

Children at Risk

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



Visit <http://childcentre.baltinfo.org>

Regional responsibility

Regional co-operation was a new idea when the five Nordic countries nearly 50 years ago opened common borders. Open borders bring people together but it also opens borders to unwanted activity.

When the issue of sexual abuse of children became so brutally highlighted at the World Congress in Stockholm 1996, countries in the Baltic Sea Region found it natural to look for regional solutions. Natural, because the problem transcends borders and requires joint action.

Natural, also because countries can benefit from the experience of others. The devastating effects of abuse against children are a common concern for which all countries of the region must take responsibility.

Thus, the need for co-operation had been recognised and the question was now how, in practical terms, countries could collaborate across borders. The answer was to create a regional network using the simplest and most cost-effective tool available, the Internet.

My government and our colleagues in the Norwegian government have, with the strong support of all countries in our region, have taken the lead in establishing the Child Centre network.

In building the Child Centre, it was particularly important to ensure that the site would actually fulfil its requirement as a practical tool. The aim was not to establish a showcase but a useful facility in preventing child abuse and rehabilitating its victims. It must therefore be simple to use and contain qualified information for professionals. Above all, it must be strongly rooted among professionals and child experts throughout the region.

At an early stage, it was decided that daily responsibility for updating research, methods and other vital information, would be carried out by the experts themselves – the professionals and organisations actually dealing with abused children. Thus, we could ensure that the network would not only be a token gesture by governments but the working tool we were striving for.

We have, through this project, shown the power and potential of regional co-operation. Professor Stewart Asquith, who has been a committed supporter from the start, aptly notes in this issue that the network will make a difference for children in this region. I congratulate all those who have been involved.



Ingela Thalén
Family Minister

A common achievement

All of us who have been involved in establishing the Child Centre felt a certain pride when we recently opened our new site. Not individual pride but a sense of satisfaction for what we had jointly achieved.

As Chairman of the Swedish Special Group, I have, over the past two years, had the honour of closely following the political process which has formed the IT-network.

The initiative grew from our common indignation over the daily abuses committed against the most vulnerable of our citizens, our children. We realised that in order to reach tangible results, we must adopt a joint regional stand. The fact that all eleven Baltic Sea countries had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, formed the backbone for action.

As a diplomat, I am well aware of the difficulties involved in finding solutions that fulfil the needs and requirements of all countries. Yet, I strongly believe to be truly successful, international co-operation is necessary. When information knows no borders, we cannot act alone as nations. When our citizens cross borders to commit crimes against children, we as nations have a duty to prevent offences.

The countries in the region each have their own culture. The levels of economic and social development are not equal. However, we share a common concern for the welfare of all children in our region. That is our common responsibility.

We have spent many hours at conference tables in planning the Child Centre. In retrospect, these have been hours well spent. I am convinced that the strong political support from the highest levels has been the key to our successful network. Without that support, we would not have achieved these results.

While the political support and process has laid the necessary foundation, it has been equally important to shape the Child Centre as a



practical tool for all the dedicated professionals and voluntary workers who each day work to improve conditions for children. We have much to learn from each other's experience and knowledge, especially when dealing with fragile and brutally abused children.

Sweden and Norway have taken the lead in establishing the Child Centre. We now enter the next phase when responsibility is transferred to the Secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. That will ensure the continuing political support for our common cause. Hopefully, we, through our involvement in this process, have to some measure contributed towards ridding our region of the despicable offences against all our children.

Bo Henrikson
Chairman of the Swedish Special Group
for Children at Risk in the Baltic Sea Region

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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What is the significance of the Child Centre?



Monika Schröttle, Deutsches Jugend Institut, Germany:

"For me the importance lies in being part of a network and the government support this network enjoys. We have a good foundation with governments, ministries and competence centres. It is important to discover what really works. We have all seen plenty of plans with precious few results to show. My vision is that we both feel and become part of a global movement. We can empower ourselves."



Dorte Rievers Bindslev, Ministry of Social Affairs, Denmark:

"We must focus on how to develop this network. These things are always simple to decide on a high level. However, politicians cannot make it work. We started top-down. How we use this network will be a sign of its success."



