

P R O M I S E

Building a Culture of Participation in Barnahus

**Implementing Children's Right
to Participate in Decision-Making**

Building a culture of participation in barnahus: Implementing Children's Right to Participate in Decision-Making

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1. Introduction

Barnahus (which means ‘a house for children’ in Icelandic) is a child-friendly, multi-disciplinary and interagency model responding to child victims and witnesses of violence. From the beginning Barnahus strives to ‘operationalize children’s rights to receive adequate support and protection and to have access to child friendly justice’ (Guðbrandsson 2017, pg. 5). To support the establishment of Barnahus models across Europe in compliance with European and international law, the PROMISE Barnahus Network developed the [Barnahus Quality Standards](#).

The main principles are:

- Respect for the participatory rights of the child by ensuring that she/he is heard and receives adequate information and support to exercise these rights
- Multi-disciplinary and interagency collaboration during investigations, procedures, diagnostic and needs assessments and service delivery, to avoid (re)traumatisation and securing outcomes that are in the best interests of the child
- Comprehensive and accessible services that meet the individual and complex needs of the child and her/his non-offending family or caregiver
- Ensuring high professional standards, training and adequate resources for staff working with child witnesses and victims of violence.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has underpinned the development of Barnahus and children’s right to participation, protection and provision of services for children who are victims or witnesses of violence. Children’s right to express views on all matters affecting them, and to have them given due weight, commonly described as child participation, is embodied in Article 12 of the CRC and applies to all children capable of forming a view. The right to participation, along with the child’s right to receive information in Article 13 of the CRC, is set out explicitly in *European Barnahus Quality Standard 1.2 - Right to be heard and to receive information: Children’s rights to express their views and to receive information are respected and fulfilled*. This right applies across all aspects of the Barnahus model and specifically highlights CRC Article 12 which states both that the child has the right to express his /her /their views freely in all matters affecting them and these views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity (1) and that the child should be provided with the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child (2). In sum this means that in any children who are involved with a Barnahus have the right to express their views and have them given due weight at an individual and collective level.

This paper explores ways of embedding child participation in Barnahus across Europe, drawing on the Lundy model of child participation. The Lundy model encourages decision-makers to address the qualities of rights-based participation using four concepts: **Space, Voice, Audience and Influence**. They apply to any issue and any decision affecting individual children or children as a group. Furthermore, the Lundy model provides explicit recognition of the interaction of article 12 with all other rights in the CRC, including the right to be protected from harm in Article 19 of the CRC - another foundational principle of the Barnahus model.

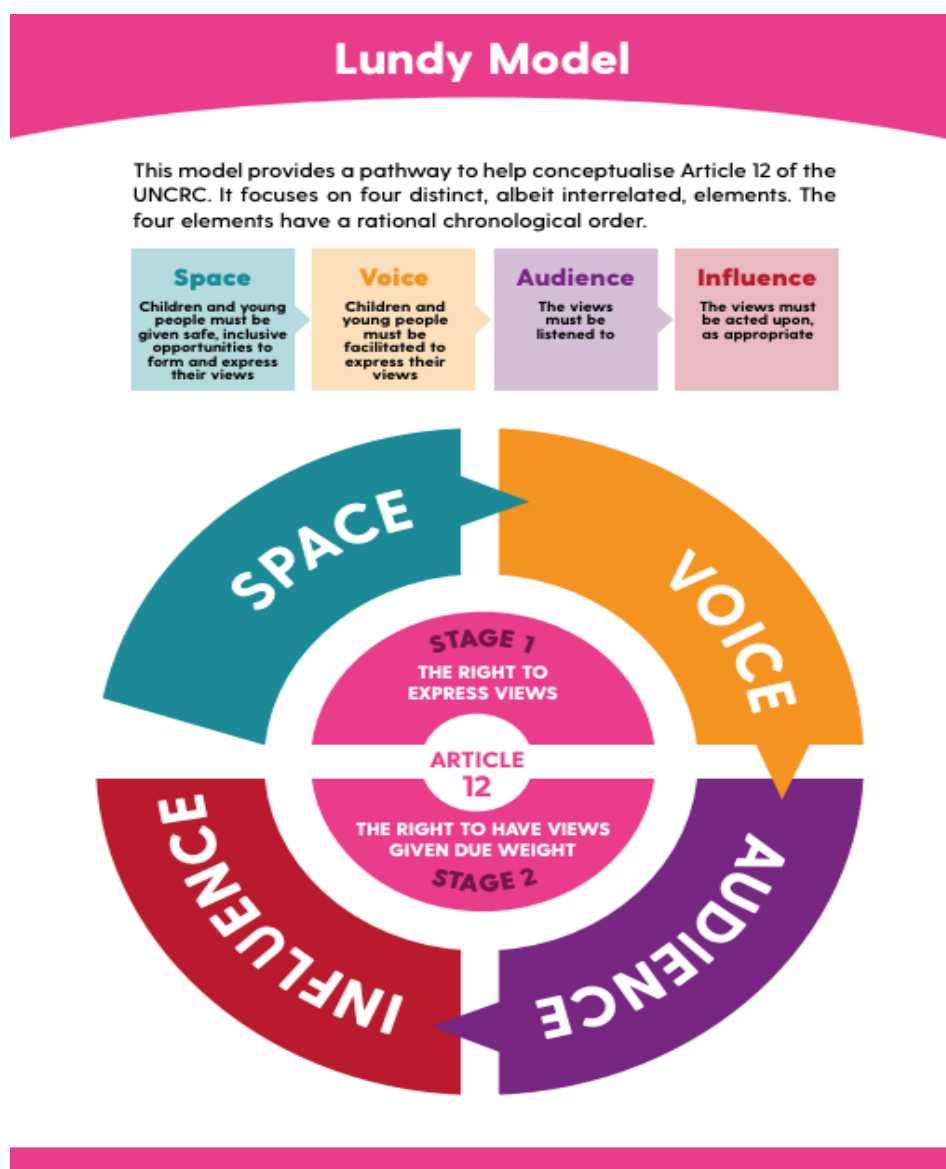


Figure one: The Lundy model as depicted in the Irish National Child Participation Framework (DCEDIY, 2021)

