

Blátt Áfram's  
Response and  
feedback on T-ES  
(2013)07

# [LANZAROTE CONVENTION]

Response to General Overview Questionnaire on the implementation of the  
Lanzarote Convention  
Blátt Áfram  
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## What is Blátt Áfram?

Blátt Áfram, (pronounced: blout a-from), which translates as “Straight Forward,” is the leading grass roots child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention organization in Iceland, NGO.

Blátt Áfram was formed in 2004 by twin sisters, Svava Brooks and Sigríður Bjornsdóttir, who themselves were sexually abused as young children growing up in Iceland but who sought to turn around their misfortune by helping others.

Blátt Áfram’s mission is to end the cycle of child sex abuse and break the conspiracy of silence around this most devastating and pervasive social issue by educating adults and creating greater awareness within the community, media and government. By shedding a light on this dark subject and speaking openly about their own abuse, Svava and Sigga have influenced recent legislation and statutes, created awareness of CSA and supported numerous abuse victims to come forward. In short, these two sisters have influenced a nation and helped many children and adults seek help, something that was almost completely unavailable previously.

Blátt Áfram is actively involved in educating all adults who work with children and teenagers on how to look for the signs of sexual abuse, and what potential steps should be taken if they suspect a child is being abused. Sigga and Svava have trained teachers, day care workers, outreach centers, after school programs and sports organizations – virtually anyone who comes in contact with children. They also have given numerous talks to teenagers at high schools and other forums across the country, speaking openly about their own abuse while educating people, young and old alike, about this most delicate and difficult subject. Their message is one of hope, healing and progress, not blame and anger.

In 2004, Blátt Áfram with the cooperation of Darkness to Light, a US-based CSA prevention organization, translated into Icelandic and mailed a copy of the “7 Steps to Protecting Children” to every home in Iceland. And, starting in 2005, Blátt Áfram held its first annual International Conference on Child Sexual Abuse Prevention. Blátt Áfram’s main focus is on primary prevention with education and powerful PSA messages. This focus has created an environment and public support, where Blátt Áfram’s CSA prevention education for adults, teens and children is now a routine education in most public schools in Iceland.

For more information on Blátt Áfram and the prevention programs that are being offered please email [blattafram@blattafram.is](mailto:blattafram@blattafram.is)

*Below are responses with the question’s heading that relate to the prevention of abuse and the experience and programs provided by Blátt Áfram:*

## GENERAL FRAMEWORK

### Question 6: National or local coordination, cooperation and partnerships

- a. *Please describe how coordination on a national or local level is ensured between the different agencies in charge of the protection from, the prevention of and the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. In particular, please provide information on existing or planned coordination between the education sector, the health sector, the social services and the law enforcement and judicial authorities (Article 10, para. 1)*

Unfortunately, there have not been efforts among Icelandic ministries to include Blátt Áfram on behalf of the Lanzarote agreement. Blátt Áfram, a grassroots, non-governmental organization (NGO) established in 2004, is the only organization in Iceland dedicated to the awareness, education, and prevention of child sexual abuse among children *and* adults. Since the Lanzarote agreement, the committee has facilitated efforts on behalf of the ministry. As a result of these initiatives, the committee is competing for funding with other non-governmental organizations, as the ministry makes decisions as to the allocation of these funds. It is not our intention to be in direct competition for funding with other NGOs that have been providing valuable services for years; but rather, compliment their efforts by integrating the valuable services that we have been providing for the last decade.

