



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND WELFARE

**Erfarenheter kring barn som anhöriga  
Children, and parents with health and substance use  
problems**

Tytti Solantaus  
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# This presentation draws from

- Effective Child & Family Program in Finland
  - International collaboration
    - Nordic Forum – Children in Focus,
    - Two EU programs involving nearly 15 countries, CAMHEE and Kids Strengths
  - Research
- & my own clinical experience in child psychiatry



# We all know that

- Parental problems are a major risk for children's adaptation, school achievement, behavioral and emotional problems in childhood
- Extending to adulthood
- **Intergenerational cycle of mental illness and social exclusion**



# Torvik TA, Rongmo K. Barn av foreldre med psykisk lidelser eller alkoholmisbruk: omfang och konsekvenser. Norge, Folkehelseinstituttet rapport 2011:4

Parent with	Children with parental psychiatric disorder	Children with parental substance abuse disorder	Children with either parental problem or both
dg +	410.000 (37,3%)	90.000 (8,3%)	450.000 (40,5%)
Mild or moderate disorder	260.000 (23.1%)	70.000 (6.5%)	290.000 (26,5%)
Major disorder	115.000 (10.4%)	30.000 (2,7%)	135.000 (12.2%)

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# Children with a parent suffering from cancer

## Niemelä 2012

- Register based study
- 1987 birth cohort
- 59 669 children
- Follow-up until age 21 (2008)



# Niemelä 2012

- 6-7% of children experience their parent's cancer by age 21
  - 3 % : father
  - 4 % : mother
- 4% of children under 18 yrs
- Increased risk for child mental health disorders, **enhanced considerably by the parent's and the spouse's mental health problems**



# Prisoners and their children

- A majority of prisoners have personality disorder
- Murray and Farrington (2005, 2008) : Follow-up of offspring until age 32
  - Low level of education, poverty, relationship problems,
  - 70% with antisocial personality disorder
  - 50% reported having committed a crime



# These families have also other problems

- Family economy
- Unemployment
- Marital problems, divorce
- Problems in other family members
- Somatic illness in family members
- Housing problems
  - Neighbourhood problems
    - School problems