Understanding the current context for individual and collective child participation in Barnahus was established through a mapping exercise of Barnahus across Europe conducted by the partners of the PROMISE Barnahus Network. Results from ten countries were collated and analysed.ⁱ All respondents demonstrated knowledge about child participation and were committed to ensuring children were heard, respected and supported when involved with Barnahus. There were different approaches and examples as to how children's right to be heard was upheld. In this report, we present the Lundy model of participation and consider how the model might be applied at an individual and collective level in Barnahus, drawing on examples of promising participation practice from across Europe.

2. Children's right to be heard in matters that affect them

Children should be involved in decisions that are made about them because it is their human right - one that recognises their dignity, equality and respect for their worth as a human person. While there are many benefits which accompany child participation, not least the ability to implement effective, child-centred decision-making, children's right to have their views given due weight in decisions affecting them does not need to be justified any more than any other human right: it is a binding legal obligation in international law on governments (and all public bodies). The right is set out in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by every European state):

1. *States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*
2. *For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.*

It is important to note the following:

- It applies to '*all matters affecting the child*' not just those issues that adults choose as appropriate for participation
- It applies to decisions affecting individual children and children as a group (e.g. design of policies or services).
- It is a right and not a duty and children should not be required or forced to express their views.

It is worth underlining that this paper primarily focusses on the ways in which Barnahus should facilitate children to express their views in processes and proceedings concerning them in the Barnahus. It is worth separately considering the fact that interviews with children in the Barnahus typically also serve as the moment for the provision of evidence by the child, which may be used in the court room.

Consequently, when considering the way in which children are interviewed in Barnahus, consideration must be given to both their right to participate and express their views (as discussed in this paper) and also to ensuring national procedural rules concerning the criminal justice proceedings are fully respected. The issues arising for the criminal justice proceedings when interviewing children for the provision of evidence are discussed further in the Promise procedural safeguards resources and training materials.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in General Comment No. 12 on the Child's Right to be Heard has identified nine qualities of child rights-based participation (UN, 2009, para 134). It states that participation must be: transparent and informative; voluntary, respectful, relevant, child-friendly, inclusive, supported by training, safe and sensitive to risk; and accountable. The Council of Europe's handbook (2021) [Listen-Act-Change – Council of Europe Handbook on children's participation](#) identifies the need to step up in the

implementation of children's participation rights, and draws on the Lundy model as a framework for understanding how this should be approached.

Realising Article 12 is fundamental to the children's experiences in Barnahus. One of the central motivations underlying Barnahus was the child's views were not being heard at all or satisfactorily in judicial and administrative proceedings. There was recognition that the environments in which children were disclosing violence were often inadequate, retraumatising and did not secure the best evidence for proceedings. The Barnahus aims to provide the optimum conditions for children to feel safe, informed and supported to disclose the hurt or harm they have experienced or witnessed – but children are not required or forced to communicate.

The key principles and cross cutting activities set out in Standard 1 are critical for realising child participation in Barnahus:

- Ensuring that the best interests of the child are placed at the centre of practice and decision-making
- That's children's rights to be heard are fulfilled without causing (re)traumatisation, including providing them with adequate information at all times
- Ensuring that protection, assistance and justice processes are undertaken in a timely way.