Carin Nordenstam, Norwegian National Resource Centre on Child Sexual Abuse:

"The site's success will largely depend on whether we make use of it. Will it be sufficiently interesting? There are always obstacles to overcome before we start communicating."

Over the past two years, the governments of Sweden and Norway have, with the support of the European Union, developed the Child Centre network and its web site. With the network structure now in place, collaboration will be permanently established under the auspices of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS).

At the Baltic Sea States Summit, held in Denmark April 2000, the Heads of Government decided to "intensify efforts to enforce a co-ordinated and multidisciplinary approach towards children at risk" in the region. Among such initiatives, the eleven Heads of Government specifically mentioned the Child Centre IT network.

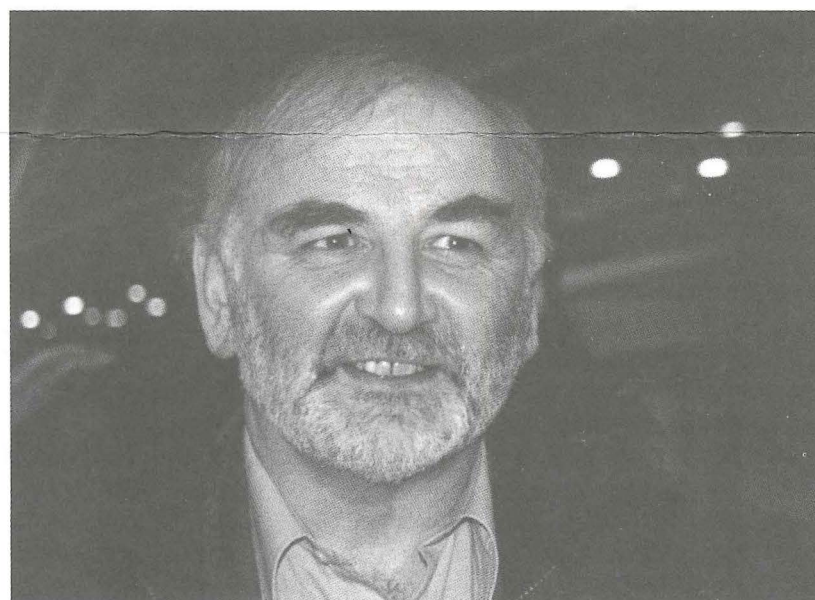
"A powerful tool to prevent abuse"

The Child Centre network can act as a powerful tool to prevent the sexual abuse of children. "If I did not sincerely believe it could make a difference for children, I would not have become involved," says Professor Stewart Asquith. "It is easy to criticise the Internet. However, I strongly believe that it can also be a positive tool with the power to prevent sexual abuse."

Professor Asquith, Head of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of Glasgow, has been closely involved with the project since its very beginning and attended practically every meeting. As an avid computer user he immediately recognised the potential for sustained regional cooperation through an IT-based network.

"We now have an effective, efficient and cost-effective network solution. For me, the most interesting feature has been that of regional cooperation. It has been vital to this project that it, from the outset, has carried a high political profile. That political platform was necessary to join 11 countries."

The project has now reached a critical stage, he believes. Over the past two years, the network has existed only as an abstract idea and there have been numerous preparatory political discussions concerning direction and decision



Involvement from the highest political levels has been crucial in establishing the Child Centre, Professor Asquith says.

making. The project was also hampered by technical difficulties. All that is in the past.

"We have spoken about the network as a general idea. We have spoken about the technical problems and about the political agenda. Now we actually have something to do and what we facing are practical problems."

The first phase in the development of the web site has now been completed. Further developments will add, for example, a secure teleconferencing facility. However, it is important to keep in mind that the technology is merely a tool. "The IT network is all about

cooperation. And what we wish to achieve."

Hopefully, the site will continue to evolve. There will always be more information to share and new areas for cooperation. "The dynamics are built in," professor Asquith notes.

An annual publication by the Child Centre network concerning sexual abuse of the region's children could be a powerful manifestation of the collaboration between the eleven countries. This suggestion was put forward by Professor Stewart Asquith to all Child Centre participants and will now be considered.

