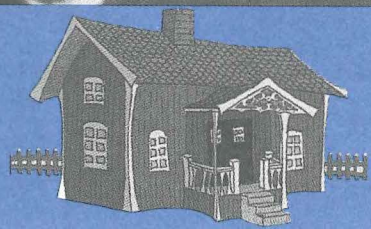
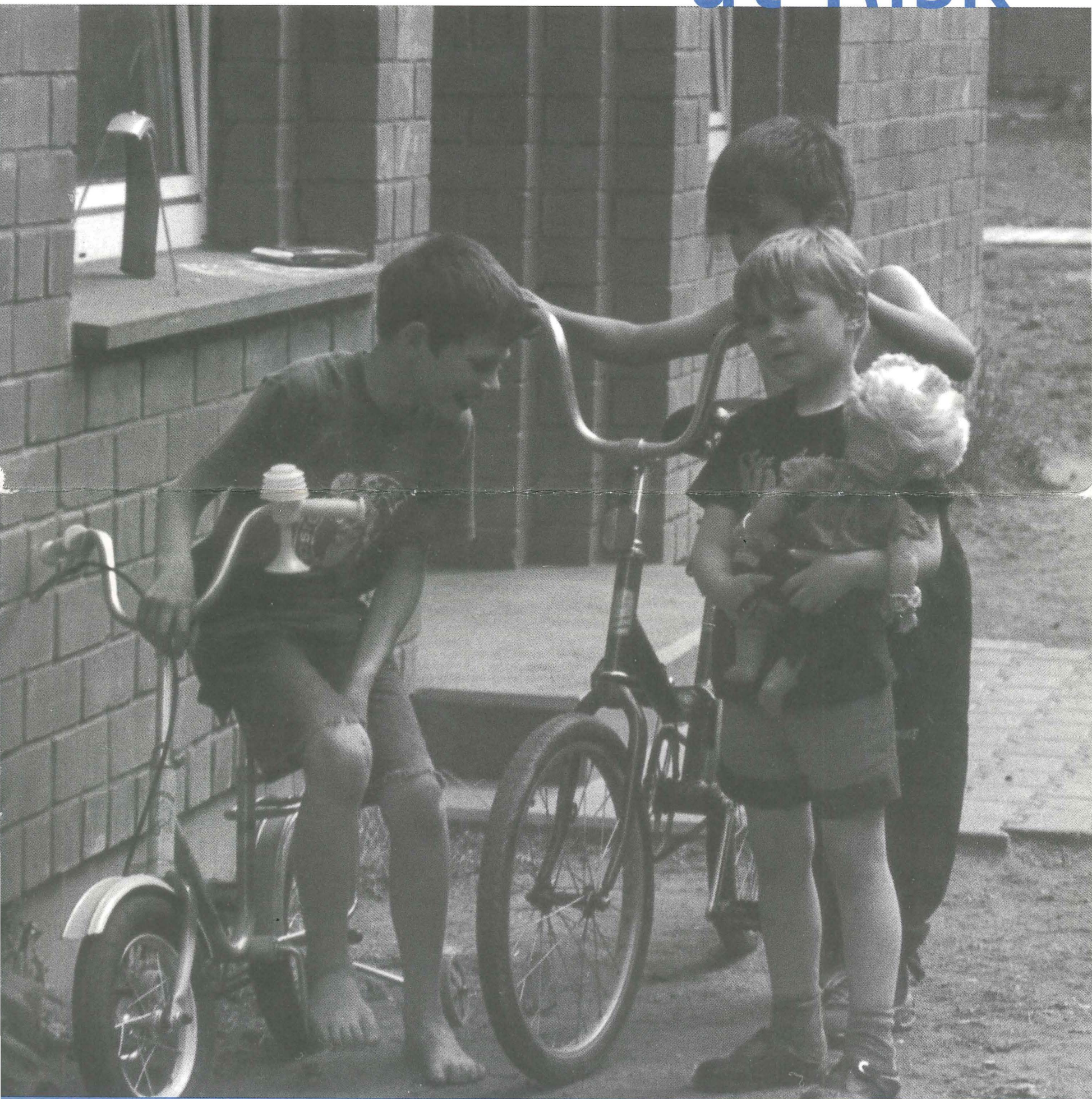


No 2•99

Children at Risk

The Swedish Special Group for Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region



The Baltic Child Centre
for Children at Risk

Exciting developments

It is with great pleasure I present the second issue of Children at Risk. This issue is published in both English and Russian. Hopefully, even more readers will this time discover an interesting content.

We will continue to strive to provide information about vulnerable children and highlight good regional examples of work going on in this field. I have also found it important, on the political level, to meet colleagues in order to discuss the situation of these children with an aim to prevent, protect and rehabilitate.

On 17 March this year regional ministers with responsibility for children's issues met in Stockholm to discuss ways of developing administrative and professional cooperation. There was general agreement concerning the importance of joint efforts in focusing on children at risk in the region. At that meeting, I presented a proposal to make use of information technology in these efforts. The idea was welcomed and the Norwegian Ministry for Children and Family Affairs is now working with the Swedish Special Group to further develop a model. This model will be presented at a meeting of experts, 28-29 September in Visby, Sweden.

