

The Lanzarote Committee,  
study visit in Iceland, May 2012

The Children House -Barnahus:  
Multidisciplinary Response to  
Child's Disclosure of Abuse

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# Child Sexual Abuse - Crimes of unique nature

- The vulnerability of the child victim
  - The “silent” crime, secrecy of the abuse
  - Child victims difficulties in disclosures
  - Trauma esp. related to intra-familial abuse
  - Do children tell?
- The 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 than the child victim, rarely exist

# The Child's Disclosure

- 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
- Dealing with Child Sexual Abuse is therefore the responsibility of many agencies

# 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”

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

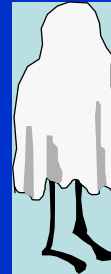


## Multiple interviews – Harmful for the Criminal Investigation

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

# Social Awareness and Sexual Abuse

➤ Stage of Denial



➤ Stage of Admittance



➤ Stage of Social Recognition



# The background of the Children's House

- Increased international awareness following the Stockholm Congress on commercial sexual exploitation of children in 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



A research finding on sexual abuse 1995-97:  
Tracing the Cases

<b>Total number</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>CPS</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>77%</b>
<b>Police</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>46%</b>
<b>Prosecution</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>Court cases</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Convictions</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>13%</b>

# Overview of the Research Findings: Procedural Defects

- Violation of the principle of the best interest of the child: multiple interviews in different location
- Lack of coordination/cooperation between the different agencies involved; Child Protection, Police, Prosecution, Medical profession, Therapists etc.
- Lack of an interdisciplinary approach
- Absence of appropriate guidelines in work practices
- Lack of personnel with appropriate training and specialisation, especially in conducting investigative interviews

# “In the best interest of the child”

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 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”

- The Children Advocacy Centres from USA

# 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



# Children's House

Medical  
Exams and  
Evaluation

Joint  
Investigative  
Interviews

Victim  
Therapy

Family  
Counselling/  
Support

Education,  
Training and  
Research

Networking  
Local/ National

# Signs of progress

- Significantly higher rate of detection and investigation, prosecution and sentencing
  - Incidence rate increase from 1.5 to 3.1
- The number of:
  - Cases investigated more than doubled
  - Indictments have more than tripled
  - Convictions have more than doubled