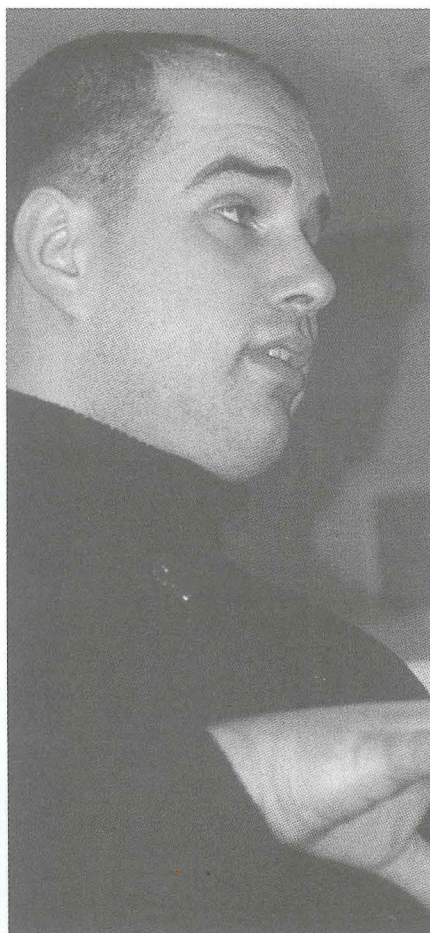
What would you like to find on the site?

The Competence Centres are national multidisciplinary teams with special knowledge in rehabilitating sexually abused children. These Centres are appointed by each country within the framework for the Children at Risk Project. They form together the regional Child specialist network and will work in close collaboration with the National Co-ordinators.

The Ministries responsible for children's issues in each country have appointed their National Co-ordinator. The National Co-ordinator is responsible for updating the website's national pages.

When National Co-ordinators and Competence Centres were asked what they would like to find on the site they listed:

- Overview of current knowledge
- Description of best practices
- New and existing research
- Action plans
- Who are the sex buyers?
- Statistics
- National debates
- Links
- Calendar
- New legislation
- Daily work among professionals, children and parents
- Children's advocacy centres
- Professional and personal obstacles
- Areas we lack knowledge about
- Application forms for grants
- A common education programme
- Cultural background to child sexual abuse.



Co-ordinating national information

When Evaldas Karmaza was appointed national co-ordinator for Lithuania he immediately set out to determine what a co-ordinator actually does.

"I was appointed national co-ordinator in summer 2000 and started off with a great many questions about what that entailed. The first two months were spent trying to structure the assignment. Although, most people are not accustomed to speaking about child sexual abuse, I concluded that as national co-ordinator I should have as much knowledge as possible about the situation in

Lithuania. I soon discovered that plenty of small NGOs were active in local action projects.

I also discovered that there is a need for coordination. During one week in Lithuania, we had three seminars on the subject of child sexual abuse. I must therefore be fully informed about all ongoing activities. Money is always an important consideration and as national co-ordinator, I should keep track of funding sources.

Finally we have created a national web site. It is important to raise awareness. We also plan to spread printed information since only one tenth of the Lithuanian population have access to the Internet."

Competence centre in practice



The Centre against abuse in Riga was selected as the Latvian competence centre. This centre was opened in 1996 to support families and children subjected to abuse.

The Latvian Centre against abuse has three main fields of activity. It carries out training

and seminars for professionals all across the country. It also has a counselling department that

works with outpatients and, finally, a shelter with 20 places where abused children can stay 30 days or more, either alone or with the non-abuser parent.

"For us, working with abused children has been a question of educating society, explains Agnese Strauta of the Centre.

"When we were still a part of the Soviet Union, this problem simply did not exist. We now have adult women coming to us who never received any help because sexual abuse was not recognised. Therefore it is vitally important to spread information on where to seek help."

The Centre has been organised using a multidisciplinary approach. "One crucial question that we hope the network can assist us with concerns developing registration and documentation. What works and what doesn't work?"

NGOs welcome Child Centre

The Child Centre network web site also offers a new facility for non-governmental organisations working with child abuse issues. At a meeting of NGOs in March in Tallinn, they expressed great

interest in using the network.