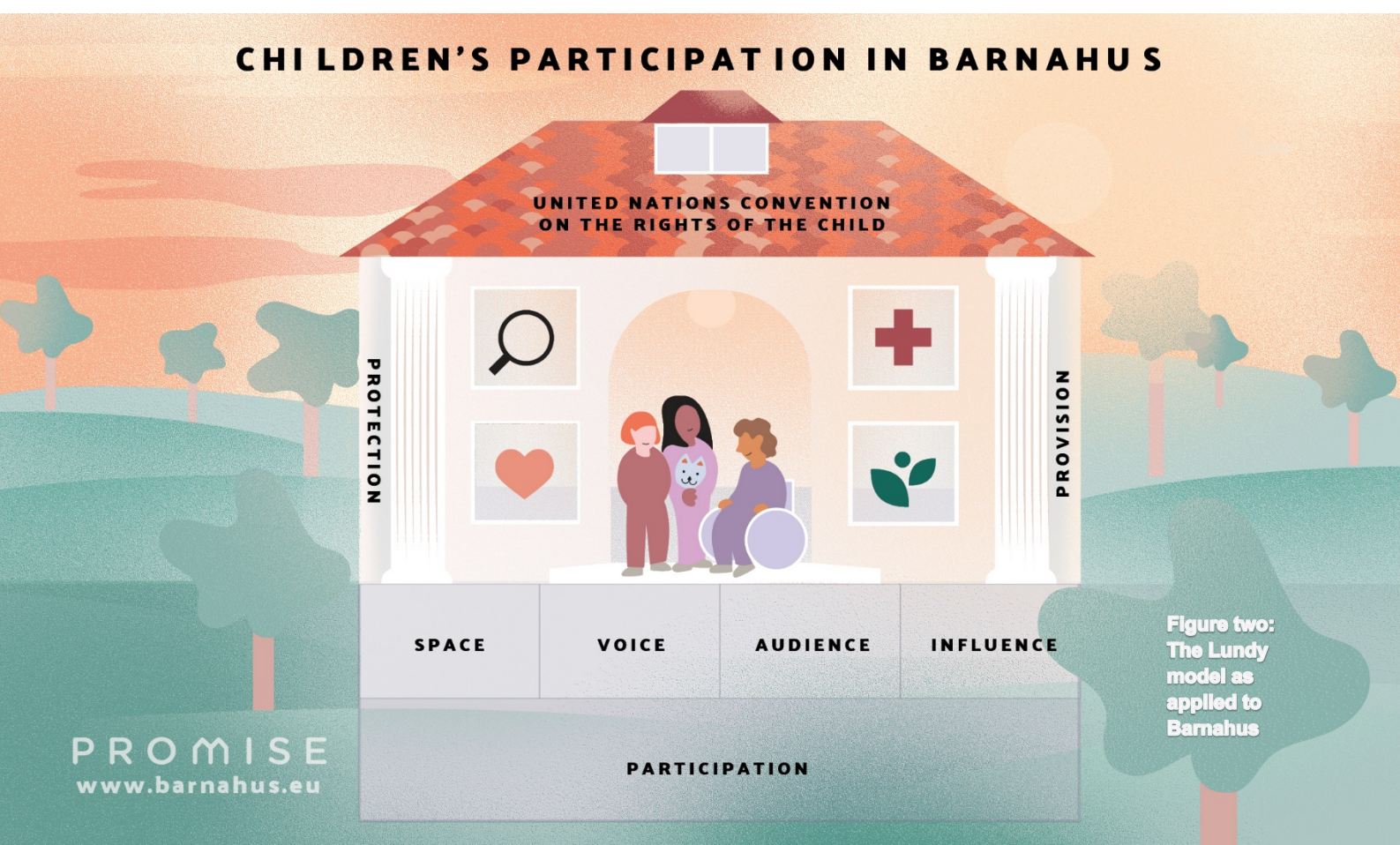
Therefore, this standard should guide the realisation of Article 12 in every aspect of the Barnahus model - in all four rooms of Barnahus (justice, child protection, physical health and mental health) - as well as in its multiagency and interdisciplinary work. In reiterating General Comment No. 12, the standards underline the fact that states must ensure that all necessary measures must be implemented to ensure the child is heard. The standard also recognises that the realisation of the right to be heard is crucial for delivering children's other rights in Barnahus since: "systematically hearing the views of the child will provide a deeper understanding of the child's wishes and needs and facilitate determination of the best interests of the child, as well as appropriate and sustainable action, including for example, treatment and therapy' (Lind Haldorsson, 2017, pg. 33).

Children are provided with information from the moment they enter the service- they are informed what is going to happen, how and why, they could choose a social worker /psychologist when possible. Individual work plans and assessment are negotiated with the child. The child's opinion is well documented and presented to authorities (SAPI, Bulgaria)

As the Lundy model emphasises, Article 12, like all human rights, is indivisible and inter-related to children's other rights. This is true of children's other participation rights which are often neglected when Article 12 is discussed. For example, Article 13 give children a right to *seek, receive and impart* information. Article 13 covers expression in an array of formats that might be particularly appropriate for children, including art and media of the child's choosing. Article 2 (the right not to discriminated against in the exercise of their other rights) is also important here and requires that all children should have the opportunity to be heard, irrespective of their age, disability and/ or ethnic background. These provisions are all incorporated in the Barnahus Quality Standards; for example, Standard 3: Inclusive target group where Barnahus includes *all* children who are victims and/or witnesses of crime including all forms of violence. We now consider the implementation of the Lundy model for realisation of child participation in Barnahus.

3. Implementing child participation in Barnahus

The Lundy model enables Barnahus services to plan and evaluate all of its activities in the light of the qualities of rights-based participation: **Space, Voice, Audience and Influence**. The four concepts have a rational chronological order. They apply to any issue and any decision affecting individual children, as well as children as a group. In this section we outline how each of the Lundy concepts can be implemented for children in Barnahus and provide examples of promising practice from across Europe.



Space: provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

- The space should be **actively created**: it is not enough to wait until children express a view or approach a decision-maker.
- Children should feel **safe**. Children should not fear or experience rebuke or reprisal when they express their views.
- The space should be **inclusive**: steps should be taken to ensure that all children can take part (e.g. younger children, children with disabilities, children who do not speak the official language)

Creating the space for individual children and young people to express their views is the first step to securing the participation rights of children and young people who are involved with Barnahus. This involves actively creating the opportunity for children to communicate their views in a space that is safe from fear of rebuke and reprisals. This is articulated in Barnahus Quality Standard 4 where ensuring a child-friendly environment requires that Barnahus are preferably in a detached building, in an environment familiar to children and fully accessible for children with disabilities or special needs (Standard 4.1). The interior is designed in a child and family-friendly way appropriate to the different ages and needs of children (Standard 4.2). This is required in each of the discreet spaces of the Barnahus – known as the four rooms where children are interviewed (criminal justice room), medically examined (physical wellbeing room), assessed for protection and support (child protection room) and assessed for mental health and support (mental wellbeing room), as well as in the multidisciplinary and interagency (MDIA) work that connects all the rooms.