# Children and Adolescents in Enlarged European Union (CAMHEE program)

## Work Package 5 Families with parental mental illness

### Eastern Europe

- Bulgaria
- Lithuania
- Romania

### Central Europe

- Austria

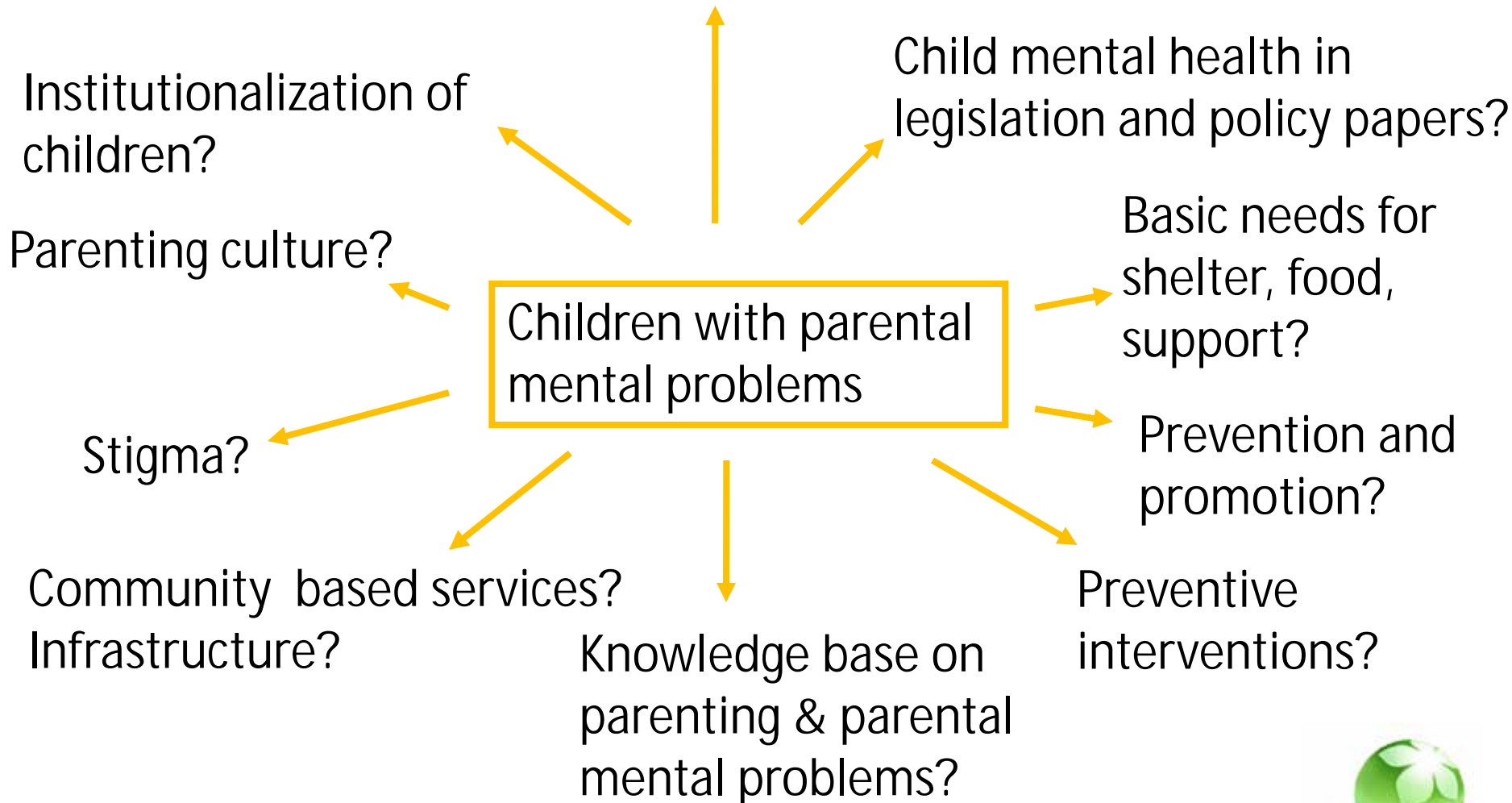
### Northern Europe

- Finland
- Norway

Solantaus T, Puras D. IJMHP 2009



# Rights of mentally ill parents and of their children?



- Initial reaction in new countries when confronting this issue:
- "How awful for children, awful parents, we have to save the children from these parents"
- Children are targeted in actions, parents left out, surpassed
- The role of stigma: stereotyping, prejudices, discrimination (excluding from decision making concerning their own family, life)



# When raising awareness, focus on possibilities for prevention

- When trying to raise awareness, beware of repeating stigmatising attitudes by using extreme examples of children suffering
- They increase stigma and helpless attitudes: this is not our task, it is for child protection



# All partners (all countries in the world?) share important issues

- Children neglected in policy and strategy papers and in legislation overall
- Stigma of mental illness
  - Stereotyping, exclusion from decision making
- Mental illness leads to accumulation of personal, interpersonal, social and economic problems
- The generational cycle of mental illness and social exclusion



# My experiece concerning Europe

	Awareness Attitudes towards mentally ill parents	Legislation Policy	Action in health and social services
Countries X	Little awareness Strong stigma Harsh attitudes	-	None or very rarely
Countries Y	Rising awareness Fairly strong stigma	-	Sporadic, increasing
Nordic countries The Netherlands	Fairly extensive awareness Stigma underneath	+	Nationwide



# Research: The generational chain of mental disorders

- Rutter 1966, 1989....:
  - Risk for children - genetic and environmental mechanisms and their complex interaction
  - **A call for psychiatric services for adults to respond to the needs of children and the whole family**
- Weissman et al, (2005, 2006) 3-generation study
  - Risk also for physical illness
- Dean et al (2010) register based study in Denmark:
  - Risk for a wide range of disorders



# Is prevention possible?

- Siegenthaler et al JAACAP 2012
- Meta-analysis of 13 studies, over 1100 children
  - 9 from the USA
  - 2 from Canada
  - 1 from Great Britain
  - 1 from Finland





# Meta-analysis 2012

- **Prevention is possible**
- Children's risks decrease about 40%
- Prevention of internalizing symptoms /disorder
- 17 interventions needed to prevent one new diagnosis in children



