

# INTERIM REPORT

Engaging with children and young people:  
what does Barnahus mean to them?



Report written by Kim Coutts & Beth Farmer, Founders and Directors of GIFT  
Artwork by Sharon Caddie & the young people who wish to remain anonymous

### **Acknowledgements**

**The authors are grateful to all the young people whose participation and feedback made this project possible and to the families and staff who supported the participants throughout.**

# Introduction

Healthcare Improvement Scotland's Standards and Indicators team are working with the Care Inspectorate to develop a set of standards for a Barnahus model in Scotland. Barnahus, or Child's House, is a child-centred response for children who are victims or witnesses of serious crime and abuse.

In February 2021 Healthcare Improvement Scotland invited organisations to submit proposals for an engagement exercise to get feedback on the structure, layout, look and language of a set of standards for a Barnahus model in Scotland.

In March 2021 the Moira Anderson Foundation (MAF) partnered with Glasgow Initiative of Facilitation & Therapy (GIFT) to submit a proposal to facilitate a series of creative consultation sessions with children and young people to get feedback on the Barnahus Standards document, and were successful in their application.

A programme of workshops was subsequently designed that gave children and young people an opportunity to participate creatively in a safe space and was underpinned by the United Nations Conventions on Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Participants were sent a pack containing art making materials which they used as part of their engagement. The workshops included games, creative activities and space for discussion. Due to ongoing COVID restrictions at time of delivery all sessions were facilitated via Zoom. In order to support the young people to participate the facilitators had to be flexible in their approach.

This interim report presents some of the findings, feedback and recommendations from the young people who took part in the workshops and interviews so far in order to inform and influence Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate with the development of the final 'Standards' document.

# Our Approach

In May our recruitment phase commenced - we designed a digital flyer which we shared with 17 organisations, and used social media to widen the reach. This resulted in 16 young people joining the project with a view to participating in the workshops. To date we have delivered 6 group workshops and 2 individual interviews with 9 young people attending in total.

Risk assessments were conducted to inform our decisions about the delivery of the workshops. This was an essential part of the planning to ensure the safety of the participants, and something we reviewed on an ongoing basis.

We created Participant and Barnahus Information Sheets alongside a consent form. This made up the welcome pack which each young person received, together with a carefully considered art pack that took into account the various aspects of the young people environments. The art materials included a selection of pens and pencils, a selection of papers in various colours, letter stamps and collage materials.

We ran two introductory sessions with the goal of meeting the participants and sharing some information about the project as well as explaining the plan for the upcoming sessions. Check-in and icebreaker activities were used to open the session and help everyone settle in.



Art pack sent out to participants

## The Creative Delivery

During the first workshops, to provide the young people with a high level introduction to the Barnahus, we shared an overview of the current process when a child makes a disclosure about abuse, versus what it would be like if Scotland implemented the Barnahus model. This led to a discussion with the young people about what "house" means to them and we introduced the four key areas which make up the Barnahus: Criminal Investigation, Child Protection, Physical Health and Mental Health.

These discussion topics were set within a framework of check-in, warm up and creative activities both to make the sessions fun but also to initiate some art making from the young people. In this first session we worked with the participants to explore how different feelings were represented through line, colour and shapes.

As a result of the feedback and reflections on the first workshops we designed a set of creative worksheets with prompts which invited the young people to provide a visual response to them, to encourage a creative dialogue through the exploration of colour and mark making. These were sent out to the young people prior to the second workshop.

In workshop two, in parallel with art making, we had a discussion about the four 'rooms' which make up the Barnahus. This gave an opportunity for the young people to share their lived experiences of the journey which follows a disclosure of abuse. In both 2:1 interviews we facilitated an in depth discussion to gather thoughts on the structure, layout and look of the draft 'Standards' document.

'Somewhere I feel  
safe'

'Somewhere I feel  
myself'

Exploring the topic of 'house' with participants

# The Creative Consultation

In the first workshops we introduced the idea of the Barnahus and looked at what the current procedures are like for children and young people. None of the participants knew what the Barnahus was however, all of the young people were shocked at the number of professionals a child or young person may have to currently speak to, with one young person commenting that it **“is terrible, you shouldn't need to do that”**.