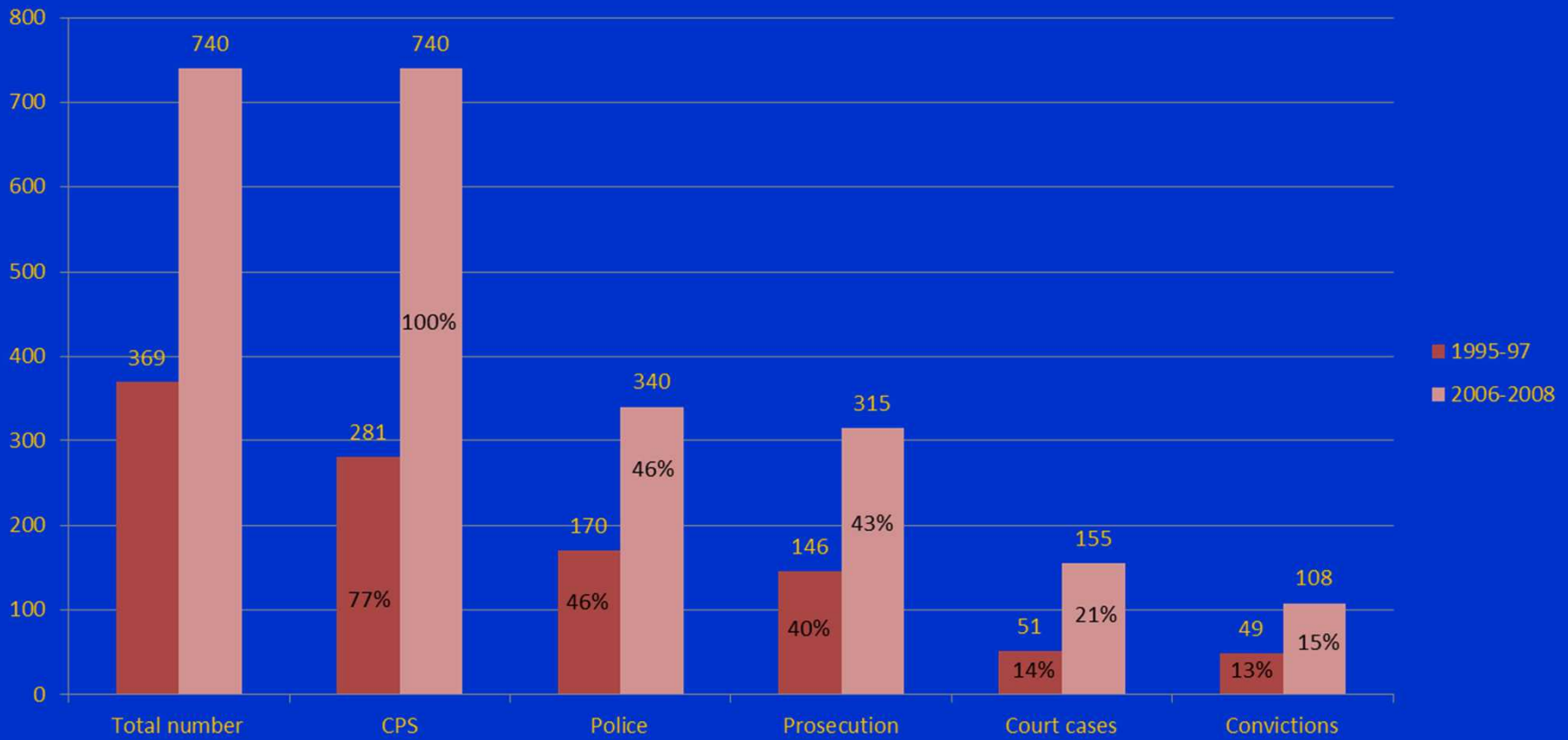
# Tracing the Cases

A research finding on sexual abuse 1995-97 compared to 2006-2008  
based on official statistics

	1995-97	2006-2008
<b>Total number</b>	369	740
<b>CPS</b>	281 (77%)	740 (100%)
<b>Police</b>	170 (46%)	340 (46%)
<b>Prosecution</b>	146 (40%)	315 (43%)
<b>Court cases</b>	51(14%)	155 (21%)
<b>Convictions</b>	49 (13%)	108 (15%)

