

CHANGEFACTORY 2023

from children
in Norway:
our list prior
to reporting



About Changefactory Knowledge Centre

Why knowledge directly from children?

Children and young people must feel that the school, kindergarten, help services, police and legal system are safe and useful for them. Children and young people all over Norway have experiences of meeting these systems and advice about how they can be the best possible. Authorities, professionals and students often lack this knowledge from children and young people, when frameworks and what constitutes good practice are to be determined, nationally and locally. Therefore, knowledge from children must be brought in to a much greater extent and, together with other knowledge, be part of the knowledge base, when developing and ensuring the quality of good systems for children and young people.

More than 10 years of collecting knowledge

Changefactory (CF) has, since 2009 systematically collected experiences and advice from children and young people about how they experience school, kindergarten, help services, the police and the legal system. Young people from 13 years old are invited to present the knowledge to politicians, bureaucrats, professionals and students. In 2017, the Prime Minister opened the Changefactory Knowledge Centre.

Children and young people in the different systems are invited to share experiences and give advice. They're invited in collaboration with professionals in the different systems. Over the last decade, CF has collected answers from 2200 children in mental health care, 2200 children in the child protection system, over 700 children in kindergarten, 8000 in school, over 300 children in conflict with the law (suspected or charged with crime) and more than 200 children who have been subjected to domestic violence or sexual abuse and have met the police. CF has also collected answers from over 300 young people who have struggled with drug abuse, and over 600 who have been subjected to domestic violence or sexual abuse.

Promoting children's procedural rights

Together with knowledge directly from children, CF promotes children's procedural rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. These rights strongly match what the knowledge from children emphasises as important for adults to realistically be able to cooperate with children. These rights are the child's right to sufficient and understandable information, to express themselves freely and to not have information from or about the child shared without the child's prior knowledge and the opportunity to express their views freely about the sharing of information. This must be ensured before an assessment can be made of what is in the best interests of the child.

Children and young people present, as pros

The knowledge from children is presented in reports, films, podcasts, books and online. Participants in the surveys that are 13-21 years old, can also be invited, as pros, to work with communication and professional development. The pros present knowledge directly from children to politicians, national authorities, professionals and students.

About consent and data protection

In line with CF's purpose and values, it is important that children and young people who participate in surveys and in CF's other activities feel safe and that their rights are secured. This also applies within consent and data protection. CF therefore provides good and understandable information about what children and young people can choose to participate in and what their participation entails. CF has good routines for data privacy and consent. Children over 16 can consent themselves. For children under 16, CF obtains consent from the children and their guardians.

About the Changemethod

Participatory and practice-oriented method

In order to collect, systematise and disseminate summarised experiences and advice from children and young people, a participatory and practice-oriented method is used. The method has been developed in close collaboration with children and young people and deeply respects that children have the right to express their opinion, in ways that feel safe for them. The method consists of process descriptions and tools that help many different children and young people to participate. CF has named it the Changemethod. It's based closely on a participatory method used in action research, called Participatory Learning and Action (PLA).

Safety is most important

The experiences and advice are collected at sessions. The sessions are organised with an emphasis on ensuring that they are experienced as safely as possible for the children and young people who participate. The adults who facilitate are, among other things, trained by pros to meet children and young people with openness and human warmth. This is based on knowledge from children about what adults have to be like, for children to be able to speak honestly.

Experiences and advice are summarised

Experiences and advice from the sessions are documented in transcripts and other written and visual documentation. The data is summarised and systematised. There are no links made to theory. Experiences and advice that are repeated by many children and young people in many places in the country, become the main answers. We call this knowledge directly from children.

Changefactory Knowledge Centre

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Photo: Morten Brun

Pictures are of participants in the project

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About this report

About how the report came to be

This report was written by children and young people in collaboration with “factory workers”. Some of the factory workers have law degrees.

The answers presented are based on (1) main responses from children and young people in the many surveys that Changefactory has conducted over the years, (2) specific advices and experiences from recent workshops with active pros, (3) advices from young people in four school classes around Norway, during February 2023.

(1) The surveys are conducted using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative method is the most important for us to ensure a range of experiences and understandings, and in-depth understanding of these. Answers that are repeated are summarised into main findings, without being linked to theory, and are presented as knowledge directly from children. The language used is as close as possible to the language used by the children themselves.

Changefactory’s surveys should not be considered research, but at the same time, they follow specific methodological requirements to ensure that we reliably document children’s experiences and advice. The summarised knowledge from children and young people is a supplement to research knowledge and enables better decisions to be made when services want to improve the way they work.

(2) Workshops/Weekend gatherings: Over the past two months, workshops have been held for active pros where they have used the main answers from the surveys as a starting point, and worked to refine and describe them.

(3) School classes: A temperature check has also been conducted in four school classes around the country to assess how children’s rights are being ensured in Norway today.

Consent and data protection in this report

Everyone depicted in the report has given written consent to participate. CF has obtained the written consent of both the children and those with parental responsibility when those depicted are under the age of 16. The legal basis for processing is the EU General Data Protection Regulation art. 6(1) a, in accordance with Norwegian law.

Norway and children’s rights

We know that many things work well for children in Norway.

We know that many professionals want to support and help children.

We know that many lawyers are working to ensure that the Convention on the Rights of the Child applies always and everywhere.

At the same time, children in Norway are reporting that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is being violated frequently and in all systems for children, including schools, support systems, and when children encounter the police. We believe this is because students and professionals are taught too little about how the Convention on the Rights of the Child should function in practice and what it takes for adults to ensure children’s rights.

We also believe that this is because the adults in Norway do not understand how crucial these rights are for children to feel safe and well.

A country with this many resources should be able to accomplish this

Summary

Below follows a summary of the main areas of concerns, key issues and challenges based on knowledge from children in Norway. Challenges and recommendations are further explained under the following sections.

A. General measures of implementation

- Students are not systematically taught how to ensure children’s procedural rights

B. General principles and civil rights and freedoms

- Students who are new in Norway lack necessary information and are often separated from Norwegian students
- As a group, children’s right to express themselves is often not ensured
- Interdisciplinary collaboration occurs without the child’s knowledge
- Children’s rights are not specified concretely enough in laws for children to notice it in practice

D. Violence against children

- It’s arbitrary whether children receive information about domestic violence and sexual abuse in kindergarten and school
- It’s arbitrary whether children get to speak alone with professionals
- Focusing on symptoms/behaviour makes it impossible for many children to speak up about domestic violence and sexual abuse
- Concerns reported to the child protection service are sent without the child’s knowledge

E. Family environment and alternative care

- The Child Protection Services do not arrange an atmosphere conducive to children speaking safely during the investigation-phase
- Children’s opinions are often not given due weight when child protective services wants to relocate children
- Extended use of standardised help and coercion in Residential Child Care Institutions
- Children’s rights often not ensured when deciding visitation rights

F. Disability, basic health and welfare

- Access to mental health care in municipalities vary
- Children rarely get to participate in deciding treatment in mental health care services.
- Challenges when psychotropic drugs are decided upon and little research
- There are too many opportunities to subject children to coercive measures in mental health care services

G. Education, leisure and cultural activities

- Students don’t have enough of a say on how school should be in order to learn and thrive as best as possible
- Extra help at school is decided without children having received enough information or expressed their views freely/safely about which help they want
- Children who are angry and use violence are stopped in unsafe ways that push children further out of school and society

H. Special protection measures

- Children get stopped by police without reasonable suspicion
- Children’s rights are often not ensured when children are interrogated
- Action days frighten children



These are stories from young people about when their right to privacy wasn't respected

I went to my teacher and my teachers boss multiple times telling them that I was struggling at school both in my work and my mental health and that I didn't want to be there as I felt like an outsider. They called my mum and told her I was not trying and I was distancing myself away from school life. However this wasn't the case. But because of what my teacher said to my mum it caused a lot of problems for me at home. This made me not want to go to my teacher again for help as I felt like no matter what I said, he never listened to me and just said the complete opposite to my mum.

