

Collaborating Against Child Abuse

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Editors

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Exploring the Nordic Barnahus Model

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Foreword

Twenty years ago, I boarded an airplane for Huntsville, Alabama. Over the course of the long journey to this final destination, I could not help but wonder if embarking on the trip had been a smart decision. From a European perspective, the USA had never been a role model for child welfare, and in that context, the southern states were probably regarded least desirable of all. However, intensive research using the fast developing Internet of the time had led me to believe that I had found what I was looking for: a model for addressing child sexual abuse that was both multiagency and child friendly. It was referred to as the Children's Advocacy Centre or CAC—not a particularly transparent title. The few days I spent learning about the CAC model proved very valuable and, on the way back to Iceland a few days later, I found myself completely at ease with having set out on this mission. In fact, I was thrilled.

Why did the CAC model have particular value for Iceland in the mid-nineties? There were two main factors at play here, the former being that the Government Agency for Child Protection (Barnaverndarstofa, BVS) was founded in 1995. BVS had been entrusted with coordination, competence building and the provision

of specialised services in Iceland's highly decentralised child welfare system. Thus, BVS was already working on reforms when the second factor, the enhanced awareness on child sexual abuse following the first World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation, held in Stockholm in 1996, made its mark in Iceland. This combination brought forth the first study on the prevalence of child sexual abuse in Iceland, measured by the intervention of different sectors in society—the local welfare services, the medical and the judicial sectors. The findings of the study came as a shock to a society that had largely been in a stage of denial of child sexual abuse and in the debate that followed reforms were demanded.

In the discourse at the time, I used the term *Barnahus* (meaning “a house for children”) as a rudimentary concept to describe the need for a child-friendly competence centre in line with the Acute Sexual Assault unit at Reykjavik Hospital, where different professionals work together. After the Huntsville trip, the term *Barnahus* gradually took on a more distinct meaning, as the work on transforming the CAC concept to fit Icelandic reality proceeded in collaboration with partner agencies. The objective was to integrate the highly developed investigative tradition of the USA with the “Nordic welfare model”, a legacy that we have always been proud of.

The outcome of this work, what is now known as *Barnahus*, had the same ingredients as the CAC but differed from it in two important respects. Firstly, it became part of the judicial system in the sense that the child should be able to give his/her testimony under circumstances in conformity with the principles of the “due process”. Hence, the child need not repeat his/her statements nor be subjected to confrontation in the courtroom should the case be prosecuted.¹ The other difference is that *Barnahus* became an integral part of the institutional landscape of the child welfare system that is operated by the central and local authorities, ensuring rights to publicly funded services that are accessible to all children without discrimination.

The Icelandic *Barnahus* started its operations in 1998 as a pilot project, and although the first couple of years were turbulent, it did not take long for professionals and public alike to appreciate the progress that followed. Soon I felt very strongly that the model should

be introduced to our Nordic colleagues, who had so generously shared knowledge and experience with regard to child welfare with Iceland in the past. The Barnahus/CAC model was first introduced abroad in a keynote presentation I delivered with a colleague from the USA at the Nordic Child Welfare Conference in Åbo, Finland, in 2000.² Over the course of the next few years, the interest in Barnahus grew with rising pace.

A report made in 2002 by Save the Children Europe, “Child Abuse and Adult Justice”, contained the findings of a comparative study of ten European justice systems’ handling of cases of child sexual abuse. In the report, the Icelandic Barnahus was identified as a “best practice” model. This was the first international recognition of the Barnahus model, and these findings were subsequently underlined at an international conference in Copenhagen, followed by another domestic Save the Children conference held in the Danish Parliament in November 2002. Based on the positive debate in the Parliament conference, I was optimistic that Denmark would be the first to implement Barnahus outside Iceland. This turned out not to be the right time for Denmark, but when the right moment finally arose in 2013, this long incubation period was richly rewarded in outstanding implementation. It is nevertheless safe to say that the publication of the Save the Children report had a great impact, since Save the Children national organisations in most, if not all, of the Nordic countries advocated for the model following its publication.

The work done by Save the Children, especially in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, was continuously brought to our attention by the increasing number of requests made by professionals, officials and politicians to visit Barnahus in Iceland. The number of these visits increased particularly when the meetings of the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council were held in Reykjavik. For Nordic politicians, this was a learning opportunity, which may have contributed more to the growing number of Barnahus in the Nordic countries than we will ever know for certain. The immense appeal Barnahus has for politicians must also be taken into account; it is concrete, tangible and inexpensive, and it benefits children, a group universally loved!

An additional factor that played a role in the evolvement of Barnahus in the Nordic countries is the government collaboration “Children at risk” (CAR) within the framework of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). This cooperation was initiated by Sweden and Norway following the first World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation. The CAR is managed by an Expert Group representing all the member states, and I was privileged to be elected the first Chair. During the early years of the cooperation, competence centres in each state played an important role in its activities. These included Barnahus Iceland and BUP-Elefanten, the child and adolescence psychiatric clinic in Linköping, Sweden. From the onset, the CAR cooperation proved to be important for introducing the Barnahus model at the level of central and local government in the member states. Presently, CAR is managing the EU-funded project “Promise”, launched in 2015, the aim of which is to promote the Barnahus model across Europe, with 12 states actively participating.