Earlier this year, I visited Poland and Latvia, meeting political leaders, NGO-representatives as well as visiting institutions and projects. In Latvia, I visited Skangal, the family estate of former Swedish Prime Minister, Olof Palme. At the estate, the Salvation Army now operates a home for children who, for different reasons, cannot continue living with their own families. At Skangal, they are given the opportunity to develop and attend school. The goal is that each child as soon as possible can return to his or her family.

I also visited the project "Livslust", which we wrote about in our first issue. In Azeitpe, I met youngsters who had overcome difficult circumstances and received an education and a new positive outlook towards the future.

Much more has also taken place to strengthen our networks. In May, the conference "Children and Residential Care - Alternative Strategies" was organized with the support of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Researchers and practitioners from several fields met and there was a general consensus concerning the importance of developing alternatives to institutional care.

In June, the Council of Europe organized a meeting of family ministers in Sweden with the theme: "Towards a Child Friendly Society". For the first time young people were invited as speakers and their views formed the basis for subsequent ministerial discussions.

The young delegates underlined the need for parents and other adults to spend more time with children and young people. They also expressed concern over growing alcohol and drug abuse.

As evident, exciting developments are now taking place in our region.



Maj-Inger Klingvall
Minister of Social Security
and Children

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Ingrid Åkerman, Eva Rimsten and Bo Henrikson.

Common IT house under construction

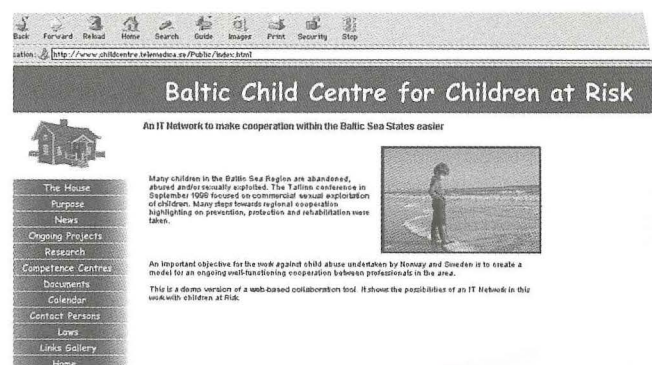
The shared common waters have formed the basis for a growing exchange of experience, expertise and knowledge between countries of the Baltic Sea region. Increasingly, information technology is used to facilitate information exchange in such diverse fields as medicine and pollution control.

Child protection is no exception. Following an initiative by Norway and Sweden, an exciting project now seeks to make use of information technology in assisting children at risk.

Establishing a closer regional collaboration in the area of child protection and welfare was first raised at a meeting of Heads of Government in 1988. An immediate priority area was commercial sexual exploitation of children. This was later expanded to encompass children at risk in general.

The need for increased information on ongoing projects, exchange of valuable experience and statistics, access to specialist advice and database information was often mentioned by many of those actively involved with child welfare issues. At the ministerial meeting on children's issues earlier this year in Stockholm, the idea to make better use of existing information technology was put forward. To use IT as the basis for sharing information and experience is, of course, by no means original. However, creating the IT-network "The Baltic Child Centre for Children at Risk" is the first such project attempted under the umbrella of intergovernmental cooperation.

All the 11 countries organized in the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) have now been invited to take part in building the joint children's house. The project has already won support from Estonia, Finland, Iceland and Russia. It would provide meeting places for people in different professional and political areas: politicians, government officials, non-governmental organisations and specialists. To realize the house requires openness in combination with the highest degree of privacy and security. All those interested are welcome to "visit" the public access areas whereas other areas would be accessible only to users with special authorization.



The idea is to expand the present web site managed by the CBSS Secretariat with an Internet-based tool to:

- permit the transfer of large amounts of information needed for, for example, teleconferences and distance education;
- offer a secure facility for government agencies, organizations and experts to exchange experience as well as permitting consultation and instruction;

The house opens possibilities for numerous activities. A children's home in one country could, for example, consult specialists in other countries when faced with a particular problem. A seminar on children in Moscow could invite a specialist speaker from Iceland via teleconference. Visitors could easily access the IT-library to update their web-links. Journalists could check information and who can provide information on child-related issues.

To demonstrate the concept, a simple model has been constructed. The model was first shown at the Council of Europe's Conference for family ministers, held in Stockholm in June. Several countries, not only from the Baltic Sea Region, expressed a keen interest in the idea. The concept also received strong support from Foreign Ministers of the Baltic States at their meeting in Palanga in June.

Additional discussions on the further development of the Children's House model are due to be held in September in conjunction with the TechNet Baltic conference in Visby, Sweden.

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www.baltinfo.org/children
and
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The Swedish Special Group for Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region was established after the Conference in Tallinn on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Baltic Sea Region 1998 by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs in Sweden. The Working Group's mandate is to serve as information centre for children at risk and to pursue follow-up activities of the Conference in Tallinn within the social area.

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UNICEF encourages alternatives to Russian institutional care

"While the Russian Federation is going through a difficult time of transition at present with hardships shared by much of the population, the humanitarian concern of children in institutions are urgent," a UNICEF sponsored fact-finding mission recently concluded.

The report is available on: www.mdri.org/whatsnew/Russia/Russiaone.html

The mission, which was carried by Mental Disability Rights International, visited several types of institutions in Kaliningrad, Saratov and Moscow.