At parent-teacher meetings, my parents find out stuff that's been happening at school because the teacher mentions it in a jokey way, like "yeah, there was quite a drama with the gang last week" and then starts talking about it. And sometimes it's even worse stuff that my parents find out because he mentions it kinda for fun. It's really annoying because it makes me lose trust in my teacher and I don't want to talk to him about things anymore. It also makes me more careful with who I trust and maybe even lose trust in all adults.

After something bad has happened, adults at school, like the class teacher, department head, and others can talk to each other about it. That makes it harder to trust other adults, and you start to lock things inside yourself. It gets harder for you when things get worse because you don't dare tell anyone. So it can be easier to make bad choices since you don't want to tell anyone. Bad choices can be anything from skipping classes, dropping out of school, and breaking rules.

When I directly asked them not to share or to stop talking about it, they kept doing it. No one said they were gonna share anything. I talked to someone about how things were awful at home and she said it was for my safety that she had to tell those at home that things were awful for me. It could've been dangerous for me. So that was really shitty. I haven't been able to trust any adults since then. It wasn't necessary information that they needed to bring up with my parents. I feel like they could've talked to me first about how they should say it.

I had a dad who was sick, and thought it was really hard. I trusted the school nurse. Eventually I dared telling her it was really tough that my dad was sick. When I came home from school that day, I noticed my parents had found out. I could see they were upset and worried about me. The consequences were that I stopped seeing the school nurse. It didn't feel like I could trust her anymore, when she had shared a secret like that.

When I was admitted to the psychiatric emergency ward after a suicide attempt, my mother called every day to find out what was happening with me. All information was shared with my mother without telling me. They didn't understand that what was happening at home was part of why I tried to take my life. This led to consequences for me when I came home, which caused more harm and made me even more suicidal. I went through even more psychological abuse. It made me even worse and led to new traumas I still struggle with today. Now it's very hard to trust adults and hard to tell anything without being terrified it'll go back to my mother or that my mother will find out what I've said, because it's something I have been threatened with my whole life.

I talked to my psychologist about some super private stuff in my life. Like how I had a boyfriend and that we had sex, and how I had been feeling really bad lately and school wasn't going so well. I asked my psychologist not to share it with my parents because it could make the situation way worse or more serious. The psychologist went to my parents right away and told them everything. They were really pissed at me because I wasn't allowed to have a boyfriend, and they ended up kicking me out. Now I'm without a family. They don't want anything to do with me anymore because they think I've done something that goes against their religion and culture. My life became awful. I'm all alone now and nobody wants me or wants to support me.

I had a meeting with my social worker from child protection at home in the kitchen. He started asking me things I didn't want my foster parents to know. I'd made sure my foster parents wouldn't hear what I was saying by asking them to take the dogs for a walk so I could talk to him alone. A few days after the meeting, my foster parents came up to me and started asking questions about what I'd told child protection like "Why did you tell child protection that?" and "That's not true, why are you lying about what we do?" It made me lose trust in my social worker. It made me feel like child protection doesn't let me have a say about the information that gets shared in my own case.

When I was at the child welfare institution for two and a half months, I found out when I got home that my mum had been calling them every day to ask how I was doing. They'd told her absolutely everything without telling me. I had made it clear I didn't want any contact with her, yet everything was shared behind my back. They never told me they would share. When I got back home, I got consequences of course. I was shocked when my mum started being constantly more passive-aggressive than before and would use things that happened at the institution against me. It made it really hard to trust adults and be honest with the child protection services. It definitely made me view adults even more as scary, evil, and untrustworthy, which is something I've learned since I was little.

I went through a period with court cases and "samtaleprosess" (a conversation-based process) with the county social welfare board, I've heard they told everything about me, everything I've done. They didn't even ask me if I was okay with them talking about it. They talked about it in the "samtaleprosess" and in court in front of everyone. I felt like I didn't have a voice in my own life and in my own case, and I started to feel very withdrawn and felt like I wasn't worth all the stress and hassle with the court cases. I think it's terrible because everyone started feeling sorry for me and trying to talk to me about it.



▶ A. GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Below, we suggest questions that the State of Norway should be asked, based on the knowledge that Changefactory has gathered from children and young people around Norway.

Students are not systematically taught how to ensure children's procedural rights

Questions for the state of Norway

1. What will the state do to ensure that those studying to work with children are aware of and receive training in how to secure children's procedural rights (the best interests of the child, the child's right to freely and safely express themselves, the child's right to information, and the right to respect for their private life) in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child?
2. What will the state do to ensure that children learn in a systematic and child-friendly way what procedural rights they have when interacting with adults?

Basis

Referencing concluding observations (CO) 10(a) and 10(b) from 2018. Changefactory has since 2015 interacted with thousands of students at educational institutions around the country. The students answer very differently to questions about how they are taught to use children's rights. Few answer that they have learnt how to assess the child's best interest, and that the assessment should be done after the child's right to information, to express themselves freely and to be told before information about them is shared, are secured. Very few answer that they have learnt to provide the child with information and to let them express themselves before information from or about the child is shared.

In 2021 and 2022, the student democracies at 7 universities in Norway adopted the resolution to work to ensure that students studying to work with children learn how to guarantee children's procedural rights in the workplace. The state has not clearly specified in regulations that students who work with children must learn practical ways to secure the procedural rights of children. Knowledge from children suggests that this is crucial for children's systems to feel secure and useful for children.

Knowledge from children shows that most children don't know how children's rights apply in their lives - at school, when they need help, in leisure activities or at home. They don't know what it takes for their rights to be violated. Most children in Norway know that children have the right to live without war, the right to education and other basic rights. But they do not know what rights they have in their interactions with adults in the school system, health and care services, police or justice system. (from "Speaking Safely in School", 2021).

▶ B. GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Introduction

The pros at Changefactory have in recent years travelled around Norway, to talk about the importance of involving children, to make them feel safe and to make school and help worthwhile. We have explained to students and professionals what knowledge from children says about this, and that the children's rights to a great extent say the same things. Many other people in Norway have also been concerned with what many call children's right to participation. In surveys directly from children, however, children around the country still respond that there is much that adults do not understand when they are to collaborate with children. This can put children in situations where they do not know that they could've said that something needs to be changed or they are not given the opportunity to say something. Guidelines, regulations and laws also show that some adults do not understand how to meet children in a safe way, and where they shall participate in decision-making.

We suggest questions on the following topics

1. Students who are new in Norway lack necessary information and are separated from norwegian students
2. Children as a group are often not ensured their right to express their views freely
3. Interdisciplinary collaboration occurs without the child's knowledge

Students who are new in Norway lack necessary information and are often separated from Norwegian students

Questions for the state of Norway

1. How will the state work to ensure that students who are new in Norway receive enough and understandable information about their rights in terms of the type of class they can attend and the mental health services they are entitled to, in school and in their municipality?
2. How will the state ensure that students who are new in Norway get an actual opportunity to choose whether they want to attend classes with Norwegian students or with other students who are new in Norway, in upper secondary school - and at the same time ensure that combination classes are placed in close proximity to Norwegian students?

Basis

With reference to CO 11b and 29a to Norway in 2018. Knowledge from these young people explains how important it is that each student can decide for themselves how quickly they want to join a class with Norwegian students. In upper secondary school, many are placed in combination classes, together with others who are new in Norway.

Children and young people who come to Norway talk about major challenges related to how they are accepted in upper secondary school. Many are put in their own classes, other parts of the schoolyard, or in other areas of the city. Some have to attend classes with adults. Some have to go from ordinary secondary school to a combination class at upper secondary school. Many have lacked information about opportunities and rights - in relation to level, class, health services and who they could talk to. Many lack Norwegian friends and then it takes a long time to learn the language and to integrate into society. (from "Short way to friendship", 2022 and "Give us a chance", 2020)

As a group, children's right to express themselves is often not ensured

Questions for the state of Norway

1. How does the state ensure that groups of children under 18 years of age, groups of young children, and groups of vulnerable children (child welfare, psychiatry, conflict with the law) are heard when laws are to be created, initiatives or measures are to be initiated, or when other decisions are to be made for them as a group?

Basis

Referring to CO 10c and 14a. The state initiates a lot of work every year and every month that will affect groups of children. This is often done without Norway seeking input from the group of children the work concerns, especially for children in difficult life situations.

