

Barnahus Ireland

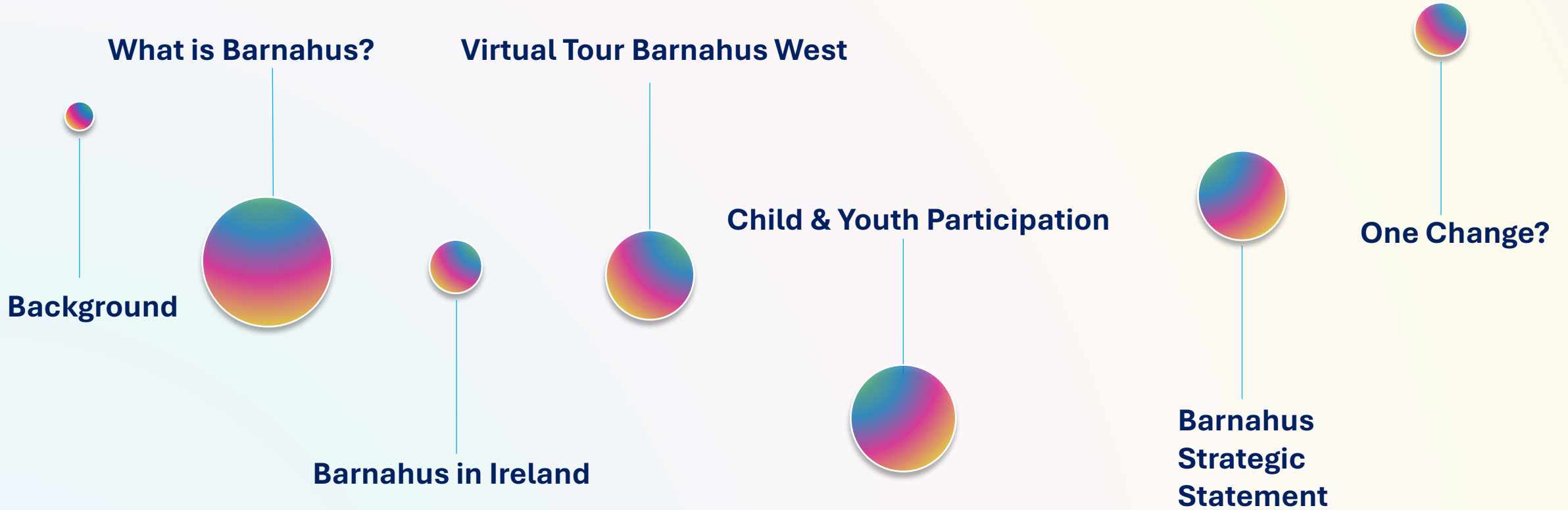
Challenges in Challenging Settings



30th July 2026

Julie O'Donnell | Tusla | National General Manager Barnahus
Niamh Whooley | Social Work Team Leader | Barnahus South

Agenda



What is Barnahus?

- Child centered European **Model of Practice** to promote and improve interagency responses to victims of child sexual abuse and their non-offending caregiver(s).



Why Barnahus in Ireland?

Ireland's response to Child Sexual Abuse

- Reports identifying limitations in the service response

Cross Government approach

- The Department of Children, Disability and Equality, the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, the Department of Health
- Tusla, An Garda Síochána, the HSE and Children's Health Ireland

Programme for Government Commitment

- “Expand Barnahus nationally and strengthen measures aimed at preventing violence against children.”



Why Barnahus in Ireland?