"The organisations wish to be recognised and explain their work," says Heikki Sariola of Finland's Central Union for Child Welfare. "Through the site,

they can spread information concerning policies, events, training and educational activities."

At the Tallinn meeting several organisations also mentioned the opportunity to obtain profession-

al advice and guidance. Some of the topics they wish to cover are trafficking across borders, sexual abuse, prevention, legislation, community action, Internet and rehabilitation of victims.

For the past five years, 16 year-old Lena has lived away from home, drifting among friends and acquaintances. Occasionally, she visits her alcoholic parents and brings them food. Her sister is a drug addict, obtaining money for drugs through theft and prostitution. Recently, Lena's father bit her so severely that she was hospitalised. Fellow resident, 16-year old Sonya's father abandoned his family when she was very young. Blamed by her mother for ruining her life, Sonya was raised by her grandparents. When they died, she returned home. Sonya's mother assaulted her and threw her out on the streets. Badly bruised she reached a shelter.

Making a difference

Lena and Sonya now two of the 40 young women, 13-18 years, in the St. Petersburg social rehabilitation centre Malookhtinskii Dom. They, and most of the other residents, have been victims of sexual abuse. Many have been raised by alcoholic single parents and abused by stepfathers and other men.

These problems have perhaps been accentuated by economic turmoil over the past decade. Yet, abuse against children is scarcely a new phenomena and the Malookhtinskii Dom was established already in 1891. It is presently an institution under the Committee for Family, Children and Youth Affairs of the St. Petersburg City Administration. The Centre offers therapeutic and medical support for residents during their one-year stay. During that year, the Centre tries to prepare them for future

life in planning educational and vocational strategies.

Swede Birgitta Westerberg has, for the past years provided support for Malookhtinskii Dom. As director of a small foundation, she has been involved in child welfare issues in Russia since the beginning of the 1990'ies. "I remember watching a news item on television and suddenly realising how close these problems were and that I simply could not continue idly sitting by."

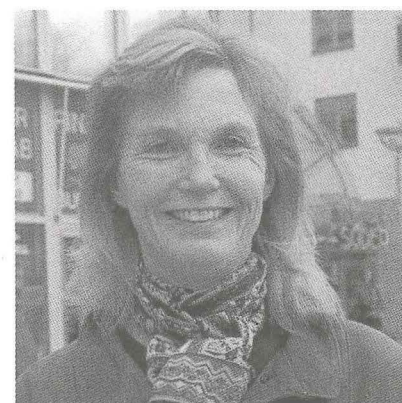
She travelled to St. Petersburg and after visited several institutions, decided to support a children's hospital.

After a few years, the foundation wished to expand their support to the social sector. "Again, we visited several institutions and were particularly impressed by the dedicated work carried out by

Galina Volkova, the superintendent for Malookhtinskii."

The City Administration provides housing and food for the residents while all other needs must be met from other sources. Thus, the Susanne Westerberg Memorial Foundation has provided computers to assist the young women in vocational training. Other contributions have included clothes and art material. However, their greatest contribution has been to fund the complete refurbishment of a previously vacant storey. With the added space, the Centre can now receive far more residents. "We have tried to assist them both with advice and goods," says Birgitta Westerberg.

The Foundation also seeks to increase awareness and knowledge about the prevention and rehabilitation of sexual abuse



Birgitta Westerberg's small foundation supports institutions in St. Petersburg.

against children. In March 2001, they sponsored a seminar on the subject for social workers and health care staff in St. Petersburg. "The seminar was a success and the next step will be to make it possible for experts in this field to actually visit institutions to give advice and provide training."

The Foundation's efforts were recently recognised when the Queen Silvia and Crown Princess Victoria in November 2000 paid a visit to Malookhtinskii Dom. "It is important for us to see that we are not alone and that others care about us," wrote resident Anya Tambovskaya following the visit. "I could see that they enjoyed visiting us and greeted each girl."