The majority of young people taking part have lived experience of the current procedures. One young person spoke openly about their own experience stating that what had been described in the example was exactly what had happened to their 4 year old sibling and that this has impacted on their sibling's mental health, explaining **“I feel like talking to that amount of people is what caused [my sister] to blame herself for quite some time.”**

One young person thought that change was needed and that the Barnahus was **“a good thing because in that way, you don't need to keep going to 14 different people to chat to and get help.”**

Thinking about their lived experiences, the young people explored what a Barnahus would mean to them:

- A place of safety
- Trust
- Honesty
- A better future
- Childrens voices are important
- A comfortable place to talk



'What does Barnahus mean?' Image created by participant

# Creative Responses to the Barnahus

Through workshops the word 'safety' was a recurring theme and we started to think about what that sense of 'safety' looked like as a colour, a line or a mark for the young people. For many of the participants they associated 'safety' with a sense of feeling cosy or, as one young person described it **"a warm, comfortable environment"**.

The young people felt that this would be best represented by colours such as reds and oranges; some of the young people described it as bright colours **"like purples and pinks, and reds and yellows and greens;"** other young people were drawn to more **"calming colours, neutral colours."**

In the next step of the process, we asked the young people to consider how different feelings would be represented visually.

The participants felt that positive feelings could be conveyed through **"soft scribbles, wavy lines, and curvy lines,"** with one young person making the observation that **"if it was zig zags it would be angry"** and that **"calming is more smooth and wavy."**

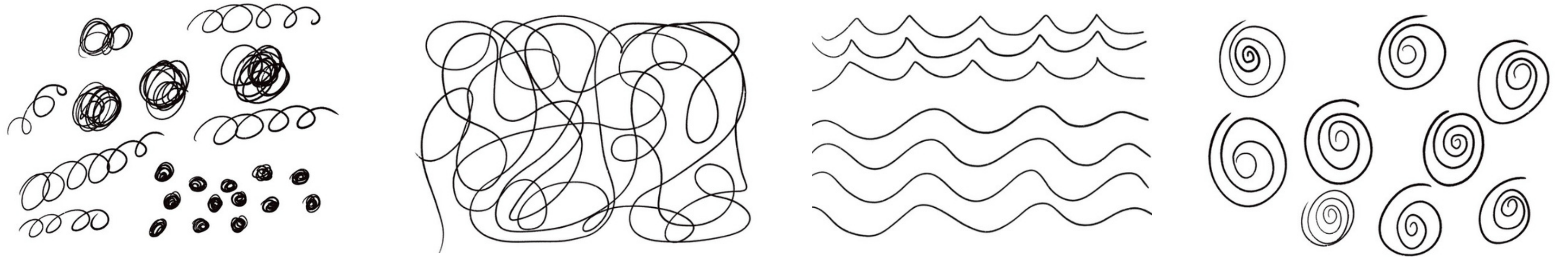
We ended with an exercise exploring the physical components of a house and how that can be broken down into individual shapes. One young person commented **"if you put a triangle and rectangle together you would get a house."** The standard imagery associated with a house was not something that the young people could connect with as many live in flats therefore many felt more connected to **"squares, rectangles & parallelograms."**



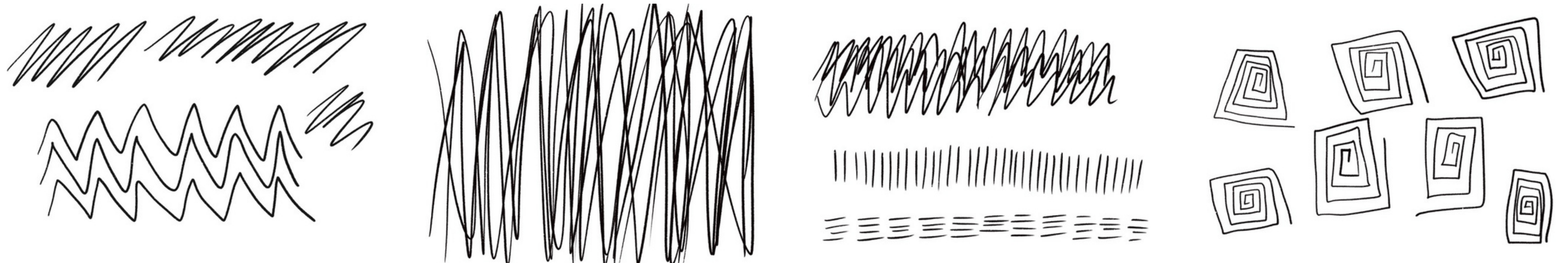
Sample of colours chosen by young people