Some challenges when the state tries to invite participation

- The children who are given a voice are often selected by adults.
- Many groups of children rarely get a chance to express their views, such as young, sick, dangerous, and otherwise vulnerable children.
- Even when children do get to express themselves, usually only a few of them are consulted.
- Those who speak on behalf of children are often adults in their 20s or 30s.
- Children's responses are rarely presented clearly apart from other responses, but are often included in recommendations from professionals.

We believe it is quite unfortunate that the state does not ensure this because

- Expressing their views as a group is a right that children have
- The state might end up using funds for the wrong things without knowing it.
- Changes made in legislation can make things worse for children.
- New reforms can be worked on for years and still not be helpful
- Major initiatives and plans can contain many ineffective measures.

Interdisciplinary collaboration occurs without the child's knowledge

Questions for the state of Norway

1. How does Norway plan to ensure children's right to receive information and express themselves freely and safely before information about them is shared, in initiatives from national authorities such as BTI, 0-24, etc.?
2. In Norway, there is now a legal provision included in 14 laws that allows for more sharing of information and a duty to collaborate, without describing children's right to information and expression before information is shared. Why aren't children's procedural rights secured, when 14 laws were amended?

Basis

All adults applaud and cheer for the goal of more interdisciplinary collaboration. Children may also see it as good for them, but it can also make the situation worse for them. Many children have said that it can become very unsafe when services collaborate without asking them what they think about it and how it can be done safely. Information about the child is often shared without their knowledge. Phone calls, meetings and plans are carried out without the child's knowledge or involvement. This can cause children to lose a lot of trust. Without trust, children do not tell adults important things they need to know. For many children, decisions that are made and actions taken can feel unsafe and unhelpful for them.

Children's rights are not specified concretely enough in laws for children to notice it in practice

Questions for the state of Norway

1. The Norwegian Parliament made several resolutions in 2020 and 2021 to ensure a review of the laws, so that children's right to information, to speak freely/safely, and to be informed and consulted before anything is shared (children's procedural rights) are clearly stated in all laws. The goal was to ensure that professionals, who are not lawyers, can use these rights correctly and easily in practice. Will the state ensure that the review of the laws is carried out?

Basis

Referring to CO 13b. Changefactory has systematically gathered experiences and advice from children and youth in Norway for over 10 years on how the systems created for them can be experienced as safe and useful for the children. Feedback that has been repeatedly given is that children must receive information, speak freely and safely, be informed before anything from or about them is shared, and that they must be involved in decision-making. Barely any children have known that these are rights they have under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Pros at Changefactory have presented the findings to students and experts. In some places, lawyers have confirmed that what the pros explained resembled the rights that children have. But children are not familiar enough with these rights and do not know when they are being violated.

The pros arranged meetings with members of parliament and asked for their help in making the systems safer for children by improving the understanding of children's rights among professionals. The pros inspired politicians to make several resolutions (called requests for action) to include the rights in the laws.



Quotes from children about concern reports sent to the child protections system

We need to have a say in whether a concern report is sent. We need to know what's in it, because then we feel safer and in control.

They have to include us when they're writing the concern report. That way we can explain how they should write in it.

It's smart if they ask if there's an adult we'd like to talk to. That makes it safer for us to say what we really think.

I think they should always talk to the child first before sending a concern report. After all, it's the child who knows how things are for them at home. If they just send a concern report without talking to the child, they could do totally wrong things.

When we talk about them being concerned and things like that, they have to say what they plan to do with what the child says. If they don't say it, I won't tell them anything.

I think they should talk to the kid it's about. Because they could've misunderstood something. If they do that, it could make things worse for the kid.

Talk to the kid about it if there are any concerns. Adults think it's very urgent without remembering this is maybe something the kid is used to. If adults send a hasty message, the kid can totally close their mouth.



► D. VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Introduction:

ChangeFactory has in 2016-2023 collected answers from 600 children exposed to domestic violence and sexual abuse. In 2019, NKVTS (National Knowledge Center on Violence and Traumatic Stress) conducted a survey on young people's experiences of domestic violence and sexual abuse in their upbringing. Only 1 in 5 reported that they've told someone in the public sector about the abuse.¹

In the book "Wisdom about domestic violence and sexual abuse" 500 children and young people exposed to domestic violence and sexual abuse provided their experiences and advice.² The book provides clear answers as to why so many children don't speak up to anyone in the public sector. It also provides advice on how to make it safe enough for children to speak up and how to collaborate with children after they've spoken.

We suggest questions about the following topics

- It's arbitrary whether children receive information about domestic violence and sexual abuse in kindergarten and school.
- It's arbitrary whether children get to speak alone with professionals.
- Focus on symptoms/behaviour makes it impossible for many children to speak up about domestic violence and sexual abuse.
- Concerns reported to child protection services are sent without the child knowing.

It's arbitrary whether children receive information about domestic violence and sexual abuse in kindergarten and school

Questions for the state of Norway

1. Will the state of Norway ensure that all children receive systematic information in kindergarten and school about domestic violence and sexual abuse and where they can go for help if they are exposed to it?
2. Will the state of Norway determine who in the municipalities is responsible for ensuring that all children in a municipality receive information about domestic violence and sexual abuse?

Basis

Referring to CO 17(d). Many children lack information about domestic violence and sexual abuse, and what adults or other children aren't allowed to do to them. They don't know what mental, physical or sexual abuse is. Many know that strangers aren't allowed to hit them or do something sexual to them, but don't know that someone in their family or someone they know or love isn't allowed to. If they don't know this, how can they speak up?

All municipalities in Norway must ensure that all children in their municipality systematically receive information about what adults and other children aren't allowed to do to them. This must be done regularly in kindergarten and school. As far as we know some municipalities do this, but very few systematically. No municipalities have specified what systems are responsible for making sure it's done. (Klokhet om vold og overgrep, Universitetsforlaget, 2020, *Wisdom about domestic violence and sexual abuse*, p. 104-105)

¹ G. S. Hafstad & E. M. Augusti (2019). Ungdoms erfaringer med vold og overgrep i oppveksten: En nasjonal undersøkelse av ungdom i alderen 12 til 16 år. (Rapport 4/2019). *Youth experiences of violence and abuse during upbringing: A national survey of youth aged 12 to 16 years (unofficial translation)*

² Klokhet om vold og overgrep, Universitetsforlaget, *Wisdom about domestic violence and sexual abuse* 2020,

It's arbitrary whether children get to speak alone with professionals

Questions for the state of Norway

1. What measures will the state of Norway implement to ensure that the support services will provide an opportunity for children to speak alone with professionals, without their parents present, to ensure the child's right to express themselves freely (safely)?

Many children have experienced that professionals in support services don't speak with them alone, but with their parents present. For children exposed to domestic violence and sexual abuse, having their parents present in conversations has made it impossible for them to be honest with the professionals. Children have been asked about physical and mental ailments, but haven't had the opportunity to freely (safely) express that these ailments come from domestic violence and/or sexual abuse because they weren't given the opportunity to speak alone. (Klokhet om vold og overgrep, Universitetsforlaget, 2020, *Wisdom about domestic violence and sexual abuse*, p. 93 and 188)

Numbers, statistics, reports

Barnevoldsutvalget (the Committee on Violence against children) was appointed to review serious cases in which children and young people have been subjected to domestic violence, sexual abuse and neglect. Here are some of the findings:

Conversations with the child weren't arranged in such a way that it was possible for the child to speak freely: "There were also examples of cases where children had been talked to, but in a way or with frames around it that wasn't suitable to make them safe enough to speak up about what they experienced at home."³

Detection wasn't a result of the public's efforts: "Almost none of the cases that the committee has looked at were detected as a result of the public's efforts."⁴

Focus on symptoms/behaviour makes it impossible for many children to speak up about domestic violence and sexual abuse

Questions for the state of Norway

1. How does the state of Norway ensure that the focus on children's symptoms/behaviour is reduced, so that more children can be enabled to speak up about what lies behind the symptoms/behaviour?