The great majority of children in Russia's institutions are "social orphans", many of whom have been placed in institutions by parents as a result of the lack of economic resources and other needed social support. Both real and social orphans could live with their own family or a substitute family if adequate educational services and support were available, MDRI says.

"Russian authorities should respond to the current crisis by creating community services to meet the needs of children in their own home and community. As soon as possible, the entry door to institutions should be closed – and all new admissions should be terminated."

UNICEF's programmes in the Russian Federation started as late as 1997. "Our main strategy is not to concentrate on the existing state of affairs but to encourage the transformation of the concept of state institutional care towards alternative ways such as foster care and temporary short-

term homes," says Vera Gavrilova at the UNICEF office in Moscow.

The historical emphasis on institutions is primarily due to lack of resources. It was purely practical to gather as many children under one roof instead of looking to the individual needs of each child. Street children were numerous in the 20's and after the Second World War there was an urgent need to care for children whose parents had died. "There was simply no time to look at individual needs when dozens of children required a decent place to live."

Changing this approach is a complicated process. Together with its partners, UNICEF has organised study tours, seminars and workshops. The United Nations organisation has started receiving reports from different parts of the country that municipalities and regions are finding that family and family-type units are actually more efficient and less costly than large institutions.

"We are looking both for assistance in know-how and financial assistance. To re-organize child institutional care requires money. But we must be able to channel funds in a credible manner. Be-

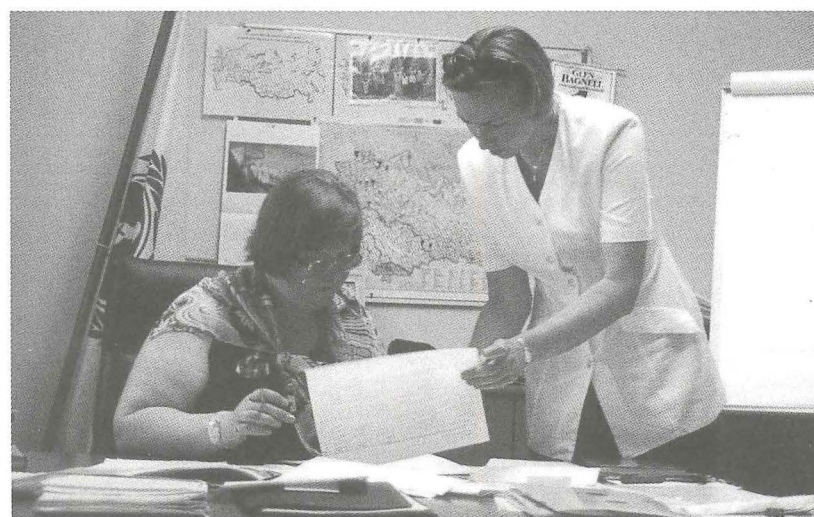


Photo: Ingrid Aicman

fore we start fund-raising activities we must be able to provide a basis for a capability to digest the funds. There must be a clear indication of how the money is to be spent. We do not want to just improve institutional care but rather to pave the way for change."

The UNICEF mission warned that delays in the development of community-based alternatives could create increased human and financial costs. As institutional placements rise and more families break-up, children face rising levels of mental disability. Public exposure of abuses in institutions will increasingly pressure government authorities and international donors to invest in improving institutions. Such assistance had in the past resulted in a substantial increase in the number of institutionalised children, the mission claimed.

The concerns of children in Russia's institutions must be understood in the context of recent economic difficulties, the UNICEF mission further pointed out. As a result of the transition to

Vera Gavrilova (right) together with Olga Remenets at the UNICEF office in Moscow.

a market economy, far fewer resources are available for social services and the social safety net has been significantly cut back. The transition has had a negative impact on the public health of the population as a whole and the country has experienced a decrease in the life expectancy.

Children in institutions represent only a small fraction of the children or adults suffering from the economic crisis. In addition to the 480,000 children in institutions, the Ministry of Interior estimates that there are up to 1.5 million children living in the streets of Russia. There are also a large number of children in the criminal system, including prisons, jails, and other forms of juvenile detention.

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Ministerial meeting agrees on broader perspective

"Not providing a good childhood is to destroy the future", Maj-Inger Klingvall, the Swedish Minister for Social Security and Children, pointed out in her opening statement of the Ministerial Meeting in Stockholm on Children at Risk.

For the first time ministers responsible for children's issues within CBSS met in March to

discuss continued regional co-operation on how to prevent, protect and rehabilitate children at risk.