- b. *Is cooperation with a view to better preventing and combating sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children encouraged between the competent state authorities, civil societies and the private sector (Article 10, para. 3)? If so, please specify how:*

No, there is no cooperation between grassroots NGOs and the committee of the ministry. However, over the last ten years, there have been great collaborative efforts between Blátt Áfram and organizations such as Child Protective Services, BVS, law enforcement, and The Children's House, in order to raise awareness and promote education in Iceland about child sexual abuse. This partnership has resulted in a number of conferences to inform professionals and the public about the issue of child sexual abuse, and to provide information and training on how to better implement primary prevention education

### Question 7: International cooperation

*Has your country integrated prevention and the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children in assistance programmes for development provided for the benefit of third states (Article 38, para. 4)? Please give examples.*

Since its foundation in 2004, Blátt Áfram has provided primary and secondary prevention education in Iceland, utilizing a model from a nationally recognized NGO in the United States. Prevention training and education programs include:

1. **7 Steps to Preventing Sexual Abuse of Children** – an informational booklet for responsible adults. This literature on prevention has been distributed to each Icelandic household.
2. **Darkness to Light Stewards of Children** – a training program for sexual abuse prevention. This training is provided to adults, parents, and professionals who work with children and teenagers. The program is designed to equip adults with step-by-step training to prevent, identify, and respond to cases of child sexual abuse. Darkness to Light originated in the U.S. and Blátt Áfram has been providing this training in Iceland since 2006.
3. **“Kids on the Block”** – An interactive puppet show that originated in the United States. From 2005 to 2012, “Kids on the Block” was performed throughout Icelandic elementary schools for children 7 to 11 years of age. Beginning in 2012, “Kids on the Block” has been taken and run by the ministry’s *Vitundarvakning* committee. These performances are now shown to children 7 years of age only.

Although the show is designed for a younger audience, the program’s reach extends beyond the confines of this age group, as it is also used as a tool to help adults understand how children communicate. While the performance conveys the message to children that it is okay and necessary to tell someone when they are in need of help, it also serves as a message to adults that it is their responsibility to make sure children know *how* to ask for help, as well as be able to identify when a child is in need of help.

There is an emphasis that adults, specifically teachers and school staff, must be prepared with education about child sexual abuse, how children disclose information, how to respond to disclosure, and the importance of reporting. Through this production, Blátt Áfram asserts the need for social services, e.g., a school counsellor on staff, to properly handle reports of child sexual abuse, as well as serve as a resource for children to get the support they need.

4. **“Secrets”** – child sexual abuse prevention education for children in the form of an animated film, designed for children ages 5 to 12. The purpose of the film is to educate children about the difference between good and bad secrets, as well as how to distinguish between secrets and surprises. In addition, a lesson is delivered on how to say “no” when someone is making them feel uncomfortable or asking them to keep a secret from parents or caregivers. The animated film is supplemented with coloring sheets and discussion questions to solidify the learning objectives.

This prevention education has been provided in Iceland, in collaboration with the city of Reykjavik, since 2010. Each year the film is shown to 3<sup>rd</sup> graders by school administrators and teachers.

5. **Prevention for Teenagers** – A prevention program designed for teenagers 12 to 15 years of age. This integrative approach involves Blátt Áfram materials in conjunction with the *7 Steps to Preventing Sexual Abuse of Children* literature. Engaging activities that involve acting and cooperation with one another are facilitated to promote further communication among the teens. This interactive presentation provides education about what is sexual abuse, who abuses children, and how to get help. In addition, there is a discussion about sex and the damaging effects of drugs and pornography. This prevention program aims to create a forum where teens are encouraged to ask questions in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

Each year since 2004, Blátt Áfram has provided public service announcements (PSAs) via media outlets such as television and radio commercials, as well as newspapers and interviews. These efforts have created greater awareness among the public on the issue of child sexual abuse, as well as education about prevention solutions.

Research has been conducted on the effectiveness of educational programs and materials provided by Blátt Áfram in Iceland. Additional information can be provided on this research.

Blátt Áfram has expanded its global reach and is now providing consulting and support services in other countries such as Greenland, Hungary, India, Sweden, Lithuania, and Rumania.