Basis

Referring to the committee's CO 17(d). When children experience painful and difficult emotions, it can manifest as being rude, bullying others, stomach ache, isolation, anger, problems with food, lying, fear, self-harm, substance abuse or criminality. Until now in Norway, this has been called behavioural problems or mental illness. Many children have experienced that adults have focused a lot on these behaviours and on removing them. For many the focus on symptoms/behaviours has thus contributed to covering up domestic violence and sexual abuse. Many adults have spent time observing the child's behaviour instead of asking the child in a warm and non-accusatory way why they are doing what they do. Measures, diagnoses and treatments based on changing the child's behaviour can make the situation worse for the child. And the domestic violence and sexual abuse against the child will continue.

³ Barnevoldsutvalget NOU 2017:12 para. 6.2.2.3, *the Committee on Violence against children national public inquiry (unofficial translation)*

⁴ Barnevoldsutvalget NOU 2017:12 para. 6.2.1, *the Committee on Violence against children national public inquiry (unofficial translation)*

Concerns reported to the child protection service are sent without the child's knowledge

Questions for the state of Norway

1. Children report that most of the concerns about them are sent to the child protection service without them knowing. Will the government amend legislation to ensure that the duty for a government employee to report a concern about a child, doesn't activate before the child's right to sufficient and understandable information and to freely (and safely) express their view are secured?
2. Will the government make it clear that the child's own view should be a primary consideration in the assessment of whether the concern should be reported?
3. How will the government ensure that children who are victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse, get to execute their right to information and to freely (and safely) express themselves, as part of the child's right to protection against domestic violence and sexual abuse?

Basis

Referring to the Committee's CO 16(d) and 17(d). Some children speak up about violence, abuse or other painful things to an adult they trust in the kindergarten, school, in leisure activities, or in health services. Very many of these children have experienced that adults report a concern about the child without the child knowing, and without the child's right to information and to express themselves freely (safely) being secured. They've thus lost their trust in adults and have stopped speaking up, withdrawn what they've said, or changed their story. The starting point for the right help has then become very difficult.

Figures, statistics, reports

The Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasises in GC No. 13 para. 63, that children's right to participation contributes to the fulfilment of children's right to protection, and vice versa – that children's right to protection contributes to the fulfilment of children's right to participation.⁵

⁵ NIM Norges institusjon for menneskerettigheter, Barns rett til beskyttelse mot vold, overgrep og omsorgssvikt s. 30-31, NHRI Norwegian National Human Rights Institution, *The Human Rights Framework for Children's Right to Protection Against Violence, Abuse and Neglect (unofficial translation)*, 2022



► E. FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE

Introduction

Changefactory has gathered knowledge directly from children on various aspects of child protection work. Knowledge from children states that children need a child protection system that makes it safe for children and which gives due weight to the child's view in decisions that concern the child, so that the help is useful for the child. During the period 2014-2023, Changefactory has spoken to more than 2000 children aged 6-21 with experience from child protection services.

We suggest questions about the following topics

- The Child Protection Services do not arrange an atmosphere conducive to children speaking safely during the investigation-phase
- Due weight to children's opinion when relocating them
- Standardised help and the use of coercion in residential child care institutions
- Contact with biological parents

The Child Protection Services do not arrange an atmosphere conducive to children speaking safely during the investigation-phase

Question for the state of Norway

1. How will the state ensure that all children get information about, and have a real opportunity to, have a person they trust (not their parents) present in all meetings with the Child protection services?
2. How can the state, during the Child protection Services' investigations, better secure children's right to be informed and to express their views, and ensure that it is always assessed whether it is necessary before information about them is shared with their parents?

Basis

Children have reported that it is difficult to open up and talk about painful experiences at home to someone they don't feel safe around. The UNCRC and the new Norwegian Child Protection Act both guarantee every child the right to have a trusted adult present in meetings with the child protection system. However, this is not effectively implemented in practice in Norwegian child protection. Many children don't know that they have this right and many experience that child protection workers would prefer that they didn't have a trusted adult present.

Knowledge from children shows that three out of four children don't tell the most important things to the child protection services. One main reason for this is that they don't feel safe about what will happen if they tell. Many have noticed that the child protection services talked directly with the parents, without the child knowing first. This could cause a worse situation at home. Many children therefore stop telling important things to the child protection services. (From "Understand What's Most Important", 2019, p. 15-17, 28 and "Talking Safely in the Child Protection System", 2021, p. 5, 39).

Numbers, statistics, reports

A report on child protection services' investigations say that on average there were 1.4 meetings with the child during the investigation. Only 60% of the children were spoken to. 25% of children 6-12 years old were not spoken to.¹

In Norway the new Child Protection Act (2023) gives all children the right to have a person the child trusts present (not a parent) when meeting the Child Protection Services. In an evaluation from 2021, it emerged that the arrangement with a trusted person for relocated children, was used little by the child protection service, even though the children wanted to have a person they felt safe with.²

Children's opinions are often not given due weight when child protective services wants to relocate children

Questions for the state of Norway

1. Does the state recognise that the opinion of the child should be a primary consideration when assessing whether the threshold for moving a child out of its home is reached, or when deciding reunification with the child's biological family?
2. How does the state ensure that the decrease in decisions to move a child from their home, following the ECHR rulings against Norway, is in the best interests of each individual child? And does the state know what Norwegian children think?

Basis

Referring to CO 20(b). The judgments from the ECtHR against Norway have caused the number of adoptions and decisions to move a child from their home to decrease in Norway, while the number of children reunified with their biological parents has increased. Professionals may have become scared that parents will be sending their case to the ECtHR. A strong focus on parents' rights can overshadow children's rights. We therefore ask you to check how Norway is ensuring that the individual child's point of view is sufficiently taken into account.

The knowledge from children is very clear - serious domestic violence and sexual abuse reaches the threshold for moving a child. Although, if a child is exposed to less serious violence or other forms of neglect, the child's opinion about moving must be decisive. Before children express themselves, they must receive enough information about what is not acceptable happening at home and what kind of possibility the child protection service has to help.

Knowledge from children says that reunification can be incredibly frightening, but it can also be incredibly nice - it depends on whether the child wants to move back or not. Making a decision on reunification when the child doesn't want it can have serious consequences in the child's life. (From "It's about us" pp. 42,51)

1 Øivin Christiansen et al. Delrapport 4: Når barnevernet undersøker 2019, *sub-report 4: when child protection investigates* (unofficial translation), 2019.

2 Proba samfunnsanalyse, Evaluering av ordningen talsperson og tillitsperson S. 113, *Evaluation of the Trust Person and Confidant Arrangement* (unofficial translation), 2021 p. 113.

Extended use of standardised help and coercion in Residential Child Care Institutions

Questions for the state of Norway

1. How does the state ensure that an individual assessment is done for each child, and that the child is given the opportunity to express their view on what kind of help they should receive, when the child care institutions provide standardised help?
2. Does the state believe that the use of isolation and physical restraint in Child Care Institutions should be reduced?

Basis

In Norway, standardised treatments have been introduced in public child care institutions in recent years. All children are treated in accordance with the same method. The treatment emphasises mapping of social skills and emotional and behavioural difficulties. What kind of help each child should receive is not determined by an assessment of what is best for that individual child. Knowledge from children shows that standardisation can stand in the way of children getting better and that they can quickly lose trust in the adults in the institution. (From "They think they know what's best" 2021, p. 52)

The knowledge from children regarding the use of coercion in child care institutions is serious. It causes children to lose trust in the adults who are supposed to help and triggers traumas from past experiences (4 out of 5 have previously been exposed to use of physical force). For many the consequences of coercion are that they lose boundaries for their own body, have negative reactions afterwards, and begin to view themselves as sick and dangerous. Children have explained that it also makes life afterwards more difficult. Children are asking Norway to assess the risk of using coercion, and that access to use coercion under the Child Care Act should be curtailed. (From "If I Were Your Child" 2019)

Research, Statistics and Reports

*A report on the institutional offer for young people with concurrent needs for care and help with mental health was published in 2020 (...) When researchers questioned both staff and youth about their experience of the standardised offers, the experiences were vastly different. The adults largely supported the use of the behavioural therapy method DBT. The youths were highly critical of the offer. The researchers wrote that the stay did not seem to be of any benefit to the youths. SINTEF concluded that there is no reason to recommend the model for further establishment of institutions.*³

*Researchers have interviewed young people about their experiences with the use of coercion. The report clearly tells that the coercion is experienced as frightening and humiliating. The youths in the interviews tell that it feels unsafe at the institutions after coercion has been used. The report also states that coercion breeds more coercion and that conflicts can be prevented and coercion use reduced by having a greater focus on seeing, asking and listening to the youths.*⁴

³ Sintef, Nytt institusjonstilbud for barn og unge med behov for langvarig omsorg utenfor hjemmet og samtidig stort behov for psykisk helsehjelp, *New institutional offer for young people with concurrent needs for care and help with mental health (unofficial translation)*, 2020

⁴ Gro Ulset and Torill Tjelflaat, Tvang i berneverninstitusjoner: Ungdommenes perspektiver, *Coercion in child care institutions: Perspectives of the youth (unofficial translation)*, 2012.

