

Presentation A travelling idea – the 20th anniversary of Barnahus Iceland

By Turid Heiberg, Council of the Baltic Sea States

Congratulations to Barnahus Iceland, congratulations to Bragi, Olof and all staff of Barnahus from the beginning until today. Congratulations to the judges, to the police, to the social and medical staff and workers...Congratulations to beautiful Iceland for providing us with an European model of multi-disciplinary and interagency cooperation for children victims of violence...

Barnahus Iceland has been the inspiration for all of us, for the development of Barnahus in the Nordic and other countries in Europe – it has inspired the Lanzarote Convention and Committee, the EU and the UN – and it has inspired the development of the legal framework in Europe and many activities and programmes.

And it has inspired the Council of the Baltic Sea States Expert Group on Children at Risk. Bragi has, by the way, been a member in that expert group since its initiation in 1998...influencing the 11 countries in the region – being all the Nordic countries including Iceland, the 3 Baltic countries, Poland Russia and Germany – to invest in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Barnahus - and take part in the lessons learned.

As such, the PROMISE project, managed by the Council of the Baltic Sea States in cooperation with a multitude of partners and experts from existing Barnahus and research environments, are the true child of this vibrant past and proud European history.

I remember in 2013/14 Olivia Lind Haldorsson, the author of the Barnahus Quality Standards, and I meeting up in Brussels - and starting to talk about Barnahus - and what about making a project to develop supporting guidance materials and advocacy to support more countries in Europe to take their next steps towards establishing Barnahus? ...was that a good idea? We had both years back been advocating for Barnahus in respectively Norway and Sweden. At the same conference was Bragi, we launched the idea and Bragi was immediately on the top suggesting partners and experts to join the project.

Well we got the project – and in 2015 the partners and experts met – to develop the vision for the project and discuss details. I remember well how we

all looked at each other, some of the partners had never met each other before. We all wondered what would this project be like? They looked nice all of them – but who were they and what could each one contribute to the project? Happily, it all made more and more sense when results started to emerge....

PROMISE I was about developing the standards, but we were also like a travelling circus - travelling around having exchange meetings in different countries with Barnahus or similar set up to discuss and take part in lessons learned from each place.

I remember strongly how positively surprised I was with the strong engagement embracing us in the first meeting with professionals and policy makers in Zagreb. It was like the 50 participants were just waiting for someone to come and support – tying the dots together, give confidence, provide tools and standards. How did you do it Denmark – how did you get your excellent law? What are the academic arguments - how to make convincing advocacy..What were the experiences of those carrying out forensic interviews, and medical investigations and what was the role of the Barnahus versus the court and municipality? How did you get the ear of the judges? All these questions – and we helped each other in the best possible way to answer them, while travelling from city to city and country to country...

As you know, the PROMISE project became a success! While we had Barnahus in most of the Nordic countries, we now have it – or will soon have it – in all of the Baltic sea Region except Russia. In 10 countries close to us. In addition, very many other countries in the broader Europe also have it...the Council of Europe is parallel promoting and supporting – while it shows out that nearly all those who is on the track use the Barnahus Quality Standards and the other PROMISE guidance material. The last meeting of DG Justice in Europe in June, the 2-300 professionals present used quite a lot of time to talk about Barnahus. Yes, Barnahus has become a concept like ombudsman now...and we would like to keep it like this.....

PROMISE II is about strengthening implementation at national level, developing framework agreements, capacity building getting all the sectors around the same table dividing tasks and responsibilities.....PROMISE II has EU funding out 2019 and we have already started discussing PROMISE III. On Monday to come we will start discussing what could be the main components of the next level – I will be here until Friday – please hand over your ideas....

Let me summarize the main achievements:

- Connecting professionals, policy makers, experts
- Apply lessons learned from Barnahus Iceland and other countries
- Apply the legal framework of the CRC, Lanzarote Convention, the EU victim Rights Directive, the EU Child Sexual Abuse Directive, the EU anti-trafficking directive..
- Apply available research and documentation..
- Developed the European Barnahus Quality Standards + other standards
- Establish the European Barnahus Movement and network
- Appreciating the commitment and generosity of all experts and dedicated professionals to support others
- Consistently advocate the importance of involving all relevant stakeholders at national level
- Noting the huge exchange of expertise across Europe through support to national level activities

This celebration of Barnahus Iceland is connected with celebrating the travel of an Idea to the rest of Europe...Very many of you present today – have also been part of this journey - with the PROMISE project or in the capacity of Council of Europe..or as academics, professionals and policy makers – .

Congratulations to all of us for giving children victims of violence a voice and importance – they have the right to a childhood without violence. You are making that happen. Congratulations.