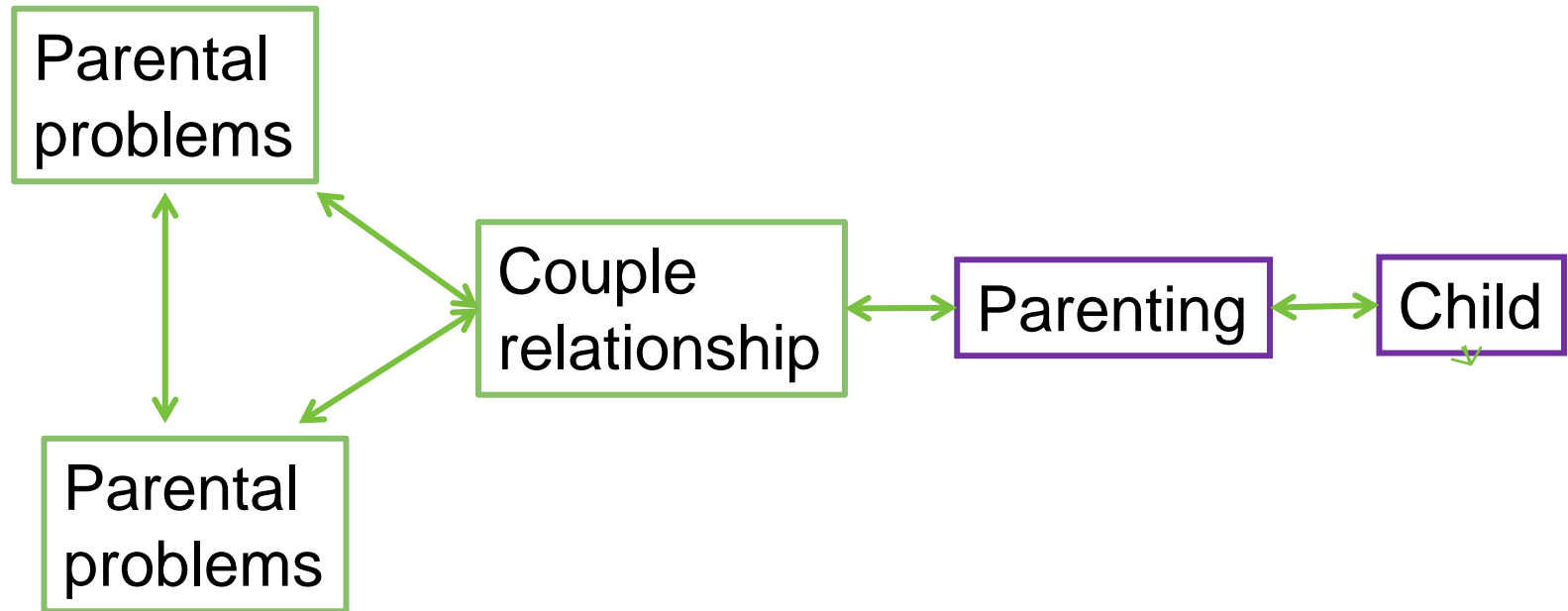
- We need a public health approach – over 20 % of families affected
- Prevention for all families with troubled parents
- We need both low threshold and more intensive methods / interventions



- In order to know what to do, we need to know how the impact on children comes about



# Family relationships and parenting mediate the impact of parental problems on children



# Importance of Parenting

- Parents are decisive in setting the level of functioning and the emotional climate at home
  - expressions of love and caring
  - monitoring and encouragement
  - joint enjoyment and problem solving
- Mental distress compromises parents' relational sensitivity, energy and skills
  - Positive parenting diminishes
    - less expressions of love, caring, support
  - Negative parenting gains ground: anger, criticism,