Sweden took the lead in implementing Barnahus in Scandinavia and probably for a very good reason. For many years, professionals working at BUP-Elefanten, led by Carl Göran Svedin and Lena Banck, had been pioneers in applying an interdisciplinary approach in dealing with child sexual abuse, and they were committed to implementing CAC in Sweden. We did some work together during this time, including training organised by Allmänna Barnhuset at Sättra Bruk and at the police region of Malmö. Iceland received invitations to conferences to present Barnahus on a number of occasions, for example, by the Swedish Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority (Brottsoffermyndigheten) and the Police Academy in Solna in Stockholm. It was at the Solna conference when, during the coffee break, I was approached by a couple of body guards who politely asked me to step into the garden—her Majesty Queen Silvia, patron of the Conference, wanted to have a word.

When her Majesty Queen Silvia arrived for a royal visit to Iceland in 2004, she requested to visit Barnahus, a wish she had first expressed during the coffee break in Solna. I recall that the time allocated to the royal programme was far from being enough to accommodate her Majesty’s enthusiasm during her stay in Barnahus—to the dismay of

the officials responsible for the timekeeping! A year after her Majesty's visit, I was honoured to be invited to address the formal opening ceremony of Barnahus Linköping. On this occasion, I had the pleasure of listening to her Majesty's inaugural speech, in which she described the impact of the visit to Iceland, her vision of Barnahus becoming a reality in Sweden and the commitment of the World Childhood Foundation to contribute to this mission.

A royal visit can certainly make a difference, as was the case with her Majesty Queen Silvia. However, a favourable social and political environment is necessary as well. A few years earlier, another royal champion of children's rights, her Majesty Queen Rania of Jordan, came for an official visit to Iceland. She became enamoured with the Barnahus concept, and at her request, I worked for a week in Amman to examine whether Barnahus could be materialised there. The outcome of this endeavour underlined that a developed infrastructure, unfortunately absent in Jordan at the time, is a prerequisite for the implementation of Barnahus. A fantastic infrastructure, combined with a political will to enforce the implementation of Barnahus nationwide, explains the rapid development that occurred in Sweden.

Norway had already begun their homework when the first Barnahus in Sweden opened, as the Ministry of Justice and the Police had set up an inter-ministerial working group to prepare a pilot. This was in response to discussions in the Norwegian Parliament following the Save the Children report on Barnahus in 2004. When the preparatory committee came to Iceland for a study visit, I recall that the members of the working group expected only one Barnahus to be set up as a pilot, on the basis of which further decisions would be made. However, the great interest in Barnahus already present in Norway was reflected in the setup of two Barnahus in 2007 and sooner than anyone had envisaged more followed.

Barnahus received attention outside the Nordic community as well. I was invited to present on the topic as part of the Global Issues series of the 20th International San Diego Child Maltreatment Conference. Following this, a group of professionals from Washington State Criminal Justice and Harborview Medical Centre in Seattle nominated Barnahus Iceland for the ISPCAN³ Multidisciplinary Award. The award

was presented at the ISPCAN World Congress in York in 2006 and that paved the way for further promoting Barnahus, for instance, in the opening lecture of the ISPCAN European Congress in Lisbon the following year.

In 2006, the Council of Europe (CoE) launched the transversal programme “Building a Europe for and with Children” for enhancing children’s rights and eradicate violence against children. The first phase consisted of “standard setting” that produced a number of international tools that implicitly and, at times, even explicitly refer to the principles of Barnahus. I was privileged to be a member of three expert groups that drafted significant international agreements and guidelines for the potential growth of Barnahus. These were the Lanzarote Convention⁴ in 2007, the CoE Guidelines on child-friendly justice (2010) and the Recommendation of Social Services friendly to children and families (2011). The latter two explicitly recommend that governments set up “child-friendly, multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary services for victims and witnesses of abuse”.

A careful reading of the Lanzarote Convention brings forth common characteristics with Barnahus: the emphasis on child-friendliness, comprehensive services, multidisciplinary collaboration, forensic interviews and avoiding re-traumatisation. This reflects the extensive discussion on Barnahus in the expert group during the drafting phase of the Convention. The Lanzarote Committee is the monitoring body of the Convention. The first study visit of the Committee was to Barnahus Iceland and a commitment to promote the model in all of the member states followed. I served as the Chair of the Lanzarote Committee for two terms and that gave me the opportunity to advocate for Barnahus in many European countries, as mandated by the Committee.

The CoE’s international tools mentioned above have had a great impact on important directives of the European Union (EU). This includes the Directive on Combating Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (2011) and the Directive on the Rights of Victims (2012). Over the past years, the EU has increasingly devoted attention and resources to children’s issues. The EU’s guidance on integrated child protection systems is an ambitious programme whose aim is that of setting international standards. I was honoured to speak on Barnahus at

the European Forum on Children's rights and integrated child protection systems held in 2015. The focus given by the EU on the Barnahus model in this work and the allocation of substantial resources to implement the model in Europe through the "Promise" project referred to earlier fuels expectations for further achievements.