## PREVENTION OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND SEXUAL ABUSE

### Question 8: Education, awareness raising and training

- a. *Which legislative or other measures have been taken to:*
  - *ensure that children, during primary and secondary education receive information on the risks of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, as well as on the means to protect themselves, adapted to their evolving capacities? (Article 6, Explanatory Report, paras. 59-62). Please also specify whether this information includes the risks of the use of new information and communication technologies (Article 6, Explanatory Report, para. 63);*

For nearly a decade, Blátt Áfram has provided education about the dangers of sexual exploitation and abuse to children, as described in the aforementioned

list in response to question seven. Most notably, the “Kids on the Block” production, geared toward children ages 7 to 11, as well as “Fáðu Já,” a short film for youth in the teenage bracket. Each come complete with an interactive lesson plan to solidify the core learning concepts.

- *encourage awareness of the protection and rights of children among persons who have regular contacts with children in the education, health, social protection, judicial and law-enforcement sectors and in areas relating to sport, culture and leisure activities? (Article 5, para. 1);*
- *ensure that persons, referred to while replying to the bullet point above, have an adequate knowledge of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, of the means to identify them and of the possibility of reporting suspicions of a child being the victim of such acts? (Article 5, para. 2).*

It is unfortunate that the importance of this article has not been understood in Iceland. Adults who work with children are not adequately trained in regards to identifying signs of child sexual abuse and the necessary steps to report suspicions of such acts.

Reluctance to implement policy and procedures such as mandatory background checks, prevention training, and education on identifying and reporting signs of child sexual abuse, continues to exist in Iceland. As a result, administrators, staff, and volunteers who work with and around children remain untrained, and defenceless children unhelped.

It is imperative to the safety and protection of children that this is changed immediately. We must ensure that all personnel who work with children understand the scope of this problem, how to prevent it from happening, and in the event it occurs, the urgency of the situation and how to follow the steps put in place by the organizational policy to follow through with reporting and bringing the child to safety.

Blátt Áfram believes that the majority of the governmental efforts since the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention have solely been focused on the education of children. Although the education of children about CSA is certainly important, it is secondary prevention. Blátt Áfram strongly believes there is an urgency to focus on prevention at the *primary* level – and that is with adults. The education and training of adults to stop abuse in its tracks.

In Iceland, there are currently more children being educated about child sexual abuse prevention than adults. In our life experience as well as in our professional experience, most children that will come forward and speak about their abuse will not get the help they need. This is because teachers, coaches, parents, and adults in general, are not adequately trained in the identification and prevention of child sexual abuse. Blátt Áfram recognizes this as an issue of huge concern. It

is *adults'* job to protect children. It is only adults that can stop abuse and prevent it from happening in the first place.

Blátt Áfram challenges the government to redirect that focus on educating adults, first and foremost. Then when ALL adults that work with children have received training, we can direct focus back onto secondary prevention. After all, abuse starts at the top with adults. Therefore, we mirror our prevention strategy using the same top-down approach.

Blátt Áfram's contribution has been an integral part of the fight against child sexual abuse, as its programs are already being implemented as part of the all-encompassing approach to protect children for the last decade.

Blátt Áfram has repeatedly requested meetings with the Committee before their decision to provide "Kids on the Block" as the sole curriculum to educate children, in order to underscore the importance of primary prevention education for adults in conjunction with, and prior to, secondary prevention education for children. In order for this program to be effective, teachers and supporting staff *must* be adequately equipped with the understanding of the importance of reporting *any* suspicion of abuse to the authorities, as well as properly trained on how to respond to a child's disclosure of abuse.

Research shows that most adults who have not been properly trained will not report abuse and will actually minimize any suspicion of abuse, given the sensitive, uncomfortable nature of the subject. A staggering fact considering the majority of teachers and staff are not properly trained in how to handle the suspicion or disclosure of abuse, and the necessary steps to report to authorities. As a result, a comfort level with discussing the issue of child sexual abuse with children as well as with other adults has not been established. Albeit the committee had initially provided town hall meetings for school administrators with an introduction to the different agencies that provide support around the issue, nevertheless, given the lack of legislation and systematic policy, there remains no way to ensure the proper training of each and every adult that works with and around these children.