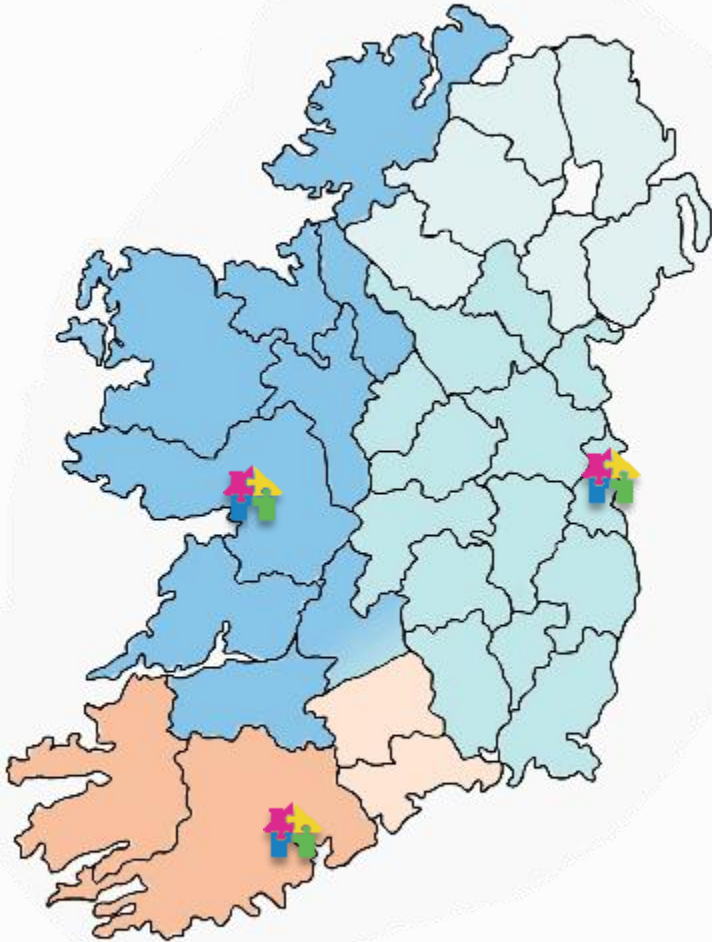


- Rights-based model of practice
- Barnahus Quality Standards
- Centred upon Childrens Rights UNCRC, especially Article 12
- Incorporates Council of Europe guidelines on child friendly justice
- Represents a shift from **‘othering’** to **empowering**.
- Facilitates institutional change, not just service development.
- Supports more effective service delivery.

What is Barnahus?

A Tour of Barnahus West

Evolution of Barnahus in Ireland



Established Locations

- Barnahus West (Galway) supporting children since 2021
- Barnahus South (Cork) supporting children since 2024

Geographic Expansion:

- Barnahus East (Dublin) to launch in 2026

It's Four Agencies Under One Roof

- Criminal Investigation
- Joint Specialist Interviewing
- Victim Assessment



- Forensic Medical Examination and Support



- Forensic Medical Examination and Support
- Barnahus East Therapy

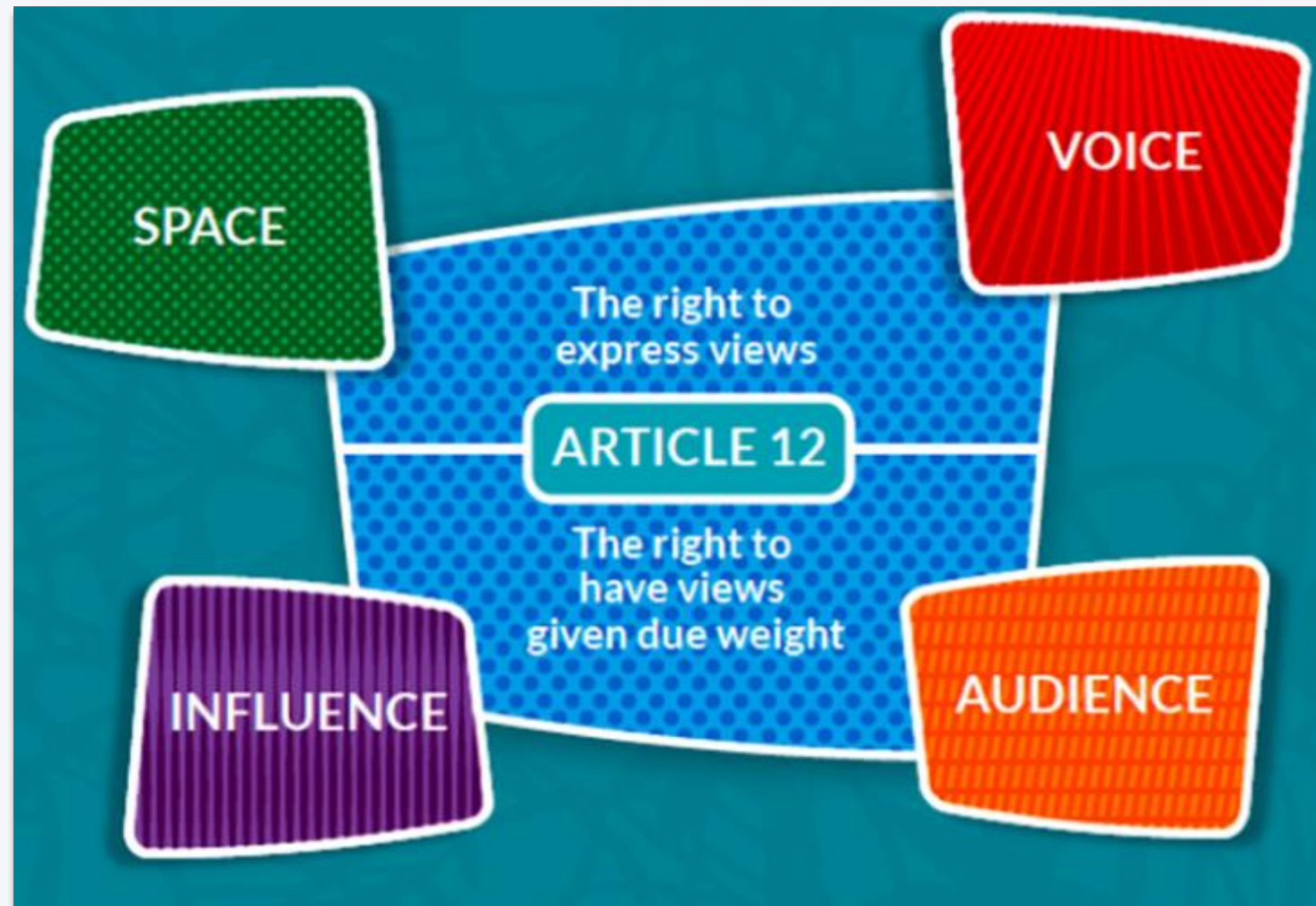
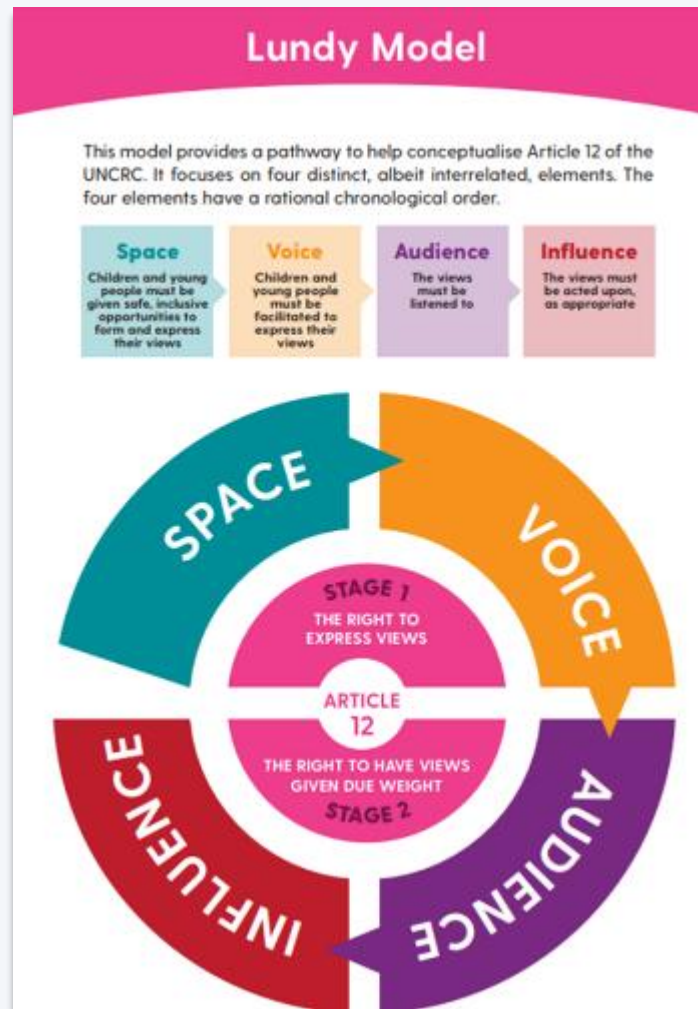


- Child Protection
- Barnahus Therapy
- MDIA Coordination
- Specialist Interviewing

Child & Youth Participation



The Lundy Model of Participation



The Lundy Model Applied to Barnahus



A seat at the table for everyone

No one should be excluded from participating, regardless of ability.



Including the voice of the child will not be a one-off event

It will be an interactive, on-going process.

It will be an inclusive process
True participation will lead to changes in how we do things.