# Tracing the Cases

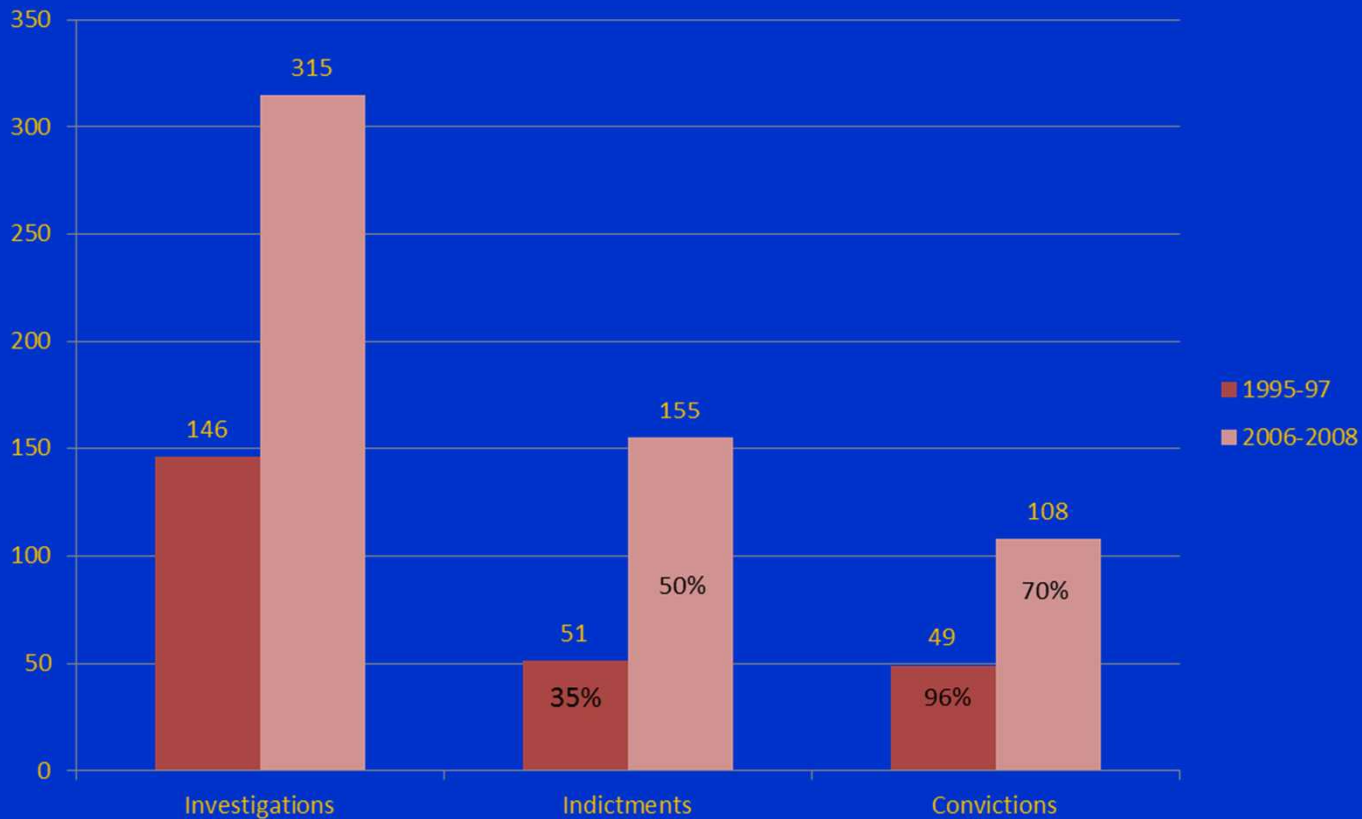
A research finding on SA 1995-97 compared to official statistics from the State Prosecution, the Gov. Agency for Child Protection and the Court Council 2006-2008





