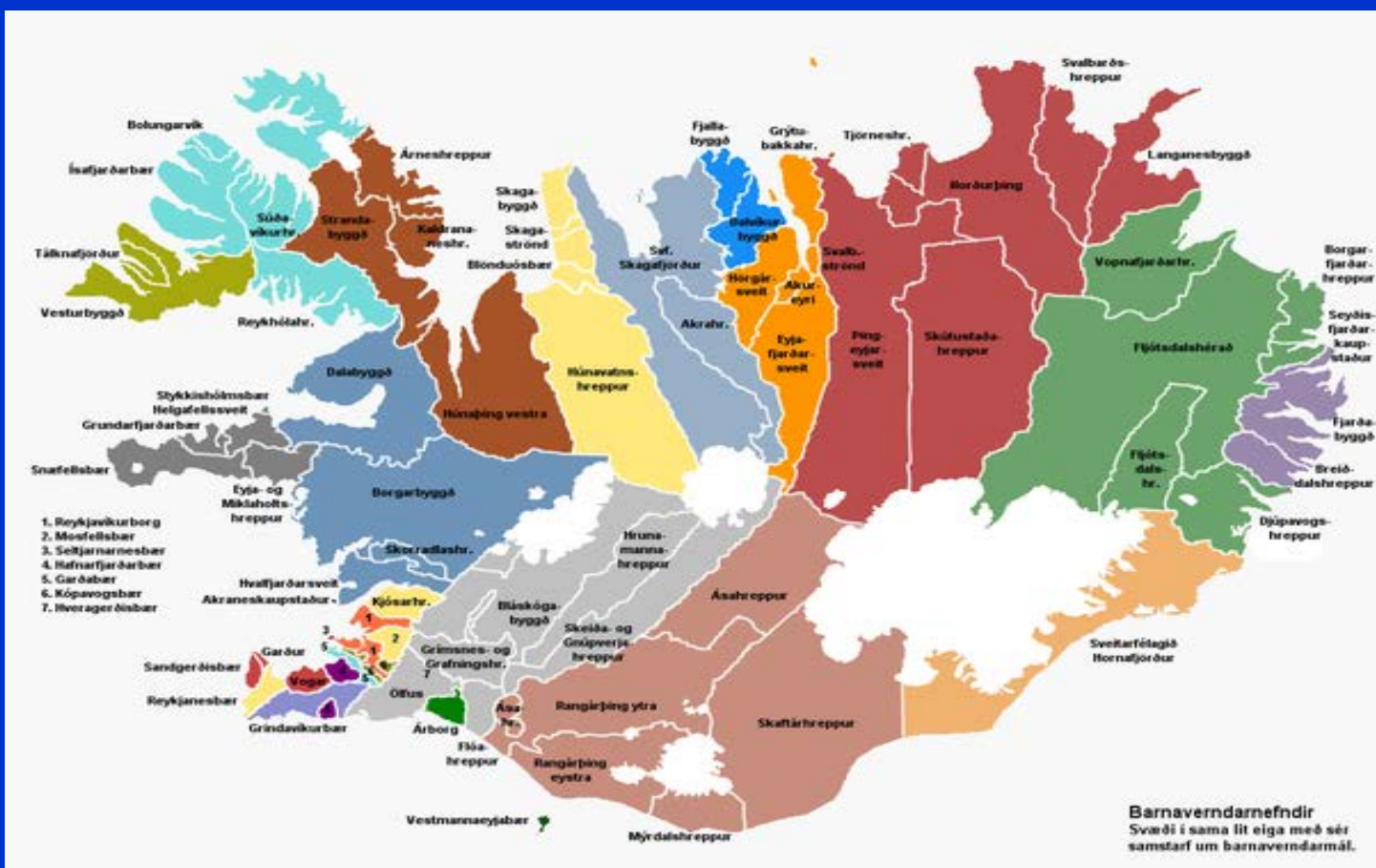
- The Gov. Agency for Child Protection
- The State Police
- The State Prosecution
- The Police Dep. in Reykjavik
- The University Hospital – Dep. of Pediatrics and Dep. of child Psychiatry
- Association of the Directors of Local Social Services
- The Child Protection Services in Reykjavik