The ministers decided to broaden the scope beyond commercial sexual exploitation of children to the wider context of "children at risk" since:

- children who are victims of commercial sexual exploita-

tion are also at risk in other ways;

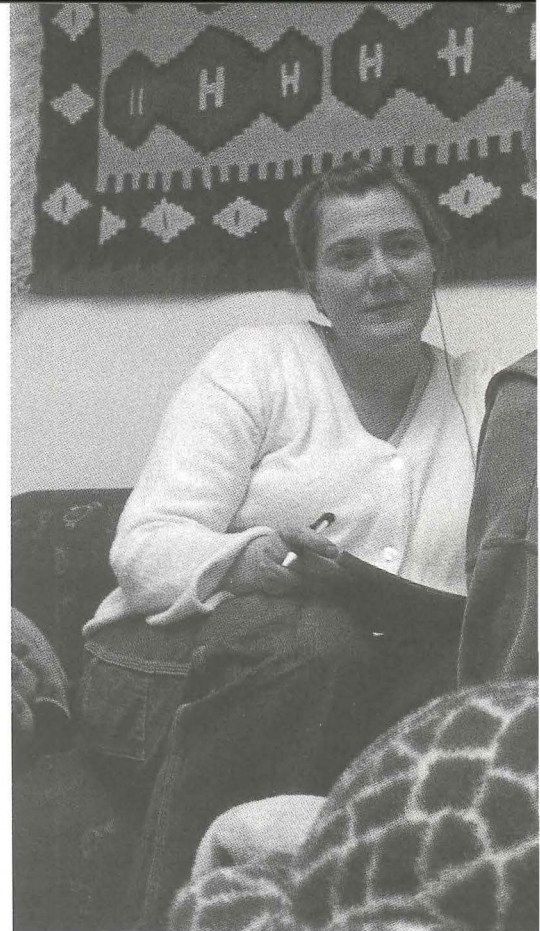
- measures to assist victims must be viewed in the wider context of social and welfare policy;
- efforts to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children must be seen in the context of the opportunities and support given to all our children,

- the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides for a minimum standard for all our children.

The participating ministers welcomed Sweden's and Norway's initiative to establish an IT network for exchange of information, research, education and for consultation.

In 1997, the Icelandic government decided to radically reform the country's approach to sexual abuse cases. The previous year, a government study had indicated that before the age of 14, two to three percent of all children were dealt with as potential victims of sexual abuse by the child protection services. Bearing in mind that only a fraction of incidences are in fact reported to the law enforcement or child protection authorities, the findings came as a shock to many.

Specialists meet at the Children's House



Ragna Gudbrandsdóttir in the child-friendly interview

The "Barnahus" or Children's House was then established – a concept borrowed from the Children's Advocacy Centers in the United States. The CAC movement in the USA has grown rapidly with the total number of such centres now nearly 200. The Houston, Texas CAC centre – the largest – provided necessary technical assistance when the Reykjavik Children's House was planned.

"We have adapted the U.S. model to Icelandic conditions and Icelandic legislation," says Barnahuset's psychologist Vigdis Erlendsdóttir. "A lot of effort was spent in preparations and our experience since starting is that the model works well."

The Children's House is a partnership between the child protection services, health services, law en-

forcement and prosecution. They agree to work together under one roof to investigate child sexual abuse and provide assistance and treatment for the victim and the victim's family. Their aim is to prevent the re-victimization of the child by providing a child friendly environment for investigation as well as empowering the child to overcome traumatic consequences.

All cases of child sexual abuse in Iceland are now referred to the Children's House which serves the whole country. The child is interviewed on videotape either by a judge or by a specialized interviewer specifically trained in working with sexually abused children and skilled in obtaining information necessary for law enforcement and prosecution. The decision concern-

ing who conducts the interview is left to the judge in question.

Present, but in a different setting, are the representatives of the child protection committees, the police, the state attorney and, when possible, the defence attorney. Collectively they follow the interview live on an internal television system. All those present can, if necessary, assist in the interviewing process by communicating with the specialized interviewer.

The videotaped interview provides all agencies with the key to the management of the case, allowing them to analyse the child's disclosure without further traumatizing the child through repetitive interviews. It also preserves the child's account of events for use in court proceedings.

The Children's House also has an on-site medical clinic with paediatricians to carry out necessary medical exams and assessment. Their findings are documented through the use of a voloscope, state-of-the-art equipment that records the examination on video.

The final part of the programme is an assessment of the child for therapeutic purposes. The Children's House professional team consists of psychologists and social workers that are specially trained in working with children and family members who have been affected by sexual abuse. An individual treatment plan is created for each child utilizing information from psychological testing. This plan determines the appropriate combination of individual, group and family therapy.

"The greatest advantages of adopting this approach is for the child," says Vigdis Erlendsdóttir. "He or she does not have to go through the ordeal of recounting events several times. The result is also greater efficiency; that we collaborate rather than duplicate work."

The Children's House has greatly enhanced the possibilities of dealing with child sexual abuse in Iceland, Bragi Gudbrandsson, Director General of the Government Agency for Child Protection, reports. Although inter-agency collaboration and a multi-disciplinary team approach was emphasized previously, the Children's House has transformed the nature of that cooperation as different professionals now work closely together in one location.

In Iceland, as in most countries, few child sexual abuse cases actual-



Photo: Grmur

Social worker Ragna Gudbrandsdóttir (left) with psychologist Vigdis Erlendsdóttir and Gudjón Bjarnason can follow the interviews on internal TV.



oom.

Photo: Grmur

Abused children often misinterpreted

I am currently involved in a research project of police interrogations with children. The purpose is to study and analyse the nature of these interrogations and the interaction between police officers and children as well as an analysis of the court records of cases referred to prosecution.

In another project we will interview 20 children concerning their experience of the social services in connection with the process of compulsory care. The best interests of the child is to guide all actions taken by the social services and the study hopes to create an understanding of children's experiences and understanding of that concept.