Children's rights often not ensured when deciding visitation rights

Questions for the state of Norway

1. What measures does the state of Norway take to ensure that children's right to information and to express themselves freely (safely) is secured when determining contact with biological parents?
2. How does the state guarantee that the views of the child are given due weight against the opinion of the parents when determining contact?

Basis

Knowledge from children about contact with biological parents:
62% have not received enough information for contact to feel safe,
60% have not been allowed to determine how often contact should be, and
62% have not told honestly what is important to them about contact.

Many children lacked information about the visits, including when it should be, how long it should be and what the reasons are for this exact arrangement of the visits. Few children have told honestly what is important for them about visits. For many, it has not felt safe enough to tell. Children have not dared to tell because they have been afraid of being scolded, given other consequences or that the adults would be upset. When children don't get to tell honestly, the contact that is determined can become wrong for children. (From "It's about us" p. 43).

Research, statistics, reports

*"In an overwhelming majority of cases, reunification remains the goal. Where this has been abandoned, it has been assessed whether the conditions, that there must be exceptional and strong reasons, are met. However, it is reasonable to question whether the county boards, based on descriptions in the decisions, maintain the reunification objective in too many cases."*⁵

⁵ Ingunn Alvik, Samvær etter omsorgsovertakelse, *Contact after being moved from parental care (unofficial translation)* 2021.



The police are called too quickly to the Residential Child Care Institutions, and they often use excessive force against the children.



The child protection supervisor doesn't listen to what the children say, and interprets a solution without listening properly to what the child has said.



Children do not have a say in which treatment they should receive. Everyone at the institution receives the same treatment, because it is the only one offered there.



The child is not given the opportunity to speak to the child protection services alone, so the child protection services do not know the child's views.

► F. DISABILITY, BASIC HEALTH AND WELFARE

Introduction:

Norway has a very high percentage of children in mental health care services compared to other countries. Knowledge from children says that children should get help where they live and in the most natural way as possible, for each child. Between 2014-2023, Changeactory has spoken to more than 2,100 children with experience of meeting with municipal and/or state mental health care services.

We suggest questions about the following topics

- Varying access to mental health care in municipalities.
- Children rarely get to participate in deciding treatment in mental health care services.
- Challenges when psychotropic drugs are decided upon and little research.
- There are too many opportunities to subject children to coercive measures in mental health care services.

Access to mental health care in municipalities vary

Questions for the state of Norway

1. How does Norway ensure that children in all municipalities have access to mental health care in the municipality, help close to them and in a way that feels as normal as possible and is specialised as little as possible?
2. How can Norway create help in the municipalities that ensures that information about the child isn't shared without the child being informed and given the opportunity to express their views first?
3. How can Norway create help in the municipalities that ensures that the focus on disease isn't transferred to the municipalities?

Basis

With reference to CO 25(a). A clear main answer from children is that they want mental health care that is close to them in their towns and not in hospitals. Children ask for places where they can talk about what is most important to them, and where the focus is on children getting help with the pain or hardships that they carry inside. In recent years, some of the help that was originally given in hospitals has been transferred to become a collaboration with the municipality. The opportunities this provides for the help being flexible and specializing as little as possible is similar to what the knowledge from children asks for. Challenges still exist, such as information from or about children is shared without children being told, and that the disease focus continues to be dominant.

("Help where we are", 2022, and "Mental health care - from those of us who know it", 2019)

Children rarely get to participate in deciding treatment in mental health care services

Questions for the state of Norway

1. Today, children must get a diagnosis in order to get help in mental health care services. With a diagnosis there is often a specific type of standard treatment. How can this ensure the right to get help suited to each individual child?
2. How does the state know that children are being given sufficient and understandable information, get to express their views freely (safely), and that the best interest of the child is a primary consideration before it's decided which treatment a child should be given?

Basis

When children have to be diagnosed in order to get help in mental health care services, many children describe that there is a lot of focus on their symptoms. Many children lose trust. One of the most important reasons why 3 out of 4 children haven't told the most painful or difficult things to mental health care workers is that there is such a large focus on their symptoms.

According to children, treatment in mental health care is either getting psychotropic drugs, conversations that are mainly about challenges in everyday life and the symptoms - or a combination. When treatment is almost always based on the symptoms, and options are usually few. The child's right to information, to express their views freely (safely), to know before information from and about the child is shared and being able to express their views about sharing the information is rarely secured. ("Mental health care from us who know it", 2019, pp. 57-91).

Challenges when psychotropic drugs are decided upon and little research

Questions for the state of Norway

1. How will Norway ensure children's right to information and to be able to express their views freely (safely) before children are put on psychotropic drugs?
2. How does Norway ensure that the child's opinion is a central factor when it's decided that the child should be put on psychotropic drugs?
3. How does Norway think it's justifiable for children to be put on psychotropic drugs when there is so little research on the effects of psychotropic drugs on children?

Basis

With reference to the committee's CO 26(c). Many children have lacked information about what the medicine could help with when they've been offered medication (psychotropic drugs). Many haven't been given information about side effects, why they were being put on medication, how long they would be on medication and what the medication helps with. When the information is lacking it becomes impossible for children to make an informed choice and to honestly say what they think about medication.

Few children have been given the opportunity to honestly express what they think about medication (psychotropic drugs). When professionals haven't gotten to know honestly from children, what has been decided has become wrong for many children. ("It was supposed to get better", 2020, pp. 22-24)

Figures, statistics, reports

"Treatment with drugs outside the approved product description is generally high in the pediatric population. The report "Study on off-label use of medicinal products in the European Union (op.europa.eu)" shows that 13-69% of drug prescriptions for children in hospitals are "off-label".¹

¹ Psykofarmaka – bruk hos barn og unge, nasjonal faglige råd Helsedirektoratet, *Psychopharmaceuticals – use in children and young people, national professional council Directorate of Health* (unofficial translation), 2022 p. 10.

There are too many opportunities to subject children to coercive measures in mental health care services.

Questions for the state of Norway

1. How does Norway ensure that children in mental health care services are exposed to as little coercion as possible?
2. In Norway, it's within the parental responsibility to consent to children under the age of 16 being subjected to restraint, forced feeding, tracking, seclusion, body searches and forced medication in critical situations. Does the state think that this could come into conflict with children's right to information, to express themselves freely (safely) and that the decision should be made in the child's best interests? And how will the state respect and secure the child's rights in these situations?

Basis

The responses from children about being subjected to coercion in mental health care services are serious. Being subjected to coercion has major consequences for children then and there, and later in their lives. Children lose respect and boundaries for their own bodies. This reinforces trauma children already have and it creates new traumas. It causes children to view themselves as sick or dangerous, and causes children to lose trust and faith in adults.

