Barnahus as implemented in Iceland

Bragi Guðbrandsson, Director General
The “Silent revolution” - Barnahus

✓ Barnahus has assumed a key role in the Justice as well as Child Protection System of the Nordic Countries

✓ The common mission is to avoid re-traumatisation of child victims by child-friendly and multiagency response to CAN

✓ Recommended in CoE standards and by bodies such as
  ✓ the Lanzarote Committee
  ✓ Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
The growth of Barnahus among Nordic Counties

✓ Allowing for difficulties of definitions it is estimated that the total number is 50 in Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe-islands

✓ Engaging few hundreds of professionals full time and even more part time

✓ Providing multiple services for tens of thousands of children suspected of being subjected to maltreatment and abuse
Barnahus in the Nordic context

- Paths of coming into being
- The role of the state, regional- and the local authorities
- The legislative framework
- Affiliations: social services/police
- Juxtaposition: responsibilities of partners
- Collaboration: from being structured to informal
- Target groups: victims sexual abuse or CAN generally
- Investigative interviews
- Medical examination
- Treatment strategies
The background to Barnahus Iceland

✓ Increased international awareness following the Stockholm Congress on commercial sexual exploitation of children in 1996
✓ Followed by the first research conducted on the incidence of child sexual abuse in Iceland
✓ 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
✓ Barnahus established as a nationwide center in 1998, rooted in the US CAC approach
Child Sexual Abuse -
The Unique Crime

✓ The vulnerability of the child victim
  ✓ Child victims do not normally bring charges against their offenders
  ✓ The “silent” crime, secrecy of the abuse
  ✓ Child victims difficulties in disclosures

✓ Lack or absence of evidence other than the child’s disclosure
  ✓ Medical evidence in less than 10% of cases and only conclusive in less than 5% of all cases
  ✓ Other hard evidence or witnesses other than the child victim’s rarely exist
The Unique Intervention

✓ The Child’s disclosure is the key for:

✓ Ensuring the safety of the child

✓ Providing assistance to the child victim with the aim of physical and psychological recovery

✓ Uncovering the crime in terms of criminal investigation, prosecution and sentencing

✓ Preventing the perpetrator from reoffending

✓ Addressing Child Sexual Abuse requires multiagency intervention
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

✓ Retraumatisation – re-victimisation

✓ Refers to painful/stressful re-experiencing of trauma as a consequence of sexual violence
Violation of the “best interest of the child”

✓ Retraumatization!
Multiple interviews –
Harmful for the Criminal Investigation

✓ Repetitive and unstructured interviews can distort the child’s account
  ✓ Suggestibility
  ✓ Leading and misleading questions
  ✓ Discrepancies in the child’s story

✓ Additional harmful experience: 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 CRC, Article 3.1

✓ “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”
Multiagency collaboration

- The Gov. Agency for Child Protection
- The State Police
- The State Prosecution
- The Police Dep. in Reykjavik
- The University Hospital – Dep. of Pediatric and Dep. of child Psychiatry
- Association of the Directors of Local Social Services
- The Child Protection Services in Reykjavik
The Barnahus in Reykjavik
Children’s waiting room
Waiting room for teens
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAC/Barnahus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medical Exams and Evaluation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Joint Invest. Interviews:</strong> court statements/ CPS interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Victim Therapy</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Family Counselling/ Support</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consultation and advice to local CPS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education, training and research</strong></td>
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Court testimonies

✅ The Court Judge is in charge of the procedure
✅ The Prosecution
✅ The Police
✅ The CPS representative
✅ The Child’s Legal Advocate
✅ The Defence
✅ Testimonies in Reykjavík Court
✅ Police interviews with victims 15-16 years
CPS exploratory interview

Guidelines:
✓ At the request of the Child Protection Services
✓ Disclosure is absent or very weak/ambiguous
✓ Offender has not been identified
✓ Offender is below the age of criminal responsibility (15 years)
Interviewing room
Camera in the interviewing room
The observation room
Cort session via IT - technology
Medical examinations

✓ At the request of the Police, the CPS, the Child or the Parents
✓ Implemented by experienced paediatrician, a gynaecologist and a trained nurse
✓ A child friendly examination room
✓ The use of “video-colposcope” and it’s therapeutic value by active participation of the child
✓ Anaesthesia exceptional
✓ Acute forensic medicals performed at UH
The medical room
Victim therapy - family counselling

- The child and the non-offending parent(s) receive (legal) counselling after the investigative interview
- Victim therapy can start soon after
- The dual role of interviewer/therapist excluded in individual cases
- The videotaped child’s disclosure is used for initial assessment and treatment plan
- TFCBT (Trauma Focused Cognitive-behavioural) therapy – group therapy under way
- The therapists are generally required to submit reports and testify in court proceedings
Additional benefits: Research from Barnahus on the ability of victims to give credible evidence.

- Objective: to investigate age related differences in factors associated with the nature of the allegations and the competence to give evidence and witness abilities.
- Findings:
  - The great majority of the youngest children, and almost all of the older children, have the basic competence to give testimony, although there are important age-related differences in basic abilities related to witness competence.
  - Important age related differences were found in relation to the nature of the allegations.
  - The youngest children had greatest problems with sustaining concentration during the interview and to provide detailed disclosure on the suspected abuse.
  - *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology, 2010*
Barnahus: Breakdown of victim’s relations to offender, the “circle of trust”, 2011-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The immediate family</th>
<th>Extended family, care-takers, friends</th>
<th>“Circle of trust”</th>
<th>Strangers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2011 (136)</strong></td>
<td>36,8%</td>
<td>42,6%</td>
<td>79,4%</td>
<td>20,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2012 (117)</strong></td>
<td>23,1%</td>
<td>49,6%</td>
<td>72,6%</td>
<td>27,4%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2013 (163)</strong></td>
<td>28,8%</td>
<td>55,8%</td>
<td>84,7%</td>
<td>15,3%</td>
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More than 16 years of experience

- Over 4,000 children have been referred to Barnahus 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
Before and after: investigations, indictments and convictions of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Investigations</th>
<th>Indictments</th>
<th>Convictions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995-1997</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2008</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2013</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>101</td>
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Evaluation outcome Iceland: Child-friendly testimony

Generally satisfied | Positive to interviewer | Content with info before the interview | Content with info after the interview | Not harder to testify than expected | Felt better after testifying
---|---|---|---|---|---
83 | 70 | 74 | 61 | 60 | 40
73 | 66 | 60 | 44 | 48 | 33

Barnahus/CAC | Court House
Evaluation Outcome Iceland:
Child-friendly environment

- Good location: Barnahus 86%, Court House 42%
- Attractive facility: Barnahus 69%, Court House 23%
- Positive to waiting room: Barnahus 75%, Court House 44%
Investigative interviews/Court statements
Epidemiological intervention CSA
probability of referral 0 -18 y (%)