We have insufficient knowledge of how different professionals apply existing laws and recommendations aimed at raising the status of children during treatment and examination. However, these days we do know quite a bit about how professionals can assist a child in relating events. We must, at the same time, be aware of the fact that it is never simple to get children to talk about having been subjected to different forms of abuse or about a difficult life situation. There are seldom other witnesses in abuse crimes against children except the child him or herself and the perpetrator or perpetrators. Those involved most often offer conflicting versions of events. Many experts make use of medical and physical evidence as a means of clarifying what the child has experienced. This, however, is not sufficient to explain if and what the child has been subjected to and by whom. Unfortunately, professionals, especially within the social services, rarely seek to obtain information from the child him or herself.

With regard to family therapy treatment an important aspect is that the participants influence each other and jointly contribute towards understanding the child's problems. All participants are important to successful family therapy treatment. However, my study showed that whereas the therapist was considered best equipped in understanding and creating conditions for improving the situation, children and young people were given a lesser role. Sixty one percent of the preschool children merely listened to discussions between adults. They were generally spoken about and reduced to bit roles in treatment concerning them.

The status of children in conjunction with compulsory care carried

out by the social services can also be described as asymmetric. Interviews with children and young people show that they seldom consider themselves as participants in the process and are rarely asked about their life situation. They describe a sense of alienation and apprehension towards the social workers that handle their cases. Occasionally, the child cannot even name the person who is charged with looking after his or her interests.

What happens when children in police interviews are given the opportunity to speak about what they have been subjected to? When children are questioned in the same manner as adults, there is a risk of misinterpretation and flaws in the child's answer. Children may also attempt to answer questions without fully understanding the implications, resulting in misinterpretation. Problems may also arise when not considering the risk of suggestive questions. In a study of 72 first-time interviews with Swedish children, *Investigative interviews of child witnesses in Sweden*, jointly carried out with researchers from NICHD in Bethesda, USA, suggests children often are not given the opportunity to give their version in their own words but rather are given suggestions of how the events took place. More than half, 53 percent, of the questions, asked children regarding suspected abuse, were leading and suggestive and 57 percent of the details provided by children were the result of these questions. In 64 percent of the cases, the very first question asked was suggestive and leading. There is therefore a clear risk that testimony will not be legally admissible and secondly, that the legal rights of both adults and children involved in cases of sexual abuse in Sweden are not upheld.

A view held by many professionals in Sweden is that cooperation in cases concerning abused children is an obvious advantage. I believe that view needs to be modified. In my article, *Where is the story?*, I found that children are required to relate their story to a number of experts both before and while the judicial investigation takes place. At the same time, that can be problematic since experts make use of varying investigative techniques. Thus, children can be influenced in such a way that neither the child nor his or her story is considered reliable by the judicial system. That is particularly the case if children cannot remember whether they have been

the victims of abuse. One girl, for example, who saw a psychologist while the police were conducting a preliminary investigation was exposed to several projective techniques (jigsaw puzzle, reconstructing dream experiences and symbolic drama) as part of her treatment to induce memory. She was then asked to relate to the police what she had remembered. Her case was also discussed between the police and the psychologist. It is, of course, important for children who have been victims of sexual abuse both to have their case tried in court and to receive psychological treatment. Children may also need support during the investigation. However, the question is whether they require assistance in remembering events that they may not have experienced. To subject children to a number of investigative interviews with suggestive elements can actually result in professional injustice under the guise of aiding children.

In the article, *Children's credibility in judgement of child sexual abuse*, I have noted the evaluation of children made by lawyers when sentence is passed. It is evident that lawyers pay particular attention to the child's performance in police interviews and in court, perhaps because of the difficulty in obtaining evidence in these cases. However, the fact remains that lawyers passed judgement on their own and on behalf of other members of the court based on subjective assessment. Children can hereby come to be considered as solely responsible for their performance during the judicial process since the assessment of their reliability does not stem from the conditions under which they testify and related events.

There is not much we can do in relation to children who experience difficulty in speaking about painful subjects. However, we can contribute towards altering the perception of children and the ability among social workers, police, psychologists and lawyers to interview children.



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ly go to court. "Not more than 10 percent go to court and prior to the establishment of Barnahuset even fewer cases were prosecuted," says Bragi Gudbrandsson. "We hope to dramatically increase that ratio."

Since its inception in January 1999, the House has handled 120 cases. "We had estimated the annual number of cases at 60-70 and the amount has greatly surprised us," Bragi Gudbrandsson notes.

The other surprising discovery is that family abuse constitutes a minority of cases handled. "We are particularly concerned about the number of cases with young offenders, 13-14 year old boys. It is particularly important to deal with them in a correct manner since we know that young offenders often develop into adult paedophiles. With treatment at an early age, we are more likely to succeed."

Bragi Gudbrandsson points out that this multi-agency, inter-disciplinary and child-friendly model could be applied in all kinds of abuse; whether it be physical, emotional or sexual.

"This may well be a new way of approaching children at risk and organizing child protection work, which I am sorry to say, is far too often focused on the inadequacies of parents instead of the needs of the child."

.....
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.....

How can our societies become more child friendly? That was the topic when more than 100 delegates from 30 countries gathered in Stockholm in June for the Council of Europe's 26th conference for family ministers. The conference was opened by Prime Minister Göran Persson who emphasized that children's issues should be given priority in society as a whole.