# Samples of Creative Responses

Examples of lines that represent positive feelings of 'safety' and 'calm'



Examples of lines that represent negative feelings





## What does Child-Friendly really mean?

When reflecting on what Barnabus means to young people, 'child-friendly' was a recurring term used in the documents which the participants explored through discussion and art making. A number of participants felt that it was **"about the space, environment, language"** that would **"not harm a child physically or mentality"** and **"somewhere you feel safe, somewhere that you feel yourself and that you can be yourself."**

This led to a conversation about the importance of including children's voices. One participant noted **"100% yeah, you can't have a safe space, if you're not going to involve the children...you can't exactly have it all be about adult talk about adults when it's not about them. Like I don't think that that would sit right with me. Like, as a child, you want to hear other children's voices to feel safe."**

The young people highlighted the importance of having the opportunity to speak to and hear from their peers who have had similar experiences. One young person said **"it made my feel like I wasn't alone"** another commented **"I felt like relief that I could talk"** and another said **"I'm going to speak up and tell them more about what I went through, so that they don't feel alone either."**

They felt that it was essential for the children's voices to be included in the 'Standards' document, with one participant saying that **"by hearing it from another wee boy or another wee lassie, saying that this is safe...is very, very, very valid."**

"a safe place that is comfortable, where children have the freedom to get on with their lives and not worry"

What child-friendly means to one young person

# The Standards Document

Using the PROMISE Barnahus Quality Standards as a starting point we worked with the young people to explore the look, layout and feel of a 'Scottish Standards' document. The participants had some strong feelings on the length of the document (173 pages), with one young person commenting **"I've never seen one, but I'd probably run;"** another young person responded with humour saying a document that length was **"redonkulous."** The general consensus was that the document should be **"short and sweet."**

The young people felt that there should be **"less words, more pictures, more colour."** They liked the use of photographs within the document and this helped them to visualise what the physical space within a 'Barnahus' would be like, easing any anxieties.

Imagery was an important feature that came up in several discussions as it was felt that **"some pictures"** and **"diagrams"** would help children and young people understand what would happen to them once they're in a Barnahus. Professionals explaining the process step by step was something which also came up during the discussions with one young person telling us **"to me, it would be talking the child through every step that you do to them"** and another participant said **"tell me every single step."**

In summary the young people felt it was important for the document to clearly outline the processes that form the Barnahus structure using words and visuals.

"what the process is like,  
what questions would be  
asked, what steps might be  
taken in an examination so  
that you kind of know  
what's going to happen"

One young person's description of what's important to them

## Accessing Information

During the workshops a point that was discussed frequently was how young people accessed information. This was not only important for us as facilitators to understand so that we could ensure the young people had the right technical support to access workshops, but to also understand what it's like as a young person trying to find out information that impacts their lives and also empowers them.

All of the young people we spoke to used phones or tablets and would access all of their information online, with some using social media platforms such as Facebook to find out what is happening in the world. For some of the young people, phones were a safe device however others felt that the rise in scam texts and online trolling made phones feel unsafe.

Privacy was important to the young people with some not wanting to share information on social media because it made them feel vulnerable disclosing personal information; one participant commented **"not social media as I didn't want people to know my business."** Others used virtual private networks (VPN), to protect their identity and browsing activity as the VPN hides their data and IP address.