Birgitta Westerberg is well aware of the fact that her contribution, in a global sense, is minuscule. However, for the Centre and its residents that contribution makes a substantial difference. "We as a group cannot take upon ourselves all the enormous problems of Russia. However, we can make one small contribution."

The Susanne Westerberg Memorial Foundation
gittanw@swipnet.se



Young women at Malookhtinskii Dom gather to greet Queen Silvia of Sweden.

Young perpetrators often victims of abuse

Over the past years, the problems of young people as perpetrators of sexual offences against other children have been recognised. It is not uncommon for children who are victims of abuse to victimise other children.

One study suggests that young offenders carry out 30-50 percent of all cases of sexual abuse against children and that perhaps a majority of these offenders have been abused. This unpublished study by Dr Arnon Bentovim of the British Institute of Child Health noted that the largest group of young offenders were 12-14 years of age.

Swedish researcher Niklas Långström concludes that sexually abusive behaviour often takes its beginning during childhood or teenage. Several studies have shown that approximately half of all adult perpetrators of sexual crimes claim to have had deviant sexual fantasies as teenagers and a sizeable number committed their first offences when young.

The tendency to report cases of sexual abuse to the police is low in adults abuse and is most probably even lower when dealing with young offenders, according to Långström. Young offenders, according to the official Swedish crime statistics commit 10-15 percent of sexual crimes.

“There seem to be good reason to focus on the young perpetrators of sexual crimes,” Niklas Långström writes. “However, it is only during the past two decades that this problem has received recognition. Historically both young and adult perpetrators of sexual crimes have not been the subject of sanctions from society due to the lack of knowledge concerning normal and deviating sexual behaviour. There has been a reluctance to ‘brand’ young people as sexual perpetrators since it was believed that this behaviour would vanish with growing age.”

Niklas Långström in his 1999 dissertation examined the cases of 56 sexual offenders (15-20 years) who had been examined by forensic psychiatrists. Together they had committed offences against 88 identified victims with 392 known cases in all. The average age among victims was 13 years and more than half of the offenders had sexually abused children under the age of 12 years.

Swedish Project Manager Cecilia Kjellgren points out that occasionally there is some uncertainty concerning what is an expression of normal sexuality between young people and what constitutes a sexual offence. The forms for voluntary sexual contact, sexual experimentation and sexual exploration are numerous. However, normal sexual relations between people of the same age are mutual – sex which both desire and consent to. A young sexual offender is then, by definition, a person who commits a sexual act against another person, regardless of age:

- against his or her will;
- without consent or;
- in an aggressive or threatening manner.

Cecilia Kjellgren underlines that neither young nor adult offenders belong to a homogeneous group. Young offenders display the same variations in sexually offensive behaviour as adult offenders. She summarises the main behavioural characteristics:

Naive experimentation • A young boy, generally 11-14 years old, crosses the line of normal sexual behaviour, for example while babysitting. The act is spontaneous and not premeditated. The victim is a small child 2-6 years old. The boy wishes to explore and experiment with his newly discovered sexual feelings. This may be characterised as a naive single incidents and does not require extensive treatment.

Low social skills • One group of adolescent perpetrators show signs of low social skills. They are rarely accepted by their peers, feel alienated and are drawn to younger children. The

young person manipulates and blackmails his victims.

Superficially well adapted • This description fits in on the young person who has experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse while responding by acting superficially well adapted. This person would seem to have good social skills. He has friends in the same age group. In abusing others, his behaviour is strongly rationalised and lacking in guilt. He will relate the offences as mutually accepted by both persons, intimate and without coercion.

Sexually aggressive • The young offender described as sexually aggressive commonly has an impulsive lifestyle, often raised in a chaotic family situation. A long history of anti-social behaviour is often found with acts of violence against family members and friends. Drug abuse is not uncommon. The offence is commonly associated with threats and violence and the victim could be a friend, an adult or a child. The motive is using sex to gain personal power or expressing rage due to frustration.

Sexually compulsive • The perpetrator is compulsively preoccupied with sexual behaviour. This is often expressed in offences without physical contact such as voyeurism, exhibitionism, fetishism or obscene phone calls. This behaviour may accelerate over time and lead to serious offences.