Towards a Child Friendly Society

Youth delegates – who attended the family ministers conference for the first time – suggested that providing opportunities for parents to spend more time with their children was an important contribution towards a child-friendlier society.

The young delegates' views were the basis for the ministerial discussion. They mentioned alcohol and drug abuse as a major problem. The need for participation among children and young people in the decision-making process in decisions that concern them, was also pointed out. However, the most frequent point mentioned was the lack of time



Maj-Inger Klingvall, Swedish Minister for Social Security and Children.

spent with their parents and other grown-ups.

Ministers often outlined the problems of poverty, drugs, alcohol and violence. After listening



Photo: Ingrid Akerman

to the young delegates' statements, the Estonian minister Katrin Saks, said: "I will start at

home and realize the need to spend more time with my own children."

SOS Children's Villages established in Russia

The concept of private voluntary care for abandoned, orphaned and destitute children is new to Russia. In a short time three SOS Children's Villages have been established with a fourth under way with Norwegian funding in the northern town of Murmansk.

"I am convinced that we are making a valuable contribution," says Leonid L. Mitayev, Director of the Children's Village in Tomilino, just outside Moscow. "Our concept is built upon the idea that there are enthusiastic people who want to help and therefore decide to develop their skills in working with children."

Russia is experiencing new times and transforming into a different society. "For many years, my country stood on its own beside the rest of the world – not just economically but particularly in a human sense," Leonid L. Mitayev adds. He notes that there is a growing awareness that society must assume a greater responsibility for its children but that many people are still indifferent to their needs.

The SOS Children's Village in



Photo: Ingrid Akerman

Tomilino is founded on the same principles as similar villages around the world, helping to prepare children and youngsters entrusted to their care with a home until they achieve self-reliance and are able to make their own way in life.

Every child is given an SOS Children's Village Mother and thus someone to relate to constantly throughout childhood and beyond. She has the same cares, duties and joys as any other mother and is the head of the

family, responsible for the family budget and in charge of her household. An assistant or trainee mother supports the mother so that she can enjoy her holiday or days off. To become a mother is a life-long commitment. Therefore, the mothers are carefully selected.

An SOS Children's Village family in Russia comprises of seven children, with boys and girls of various ages growing up together as brothers and sisters.

New family members are admitted up to the age of ten (and

beyond in the case of siblings, who are not separated).

Every family has a house of its own. The village typically comprises ten to fifteen family houses. The village community is a natural and valuable extension of the family unit.

The village in Tomilino, the first in Russia, has ten resident families with a total of 70 children aged 1–17 years. "SOS Children's Villages are important in changing the Russian attitude towards children," says Elena S. Bruskova, President of the Russian Committee SOS Children's Villages.

"All state institutions are organised by age and children are deprived of contacts with familiar people and environments. "A nursing child is moved to another institution at the age of three or four. Further relations with familiar and trusted persons are severed, the child is removed from his or her natural environment and life becomes unpredictable. There is a risk that the child develops negatively."

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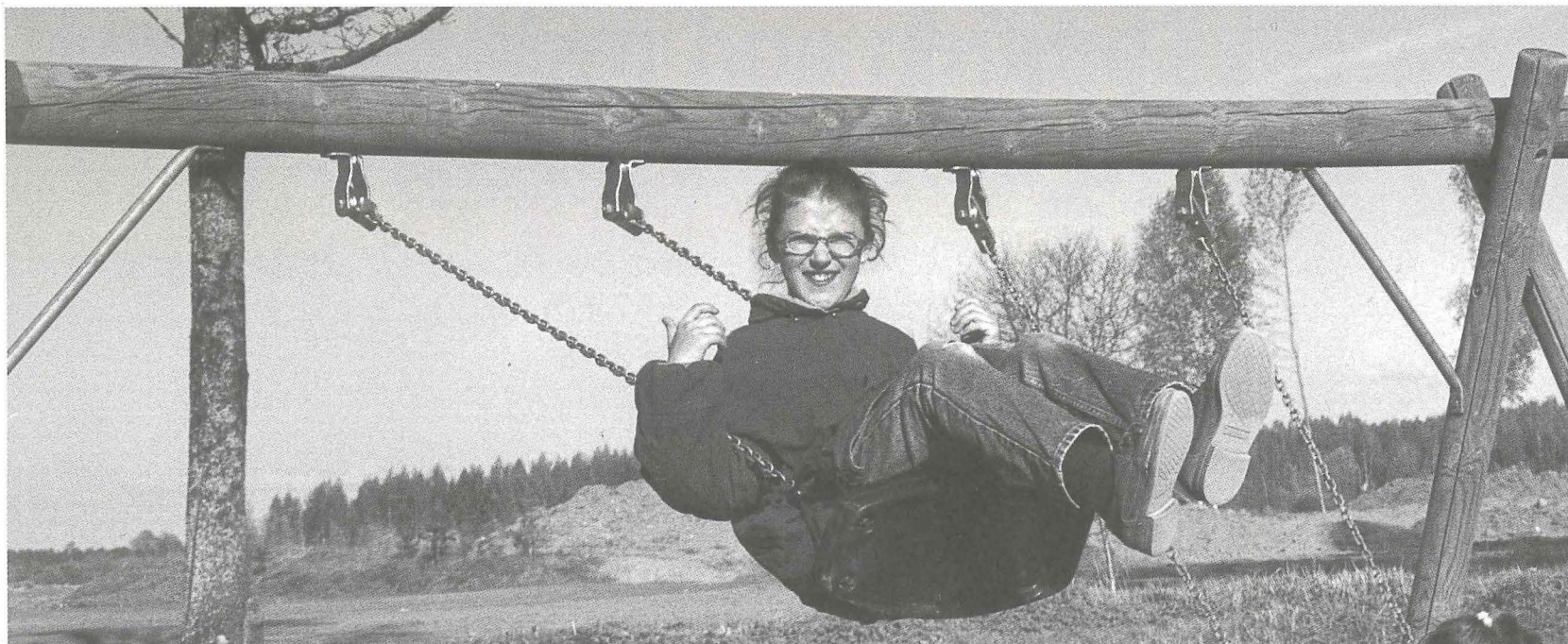