A number of the young people spoke about having dyslexia and how this impacts on their experiences of reading documents. For one young person **"it was like the words were floating around on the page"** and they couldn't focus, **"so like see if there's nothing there it feels like they're like moving about."** However the introduction of a colour overlay reading aid feels like **"the words are being held down"** and **"pushing them on the paper."**

One young person also wanted to highlight what it feels like to have dyslexia and dyspraxia and how this impacts on their ability to interpret auditory messages: **"my dyspraxia and dyslexia sit on top of each other, because they're from the same part of the brain."**

## Lived Experience of the Current System

Through our discussions the young people had the courage to speak about their lived experiences. Although this doesn't inform the design of the 'Standards' document, it should inform how we as professionals communicate with and support young people who have experienced trauma and abuse.

One young person wanted to share how they felt let down by the system: **"we feel as if we should be able to trust them, and that they should be able to handle the situation. But then in reality, it turns out, you can't trust them and you can't rely on their support. You feel hurt inside because you thought these are people we could trust. They're supposed to protect us by putting the law in place, but instead they let people like that go free."**

Another participant wanted to share a positive experience of the system: **"so I couldn't have more respect for Child Protection. I really respect Child Protection. I still have me and [my sister's] Child Protection officer's phone number. As she said she'll answer the phone anytime she can. So it's important to be able to contact that person all the time. [The Child Protection Officer] is lovely. She says she's always there for us, like emotionally support us."**

They also felt it was important for professionals to understand how their own interactions with children or young people who have dyspraxia and dyslexia can have a negative impact, creating feelings of anxiety in the child or young person.

"she was the one who did my interview. And she did it really slowly. She broke it down. She gave me a minute to cry when I needed to cry"

Young person's experience of support that they received

# Summary of Young Peoples Creative Recommendations

## Variation in Documents to meet needs of potential readers:

- Children and young people
- Parents and carers
- Professionals

## Length of Document

- Needs to be concise
- Summary versions should be made available

## Use of Imagery - Images can help communicate messages

- Photographs
- Illustrations
- Diagrams

## Colour Palette and Contrast

- Bright Colours - Red, Yellow, Pink, Purple, Green, Orange
- Balance cool colours with warm colours
- Use a varied mix of font colours

## Layout

- Orientation - Landscape
- Organise body of text through the use of headings, subheadings and main body of text highlighting where a section begins and ends.
- Columns to break pages up
- Bullet points were important to be able to understand information

## Quotes from Children and Young People

- Important to hear voices of children and young people

## Publication should be available in different formats

- Printed version
- Available on website - either as PDF documents or as webpages

## Auditory & Visual Processing

- Consider readers who have dyslexia & dyspraxia
- Sensory aspects need to be considered such as type of paper

## Consultation with Art Director

After the workshops we took the feedback and creative responses, together with the Healthcare Improvement Scotland draft 'Standards' document for Scotland and we shared them with the Art Director recruited for the project.

We agreed with the Art Director that she would design an example of one of the 'Standards' using colours and imagery created by the young people during the creative consultations, whilst communicating the information in the most simple and effective way.

One of the key considerations was that the document produced needed to be guided by the children and young people's comments and that we needed to ensure that the final design mirrored their creativity and feedback.

The design process was carefully considered to include aspects of the participants artwork as every colour and mark made was a reflection of their lived experiences. The document produced is a first draft and included in the Appendix of this report.

We are continuing to consult with participants on the design of this document so that we can collaborate with them to develop it further, and at the same time ensuring that all their voices are heard and included.

"Absolutely love, love, love this, so in touch with the ideas of what you associate with a child, with the wee scribbles and the kinda vibrant colours and I think everything is so pulled together."

Initial response from a young person to the first design draft

## Looking to the Future

The more that we listened to the young people, the clearer it became that further consultations with children and young people are essential to move forward with the development of the 'Scottish Standards' document. One young person summed it up very well: **"it would be good to hear more voices from children of all different ages, from all different kinds of backgrounds."**

From the consultations so far it has become apparent that creating a website where the 'Standards' can be accessed by children, families and professionals is essential in providing information and raising awareness of the Barnabus. Based on the young people's feedback it was felt that the format of a website would enable people to access information that was perceived to be complex in a simple and effective way. Further engagement with children and young people would be critical in the creation of such a platform.

We would recommend that additional consultations are also necessary to develop a set of accessible format versions of the 'Standards' as the resources we've had access to have not enabled this so far in the project.