*b. Which policies or strategies have been implemented to promote or conduct awareness-raising campaigns targeted at the general public where the focus is directed especially towards the risks and realities of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children? Please describe the material used for the campaign/programme and its dissemination. If possible, please provide an assessment of the impact of the campaign/programme. If there are currently plans for launching a (new) campaign or programme, please provide details (Article 8, para. 1);*

In 2013, *Vitundarvakning* has distributed literature on CSA to every home in Iceland. What's more, since 2004, Blátt Áfram conducts a media awareness



campaign which entails providing Public Service Announcements via multiple media outlets to raise awareness of the issue and scope of child sexual abuse. Not only do these raise awareness of the problem, but also the solution, as each public service announcement emphasizes the importance of prevention education of all adults.

### **Question 9: Recruitment and screening**

*B. Does the screening of candidates apply to voluntary activities (Explanatory Report, para. 57)?*

The absence of screening seems to be a problem for organizations that utilize the help of volunteers, such as sports clubs and an ongoing list of NGOs. Blátt Áfram emphasizes the importance as well as the responsibility of organizations using volunteers who work with and around children, to implement screening and training for all adults in the interest of protecting these children.

### **Question 12: Effectiveness of preventive measures and programmes**

*a. Please specify whether an assessment of the effectiveness and impact of the preventive measures and programmes described in replies to questions 4, 10 and 11 is regularly carried out.*

A number of assessments have been conducted in Iceland on the prevention programs provided. Information on these evaluations is only available in Icelandic, however are in the process of being translated into the English language.

Below is an abstract from one study. An additional study, conducted by the Department of Family Studies at the University of Iceland, will be published in February of 2014. Results of this study reaffirm the importance of providing prevention training for adults who work with children.

Please contact [blattafram@blattafram.is](mailto:blattafram@blattafram.is) for further information and copies of complete assessments.

#### **Abstract:**

Author: Dagbjört Rún Guðmundsdóttir 1981. Title Evaluation of the Stewards of Children in Iceland, education for the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a fact in our society. The consequences of being exposed to such violence has significant and widespread effects. It is clear that it is important to focus more on preventing this social problem. In Iceland the organization Straight Forward (Blátt Áfram) has fought tirelessly against CSA in their work and has had their

main focus on preventing CSA. Prevention methods of the organization is multifarious, it includes a prevention education for adults in the form of a course called Stewards of children (Verndarar Barna). In this course, adults get training on how to prevent, identify and respond to CSA. The aim of this study is to investigate the performance of the Stewards of children curriculum. Quantitative research was used to examine whether knowledge and attitudes to CSA as well as preventive behaviour have changed after the training. The study was conducted as a pretest – posttest evaluation with a comparison of two independent groups. This is a pilot study on prevention programs that are aimed at preventing CSA and is conducted in collaboration with the Centre for Children and Family Research (RBF). The results indicate that exposure to the program Stewards of children is an effective way to increase the knowledge about the prevalence and prevention of CSA. The results also indicate that attitudes towards CSA change as a result of the program. Participants are also more likely to take preventive measures to protect children from CSA than they were before the training. Participants are also more likely to speak to children about CSA.

*b. Please provide examples of the good practices in preventing sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children.*

To most effectively prevent sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, the government must be on board with an understanding of the importance of primary prevention, i.e., the training of adults to prevent, recognize, and report sexual abuse of children. Government support in conjunction with continuous, awareness-building Public Service Announcements designed to disseminate information to help adults understand the prevalence of the risk of child sexual abuse, are effective preventative measures. Included in these public awareness messages is a Call-to-Action, advising adults to pursue each of the following: 1) further prevention education for adults and parents; 2) spell out a step-by-step process for identifying and reporting abuse; and 3) provide information about places where adults can go for assistance and support if they suspect a child is being abused. With these PSAs, Blátt Áfram carefully avoids scare tactics, but rather, aims to educate and empower people by providing them with the information to overcome. For this reason, Blátt Áfram takes a rounded approach by, not only raising awareness about the problem, but also the solution.