CAC/Barnahus

Medical Exams and Evaluation	Joint Investigative Interviews	Victim Therapy
Family Counselling/ Support	Education, Training and Research	Networking Local/ National



Referrals and services

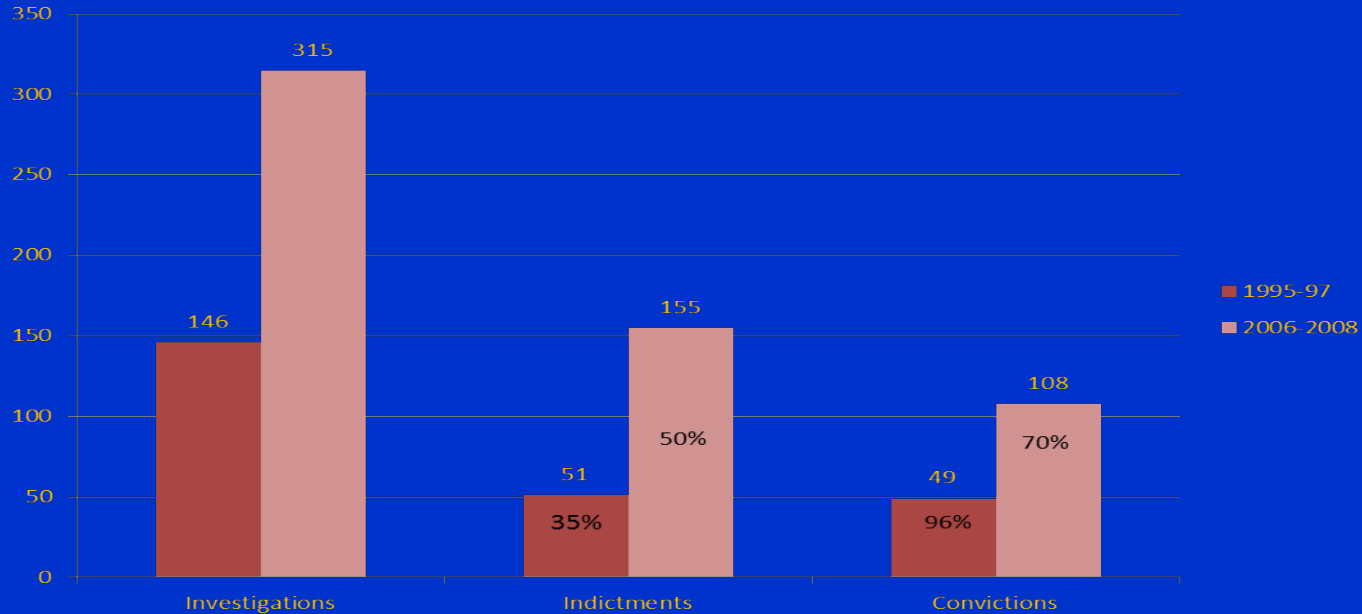
- Mandatory reporting to the local CPS
- CPS and/or Court Judges refer cases to the Barnahus
- Forensic interviews:
 - Court statements
 - Explorative interviews
- Medical Examination
- Therapeutic services
 - Trauma Focused Cognitive Behaviour
 - Support to the victim's family

Fifteen years of experience

- Over 3.500 children have been referred to Barnahus by the CPS and the Police from the onset in 1998; appr. 250 - 300 annually in recent years
- The number of:
 - Cases investigated have more than doubled
 - Indictments pr. year have more than tripled
 - Convictions pr year have more than doubled
- Evaluation shows significantly better outcomes for child victims and their families