# Tracing the Cases

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

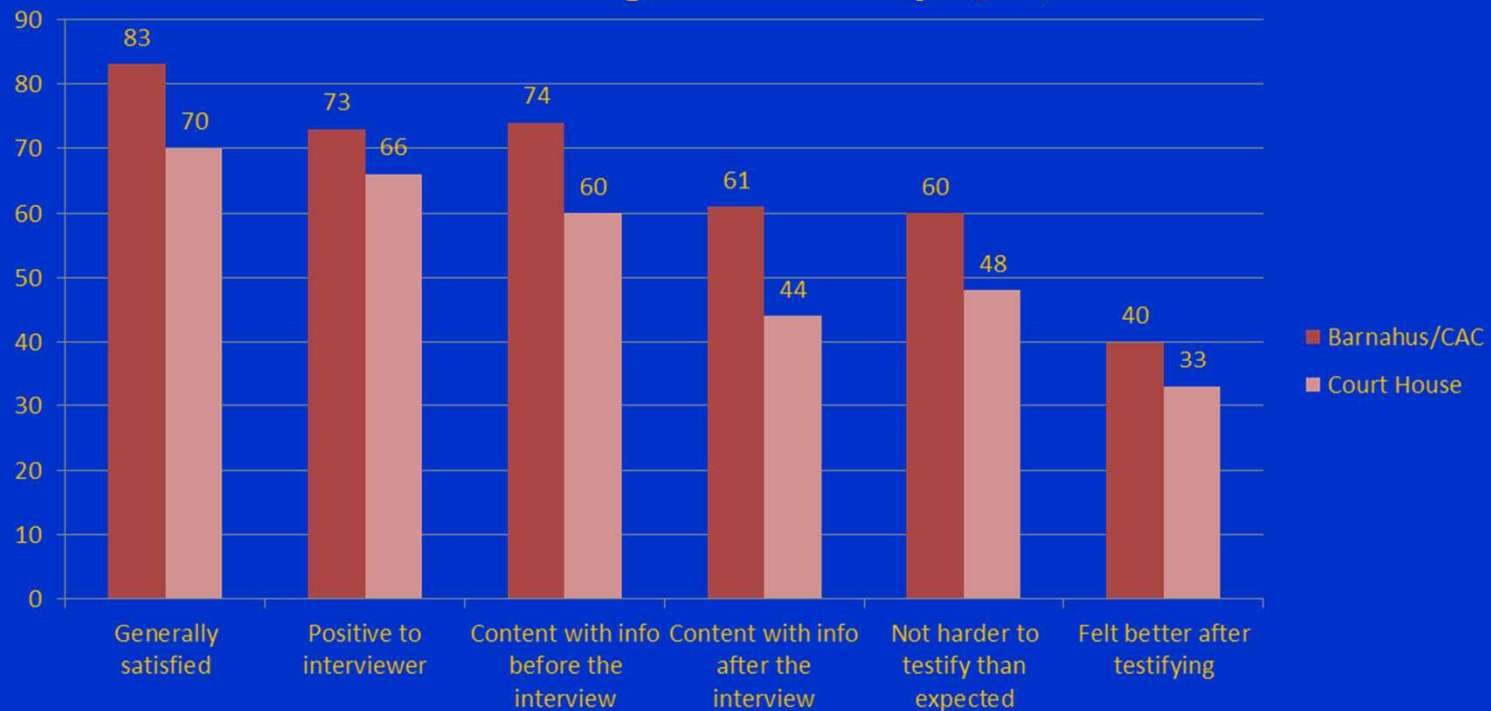


# Further achievements

- Significant improvement, not only in terms of quantity, also quality of procedure: efficient, professional and child friendly response
- Appropriate therapeutic services for child victims
- Re-victimization of the child victim by repetitive and unprofessional interviews minimised
- Mutual professional trust among the different agencies
- Assimilation of knowledge and experience
- Increased public awareness and confidence in the authorities