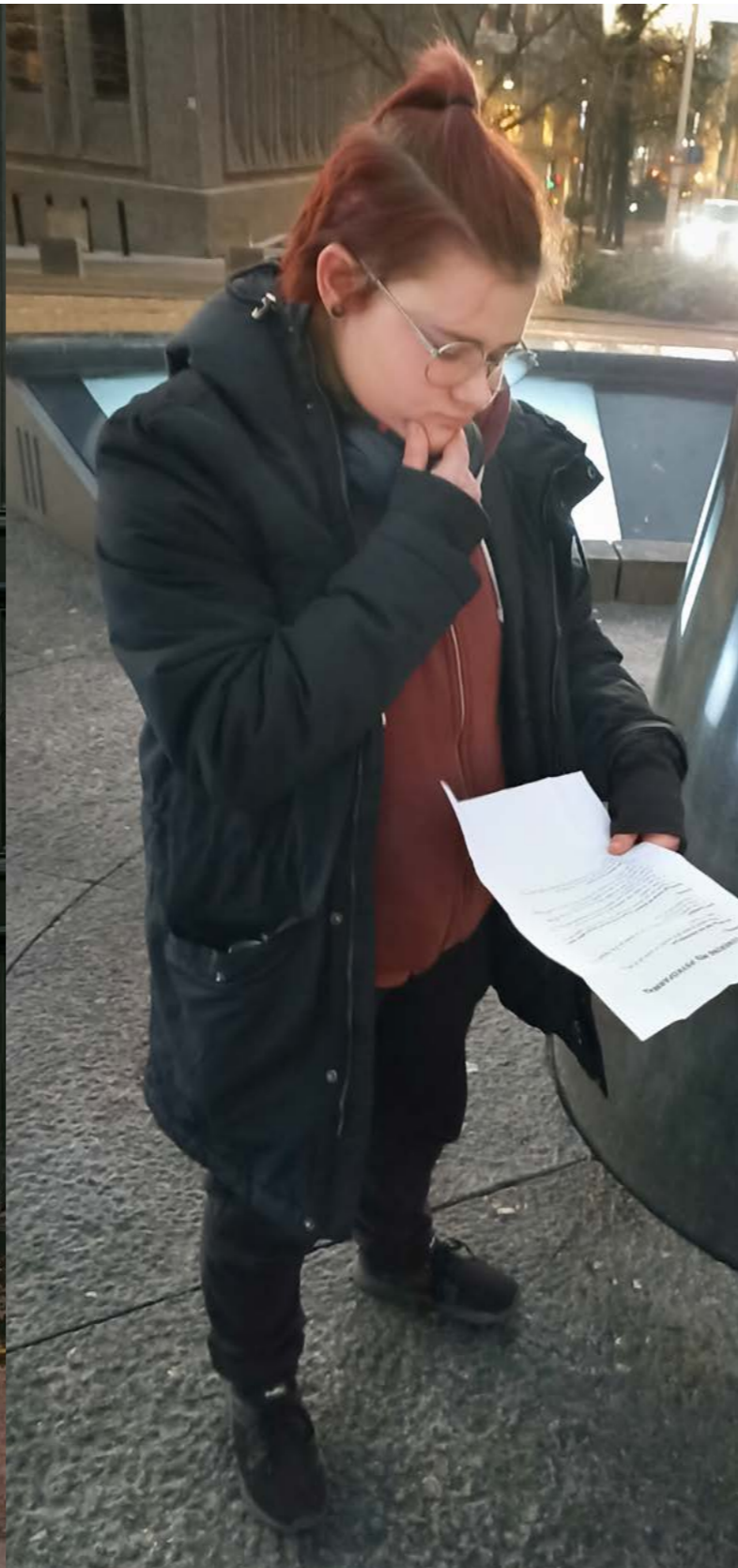
Being exposed to coercion makes it impossible for many children to get help that makes them feel better inside. When adults have held you down, thrown you to the ground, forcibly medicated you or used other types of coercion, how will it be possible for children to talk about what is painful or difficult inside? No children want to do bad or scary things to themselves or others, children want to be stopped. But children need to be stopped in safe ways ("If I was your child, about coercion in mental health care", 2019)

Figures, statistics, reports

(....) In the Parliamentary ombudsman's view, the Act on Mental Health Protection provides inadequate protection of children's personal integrity and legal certainty. Several measures that can be implemented for children and young people are so invasive that it shouldn't be sufficient to rely only on parental consent, as the practice is today.²

² Besøksrapport Sivilombudet, St. Olavs hospital, Barne og ungdomspsykiatrisk klinikk, *Report from the ombudsman's visit, St. Olavs hospital, Child and adolescent psychiatric clinic* (unofficial translation), 2022 p. 12.





The places to get help are not open often enough. When you have a problem, you should be able to get help fairly quickly. Now you often have to wait, because the places are closed.

Children don't get enough information about their medication and so they have to figure it out by themselves. Many read the instruction manual and find it scary and difficult to understand.



Doctors can quickly think medication is the right solution and say that the pills will fix you. They can speak very highly about it, but for many of us medication does not help.



The school nurse can share information with our parents, without us knowing. It can make you feel alone and make you not want to talk to anybody when they have shared information about you, without you knowing.

► G. EDUCATION, LEISURE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Introduction:

From 2016-2023, Changefactory has collected knowledge from more than 8000 children and young people in school. According to many adults, Norway has very good schools. Many children also agree with this. Nevertheless, knowledge from children about school shows many challenges, for example in school environment and inclusion. The student survey in the 7th grade shows an annual decrease in well-being and motivation from 2016-2022.¹

We suggest questions about the following topics

- Students wish to have more of a say in how the school should be in order to learn and thrive as best as possible.
- Extra help in school
- Students who are angry or use violence

Students wish to have more of a say in how the school should be in order to learn and thrive as best as possible

Questions for the state of Norway

1. What will the state do to ensure democracy in the classrooms and that the school management develops the schools based on responses from the students as a group?
2. What will the state do to help ensure that all students can help decide how they learn and thrive and how learning is to be assessed?

Basis

Knowledge from students says that student councils often don't mean that students experience being able to take part in decision-making. This can mean that many students experience school as unsafe or unhelpful - or that they don't have enough trust in the adults. Giving everyone in the class the opportunity to influence how everyday school life turns out, happens too rarely in school today. It isn't always safe enough to express one's opinion to the student council representatives, and then adults at school can miss out on knowing important things from the students. If adults in school work closely with the students on how they should teach and assess, it can be easier to enjoy school, the students get more motivation and learn better. It doesn't always have to turn out the way the students want, but then the teacher has to explain why. Then the students can understand. (from "Talking safely in school", 2021).

Extra help at school is decided without children having received enough information or expressed their views freely/safely about which help they want

Questions for the state of Norway

1. Will the state change the laws to ensure the students' right to information, to express themselves freely (safely) and that their point of view is important when deciding which help they should get?
2. What will the state do to ensure that students can get extra help with a recommendation from special education services (PPT in Norway), without first having to get a diagnosis?

¹ Regjeringen, "Flere mobbes på alle trinn", *The Government*, "More are bullied in every grade" (unofficial translation)

Basis

Refers to the committee's CO 23(d) about students who get extra help in school. Knowledge from children in the Changefactory survey on extra help in school showed that children's rights to information, to express themselves freely (safely) and to know what happens to what they say, aren't secured well enough when extra help is given. UNCRC arts. 3, 12 and 16, aren't secured and this affects the student's learning outcomes and well-being:

- 93% didn't get enough information about the help before it was decided
- 59% haven't been able to tell honestly which help they want
- 67% haven't been allowed to have a say in the decision of which help they would get

Help can be decided by adults without talking to the child, or children can be asked to say what kind of extra help they need, without the child having received enough information. It can then be difficult to tell adults honestly what kind of help they need. Help can be given to children based on what the adults think is best or based on standardised ways of helping children. A concrete assessment together with each child is often missing. In many places children need a diagnosis to get extra help. (from "Ask us, and you'll find out", 2021).

Children who are angry and use violence are stopped in unsafe ways that push children further out of school and society

Questions for the state of Norway

1. How will the state help ensure that the school's regulations ensure that when consequences are assessed, students receive information, speak freely (safely) and the student gets to know and express themselves before information from/about the student is shared?
2. How will the state help ensure that students who use violence in school are met in ways that make it possible for the adults to keep/build the students' trust and that children's rights aren't violated?

Basis

With reference to CO 16(c). As General Comments no. 12, paragraph 109 states: "(...) Giving children's views weight is particularly important in the elimination of discrimination, prevention of bullying and disciplinary measures."