It is important to consider the physical space and the relational space where children can feel safe to share their views. In Barnahus, there has been a concerted effort to create trauma-informed, safe and inclusive spaces for children to communicate, often in contrast to previous provision in adult professional spaces (e.g. police stations, social work offices) with little attention to the needs of children. Privacy for children is ensured through separate, sound-proof and private areas (Standard 4.3) and designed so that they cannot be any contact with a suspected perpetrator (Standard 4.4).

This is fundamental to ensure a child feels safe in a Barnahus. The interview room is designed to minimize anxiety and (re)traumatisation as a calm and non-distracting space. Live observation of the interview by the interagency team is discreetly designed in an adjacent room meaning the child only has to disclose hurt or harm to the interviewer (Standard 4.5).

The following examples demonstrate how Barnahus across Europe creates safe and inclusive spaces for children.

Examples of Barnahus promising practice which consider space

Drinks and snacks available to children and young people; fidget toys are available throughout the building; reception area contains child friendly information and furniture and a photo board containing information about Barnahus staff; staff do not wear uniforms or lanyards at work. They wear a name badge with a first name on it. Children offered choice and flexibility in relation to appointments (One House, Ireland)

Staff are trained in child participation. An individual approach is applied, every child is unique. We use different techniques for provoking self-expression. The furniture and equipment are fit for children; we have waiting rooms and avoid contact with perpetrator. Children can be offered a tour of Barnahus or a staff member will offer to visit the child at home if they are nervous about attending the service (SAPI, Bulgaria)

In the medical examination the child takes part in the examination. They can play with the camera and look at their hand (explore the camera) and the examination is done with their participation and in a therapeutic way. If the child doesn't want this examination and is not willing to participate the medical examination is not done. The child needs to have the feeling that they are in charge of their body. But the medical examination is done in Barnahus in a child-friendly setting and the doctors are wearing normal clothes which reduces the child's anxiety (Barnahus, Iceland)

The waiting rooms are two, one for young children and one (quite big) for teenagers. They have internet access and nice sofas to wait in. We have a special therapy room for young children with sand therapy, art therapy, play therapy and relaxation. Older children are also in a nice environment for therapy. Our interviewing rooms are with nice sofas and with a teddy bear and some "stress reducing" equipment. The interviewer is educated in child development (mostly psychologists) and the therapist also (Barnahus, Iceland)

Voice: provide information and support the expression of views

- It is a **right not a duty**: children should not be forced to participate (although sometimes silence can be form of expression).
- The right is afforded to any child who can form a view: **it is not limited by age and maturity**.
- Children should, where necessary, be provided with accessible information that **enables them to form a view**.
- Children should be given **choices as to how they communicate** their views (e.g. some children may prefer to speak while others wish to write or draw).

Having created a safe space at Barnahus within which children can express their views, the next step is to facilitate the expression of their view. This is the process within which the child is supported to speak freely where possible. For a child to be able to make an informed choice to participate and to speak freely, without fear or reprisal, child-friendly information needs to be provided about all aspects of Barnahus as part of the preparation for visiting a Barnahus in line with the child's right in Article 13 of the CRC.

One of the child's first experiences in Barnahus will be undertaking a forensic interview in the criminal justice room and Standard 6 of the Quality Standards should ensure specialised staff undertake the interview using evidence-based protocols designed to provide evidence that is admissible in legal proceedings, whilst avoiding (re)traumatisation and eliciting the child's free narrative. These protocols are to ensure a child-rights based and child-sensitive approach to investigation for the requirements of rules of evidence. Therefore, the justice room where a child is interviewed by a safe adult about what might have happened is pivotal in Barnahus.

The specialised skills involve interviewers adapting the interview to the child's age, development, cultural background, disability, and any additional needs in the best interest of the child (Standard 6.2) by interviewers gained through ongoing training. The same principles also apply for the medical assessments (Standard 7) and therapeutic services (Standard 8).

Children and caregivers should receive information about the available and necessary treatments and views given weight for preferences of timing, location and type of support provided in an age-appropriate and disability accessible format. The provision of therapeutic support is not conditional on the willingness to cooperate in the criminal investigation, prosecution or trial (Standard 8.1). This is particularly relevant to acknowledge for children who make informed choices about their own justice journey and should not face reprisals for non-participation.

Skilled staff attuned to child development and communication are essential to creating a rights-respecting space where the child's voice is heard. All children should be able to express their views, and this requires particular attention to ensuring communication tools for children with disabilities are available, there are skilled translators for children, and developmentally appropriate questions are used. The use of professional language and jargon will not assist children to express their views on decisions affecting their lives. This is particularly important when children's views are sought on the types of support required.

Ensuring that a child can express a view on who supports them, when, how often and what this involves requires the child to have clear information and meaningful choices. The recording of the child's view should ensure that the interpretation is correct from the child's perspective. Thus, providing children with high quality opportunities to express their views is an important element of facilitating participation in all aspects of the Barnahus. The requirement for highly trained professional staff is underpinned in Standard 9: capacity building with the training, guidance, supervision and counselling requirement in Barnahus.