The use of social media to share information on the 'Standards' would also need to be explored further as the majority of the young people said that they would use platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Tick Tock to inform and educate themselves. However assumptions on how they engage with social media shouldn't be made because it is clear that privacy is of utmost importance to young people.



Young person's creative response to the PROMISE document

## Final Thoughts

This project was designed to understand what the Barnahus means to children and young people and to get their feedback on the look, layout and feel of the standards document. Through discussions and workshops the young people shared their lived experiences and the need for professionals to understand how current systems impact the young people's mental health and wellbeing, while at the same time producing a set of creative recommendations for a 'Scottish Standards' document. This project will hopefully embed the values of the young people's contributions.

Throughout this project we have been committed to the principles of the UNCRC - they've not only been important to the project but it is clear that rights are important to the young people too - displayed through the language that they use and their values. One participant commented **"yeah, because I was old enough to make decisions on where I wanted to stay and who I wanted to go with. I use my rights. So I think rights are a good thing. Because whatever your rights you should use them."**

The best interests of the participants were central to our design and delivery to ensure that no one was negatively impacted by participating. We did this by continually risk assessing, monitoring and re-evaluating which allowed us to accommodate the individual needs of the young people. The young people's courage and enthusiasm to talk honestly and openly about their thoughts and feelings in relation to the Barnahus and the 'Standards' document has driven this project forward and has been essential in the co-design process with the Art Director in designing an example 'Standard.'

We originally set out to consult with children and young people, their families and professionals. However, due to the restrictions brought about by COVID, the recruitment of participants was limited due to a number of factors including staff capacity. This ultimately led us to focus on the voices of the young people who had agreed to participate. One of our aims was to recognise and celebrate the contributions made by the young people who have taken part - we hope that this project has given them a platform to share their voices.



# **Appendix - The Barnahus Standards**

1st edition produced in collaboration with the young people who  
attended the workshops and interviews

Created by Sharon Caddie, Art Director & Designer

The names and ages of children contained within the document are fictional.

# Appendix - Barnahus Standards





“

A safe place that is comfortable  
where children have the freedom to  
get on with their lives and not worry.”

Charlie, 8

# summary of standards



- 1** The best interests of the child, including their right to be heard and receive support without undue delay are central to the Barnahus.
  - 2** The Barnahus is formally embedded in national child protection, justice and health partnerships, systems and processes. Each Barnahus has formal structures in place to ensure coordinated, consistent and integrated working.
  - 3** Each Barnahus ensures that is inclusive and accessible to all children who are victims and/or witnesses of violence.
  - 4** The premises are safe, friendly, welcoming, homely, child centred and accessible, including for disabled children and children with additional support needs.
  - 5** Interagency case planning, management and review in the Barnahus are formalised by statutory procedures and mutually agreed practice.
  - 6** Joint investigative interviews carried out in the Barnahus support the child to tell their story, avoid re-traumatisation, and minimise reinterviewing.
  - 7** Each Barnahus ensures that healthcare assessment and provision is timely, child centred and responsive to the needs of the child.
  - 8** Each Barnahus provides immediate trauma-informed support and ensures that longer term therapeutic care is provided for each child and their family.
  - 9** Each Barnahus ensures that staff receive appropriate training, development and support appropriate to their roles and responsibilities.
  - 10** The Barnahus demonstrates leadership in the response to and prevention of violence against children through information collection, research and external engagement.
- 

standard 1



# key principles of the Barnahaus model

## Standard statement

Each Barnahaus upholds the best interests of the child, their right to be heard and receive information, and to prevent undue delay.

Relevant European Standards: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

### Rationale

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 3 outlines the general principle that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration.

Article 39 of the UNCRC states that all appropriate measures should be taken to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts.

When responding to children who are victims and witnesses of violence, services should consider the best interests of the child throughout the process. Continuous or undue delay to investigative procedures compounds trauma in a child who has experienced or witnessed violence.

Measures should be put in place to prevent or reduce this delay and minimize the number of times a child retells their story.

"children and young people should be given the opportunity to be heard"

Article 12(2) of the UNCRC states that all children and young people should be given the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting them.