Family relationships and parenting  
Mediate the impact

Unemployment

Economy

Health  
problems

Discrimination

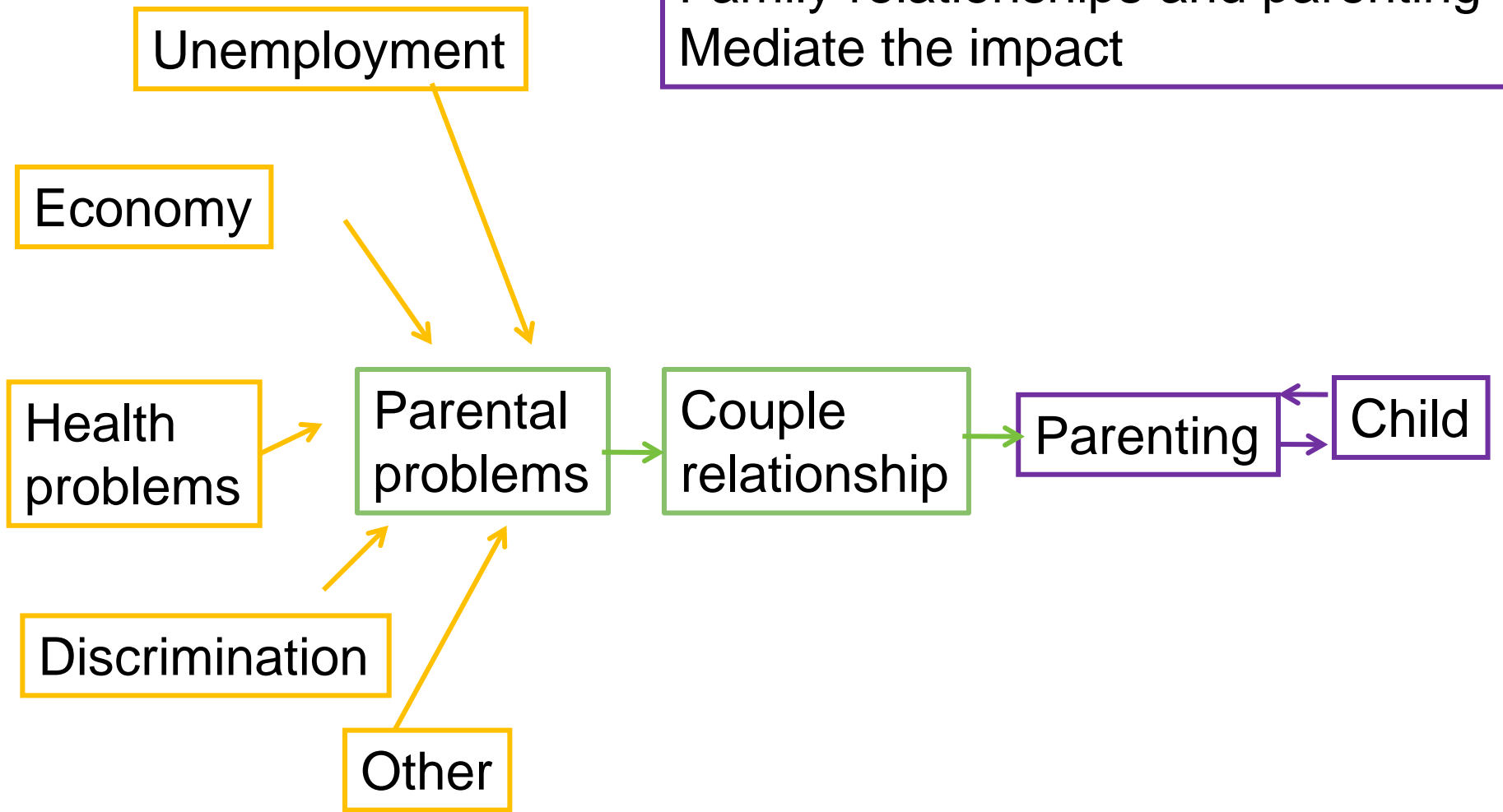
Other

Parental  
problems

Couple  
relationship

Parenting

Child



# Mother-baby program with depressed mothers, Karin van Doesum 2007

- Aim to enhance secure attachment
- Focus on depressed mother's sensitivity and interaction with the baby
- Home visits
  
- Good results overall
- **However, no effect if the family had also other problems than mother's depression**



# Protective factors / processes for young people in adversity

Sandler 2001, others

- Warm and supportive relationships with parents, sisters and brothers
- Good friends, constructive leisure time activities
  - Vs. Free-floating afternoons (Durlak 2008)
- Integration in and a sense of belonging to school

And

- Understanding what is happening and why
- Agency, participation in problem solving
- Experience of self efficacy





# What is needed?

- Parents: to understand their children and children's experiences
- Children: to be able to make sense of what is happening in their life, to get an explanation concerning what they have seen, heard, wondered about.
- Parents and children: joint problem solving



# Coping with Stress: Cognitive - behavioural group program for adolescents

- Coping with Stress, Clarke et al, 2001, Garber et al 2009
- To prevent depressive disorder in adolescents,
  - who have symptoms of depression
  - whose parents have a history of depression
- by means of helping participants
  - to gain control of negative mood
  - to alter maladaptive thought patterns
  - to resolve conflicts at home and with peers



# Coping with Stress,

Clarke et al, 2001, Garber et al 2009

- Procedure: 15 group sessions á 60 min
- Did not involve parents

Study vs control group at 12-months:

- fewer symptoms of depression and suicide,
- better overall functioning
- major depression in 9.3% vs 28.8% in the control group