Knowledge from children shows that the school regulations, in the way they are designed, often invite adults to violate children's rights. The way adults meet the students can then directly contribute to making it more difficult for the students. Children's right to information, to express themselves freely (safely) and to know before information from or about the students is shared, isn't guaranteed for children who break the school regulations. Teachers and school environmental workers can be trained to restrain students who are angry and use violence, without the adult having first spoken to the student to understand why this is happening.

Students who are angry and use violence at school explain that the use of violence often has root in something difficult or painful. When students are stopped with consequences that feel like punishment, or by the use of force, it can create an unsafe feeling inside students, and they can become even angrier. It can create a feeling of "ice around the heart". At the same time, it can become more difficult for other adults to make it safe enough for the student to tell and trust gets broken. (from "Angry on the outside, hurting on the inside", 2020).



The teacher resorts to violence when he can't be bothered anymore. For example, when two students are talking and then switch to a completely different topic, the teacher gets fed up and uses unnecessary force.



Often the teacher only pretends to let us participate in decision-making. It's frustrating, because they don't use any of our answers. The next time someone asks, we won't bother to answer because it feels pointless.



By putting people in combination class, newcomers don't get to be with Norwegian people. It's sad for everyone, because we don't get to know each other. It becomes lonely. We can think "Why did I come to this country?"



You are new to Norway and you do not get to choose whether to start school with Norwegians or foreigners. You are simply forced to start in combination class. It can feel like in the picture that you are just dragged into a combination class.



The adults must give children enough information, not just ask whether you want extra help or not. The student must be involved in deciding how the help should be.

HVA MÅ ELEVER FÅ INFORMASJON OM I STARTEN AV ET SKOLEÅR?



Regler

Forventningene til lærerne - hvordan lærerne forventer at vi skal oppføre oss.

kompetansemål - hva de vil vi skal lære.

og hva de forventer i innleveringer og presentasjoner



HVA MÅ ELEVER FÅ INFORMASJON OM I STARTEN AV ET SKOLEÅR?

- hva strengt de er på prøver
- forventninger
- regler
- uskrevne regler
- timeplan
- influanser
- strengere på karakterer

HVA MÅ LÆRERE FÅ VITE FRA ELEVER FOR AT SKOLEN SKAL KJENNES TRYGG & NYTTIG?

- hva enkeltpersoner liker og misliker
- hvilken undervisningsform som er best
- hvilke vurderinger som er best
- Lærerne informerer om kommende oppgaver og innleveringer

HVA MÅ LÆRERE FÅ VITE FRA ELEVER FOR AT SKOLEN SKAL KJENNES TRYGG OG NYTTIG?

LINDA

Person a nokke med men Banger er vi treffe / soltne. rom til a være mennesket

helsestøtter for både videregående og barne skole

ikke gjøre navn av elever

Mer fokus på psykisk helse, lære mer om det

Det er lærerne som setter standarden på skolen. Elevene reflekterer dem.

respekt av lærere bør

respektfulle

engasjerte lærere

engasjerte elever

Lærerne bør snakke positivt om oss, seg selv og undervisningen

rom for forandring og forbedring elevene

mer praktisk arbeid

var hjelpsom ikke dømmende

NEUTRALITET

Lærere tar oss seriøst og bryr seg om vi tar opp ting

Lærere tar oss seriøst og bryr seg om vi tar opp ting

HVA MÅ ELEVER FÅ INFORMASJON OM I STARTEN AV ET SKOLEÅR?

- ~ HELSETJENESTER
- ~ KRAV FOR FRITAK (Feks: karakter, nynorsk, språk, gym)
- ~ FAGVALG FOR VIDERE STUDIER
- ~ HVOR MAN FÅR TAK I GRATIS PREVENSJON

► H. SPECIAL PROTECTION MEASURES

Introduction

Changefactory has in 2016-2023 spoken to more than 300 children who have been in conflict with the law, as suspected or charged with a crime, and more than 200 children who have been subjected to domestic violence or sexual abuse and, in that connection, encountered the police. There exists little research about how children experience their encounters with the police.

We suggest questions about the following topics

- Stopping Children on the Street
- Interrogation of Children
- Action Days Frighten Children

Children get stopped by police without reasonable suspicion

Questions for the state of Norway:

1. How do the state ensure that the police don't stop or search children without reasonable suspicion?
2. How do the state ensure that children's right to information, to speak freely (safely) and that the best interests of the child are assessed before guardians are contacted?
3. How will the state ensure that coercive measures aren't used unnecessarily and that the best interest of the child are always assessed first?

Knowledge from children clearly states that how the police speak to children, stop them on the street, how interrogations are conducted and what sanctions the child receives, have caused many children to feel worse about themselves and others, and have felt pushed out of society.

In the survey "Angry on the outside, hurting on the inside" (2020), 98 out of 101 respondents reported that they've had more encounters that felt unsafe than that felt safe when meeting the police. The children explained that they experienced being stopped, checked and searched by the police because they were 'known' to them, and not for a legitimate reason. This has made the children scared of being outside and has damaged their relationship with others who were present when this happened.

When children were stopped by the police, the police often quickly contacted the guardians without first finding out if it was safe for the children. Nearly half reported having been exposed to violence in their own family. When guardians were contacted without the children being informed or being able to speak freely (safely) about it, it has felt dangerous for some children.

When the children were stopped by the police on the street, they were forced on the ground, used handcuffs or pepper spray on, put in a holding cell or threatened with a dog. It has felt like the police have used more power than necessary and they've lost trust in the police. The children can have severe reactions, freeze up and/or have flashbacks from earlier abuse. Meetings with the police can also cause the children to get new traumatic experiences.

Children's rights are often not ensured when children are interrogated

Questions for the state of Norway:

1. How will the state ensure that the police always make arrangements for children to have the opportunity to bring someone they feel safe with to the interrogation, in order to ensure the child's right to speak freely (safely)?
2. How will the state ensure that all children are appointed an attorney before the interrogation, thus having the opportunity to bring the attorney with them to the interrogation?

Basis

When children are to be interrogated by the police, the child's legal guardians are often contacted, given information about the interrogation and asked to attend together with the child. This is done without the police checking with the child if it's safe for them to have the guardians present. Almost half of the children had been exposed to domestic violence. The police cannot know which child this applies to. ("Angry on the Outside, Hurting on the Inside", 2020)

In Norway, children have the right to an attorney at any stage of the case, including during interrogation, but this isn't something children usually get in practice. Three out of four children in the survey didn't have an attorney present during the interrogation. Many weren't aware that they had the right to have an attorney present during interrogation, even though they have a right to be informed about this. ("Not mean, there's always a reason", 2021)

Action Days Frighten Children

Questions for the state of Norway

1. How does the state ensure that children receive sufficient and comprehensible information, are able to express themselves freely (safely), and are protected from having their information shared without their knowledge and consent, in connection with police action days?
2. How does the state ensure that the decision to carry out an action day is always based on the best interest of the child as a fundamental consideration?

Basis

Action days refer to swift, emergency actions taken by the police and other agencies after a decision has been made about the child, with a lot happening quickly and abruptly for the child.