Creative methodologies and active engagement should be used to support children and young people to participate in and shape services.

Where children have experienced violence, approaches to develop service-level participation should be responsive to the needs of individuals.

In order to fully participate, children, young people and their family must be given an equitable opportunity to be involved.

Standards of service for victims and witnesses of crime outline that all victims and witnesses should be fully informed and able to meaningfully participate in proceedings.



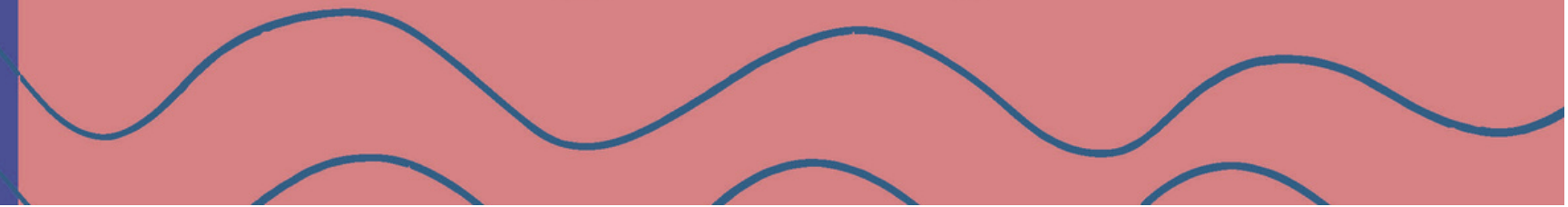


**1** The best interests of the child are paramount.

**2** Each Barnahus will support the team around the child, where the child has such a team, to assess and plan for the best interests of each child.

**3** Each Barnahus ensures that the child is listened to and treated with compassion and respect.

**4** The child can choose to be supported and accompanied by a supportive adult throughout the process.



**5** The child's right to express their views and receive information are respected and fulfilled.

**6** The child has a right to physical and psychological recovery and is supported to participate in the activities and interests that matter to them.

**7** The child can access support, even where there is no ongoing child protection or legal investigation.



8 The Barnahus provides a welcoming, homely and calm place for children and their families.



“

Children's voices are as valid as adult voices.

”

Jenny, 12

**9** Each Barnahus can demonstrate how a child and their family have influenced or directed the timing, location and nature of their support.

If these wishes cannot be met, the reasons are fully explained.



**10** Each Barnahus:

- provides opportunities for children and families to share feedback using sensitive, person centred and trauma informed practice
- can demonstrate how the views of children and their families have shaped the service, and
- has an accessible, independent complaints procedure.

**11** Each Barnahus enables the child and their family to know what is happening and receive information and advice that is:

- adapted to their age and development
- in a format they understand
- relevant
- consistent, and
- timely.

**12** All legal requirements under the Equality Act 2010 should be met to ensure that disabled children and children with additional support needs are not discriminated against in the provision of the Barnahus service.



**13** Measures are taken to avoid undue delay, ensuring that investigative interviews, child protection assessments, mental health assessments, and medical examinations take place within agreed timescales.

**14** Each Barnahus can demonstrate effective collection, monitoring and evaluation of data about the service, with action taken to improve the service as a result.

What does the standard mean for children and young people, and where appropriate their families?