Disturbed impulse control • This young offender may have a history of psychological problems, serious family problems, drug abuse or intellectual disability. The sexual offence is characterised as impulsive and might be an expression of disturbed sense of reality.

Group pressure • The perpetrators are members of a group of friends and they are acquainted with the victim. The offender generally accuses his victim and/or other members of the group. One or two members are more active as a driving force in order to attract-

ed attention and approval or to gain leadership. Others join in because of peer pressure or feel that they are expected to comply.

Beckett's model • Another manner of describing young perpetrators is to utilise the victims' age as the basis for a characterisation. There may be major differences between young people who commit offensive against others their same age and those that commit offences against children.

Those who commit offences against other young people of the same age have:

- Previously committed other crimes
- Displayed behavioural problems during childhood
- Shown anti-social behaviour such as truancy, aggressive and highly impulsive behaviour as teenagers
- Perceive themselves as have been seriously emotionally neglected.

Those that commit offences against children have:

- Previously committed sexual offences
- A pronounced sexual interest in children
- A high level of cognitive distortion
- Poor social skills
- Perceive themselves as have been victims of extensive physical abuse.

In the same manner as adults who commit sexual crimes, the adolescent perpetrator and the victim commonly are known to each other. The result of the Swedish GRUF-project show that 91 percent of the 134 victims of 70 perpetrators were acquainted. Nearly one-quarter were related to the perpetrator.

“In conclusion”, Cecilia Kjellgren writes, “we must keep in mind that young offenders constitute a heterogeneous group. The sexual offences span over a large spectrum – from minor to more serious. We cannot assess or evaluate the seriousness without entering into a close dialogue with the teenagers.”

Recruiting hundreds of adult volunteers

Paramos Vaikams Centras, the Children Support Centre, pioneered NGO efforts in Lithuania more than six years ago. It started by implementing the Open Society Fund's Big Brothers Big Sisters programme, the first such programme in the region.

Over the years, the Centre has trained more than 400 volunteer adults to support and assisted children in crisis. The very idea of voluntary adult commitment in assisting children was a new phenomenon in Lithuania and the Centre spent its first two years establishing both voluntary work and spreading its ideas.

The Centre soon recognised the need for great deal more knowledge among those working with children. "Prior to 1988, child sexual abuse was hardly even recognised in this country," says Erna Petkute, one of the Centre's programme coordinators.

In its six years of operation, the Centre has held hundreds of training seminars in understanding and recognising child abuse for teachers, police officials and social workers. The Centre has also published books on, for example, abuse and interrogating children.