Article 12 is a right unique to children. It exists in recognition of the fact that children do not enjoy full autonomy and that many decisions that affect children are made by adults, including their parents/ guardians. The Lundy model emphasises that Article 12 of the CRC must be read alongside Article 5 which states that parents/ guardians have a right and a duty to provide advice and guidance to the child on the exercise of their rights (including their right to have views given due weight) in line with the child's evolving capacities. In Barnahus, parents and carers are likely to be upset and distressed by the circumstances leading to a visit to the service. Article 18 of the CRC places an obligation on governments to support parents/ guardians in raising their child.

This means that parents/ guardians should receive information and support that enables them to understand their child's rights and that allows them to empower their child to express their views and have their views given due weight. They will require their own trauma-informed support and accessible information to be able to support children to exercise their rights including their right to be heard (Standards 3.1, 5.4, 8.4). In some circumstances though, it will be a parent or carer who has hurt or harmed the child. Barnahus needs to ensure children have a safe and trusted adult to provide this advice and guidance. It is also to be noted that, as the child matures, the role of parents diminishes to the point that some decisions will be taken by the child independently.

Examples of Barnahus promising practice which consider voice

Child participation training is made available for all Barnahus staff and is compulsory for many. For children with communication difficulties, information is sought from other professionals in order to support communications eg. adaptations as recommended by Speech and Language Therapy. Children are directly interviewed as part of medical examination, forensic interview and therapeutic assessment. Sensitive information will be made in quiet spaces in Barnahus so children can access away from the sight of others (One House, Ireland)

The views of the child are asked during interagency meetings and this is used to influence intervention planning. Interventions move at the child's pace and we often advocate for additional liaison with the child if they are feeling left out of planning etc. For example, we have often requested that a police liaison person is appointed to ensure that the child feels informed about the criminal investigation process at all times (One House, Ireland)

Child and young people focused leaflets and film explaining the service. Leaflets written by young people. We find space to speak to the child separately from the parent /career when making initial assessments. Advocates assist in presenting voice of the child and help seek their views and wishes and hopes to shape the care plan and support offered (The Lighthouse, England)

In BARNAHUS Albania, a special corner has been reserved for the paintings or creative works of children and young people, victims of sexual violence. These creations are often used by BARNAHUS Albania psychologists as part of art and play therapy techniques used during psychological sessions to express feelings, emotions which can be difficult to express in words (Barnahus, Albania)

Audience: ensure that children's views are communicated to someone who has the responsibility to listen

- Children's views should be communicated to those with the power to effect change: **dedicated listener(s)**.
- Children should know where their views are going and what can and cannot be done with them.

A key concept in the Lundy model is that children and young people's views are communicated to someone who has responsibility to listen. In Barnahus a key principle is that the child is heard without causing (re)traumatisation and protection, assistance and justice processes are undertaken in a timely way (Standard 1.3). Therefore, the importance of strong and effective multi-disciplinary and interagency working is fundamental to upholding this right and is set out in Standard 5: Interagency case management.

The audience for a child disclosing abuse in the Barnahus may primarily involve the person interviewing the child in the justice room (which may be a police officer, social worker or psychologist depending on the local Barnahus service all specially trained in forensic interviews with children). The testimony may also be heard by a multidisciplinary team in an adjacent room (which may involve a judge, defence agent, advocate, social worker, police officers in their individual roles in the investigation) (Standard 6.4). Therefore, Barnahus creates the space for the voice of the child to be heard by this large 'audience' in a highly appropriate and sensitive child-friendly way.

Furthermore, a child will meet with various professionals in the different rooms of the house which includes physical health (Paediatrician and nurse), mental health (psychologist, psychiatrist and/or therapist) and child protection services (social worker and family support worker). Every person involved in Barnahus has a responsibility to listen to the child and to work together to be accountable to the child. The child should know **who the key people are, why they are listening and what their role is after listening either directly or indirectly to a child**. Children should be informed about what can and cannot be done with their views.

Examples of Barnahus promising practice which consider audience

In certain cases when information for investigation and legal process is needed, the case manager or psychologists collaborate with the Barnahus lawyer to collect information needed. This means that information is shared to the right people in a manner which is as simple and friendly as possible (Children's Rights Center, Albania)

Example of people who are required to hear young people: specialists working with children and young people, child's parents – to be able to support the child; police and health workers; respective judges and prosecutors. We include the opinion of the child in the reports that are testimonies in the court (SAPI, Bulgaria)

Influence

- The decision-maker(s) should make a commitment to giving children's views due weight.
- Children should receive feedback explaining what has happened to their views and why.

This element of participation is aimed at ensuring that adults go beyond simply listening to children and young people; that **they take children's views seriously and are open to be influenced by them**. This is important for giving 'due weight' to the child's views in accordance with their age, maturity and circumstances. **Children should receive feedback explaining what has happened to their views and why.**

This should have sufficient detail that the child understands fully what happened to their views (Lundy, 2018). This is relevant for views shared on any aspect of their involvement in Barnahus: from forensic interview, medical examinations, child protection planning, treatment and support.

In a Barnahus the individual child's views are likely to form a very important part of the evidence for criminal proceedings against a person alleged of an offence against a child. In some countries, court proceedings may be a long process taking over a year or more. There needs to be sufficient time and resources for the child and their family to be kept informed of the process and understand how their views will be used in court. In circumstances where the evidence from the child is not used, there needs to be an explanation of this decision and sensitivity to ensure that it is not retraumatizing for the child.