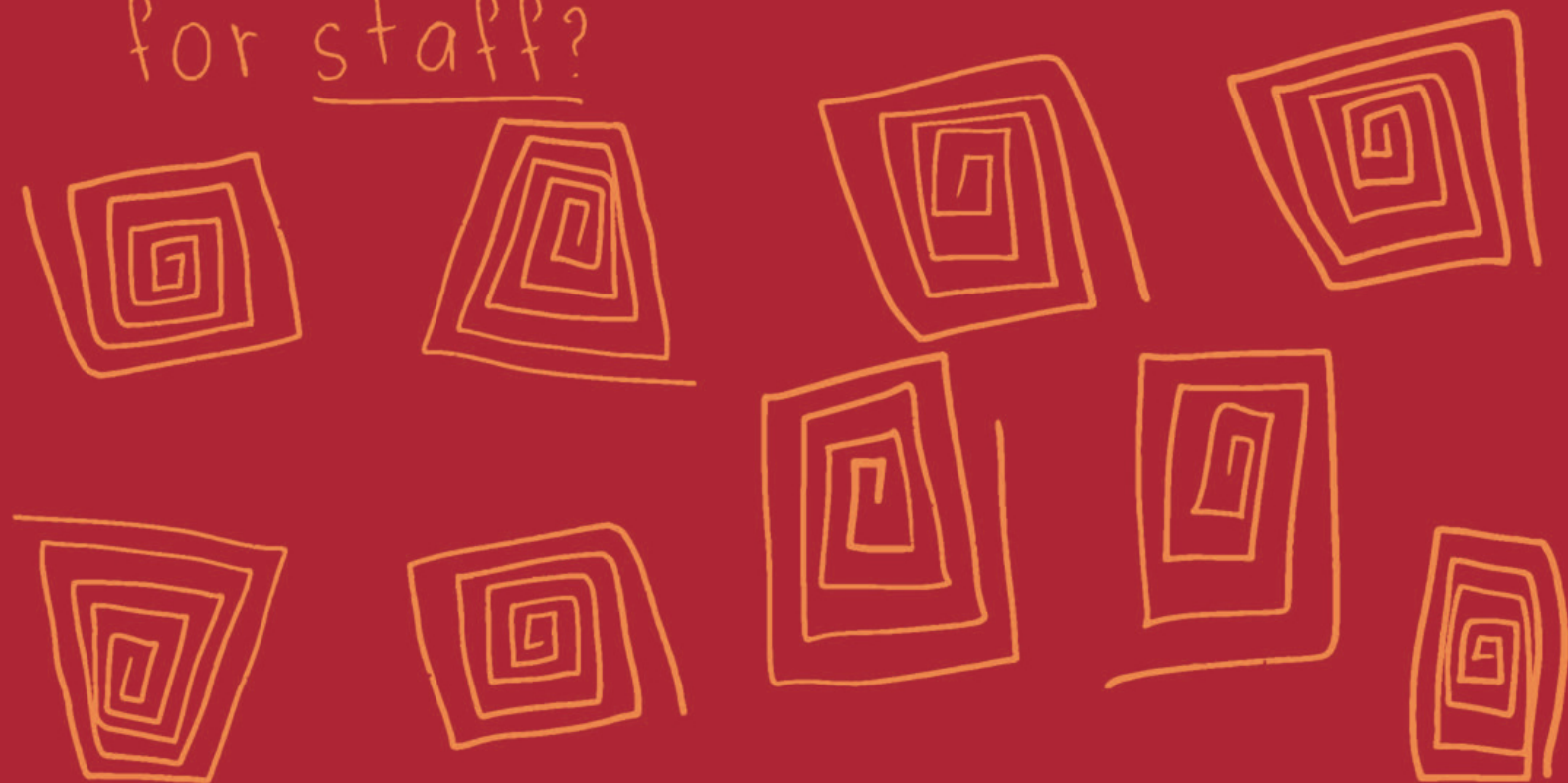


You:



- can be **confident** that your best interests are at the heart of all decisions, actions and responses
- will be taken seriously and your experiences will be **listened** to carefully
- will get the support you need and be treated with respect and **compassion**
- will receive information, **care** and **support** that is tailored to you
- will be able to tell us your **thoughts** on your experience and tell us if there's any way we can improve things for other children

What does the  
standard mean  
for staff?