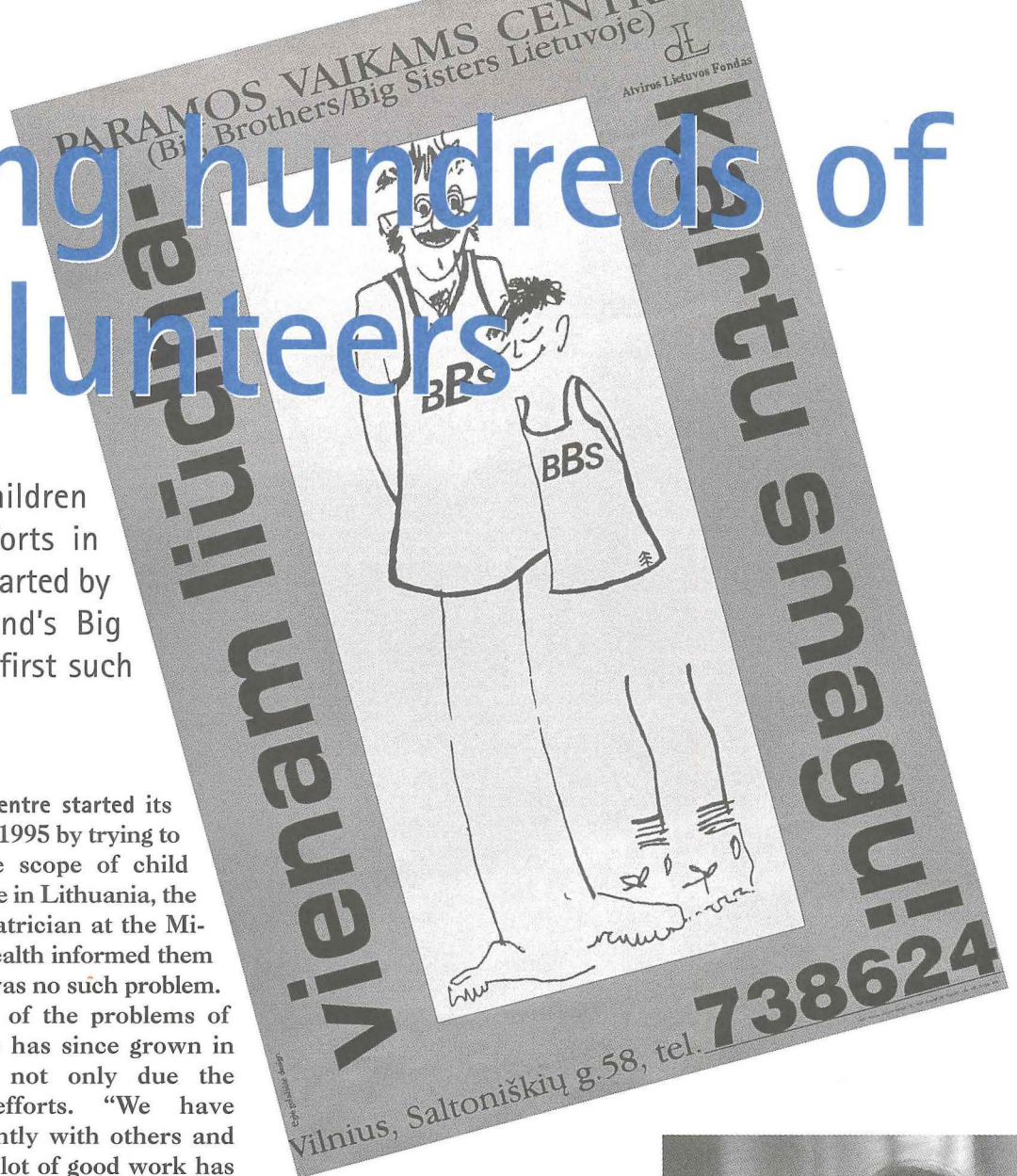
When the Centre started its activities in 1995 by trying to identify the scope of child sexual abuse in Lithuania, the chief paediatrician at the Ministry of Health informed them that there was no such problem. Awareness of the problems of child abuse has since grown in Lithuania, not only due the Centre's efforts. "We have worked jointly with others and generally a lot of good work has been carried out. We have been quite successful in educating professionals, teachers, parents, police and child protection officials."

The Centre also has found that the legal system has moved forward. "However, we still find instances where local prosecutors have difficulty accepting that sexual abuse has occurred. We have yet some way to go until awareness becomes part of the daily life of police and prosecutors."

In addition to its training activities, the Paramos Vaikams has established a resource centre to assist NGOs working with street children: "We see roughly the same number of street children from year to year," says Zydre Arlauskaite, programme officer for street children. "However, those living on the streets now have more contacts with police, NGOs and social services. More worrying is the alarming increase in drug abuse among 11, 12 and 13 year olds. More and more heroin is available at prices much lower than earlier."

Paramos Vaikams Centre has received support from the Open Society Institute and the King Baudouin Foundation but also from businesses such as McDonald's and the pharmaceutical company Eli-Lilly.

"Our mission hasn't changed: Whoever comes to us receives attention; whether it is a child, a family or a parent," says Erna Petkute. "Abused children receive therapy and children in crisis come in contact with volunteer adults. We always look at the needs of the individual client. It seems we encounter more and more problems and that they are becoming increasing complex."



Zydre Arlauskaite has seen an alarming increase in drug abuse among children.



Erna Petkute is encountering more and especially more complex problems among the children she meets.

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Taking children out of jail

In working with homeless children in Lithuania, social worker Gytis Baltrunas became acutely aware of the lack of care and rehabilitation for delinquent children. Presently, children as young as 13 years are committed to penal institutions for minor transgressions such as truancy, sniffing glue or petty shoplifting.