Significant prevention effect also over 24 months

- **But no effect if the parent was depressed at present**



# Resilience

- Normal development even though there are problems / risks for development
- **Resilience develops in interaction with the environment (Luthar 2007, Rutter 2010)**
- **Resilience cannot be 'installed' in the individual, but it is developed and sustained in interaction with the environment /family, kindergarten/ school/ peers**



# Family program: Family Talk Intervention

Beardslee et al, 2003, 2007,

Comparison of Family Talk Intervention with a lecture in 105 families with a depressed parent

Both interventions associated with

- positive changes in parents' behavior and attitudes towards their children
- decrease in children's depressive symptoms
- increased use of treatment (75% of those who needed)

The Family Talk group

- greater improvement in family communication



# Parent program Solantaus et al 2010

- Let's Talk about Children –discussion with parents
- Information and action plan for parents to support their children + access to other services when needed

## Effective Child & Family Trial

- Comparison of Let's Talk about Children – discussion and Family Talk Intervention
  - 119 families randomised to the two groups
  - Follow up until 18 months



# Effective Child & Family Trial

Solantaus et al 2010

## Findings

- Decrease in children's depressive and anxiety symptoms in both interventions
- The Family Talk more effective in depressive symptoms
- Positive change in cognitive attributions only in the The Let's Talk
- Increase in prosocial behavior in both interventions



# Vertti support groups for both parents and children (Inkinen and Söderblom)

- Builds up both peer support and family process
- Children's age from preschoolers on to adolescents
- Parallell groups for parents and children with joint sessions
  - Child group prepare questions for parent group
  - Parent group answers them in a joint session
- Child group: understanding what is happening, emotional and behavioral coping
- Parent group: understanding child experiences in relation to one's symptoms, parenting issues





# Family group program for adolescents and parents (Compas et al 2009, 2010)

- Designed for both parents and children
  - Parents with current or history of depression
  - Their children 9-15 yrs of age;
- To educate families about depression,
- To increase family awareness of the impact of stress and depression on functioning,
- To help families recognize and monitor stress,
- To develop of adaptive coping skills,
- To improve parenting skills



# Family group program for adolescents and parents (Compas et al 2009, 2010)

- Randomised controlled study between **the group program** and written **information**, 111 families
- Results: at 12 –month follow-up, the group program was highly effective on reducing children's
  - internalising and externalizing symptoms
  - rates of psychiatric diagnoses
- Positive impact on parenting and adolescents' coping skills
- **Effective also when the parent was currently depressed**



# The Effective Child&Family Programme (EC&F) 2001 –

- A nationwide development, research and implementation programme
- Two intertwining trajectories
  - 2001- change in services for adults to embrace children
  - 2007- building community based multiprofessional services
- Families with mental & physical health and substance use problems, poverty, unemployment, criminality



# Nordic Collaboration

Nordic Forum – Children in Focus, NoFoCiF

[www.nofocif.com](http://www.nofocif.com)

- Background

- Similar values, culture of social responsibility,
- nationwide health and social services,
- readiness to move on with children and families with parental problems in a constructive, proactive way



# Nordic Collaboration

Nordic Forum – Children in Focus, NoFoCiF

[www.nofocif.com](http://www.nofocif.com)

- Opportunity to speed up the development in each country with Nordic collaboration
- Rapid increase in
  - Level of awareness,
  - knowledge base,
  - Development of methods and services,
  - Advocacy across countries, policy, legislation



## Denmark

- National network for professionals working in health and social services, annual meetings since 2004
- National guidelines for psychiatry, 2007
- National guidelines in somatic health services, 2012
- Material for children, families, professionals

## Finland

- Nationwide prevention program, including also criminality, unemployment and family poverty
- Research
- Guidebooks, translated in all Nordic languages, and many others



## Norway

- Multidisciplinary approach and methods in community based services
- Strong in peer support programmes for adolescents
- Proactive legislation in 2011

## Sweden

- 2005 so called Milton money to Västerbotten, resulting in extensive training across Sweden over several years
- Research (Pihkala, Cederström)
- Proactive legislation 2011



# Nordic Collaboration

## Nordic Forum – Children in Focus, NoFoCiF

- Website building up [www.nofocif.org](http://www.nofocif.org)
- Annual conferences in alternating countries
- 2005 Finland .....2013 Sweden

## Nordic Forum 2013 - WELCOME!

- May 22-24
- Contact Anita Cederström,  
anita.cederstrom@tele2.se
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*Thank you!*  
*Tytti Solantaus*