## Staff:

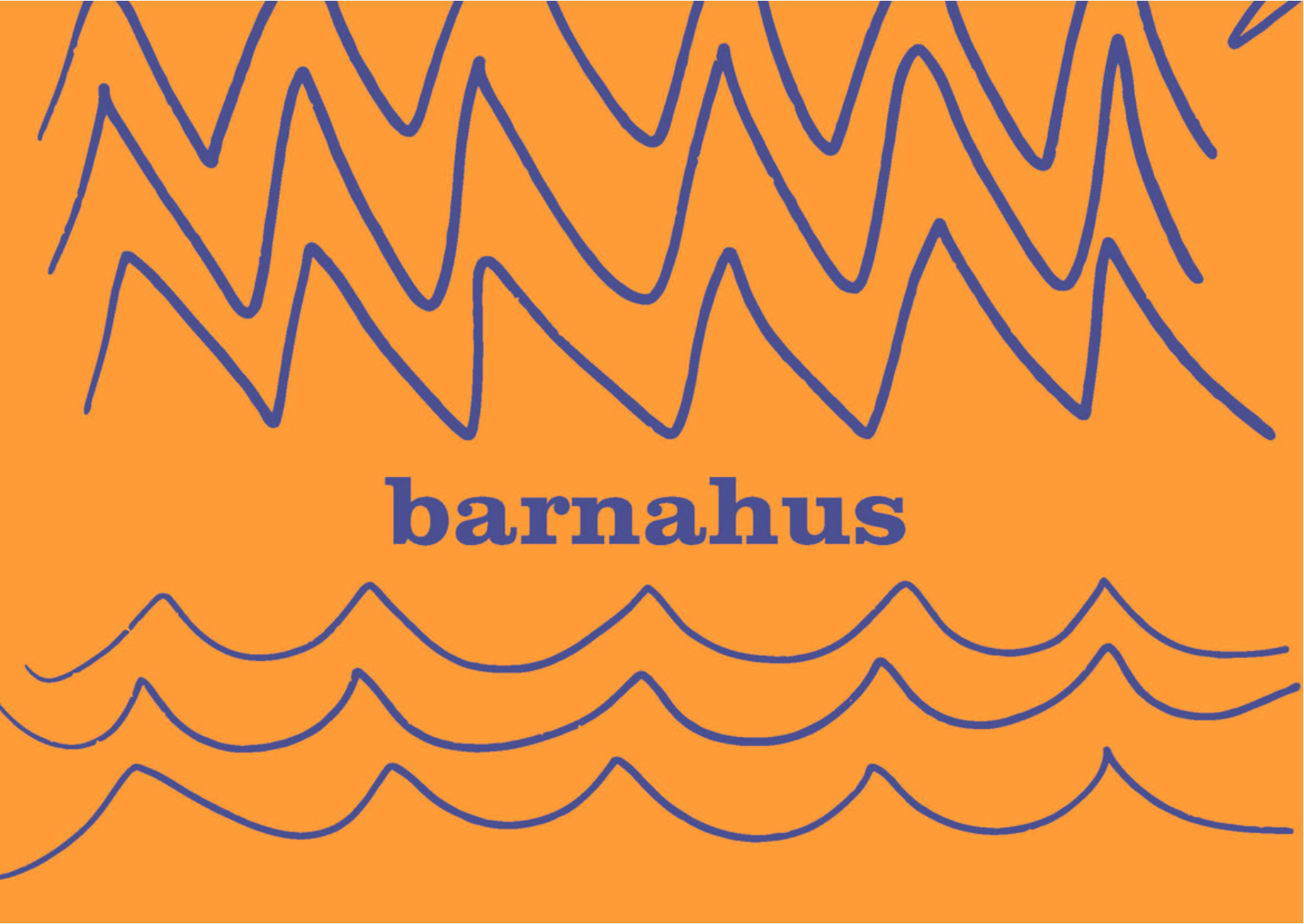
- ensure that the **best interests of the child** are a **primary consideration of all actions and decisions**
- **understand** their roles and responsibilities
- are trained and competent take a **child rights-based approach in assessing and determining the best interests of the child, and deliver care and support that is respectful and compassionate**
- **work effectively and in a timely fashion to ensure that children and young people can access appropriate care and support when they need it**
- provide children and young people, and where appropriate their families, with **responsive and appropriate information and support, taking account the diversity of experiences, needs, abilities, and cultural backgrounds**

What does the  
standard mean  
for organisations?

## Organisations:

The organisation/service:

- supports staff to work effectively across agencies
- ensures that staff receive training and support appropriate to their respective roles and responsibilities
- ensures that all children and young people, and where appropriate their families feel supported, and involved in all aspects of decision making, including feedback regarding decisions made
- provides opportunities for people to request the support that is right for them, and acts on these requests
- commits to improving its service through regular reflection and review (which includes the experiences of children and families).



**barnahus**