Records and documents should carefully document the child's view and the 'due weight' given to all testimony, alongside where the views were heard and the influence they had. The provision of a support person who is a designated, trained individual or member of the Barnahus team monitors the multidisciplinary response to ensure the continuous support and follow up for the child and non-offending families/caregivers (Standard 5.4). This is a linchpin for children's participation as it upholds the right to continue to be heard and receive information as the judicial and administrative proceedings progress.

Examples of Barnahus promising practice which consider influence

Interventions move at the child's pace and we often advocate for additional liaison with the child if they are feeling left out of planning, etc. For example, we have often requested that a police liaison person is appointed to ensure that the child feels informed about the criminal investigation process at all times (One House, Ireland)

In certain cases when information for investigation and legal process is needed, the case manager or psychologists collaborate with the Barnahus lawyer to collect information needed. This means that information is shared to the right people in a manner which is as simple and friendly as possible (Children's Rights Center, Albania)

The whole team discusses the child's views on a case by case basis, and they are acted upon. However, we do need a more structured system for this (Barnahus, Finland)

4. Collective child participation in Barnahus

This section focuses on collective participation in decision making where children's views are sought as a group and are used to influence practices and policies to improve the experience for all children in Barnahus. Children and young people's collective participation has grown apace over the past twenty years, becoming part of international, national and local policy and practice.

Examples of collective decision making include local governance, youth and school councils and children's parliaments, advocacy campaigns, service delivery and policy consultations. Children and their non-offending parents/carers are at the centre of the work of Barnahus, therefore, their views on all aspects of Barnahus should be given 'due weight' as required under Article 12 of the CRC.

Examples of collective decision making in Barnahus may include children sharing their views through:

- Involvement in the design or refurbishment of the Barnahus
- Involvement in the recruitment and appraisal of staff, development of policy and practice in individual Barnahus
- Children and Young People's Boards or forums and /or Members of Barnahus governance groups
- Research and evaluation activities
- Participatory action research groups which might investigate and report on areas of interest for children
- Discussions about ethical practice and safeguarding
- Involvement in budgetary decisions
- National influencing work at parliament and government level
- Raising the profile of Barnahus with media and communications activities
- International involvement in the Barnahus European PROMISE Network
- Informing the development of the European Barnahus Quality Standards

Space: provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

In the same way that space is created for individual participation, similarly space needs to be actively created for collective participation. This will have many of the same considerations: the space should be welcoming, comfortable, inclusive, child-friendly, age-appropriate and accessible for a group. The creation of the relational space will require skilled staff to build trust and respect between children, as well as with adults. Children will need to be supported and included in the process and feel prepared and informed to begin sharing their views. A key difference will be the time and resources in seeking the views of groups of children beyond their individual views. This requires clarity of purpose and careful planning to communicate ethically with children to invite participation.

It must be a meaningful informed choice to take part and it needs to be made clear that not taking part will not have any negative repercussions in terms of access to services and support, for example. Furthermore, in the creation of Child and Youth Advisory Groups, the types of spaces (including virtual online spaces) that are required from the perspective of children (rather than the needs of the organisations) should be explored and resourced where possible.

Examples of Barnahus promising practice which consider children's spaces

Involving young people in the design of our space e.g. artwork group, co-designed the building, currently co-designing a new light outside. Young people's forum. Young person and children's feedback forms. Artwork group - using young people to design and commission artwork. Young people on interview panels; external evaluation involved interviewing 20 young people, as well as a parent forum (The Lighthouse, England)

The Young People forum should be co-designed with YP not by the professionals (The Lighthouse, England)

Children and Youth Board are asked to be a part of round tables, shows, as well as children research on violence (Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Center, Croatia)

The whole team discusses the child's views on a case by case basis, and they are acted upon. However, we do need a more structured system for this (Barnahus, Finland)

Voice: provide information and support the expression of views

In collective decision making there may be a number of ways to understand children's views. When a space is created, there can be many ways in which children's voices are listened to on a wide range of issues that are important to them. In relation to Barnahus, this may be about the design of the service, staff and skills, what types of support are provided. It may relate to one local service or national provision. It may be about a specific topic that they feel motivated about.

Views can be expressed in ways other than in words. The use of creative methods to capture voices is encouraged for example: photos, music, drama, pictures, etc. For example, you may bring children together to discuss a topic and/or you might individually seek feedback from children to get a collective view of their experiences. In 2019, a Child Participation Tool was developed to consider children's experience of Barnahus, including the travel to Barnahus, their experience in Barnahus, coming home from Barnahus and potential follow up or mid-to-long term treatment in Barnahus (Promise, 2019). The tool recommends careful ethical consideration is given to the individual child, the environment and the follow up support surrounding the questionnaire. Sample questionnaires for children (aged 8-12) and young people (aged 13-18) related to the different aspects of visiting a Barnahus service (including on the forensic interview and medical examination) are included. Whilst translated versions of the tool are available, there are no examples of tools to be used with children under the age of eight years old or for children with different communication needs. The focus of the questionnaires is on an individual child's feedback about their experience and does not provide detail on how questionnaires will be analysed, reported and used to influence change both locally and at a national level. This tool will provide some insights into children's collective experience of Barnahus.