Tracing the Cases

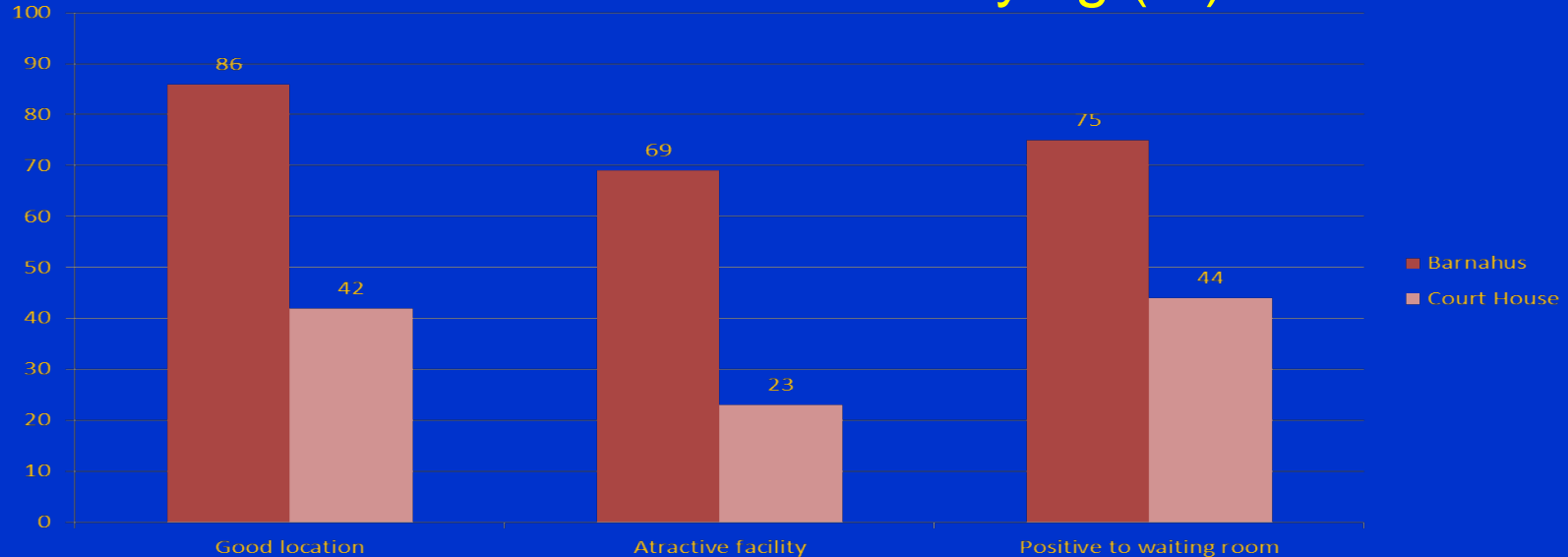
Research findings on child sexual abuse 1995-97 compared to official statistics from the State Prosecution 2006-2008



Evaluation Outcome

Child-friendly environment

Environment for testifying (%)

