

**A report to the OHCHR, prepared for the  
Universal Periodic Review of Iceland  
by NGO, Blátt áfram – CSA prevention organization,**

**Executive summary:**

The NGO Blátt Áfram is the leading grass roots child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention organization in Iceland. In this report we highlight the situation of CSA in Iceland, raise issues and concerns about certain factors, and offer suggestions for improvements. The main issues raised are the lack of CSA education and prevention in the Icelandic educational system, lack of policies with regard to the subject in government institutions and organisations working with children, and concerns about the structure of child services in the country.

**Key words:** Child sexual abuse, prevention policies, education and training, structure of child services.

## **1. The general situation of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in Iceland.**

According to an Icelandic survey conducted between 2000 and 2001, 17% of children in the country have been sexually abused before reaching the age of eighteen<sup>1</sup>.

According to articles 16 and 17 of the Child Services Act (80/2002), it is the uncontroversial duty of whoever has suspicion of a child suffering violence or abuse, particularly those working with children, to report such suspicions to child services. Training and education about appropriate reaction in the case of CSA suspicion and where to turn to is therefore an essential part of the duties of those working with children. Blátt áfram has noticed that even though most people working with children seem to have knowledge of how and to whom to report CSA, many hesitate to do so due to; lack of initiative, insecurity, fear and a tendency to doubt the validity of children's CAS reports. Therefore additional training and encouragement of unconditional reporting is needed.

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<sup>1</sup> Hrefna Ólafsdóttir (2010). Faraldsfræði kynferðislegrar misnotkunar gegn börnum. Í (ritstj.) Svala Ísfeld Ólafsdóttir, *Kynferðisofbeldi gegn börnum*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

## **2. Blatt Afram would like to draw attention to the following facts:**

- No comprehensive policies with regard to CSA education exist within university faculties educating and training teachers and other professionals working with children, health professionals, lawyers or the police force. The level of education for these professionals is entirely based on the interest and personal effort of individual professors of those faculties. None of these faculties have had any discussions on the effect of the Internet on CSA.

(see report in Icelandic on the issue:

<http://www.barnaheill.is/barnaheill/images/stories/skjol/barnaheilluttek07.pdf>)

- There are no organized programs for educating or preventing CSA in the countries pre-schools and elementary schools, neither for staff nor children. The level of activity entirely depends on the presence of an enlightened individual working at the school or an active PTA.
- There are no clear policies and procedures for institutions or organization working with children, such as schools, sports clubs or organizations conducting other extracurricular activities for children, on how to deal with and react to CSA. These policies should in addition to stating how to react and report CSA have clear guidelines regarding child-adult interactions, regarding procedures for hiring employees, and on consequences of staff violations.
- The general policy in the country seems to be that adults receive the benefit of the doubt, children do not.
- After abuse has been reported to child services, there is no formal dialogue between the child services and the child's school.
- Child services are composed of politically appointed representatives. Some of these representatives have no formal training or qualifications for dealing with cases of child abuse.

- The Child Services are scattered around the country and are in essence too many for the size of the population. This decreases their effectiveness, increases the risk of biases, and lowers the level of professionalism.

### **3. Blatt Afram would like to offer the following suggestions for improvements:**

- Education about CSA and CSA prevention should become a formal part of the curriculum of faculties training teachers and other professionals working with children, as well as for faculties training health professionals, lawyers and police officers.
- Government and municipalities would benefit from establishing service contracts with grass-root organization offering good quality education and consulting for organizations working with children.
- Government funded organizations should not receive funding approvals unless they comply with operating procedures and scanning procedures established to protect children and improve the protection of people working with children that report CSA.
- The child services should be united into a country wide institution. All reports of CSA should be directed to this institution and cases assigned by professionals to appropriate parties depending on the seriousness of the case. One institution would ensure more professional and effective working procedures, more effective follow-ups and ensure cooperation and coordination of other institutions involved. This would result in better support and services to children.

#### **4. About the NGO:**

Blatt Afram, (pronounced: blout a-from) which translates as “Straight Forward,” was created in 2003 by twin sisters, Svava and Sigga Bjornsdottir who themselves were sexually abused as young children growing up in Iceland but who sought to turn around their misfortune by helping others. Blatt Afram is the leading grass roots child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention organization in Iceland. The organization’s purpose is to educate adults about child sexual abuse and how it can be prevented. Blatt Afram’s mission is to end the cycle of child sex abuse and break the conspiracy of silence around this most devastating and pervasive social issue by educating adults and creating greater awareness within the community, media and government.

The organization focuses on primary and secondary prevention. Primary prevention refers to specific measures which stop or reduce the possibility of violent events from occurring in the first place and which do so across a large portion of the community. Secondary prevention refers to the early identification and amelioration of situations which could otherwise potentially lead to violence.

The organization conducts general education on CSA as well as specialised training for pre-school and elementary school teachers and staff. Blatt Afram is actively involved in educating all adults who work with children and teenagers on how to look for the signs of sexual abuse, and what potential steps should be taken if they suspect a child is being abused. Furthermore the organization has conducted seminars for teenagers and puppet-show for children in order to educate them and encourage them to report any type of sexual abuse. These efforts have resulted in an increased rate of reporting of CSA, both by children and adults who work with children or teenagers. Since its foundation in 2004, Blatt afram has helped many children, teenagers and their families. The organization’s message is one of hope, healing and progress, not blame and anger. This has helped many children and adults seek help, something that was almost completely unavailable previously.

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