### **Question 17: Corporate liability**

*Does your system provide that a legal person may be held liable for an offence established in accordance with **Article 26**? Please specify under which conditions.*

There is Icelandic legislation that is intended to hold people accountable (16 gr and 17 gr, nr 80/2002), however, it has never been enforced, and therefore rendered ineffective. People have a tendency not to report if there are no consequences. In Blátt Áfram's experience, there have been too many institutions that should have fired teachers, coaches, or other staff members for inappropriate touching, interaction, and sexual abuse, but have chosen not to do so.

*Below are the replies from Blátt Áfram in regards to the questionnaire for the 1<sup>st</sup> thematic monitoring round, “Sexual abuse of children in the circle of trust.”*

## **DATA COLLECTION**

### **Question 1: Data on sexual abuse in the circle of trust**

*Please indicate whether data are collected for the purpose of observing and evaluating the phenomenon of sexual abuse of children in the circle of trust. If so, please:*

- *specify what mechanisms have been established for data collection or whether focal points have been identified especially with regard to statistical data on victims and offenders within the circle of trust (**Article 10 (2) (b), Explanatory Report, paras. 83 and 84**);*
- *include any relevant data in an Appendix.*

Data has been collected from 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers who have seen the “Kids on the Block” production, which is aimed for the prevention of sexual abuse with the message encouraging children to disclose if they are in need of help. Post-program evaluation has been conducted as to its effectiveness in helping teachers identify abuse, as well as teaching children to ask for help when in need. This research report will be released in February 2014, and will be sent to your organization once it is transcribed in English.

## **PREVENTION**

Questions in this section aim specifically at collecting information on policies and strategies to prevent sexual abuse particularly in the child’s circle of trust. The questions thus concern awareness-raising of children themselves as well as of persons working in regular contact with them, thus forming a part of their circle of trust.

### **Question 2: Education for children**

*The reply to question 8 of the GOQ will be examined by the Committee to assess the implementation of **Article 6** with respect to the theme of the monitoring round. While replying to this question, please therefore only add whether a special attention is drawn to children’s education concerning the risks of sexual abuse of children in the circle of trust, and how children should protect themselves and request help in this regard. If so, please provide details. (**Explanatory Report, paras.59-62**).*

In addition to the aforementioned list in response to question 8, it is imperative to educate adults so they will be ready and trained to take appropriate action on behalf of a child when a child comes forward and discloses abuse. The Kids on the Block program is designed to teach children the importance of telling someone if abuse happens, but nevertheless, it is Blátt Áfram's experience that adults will not know how to help a child who discloses abuse if they have not received the proper training, leaving the child un-helped.

### **Question 3: Recruitment and screening**

*The reply to question 9 of the GOQ will be examined by the Committee to assess the implementation of **Article 5, para. 3** with respect to the theme of the monitoring round, paying particular attention to the recruitment and screening of persons whose professions involve regular contacts with children.*

### **Question 4: Raising awareness on sexual abuse in the circle of trust**

*Have policies or strategies been implemented for promoting or conducting awareness-raising campaigns where the focus is directed especially towards the risks and realities of sexual abuse of children in the circle of trust? If so, please specify for whom these campaigns were/are run (**Article 8, Explanatory Report, paras. 65-66**). Please include examples by providing links to what has been developed.*

All of Blátt Áfram's Public Service Announcements and media campaigns are geared toward adults, and not specifically to children.

See link for 5 different commercials via TV, radio, and newspaper media outlets:  
<http://blattafram.is/default.asp?Page=299>