Photo: Ingrid Åkerman

Estate restored to receive children

Skangal is the large family estate owned by former Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme's Latvian maternal grandparents. He spent many summers there. Now, Skangal has been restored as a children's home accommodating 20 children from socially vulnerable families during their first four school years.



The school employs four qualified teachers and the curriculum is individually adapted to the needs of each child. "Mathematics, music and arts are favourite subjects. Educational methods are untraditional by Latvian standards. With impulses from Montessori and other teaching methods, we have developed our own 'Skangal System'," says Headmistress Livita Ambeine. She adds that working with the children's parents is a greater challenge.

"I am pleased to see how well the children are taken care of and the fact that efforts are also made to help parents to take responsibility when the time comes for their children to move home," says Swedish Minister for Social Security and Children, Maj-Inger Klingvall, who recently visited Skangal.

The estate, which is located 100 kilometres northeast of Riga, was donated by the Palme family to the Salvation Army. More than 100

building and construction students together with 45 teachers from seven schools in Sweden have participated in renovating the dilapidated buildings. Several new classrooms have just been completed as well as children's dormitories. The school building is a former pigsty. In spite of the fact that the construction is only half finished, the estate looks well maintained with freshly painted buildings.

To complete the reconstruction of Skangal will cost an estimated

SEK

70 million

with financing primarily from private donations and from foundations. The Palme family in Mexico has also indicated it will contribute.

Bertil Rodin of the Swedish Salvation Army always hoped to found a home for Riga's street children. Instead, he became involved in Skangal and helped form its activities. Only half of the necessary funding has to date been obtained but Bertil Rodin is optimistic: "The Lord will not let me return until my work is completed," he says.

Two years ago, activities at Skangal started with nine children and has now grown to 20. The elegant building stands in sharp contrast to the children's home environment. In order to prevent these children from returning to the same miserable conditions, a network of 15 social workers are involved with parents. During the four-year stay at Skangal, the children stay in touch with their biological parents through visits every other weekend. The activities involve all levels of the municipality, school and social services as well as elected officials.

"In some cases it will perhaps be necessary to find other family homes for the children when they finish here," Administrator Dennis Hewett notes. "On the whole, parents have very low self-esteem and we view our work here as a major challenge to the widespread alcoholism in the country. However, in some parts of the country unemployment is 80 percent and what can you do except give people a job."

After the two-day visit to Latvia, the Swedish delegation summarized their impressions: "It was exciting to visit Skangal with its special ties to my country," said Maj-Inger Klingvall. "It is inspiring to see that the approach to children is developing and that alternatives to institutions are being found."

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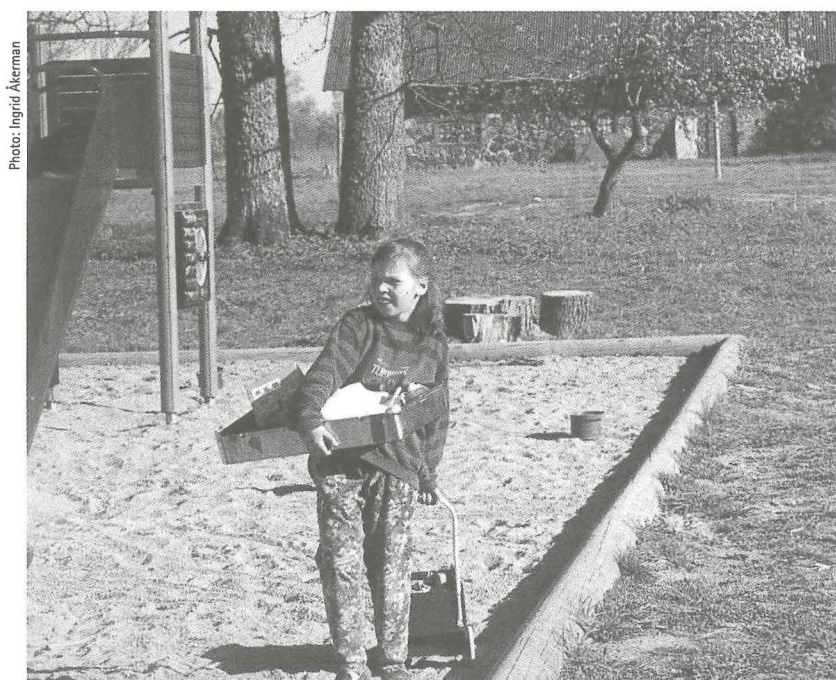