“Although the institutions ostensibly provide care and rehabilitation, they have more in common with closed prisons,” says Gytis Baltrunas. “Older, more hardened criminals provide the ‘education’ they receive.”

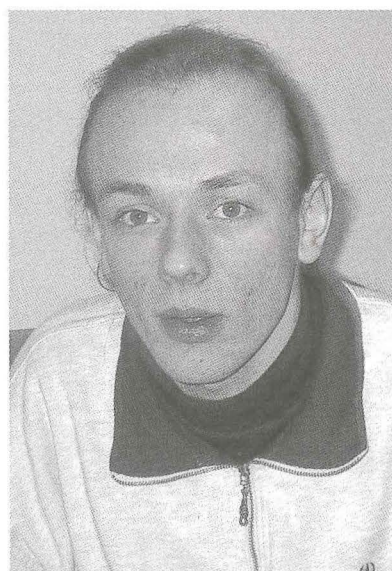
The voluntary youth organisation VERUS has therefore taken the initiative towards establishing an alternative centre for delinquent children and teenagers. They hope to receive the funding needed to provide necessary rehabilitation and education. They will welcome children 10-18 years who have been found guilty of some form of criminal activity.

“The problem is that these children have never had normal con-

tacts with adults and very often show signs of aggressive behaviour. They had been forced to beg and steal their whole lives.”

The first step towards establishing the centre was an agreement with the Bishop of Panevezys to make use of the old rectory in Inkunai, a small village 130 kilometres from Vilnius. The village offers the isolated location VERUS seeks in order to deter children from being attracted to the lures of big city life. Surrounded by forestland, with eight kilometres to the nearest paved road, there are no goods to steal and neither alcohol nor drugs are within reach.

This year, Gytis Baltrunas and his colleagues hope to start build-



ing a new centre next to the old rectory building. The centre will house dormitories for the children as well as a kitchen, dining room, library and staff rooms. They also hope to build a barn together with the children. Working with animals will be one way to teach children practical skills while also providing the community with food.

“We expect that children will

CALENDAR

Education: The Right and Privilege of a Child
13-16 May 2001,
Tallinn, Estonia

Children's Rights in Europe
29-31 May 2001,
Örebro, Sweden

Workshop - Dissociation in Traumatized Children and Adolescents
14-15 September 2001,
Stockholm Sweden

Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
17-20 December 2001,
Yokohama, Japan

stay at our centre from six months to three years,” says Gytis Baltrunas. “Thereafter they will be given the opportunity to stay at a social rehabilitation house and choose between education or work. If they encounter problems, they can always return to our centre for assistance.”



Global review of agenda action

122 governments represented at the Congress in Stockholm 1996. “The countries were committed to implementing the Agenda for Action and in Yokohama we will review progress,” says Helena Karlén, member of the Executive Committee of ECPAT International. “So far some 40 countries have produced national plans of action and we expect more countries will feel the pressure to elaborate such plans before the Yokohama Congress.”

Each year, ECPAT has monitored developments in yearly reports. All United Nations Member States have been invited to attend and will be invited to present the progress achieved in their respective countries. “Some countries have made greater progress than others and will set good examples,” says Helena Karlén.

The follow-up Congress is necessary since the Stockholm Congress failed to agree on a follow-

up mechanism. “We hope, in future, that regular monitoring will be carried out within the United Nations system, perhaps under the auspices of the Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

Over the five years that have passed since the Stockholm Congress, general awareness of the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children have grown. “The major negative developments are the increase of child sexual exploitation associated with the Internet as well as the escalating trafficking in minors.”

The World Congress in Yokohama will furthermore invite the private sector to participate. Support from, for example, the travel and tourism industry, Internet Service Providers and the media is needed to prevent commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Yokohama Congress will also allow for 100 youth participants.

Preparations are now well under way for the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, which will be held in Yokohama in December. The Congress is hosted by the Japanese Government in co-operation with ECPAT, UNICEF and the NGO Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Congress will primarily review progress in implementing the Agenda for Action, which was unanimously adopted by the