Many children describe action days as extremely frightening. Being suddenly taken away makes it impossible to speak up about domestic violence or sexual abuse afterwards, because the child is very scared and has lost a lot of trust in adults, partly due to lack of information. From a child's perspective, an action day could look like this:

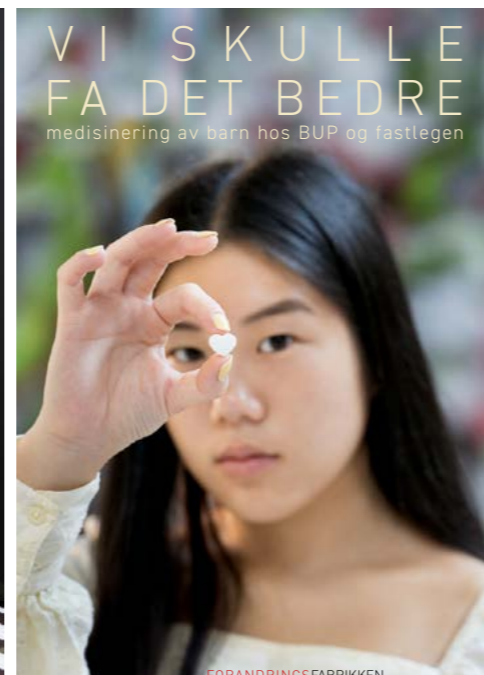
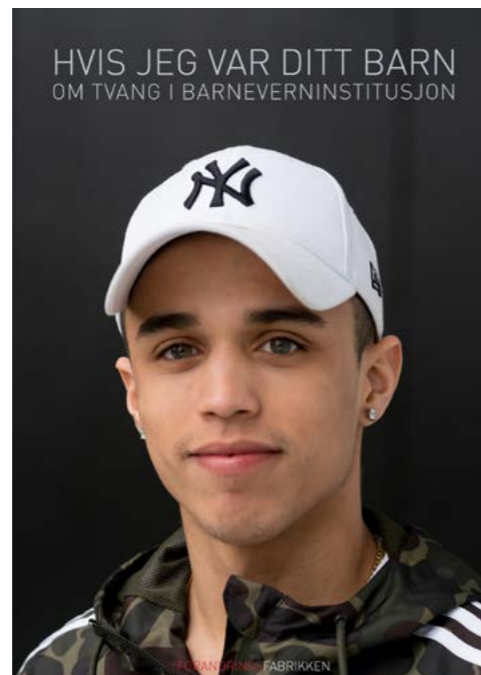
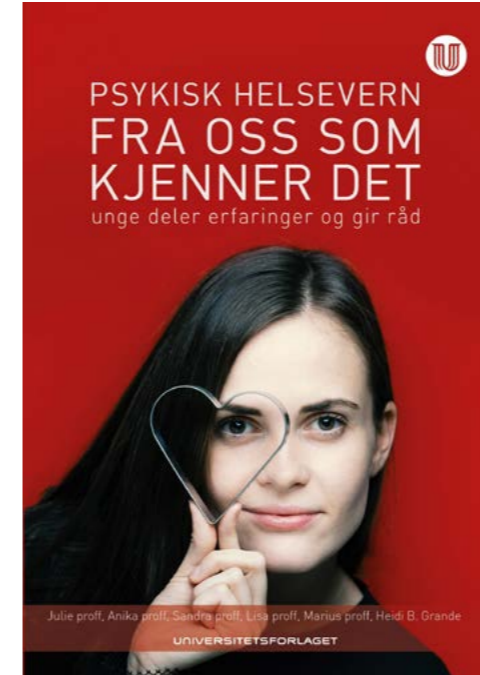
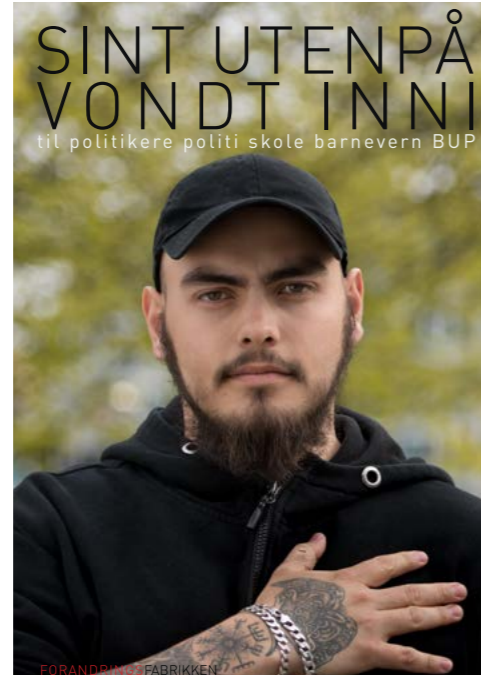
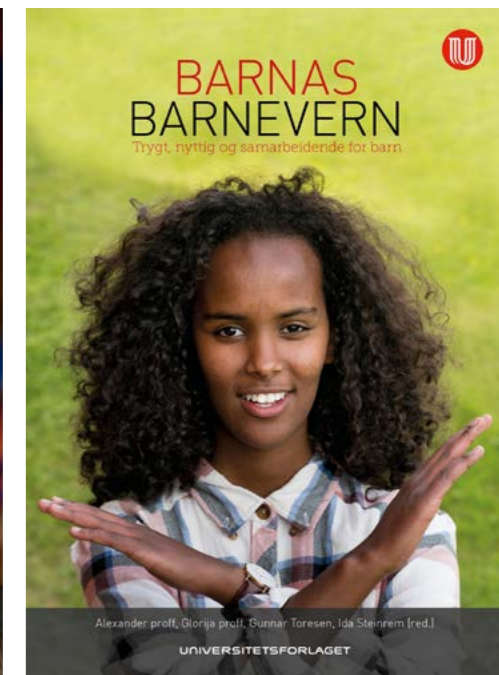
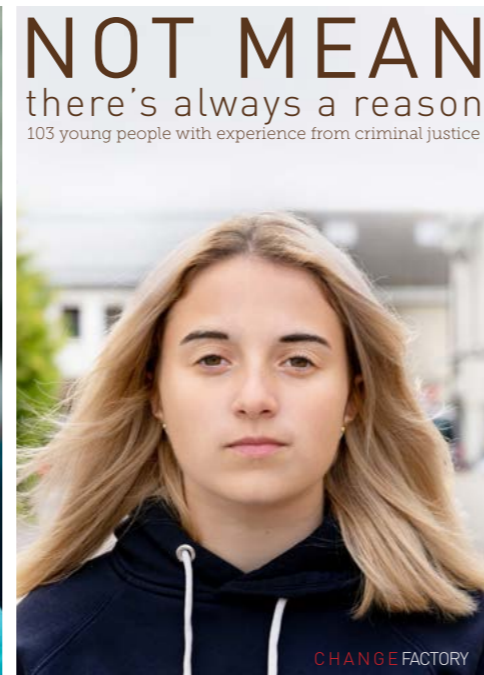
We're being picked up from nursery or school without knowing where we're going or what's happening. For many of us this is really scary. We're driven to something called a "Barnehus" (a place where children are questioned by the police). Many of us have been driven away with no one we trust there with us. When we're picked up like this we've thought that something must be wrong with us or that we must have done something wrong. Many of us have thought that we've been kidnapped, because no one tells us anything. Adults have been planning this for days or weeks – adults in the police, school or nursery have known. All the adults around us have been told not to tell us anything, in order to protect us.

The police can be worried that children will tell the parents/the suspects what is happening, and that involving the children can make the situation dangerous for them. But children who live with domestic violence or sexual abuse have a lot of competence in protecting themselves and in assessing risks, and from this they've gained much strength. The police rely on the child daring to speak up, in order to get evidence. But responses from children clearly show that the insecurity and fear that these action days create in children make it almost impossible to speak up about domestic violence or sexual abuse. ("Just and safe", 2019, and "Wisdom about domestic violence and sexual abuse", 2020, s. 260)

Figures, statistics or reports

We haven't found figures, statistics or reports on the police action days in Norway. In conversations with the police, it emerges that action days are often used to conduct interviews with children where the suspect is close with the child, for instance a family member.





De tror de vet best - they think they know better , 2021
 Forstå det viktigste - Understand What's Most Important, 2019
 Ikke slem, det handler om noe - Not mean, there's always a reason, 2021
 Det handler om oss - Its about us, 2020
 Sint utenpå vondt inni - Angry on the outside, hurting on the inside, 2020
 Snakke trygt I skolen - Talking safely in school, 2021
 Snakke trygt I barnevernet - Talking Safely in the Child Protection System, 2021
 Hvis jeg var ditt barn, om tvang I barnevernsinstitusjon - If I was your child, about coercion in residential Child Care Institutions, 2019
 Vi skulle få det bedre - It was supposed to get better, 2020
 Rett og sikkert - Just and safe, 2019
 Spør oss, så får dere vite - Ask us, and you'll find out, 2021
 Psykisk helsevern fra oss som kjenner det - Mental Health care from those of us who know it, 2019
 Barnas barnevern - A Child Welfare system for children,
 Klokhet om vold og overgrep - Wisdom about domestic violence and sexual abuse, 2020

March 2023: Some of the reports have been translated into English. We are working on translating the rest.

CHANGEFACTORY