Examples of Barnahus promising practice which consider children's voices

Children feedback forms developed with locked post boxes in the premises for children to submit their feedback (One House, Ireland)

Satisfaction surveys are reviewed and analysed annually to take into account suggestions for service improvements (Barnahus, Spain)

Children are always provided with information and consulted. Right now we are developing BARNAHUS NETWORK WEBSITE and we will have also a website for smaller kids and for teenagers. It will be interactive. Kids and teenagers will find the information regarding Barnahus services. We have also a leaflet for children on children's rights in Barnahus. It was developed together with children. 2. We ask children for feedback in an anonymous questionnaire /survey. We don't have still good methodology to ask feedback from smaller children (Empowering Children Foundation, Poland)

ECF has Research and Evaluation department that conduct surveys and focus groups with children. Special focus is put on hearing children voices while preparing and conducting social awareness campaigns or educational campaigns addressing children and youth ECF also conducts regular research seeking children's perspectives on their lives/violence/etc. (Empowering Children Foundation, Poland)

Youth Board and our psychologist were asked to be a part of creation of a theater show on peer violence, that became quite popular theater show, with many schools and families coming to watch it (Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Center, Croatia)

Audience: ensure that children's views are communicated to someone who has the responsibility to listen

Audience reflects the commitment in the Barnahus to listen to the voices of children. In a Barnahus everyone who is involved in the service should be listening to collective voices of children – whilst it may relate to the individual rooms and the professionals that directly work with children and their families. There should be robust mechanisms in every Barnahus for feedback, complaints and redress related to every aspect of the service for individual children and groups of children.

This may be one of the primary audiences as changes and improvements can be made directly through these processes. Another key audience is those with responsibility for the operation and strategic development of Barnahus (for example, managers, governance groups, funders, researchers, local and national government). Understanding the collective views of children accessing the Barnahus and indeed children who are not using the service and the reasons why will support the development of a rights-respecting Barnahus model.

Children should know who the key people are, why they are listening and what their role is after listening either directly or indirectly to the views of children. Children should be informed what the responses are to their views and what steps will be taken in response to these views. Where there are challenges to implement proposed changes, children should be informed in a timely and respectful manner.

Examples of Barnahus promising practice which consider audience

Their voice is in the annual report; their feedback is taken seriously - presented to the management team quarterly and action plans put in place to respond to their feedback

(The Lighthouse, England)

Child membership in Children and Youth Board (almost without drop out over years), the impact is seen in action (waiting area designed by children, leaflets made, their sentences on what to say to children prior to coming to our Center included, and their proposals are included in month and annual reports if needed) (Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Center, Croatia)

Influence

This element of participation is aimed at ensuring that adults go beyond simply listening to children and young people; that they take children's views seriously and are open to be influenced by them. Children should know what happens with their views in a meaningful way and often this is overlooked; yet, this is why children often give their time and energy in the hope that sharing their views will lead to change. There will always be different views shared – between children and adults and also between children themselves. Therefore, there needs to be recognition and respect of the diversity of views. The influence of children's views should be seen in the development of the Barnahus model locally and nationally. There may be a wide range of political and social issues stemming from Barnahus that children's voices should be heard. It will be important to plan well and involve children and young people to ensure that their participation is as meaningful as possible with the time and money available.

When asked and included, children and youth made such a huge difference and become unstoppable, so now it is our time to learn from them. Our Children and Youth Board are asked to be a part of round tables, shows, as well as child research on violence. Like I said before, they are unstoppable, but we would not wish to stop them, only to encourage them in sharing their views, opinions and thoughts on relevant topics, as well as them being child and youth advocates on children's needs and mental health. (Children's Rights Center, Albania)

The 'roof' of a Barnahus provides expertise through collaboration, consultation, training and awareness-raising on the rights of the child to a non-violent childhood. In the Barnahus Quality Standards, there is a capacity building (Standard 9) and prevention of violence to children through information sharing, awareness raising and external competence building (Standard 10) which should ensure learning and dissemination of work undertake with children. Therefore, those involved in all aspects of this work are an audience and able to influence for the collective views of children on Barnahus. This includes people in power who may have duties under CRC on implementing children's rights at a national and local level.

Example of Barnahus practice which addresses influence:

At Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Center, we have Children Board (7-11 years old), Youth Board (12 - 18 years old) and Parent Board, that started as an advisory mechanism telling us what we were doing right, and what wrong at Center (most of which are our Center's present and former patients, but not all). With time, we realized they are capable of much more and included them in giving their opinion on governance, how to make assessment and treatment process more child friendly and what to change in our services. Furthermore, they also became a spokesperson for children and youth needs and mental health and included in various child abuse prevention activities (Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Center, Croatia)

UNICEF and Barnahus created a group of teenagers who had been in Barnahus. Those children met all Ministers in a meeting to inform them about the good work is done in Barnahus and what needed to be better in the system in Iceland. They told the Ministers their stories and what they thought could be better in our system. UNICEF wrote a report about sexual abuse cases in Iceland and the result was that Barnahus got a new house and more staff (Barnahus, Iceland)

5. Participation *and* Protection

Barnahus is a world-leading exemplar of an initiative that is enabling children's right to be heard in the context of child protection. The implementation of children's right to be heard in Barnahus must therefore be understood alongside their right to be protected from harm (primarily in article 19 of the CRC). The relationship between participation and protection is sometimes presented as a source of tension or conflict. However, the rights should be read and applied together and Barnahus provides a model for doing so.