Earlier this year, I was privileged to take part in the opening ceremony of Barnahus in Lithuania and Hungary. By the time this book is published, there will be Barnahus in still more countries outside the Nordic states. This will probably include Cyprus and England, where the Home Office has ensured funding of Barnahus in line with the strategy put forward by the National Health Service (NHS) and King's College Hospital. I am grateful for having had the honour to address a special gathering at the House of Lords in 2015 when the strategy was made public.

One can put forward many hypotheses on why Barnahus has gained this popularity across borders, among countries with diverse cultural, judicial, social and political systems. I am convinced that this is a part of a greater international development towards the convergence of different child welfare systems in Europe reflecting the dynamic nature of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The Barnahus model can be viewed as an outcome of a conscious attempt to translate or "operationalise" the principles of the CRC to ensure the best interests of child victims and witnesses of abuse while respecting the rule of law.

The Barnahus model took a great leap forward when introduced in Scandinavia, and it will again progress significantly when other European countries take it on. But this will not happen unless we make an effort to deepen our understanding of the complex variations in the application of the model between, as well as within, the different cultural contexts. This requires research and systematic analysis on a regular basis. My final word will therefore be words of thanks, to Norwegian Social Research (NOVA) for the wonderful initiative in preparing this publication and the authors who have made this first international book on Barnahus a reality.

Notes

1. It should be noted that one of the authors of this book, Prof. Hrefna Friðriksdóttir, was at the time lawyer at BVS and contributed greatly to solve some of the legal ramifications involved.
2. Ellen Cokinos, the former Director of the Children's Assessment Centre in Houston.
3. *The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect*.
4. The Council of Europe *Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse* opened to signatures on the island Lanzarote, Spain, in 2007; hence, the Convention is usually referred to as the Lanzarote Convention, which presently 41 member states of the CoE have ratified.

Preface

The idea for this book was launched at the first meeting of the Nordic network for Barnahus research in 2014. The network was established on the initiative of Norwegian Social Research (NOVA) with the aim of stimulating research and scholarly discussions on the Nordic Barnahus model. This book is a first contribution to that end.

The book aims to define and contribute to the evolving research field that has developed in parallel with the implementation of the Nordic Barnahus model. As reflected by the contributions in the book, this is an interdisciplinary research field, spanning disciplines such as law, criminology, sociology, political science, socio-legal studies, social work, psychology and medicine. It also encompasses different methodologies. The book gathers contributions from all Nordic countries and offers an interdisciplinary and comparative approach to different dimensions of the Barnahus model. It also combines a critical research perspective with a more practice- and policy-related approach, as well as combining in-depth chapters from the different Nordic countries and an overarching comparative analysis.

The network and book project have received support from various agencies that we wish to thank here: The Norwegian Ministry of

Justice and Public Security provided a grant for the first two meetings, Children's Welfare Foundation Sweden (Stiftelsen Allmänna Barnhuset) invited us to Sättra Bruk for a two-day seminar, Stockholm's Barnahus hosted a half-day seminar and the Research Council of Norway provided funding for the book to be published open access.

This book is published by Palgrave Macmillan as an open access publication. Our Commissioning Editors in Criminology at Palgrave Macmillan, first Julia Willan and later Josephine Taylor, provided valuable support and good advice throughout the process. At Palgrave Macmillan, Stephanie Carey also offered much appreciated administrative support. We would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers who gave valuable recommendations in the process with this book, not least concerning the introductory and final chapters.

A warm thank you also to the authors who have contributed to the book—for stimulating discussions and stamina in the process of revising chapters. We especially wish to thank Bragi Guðbrandsson, Hrefna Friðriksdóttir and Anja Bredal, who read and commented on an early draft of the introductory chapter. We also thank Bragi Guðbrandsson, Minna Sinkkonen, Oddbjørg Balle, Lene Mosegaard Søbjer, Arnajaraq Poulsen and the Danish National Board of Social Services for valuable information on the different country models that are described in the appendix of this book.

The editors' work with this book was also made possible thanks to support from various sources. Susanna Johansson's work has been partly financed through a postdoc fellowship from the Scandinavian Research Council for Criminology (NSfK) and a postdoc position in social work at Lund University. Kari Stefansen and Elisiv Bakketeig's work have been partly financed by the Domestic Violence Research Programme at NOVA, funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security. Anna Kaldal's contribution has been partly within the project Children's Way Through Barnahus, financed by the City of Stockholm, Research and Development and Faculty of Law, Stockholm University.

Our hope is that this book will stimulate further research and discussion of the Nordic Barnahus model and inter-related research areas. We also hope that it can work as a resource for professionals involved in

Barnahus work, for students who want to learn more about Barnahus and for stakeholders and governments who are looking to improve collaborative work against child abuse—within the Nordic context and beyond.

Lund, Sweden
Oslo, Norway
Oslo, Norway
Stockholm, Sweden
November 2016

Susanna Johansson
Kari Stefansen
Elisiv Bakketeig
Anna Kaldal

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