



## Scotland's First Bairns Hoose

*Strangers and silent halls; Need to get my feelings out in a place that feels like home; I don't want to be alone just want to paint the pictures on the wall.*

*When I scream do you listen? I didn't come to lie; Open your mind.*

### ***Sophie's Song***<sup>1</sup>

- **Scotland's justice system needs reform to meet the needs of vulnerable victims and witnesses.** At the moment, the system itself creates standalone trauma – often reported to be more harmful than the incident itself.
- Thanks to an award from players of the [People's Postcode Lottery](#) through the Postcode Dream Trust, [Children 1<sup>st</sup>](#), [Victim Support Scotland](#), [The University of Edinburgh](#) and [Children England](#) are piloting **Scotland's first Bairns Hoose**.
- This is based on an alternative model first developed in Iceland, called Barnahus. The Barnahus brings together justice, health, social work and recovery support, 'under one roof' to best meet the needs of child victims and witnesses.
- A Programme for Government commitment to make the 'Bairns Hoose' available to all eligible children in Scotland by 2025 was included in the 2021-22 Programme for Government. This commitment must translate into radical investment and system change – it cannot be met through making minor adaptations to the current system.

## What is a 'Barnahus'?

First established in Iceland in 1998 and drawing from Children's Advocacy Centres in the USA, a 'Barnahus' brings together the separate but connected aims of helping child victims and witnesses **recover emotionally and physically** and gathering **legally robust evidence**.

A Barnahus must be a child-friendly environment, which includes four key services, known as the '[four rooms](#)': Child protection, health, police investigation and judicial procedures, mental wellbeing and recovery support. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> This is taken from 'Sophie's Song', shared with Children 1<sup>st</sup> through the Stories for Change project, where a ten-year-old girl loved music and wanted to share her views through creating a song about her experience of being interviewed due to domestic abuse in the family home. In the song, she is going to a Vulnerable Witness Suite to give evidence for court. She feels alone as her mother cannot be with her due to having to give evidence at court on the same day. You can see further Stories for Change here: [sharing-stories-for-change-impact-report-december-2021.pdf \(children1st.org.uk\)](#).



The model is underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (the UNCRC) and can adapt to the particular needs of different justice and health systems. This has been shown across Europe – in Sweden in 2005, Norway in 2007, Greenland in 2011, Denmark in 2013. With 25 years' worth of evidence and understanding to draw from, best practice is now well understood. This is reflected in the [European PROMISE standards](#). Scottish Ministers have [committed](#) to base Scotland's National Barnahus Standards on this model to be published in May 2023.

At the heart of the Barnahus is a trauma-informed, multi-disciplinary approach which unites services for child victims and witnesses and their families, reducing the number of times a story needs to be told, and ensuring that the rights of children to justice, care and protection are upheld. This not only reduces the burden on children who have been harmed but can support better evidence for trial.<sup>2</sup>

## Why should Scotland use this model?

Scotland's justice system needs radical reform to prevent more trauma being caused. The number of children who are victims and witnesses who are involved in court proceedings is not available, but thousands of children and families experience the Scotland's child protection and justice system every year. In 2017, it [had been estimated](#) that 4,900 Joint Investigative Interviews were conducted annually across Scotland.

While recent changes such as the improved approach to Joint Investigative Interviews and improved access to court special measures have arguably improved the experience for some, traumatic experiences for victims and witnesses are still too common.

The Scottish Parliament's former Justice Committee [recognised](#) the "compelling case" for bringing a Barnahus model to Scotland in 2019, and manifestos for the 2021 Holyrood election showed cross-party support. The Scottish Youth Parliament have [supported](#) the model and the Scottish Government [committed](#) to ensure all eligible children have access to a "Bairns' Hoose" by 2025 in the 2021-22 Programme for Government.

## What's happened in Scotland so far?

In April 2020, Children 1st, Victim Support Scotland, Children England and the University of Edinburgh joined forces to create Scotland's first Bairns Hoose. This will be based in West of Scotland, working closely with the North Strathclyde Partnership piloting the new Scottish Child Interview model of practice. This involves specially trained police and social work from four local authorities and two police divisions with recovery support through the child's journey provided by Children 1st. The first Bairns Hoose will open this summer.

Scottish National Barnahus Standards were commissioned by the Scottish Government and produced by Health Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate. These will be agreed in the coming months,

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<sup>2</sup> [Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service](#) (March 2015), Evidence and Procedure Review Report, paragraphs 2.1-2.3.



and these should echo the European PROMISE Barnahus Quality Standards in a Scottish context. Children 1st have advocated for the draft Standards to be braver, bolder and clearer.

## What needs to happen next?

Despite widespread support and good progress, the journey to bring the Bairns Hoose to Scotland has only just started. The Scottish Government ambition of making a Bairns Hoose accessible to all those eligible across Scotland by 2025 is a hugely commendable but equally ambitious goal.

The multidisciplinary and interagency provision of Barnahus between police, social work, health and the judiciary in the best interests of children requires transformational ways of working collaboratively. This commitment must translate into radical investment and system change – it cannot be met through making minor adaptations to the current system.

### **Contact and organisational details**

#### **Children 1<sup>st</sup>**

At Children 1st our ambition is for every child in Scotland to be safe, loved and well, together with their family. As a charity we offer emotional and practical support and financial advice to help families to put children first and campaign to uphold the rights of every child.

Further information can be found at the Children 1st website: [Bairns Hoose | Children 1st | Children 1st](#). For questions, clarifications or requests for further information please contact [lily.humphreys@children1st.org.uk](mailto:lily.humphreys@children1st.org.uk).

#### **Victim Support Scotland**

Victim Support Scotland (VSS) is the leading charity dedicated to helping people affected by crime across Scotland. We support victims of crime, witnesses, and their family members regardless of when the crime took place or whether it has been reported to the police. We offer free, person-centred, confidential and trauma-informed support, tailored to the needs of the individual.

For further information on Bairns Hoose, Victims' Awareness Week or our wider policy objectives, please contact [evie.donaldson@victimssupportsco.org.uk](mailto:evie.donaldson@victimssupportsco.org.uk).