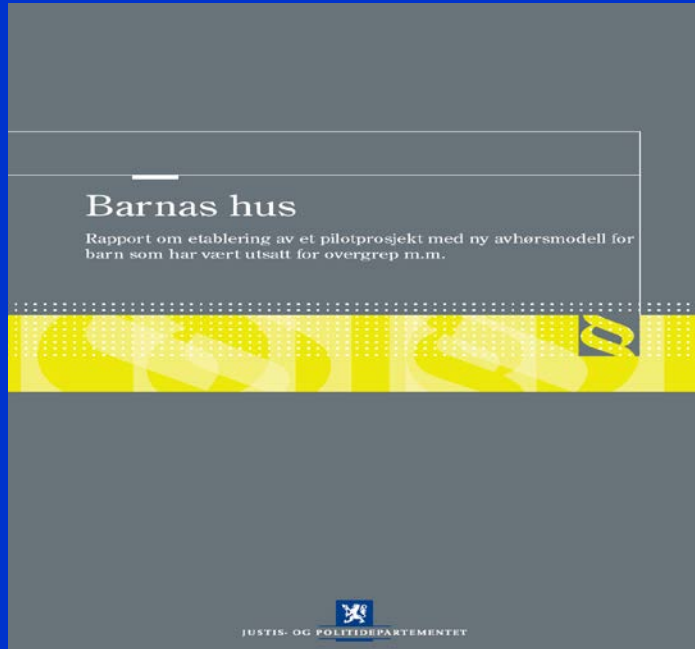


CAC/Barnahus in Europe:

Opening of the first Barnahus in Sweden, 2005



Barnahus in Norway



- 2000 – 2005 Save the Children promotes Barnahus
- 2005 Norwegian parliament decides on a pilot
- 2006 Report on implementation
- 2007 the first Barnahús i Norge (Bergen)
- Facilities in operation in 10 cities

Some further developments

- Barnahus opened in Greenland opened in 2011
- Next month Barnahus will open in 5 cities in Denmark (Köbenhavn, Odense, Århus, Aalborg and Næstved)
- The Ministry of Justice in Finland decided on a „pilot“ Barnahus in 2013/2014 - Turku
- The Ministry of Social Security and Labour in Lithuania started preparation for setting up Barnahus in 2013
- Other states include Croatia, Turkey, the Netherlands and Portugal

The Council of Europe (CoE)

- CoE founded in 1949 in the aftermath of the World War II
- Mission: integration in terms of protecting human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law
- 47 Member states, rapid increase after the collapse of the bipolar system from the times of the “Cold War”
- Increase focus on children’s rights:
 - The transversal project “Building a Europe for and with Children” from 2006

Europe for and with Children

- A transversal programme focusing *inter alia* on promoting child-friendly services and systems and the elimination of all forms of violence against children
- Phase I. (2006-2011) A comprehensive standard setting includes:
 - The Lanzarote Convention
 - „One in five“; Campaign Against Child Sexual Abuse
 - Guidelines for Child-friendly justice
 - Rec. on Child-friendly social services
- Phase II. (2012-2015) Implementation
 - Congress of Regional and Local Authorities: Strategic Plan of Action to Combat sexual violence

The Lanzarote Convention

- The CoE Convention on the Prevention of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse
 - Comprehensive: child sexual abuse and exploitation (pornography, prostitution, trafficking) in scope as well as substance (prevention, intervention, investigation etc.)
 - The principle of child-friendly response
 - Interdisciplinary and multiagency approach
 - Special emphasis on avoiding re-traumatization by *inter alia* professionally conducted investigative interviews in child-friendly setting

The CoE Guidelines for “Child-friendly Justice”

- Addresses all contacts that children have with the justice system:
 - As victims
 - As witnesses
 - In conflict with the law
- The goal is to ensure that children’s rights are respected as defined in UN CRC

CAC/Barnahus Response: Reflected in CoE Guidelines

- The Guidelines of Child-friendly justice
 - MS rec. to “set up child-friendly, multi-agency and interdisciplinary centers for child victims and witnesses where children could be interviewed and medically examined for forensic purposes, comprehensively assessed and receive all relevant therapeutic services from appropriate professionals”
- Rec(2011)12 on Children’s Rights and Social Services
- The Congress of Regional and Local Authorities Strategy against Child Sexual Abuse

Lesson to be learned!

- The growth of the CAC/Barnahus model across state borders and the positive experience from northern Europe and the United States clearly shows that this child-friendly approach is a viable option to further safeguard the rights of child victims of sexual abuse irrespective of cultural or socio-political differences.
- The commitments made by the Member States of the CoE to the principles of child-friendly, multidisciplinary and comprehensive response to child sexual abuse give hope for further progress.