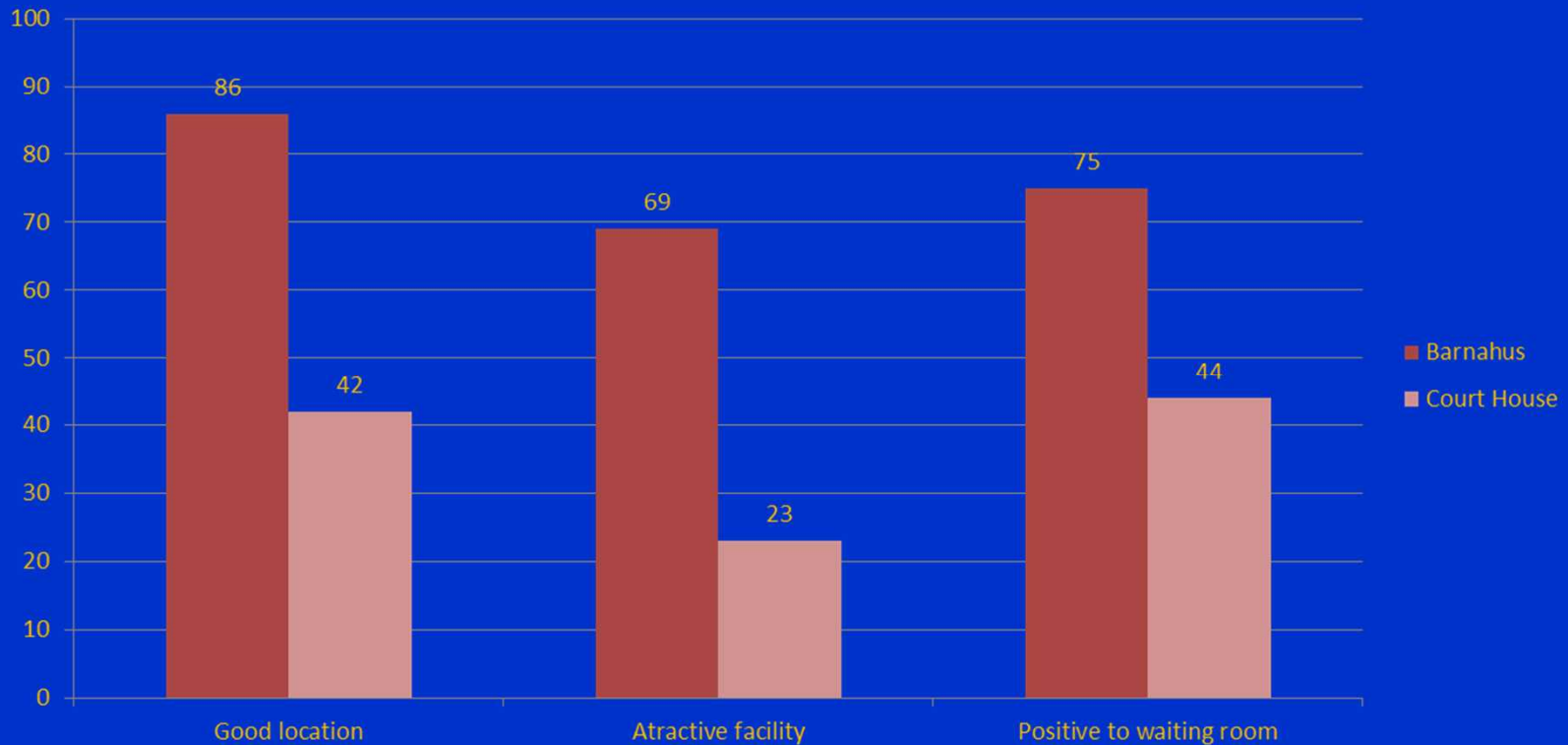
# Child-friendly testimony

## Giving testimony (%)



# Child-friendly environment

## Environment for testifying (%)



# Problems in implementation

- Controversial changes in the legislation
- The Court Judges' discretion:
  - where and how to take the child witness statement
  - if a specialised interviewer is made use of or not
- The implementation of the principle of “Equality of arms”
  - “evidential immediacy”
  - “adversarial procedure”

# Children's House/Iceland as a role model

- The *Promotion* of the Children's House model in Europe from 2000
- The identification of Children's House/Iceland as the “*Best Practice*” model in Save the Children Europe study of 10 countries: *Child Abuse and Adult Justice* in 2002
- The opening of the first *Children's House in Sweden*, Linköping 2005. Approx. 30 settings at present
- “*Children's House*”, the Norwegian Gov. Report on Pilot-project in sexual abuse cases 2006. 8 settings at present.
- The ISPCAN *Multidisciplinary Award* in 2006

# Multidisciplinary Team Award

**ISPCAN 2006** Multidisciplinary Team Award

The International Society for Prevention of Child  
Abuse and Neglect

Recognizes

*Children's House Iceland - "Barnahus"*

For Their Significant Contribution to the Welfare  
of the Children of Iceland

September 2006

# Children's Houses and Europe: Opening of the first Children's House in Sweden, 2005





# Children's Houses in Norway

- 2000 – 2005 Save the Children promotes the model
- 2005 Norwegian parliament decides on a pilot
- 2006 Report on implementation
- 2007 the first Children's House in Norway (Bergen)
- 8 facilities in operation

# Some further developments

- The first Children's House in Greenland opened in the autumn of 2011
- In November 2011 the Danish Government decided on a plan to open 8 to 12 Children Houses in the coming years
- The Ministry of Justice in Finland decided on a „pilot“ Children's House in 2011
- An application for Daphne project on establishing Children Houses: Netherlands, Portugal, Turkey, Poland supported by Sweden and Iceland

## The Lanzarote Convention

# Principles of Multidisciplinary Approach

- **Prevention:** “to ensure the co-ordination on a national or local level between the different agencies” (Art. 10.1)
- **Protection:** “Each Party shall establish effective social programs and set up multidisciplinary structures to provide the necessary support for victims, their close relatives and for any person who is responsible for their care” (Art. 11.1)
- **Intervention:** “the development of partnerships or other forms of co-operation between the competent authorities” (Art. 15.2)
- **Investigation:** Principles and General Measures of Protection (Art. 30 and 31)

# Guidelines for “Child-friendly justice”

- Guidelines (2010): <http://www.coe.int/childjustice>
- Addresses all contacts that children have with the justice system:
  - As victims
  - In conflict with the law
  - As witnesses
- The goal is to ensure that children’s rights are respected as defined in UN CRC

# CoE Standard setting

- Guidelines on Child friendly justice
  - Promoting other child-friendly actions:  
“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
  - a comparable recommendation