Lansdown (2018), focusing on adolescents, sets out a powerful case for ensuring participation to enhance protection:

*'Having both the right and the space to be heard in safety acts as a powerful means through which to challenge situations of violence, abuse, threat, injustice or discrimination. In many societies, adolescents have no avenues through which to report abuse, and, in any case, fear that if they do, they will not be believed or will be further punished. This traditional silencing of adolescents affords impunity to abusers. **Building a culture of speaking out, together with effective channels for so doing (mechanisms for both complaints and redress), will empower adolescents to challenge and expose violations of their rights. Adults can only act to protect adolescents if they understand their concerns and the risks they face – and often, it is only adolescents who can provide that information.'***

Participation is an important way of delivering protection. Involving children in decision-making is a necessary way of understanding their lives and thus protecting them from harm. Moreover, participation is a form of empowerment and that can enable children to make informed choices, giving them confidence to express their views/ wishes and thus better protect themselves. It is arguably even more important that children who have experienced violence are empowered to participate in decisions affecting them.

This discussion is also sometimes presented as a tension between children's best interests versus their autonomy, with decision-makers questioning whether children's views should be determinative of an issue when that may not be in their best interests. This is an important discussion but can be presented inaccurately. In particular, the best interests' principle should not be equated with protection from harm.

It is in a child's best interest to enjoy all of their human rights, including their participation rights (not only the right to be heard but, for example, their right to seek, receive and impart information). Moreover, a best interests' decision should always ensure that children's views are sought and taken seriously. There will be times, in Barnahus, when a decision is made not to do what the child (or group of children) wishes on the basis that it is not in their best interests. In such cases, the process should consider all of the child's interests, taking into account her/his/their views and communicating the decision in an accessible way to all those involved.

6. Next steps in building a culture of participation

This paper has demonstrated the strength of the Barnahus model when viewed through the four elements of space, voice, audience and influence that comprise the Lundy model.

The multiagency teams typically working within a Barnahus comprise of social workers, psychologists, paediatricians, police officers and sometimes criminologists, who collectively work closely with prosecutors. At an individual level, this can enable children's right to be heard across justice, child protection, physical and mental wellbeing, especially through the work of advocates. While recognizing that children's individual and collective participation in each Barnahus across Europe will vary in recognition of the unique legal, social and cultural settings (Johannessen, et al., 2017), going forward, there are a number of steps that Barnahus and the network can do to further strengthen rights-based participatory practice further and to ensure consistency across the network. Consideration should be given to:

- Adopting approaches that enable all children, including very young children and children with disabilities to be heard.
- Providing children with age-appropriate and disability accessible information at all stages of the process (preferably using material written with children themselves in a process of collective participation)
- Making sure that children know who will hear what they said, how that will be taken into account and how and when they will hear what happened.
- Collecting good information about individual children's experience of all aspects of Barnahus and changing practice where needed in response.

While Barnahus is an inspiring example of Article 12(2) in practice, the implementation of the rights-based participatory approach required by Article 12 (1) on all matters affecting the child is not yet as consistent a feature. The systematic participation of children as a group in local and national service design, research and evaluation, and wider influencing work is less developed and not as embedded into everyday practice.

To uphold the individual and collective rights of children to have their views taken into account, there needs to be enabling contexts created with time, resources and skilled staff to ensure the participation rights for all children are fully realized in Barnahus. There is much to be learnt from the practices that are beginning to emerge across the network. Going forward, Barnahus and all the services offered within them should be designed with children for children, taking into account the views of children with experience of them. Consideration should be given to:

- Creating advisory groups of children for individual Barnahus and the network as a whole.
- Including children in the design of Barnahus and consulting them on policies and practices.
- Providing training to staff on how to involve children at the strategic level in Barnahus.

One tool that might be of value here is the collective participation evaluation checklist for collective participation developed by the Irish government (DCEDIY, 2021) (See Appendix 1). This can help those developing services to reflect on existing implementation of the right to be heard across all Barnahus activity.

In conclusion, the Barnahus model provides an internationally renowned way of ensuring that children's right to have their views sought and given due weight is respected for children who are witnesses to or victims of crime. Building on its strength into the future, the focus going forward should be on ensuring that all children, individually and as a group, enjoy the right to be heard. This requires attention to be paid to ensure that practices are Lundy-model compliant and thus enabling all children to be safe, heard and taken seriously on all matters affecting them at Barnahus.

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ⁱ The questionnaire was conducted between December 2020 and February 2021. Countries that responded included: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, England, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Poland and Spain.

Implementing the Barnahus Quality Standards throughout Europe

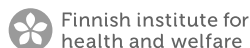
PROMISE is supporting Europe to adopt the Barnahus model as a standard practice for providing child victims and witnesses of violence rapid access to justice and care. We undertake this work to fulfil the PROMISE vision: a Europe where all children enjoy their right to be protected from violence.

A Barnahus provides multi-disciplinary and interagency collaboration to ensure that child victims and witnesses of violence benefit from a child-friendly, professional and effective response in a safe environment which prevents (re)traumatisation. With the formal support from national authorities, PROMISE provides opportunities to translate national commitment into action and engage internationally in the process. In addition, regular networking and strategic communications continually activate our growing network of professionals and stakeholders who are committed to introducing and expanding Barnahus services nationally.

The first PROMISE project (2015-2017) set European standards and engaged a broad network of professionals. The second PROMISE project (2017-2019) promoted national level progress towards meeting the standards and formalised the PROMISE Barnahus Network. The current project (2020-2022) is expand these activities to include University training, case management tools, with a view to establishing a European Competence Centre for Barnahus and laying the groundwork for an accreditation system for Barnhaus.

PROMISE is managed by the Children at Risk Unit at the Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat.

Access the PROMISE tools and learn more at www.barnahus.eu



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