Feedback is key

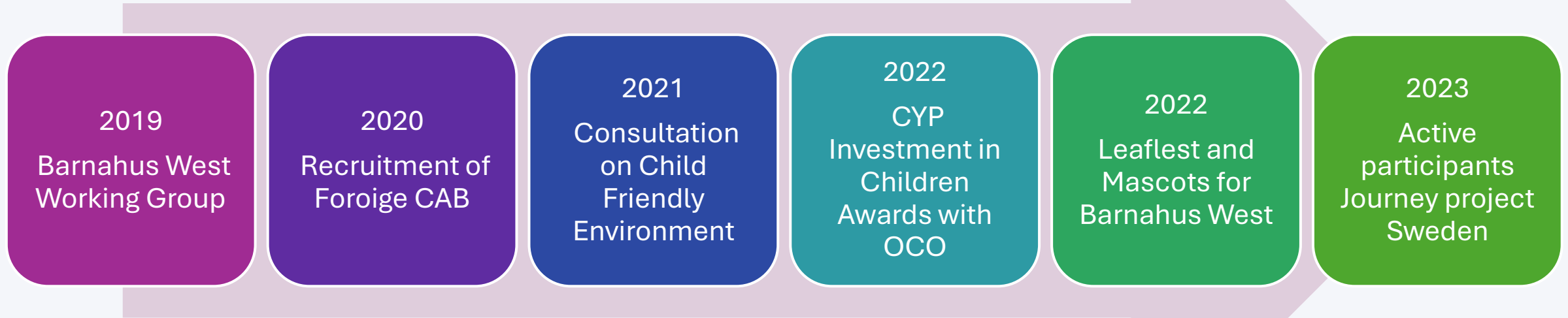
Having invited young people to comment on how service at Barnahus is provided we need to make sure young people are then able to influence its development.

The child's voice

- Each room seeks participation
- Referral screening – seeking Child's views from earliest stage
- Gardai (with parents agreement) meet with the child, explain the interview process and ask if they want to engage with Specialist Interview
- Health: Medical exam is offered, if availed of the examination is explained step by step. Child can stop at any time and only do what they feel comfortable with.
- Therapy: Views are sought in therapy screen – what do they feel they would like help with?
- Child Protection – meet with the child and ensure they feel safe and protected.



Timeline Child Advisory Board Barnahus West



Timeline Child Advisory Board Barnahus South



The Environment

The Building



The Rooms



Lighting



Therapy Dog:



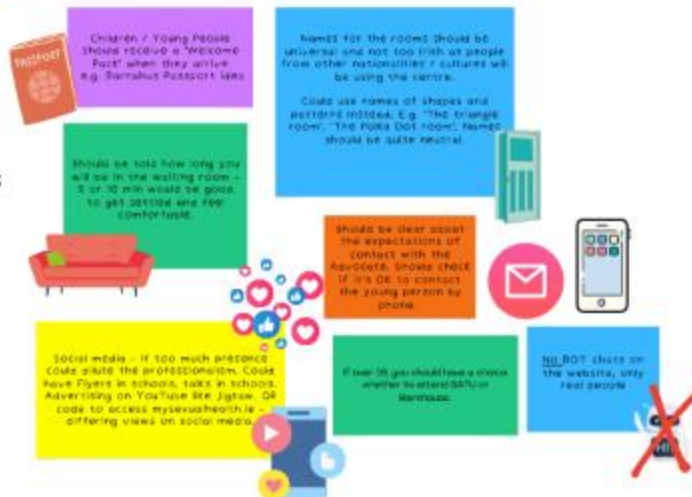
BARNAHUS SOUTH

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE CONSULTATION

We asked groups of children and young people what they thought Barnahus South should look, feel, and be like. Here are their thoughts and ideas.



Communication



The Staff



Child and Youth Participation Strategic Statement

- Placing every child's voice, safety, and recovery at the heart of Ireland's coordinated response to child sexual abuse.



What children have told us

“I’m very grateful for everything. My life is now a bit more stable after learning coping mechanisms and just having someone to talk to” – Child

“Thank you so much for being there for me, you always listened, I feel so much better” – Child

“We think it’s a great service, not one you want to use but if you have to, we couldn’t have felt more supported throughout the whole process from the Gardai to Barnahus therapy” – Parent.

“When I first came to you, I would never thought I would be where I am today. Thank you so much for everything you have helped me with” - Child

“Barnahus is the first place that supported me with what happened” – Child

“A home where you can leave your problems” – Child

What ONE change or resource that would help the inclusion of children and young people in decision making in Barnahus?



**A dedicated
Child & Youth
Participation Worker
for Barnahus Ireland!**



**Go raibh maith
agaibh.**



barnahus.ie