Photo: Ingrid Åkerman

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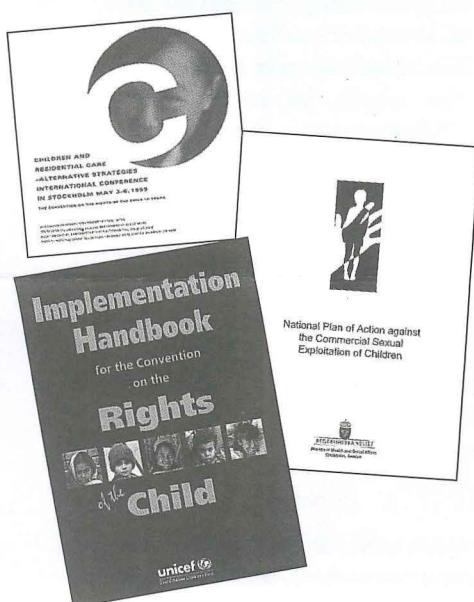
Sexual abuse against Children – a training programme for all countries in the Baltic Region.
29 – 30 September 1999.
Organizer: The Police Academy, Sweden.

The Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – advanced international training programme.
25 October – 5 November 1999.
Organizer: The Office of the Children's Ombudsman, Sweden.

Children and Trauma.
22 – 24 May 2000. Organizer: The Nordic Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

Terve-SOS 2000 – The Millennium for Children and Young People.
22 – 24 May 2000. Organizer: STAKES, Finland.

LITERATURE



Children and residential care – a Baltic perspective

This year, we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. No less than 13 articles in the convention are devoted to or linked with children growing up in institutions or at risk of being placed in institutions. To highlight this key issue concerning children's rights, the conference "Children and Residential Care - Alternative Strategies" was held in Stockholm with 400 participants from 45 countries.

The Conference mainly focused on two issues:

- risk factors in residential care and possibilities of overcoming them
- introducing and implementing alternative measures to the child care system

Similar to many other Eastern European countries, the Baltic countries have found that the number of children in residential care have not decreased. This is partly due to the numerous political, social and economical difficulties that have forced children into public care, partly to the Soviet heritage. Institutionalization was for many years, and still is, used as a means of solving wide-ranging problems.

Abandonment is the primary reason for placing children in institutions. What causes abandonment in each individual case is less evident. Poverty certainly plays a relatively large role, but this may also mask other causes.

Concerning the Baltic countries, some of the key issues are:

Prevention of separation

In the best interests of the child, the primary consideration is that he or she remains with the family. It is therefore necessary to introduce a variety of community-based social services for families and children.

"Experience shows that formal changes in legislation rarely lead to meaningful changes in practice. Unless there is broad pre-existing administrative support for the reform and new funding is available to carry it out. Those two conditions are rarely met without considerable education of policy-makers, pilot testing of service models, formal and informal evaluation, and changes in public opinion."

"Moving from residential institutions to community based services in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union", World Bank, 1999.

Short-term care

The duration of the placement is a critical factor to all aspects of the child's development. Children under school age should not be placed in institutions at all.

Dr. Ronald Federici, Virginia Polytechnic and State University, commented on the recent comprehensive neuropsychological studies based on adopted children from Eastern European and Russian institutions: Early information suggests that most of the children adopted at an age greater than four years suffer neuropsychological and emotional damages from institutionalization (for example psychological dwarfism, institutional autism). These patterns were found to be associated with prolonged deprivation combined with the inability of the child to develop appropriate attachment and reach optimal cognitive potential. Estimates suggest that for every two months of institutionalization a child may be delayed one month in cognitive and emotional skills.

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Residential care as "good enough"

Margaret Lindsay, Director of the Centre for Residential Child Care in Scotland, quoted a Scottish Office report that outlines eight principles for defining good practice:

Individuality and Development

Young people and children in residential care have the right to be treated as individuals who have their own unique relationship, experiences, strengths, needs and future, irrespective of the needs of other residents. They should be prepared for adult hood and supported until they are fully independent.

Rights

Young people, children and their parents should be given a clear statement of their rights and responsibilities. They should have a confidential means of making complaints. They should be involved in the decisions that affects them and the running of the

home. Their rights should be consistently respected.

Good Basic Care

Young people and children in residential care with or without education should be given a high standard of personal care. They should be offered varied and positive experiences of life, and should be included in the wider community.

Education

Young people and children should be actively encouraged in all aspects of their education, vocational training or employment and offered career guidance. Their individual educational needs should be identified and met.

Health

Young people's and children's health needs should be carefully identified and met, they should be encouraged to avoid health risks and to develop a healthy life style.

Partnership with parents

Young people and children in residential homes and schools should be cared for in the way which maximize opportunities for their parents continued involvement, and for care to be provided in the context of partnership with parents, wherever this is in the interest of the child.

Child centred collaboration

Young people and children should be able to rely on a high quality of inter-disciplinary team work amongst the adults providing for their care, education and health needs.

A Feeling of Safety

Young people and children should feel safe and secure in any residential home or school.

For more information
about the Scottish experience see
www.baltinfo.org/children.