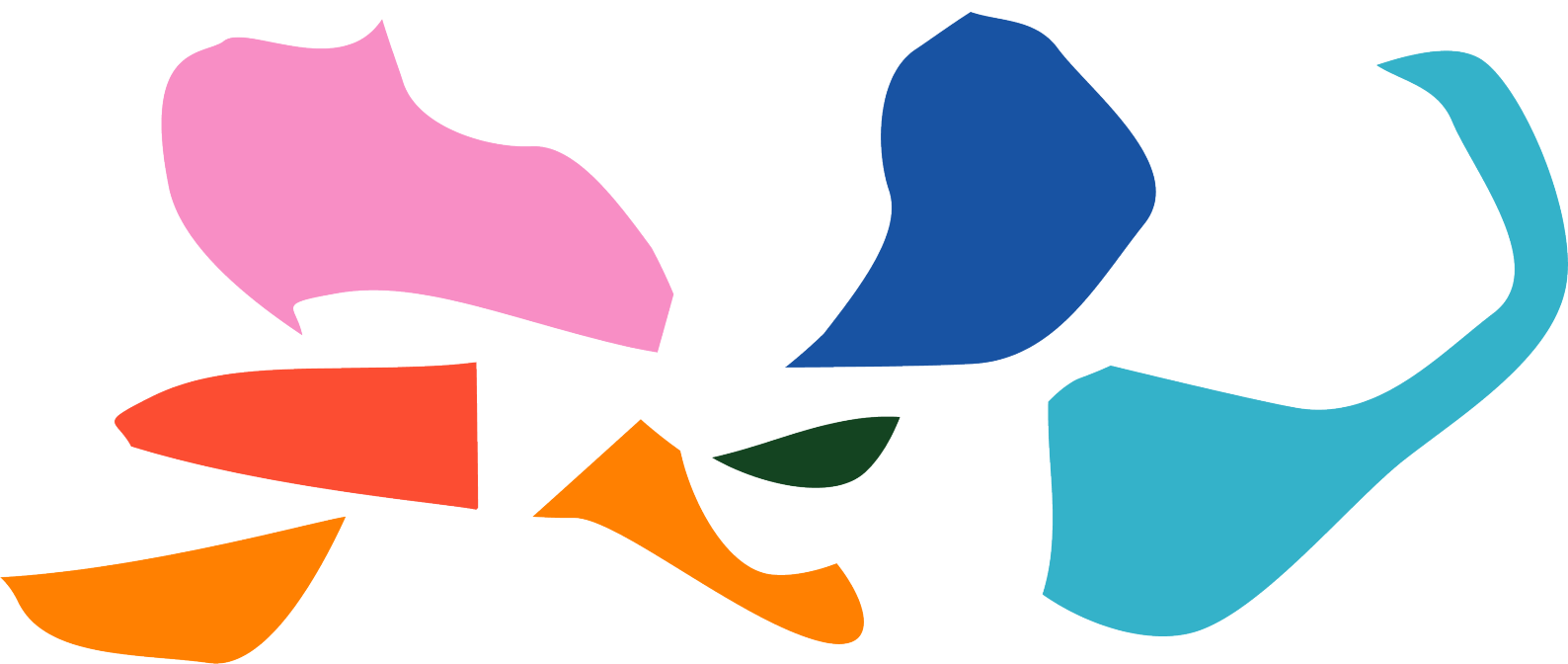


# ***THE PUZZLE***

## ***- A model for enhanced protection, participation, and support for children in shelters.***

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# Preface

For two years, Barnafriid, Save the Children, Marie Cederschiöld University, Gothenburg City Mission, and the Children’s Welfare Foundation Sweden have collaborated in an EU-funded project, After the Violence – Rights for Children in Shelters. After the Violence focuses on enhancing the right to protection, support, and participation for children – during and after their stay in shelters – who have experienced domestic violence. The full title of the project is: “After the Violence: Ensuring Child Rights Based Protection and Support to children who are victims of domestic violence, during and after their stay at women’s shelters in Sweden”.

In this report, we present a working model that we developed and pilot-tested during 2021-2022. The model is geared towards social workers and staff working in shelters and healthcare, as well as municipalities, regions, voluntary organisations, and private actors.

During this project, we met committed people who work in social services and in shelters, and we have also met many parents and children. We would like to extend our appreciation to everyone who was involved from the start and who made this project possible. In addition, we would like to thank our advisory board who contributed viewpoints and ideas during the work on the model.

Analyst Natalie Söderlind and Centre Director Professor Laura Korhonen at Barnafriid have authored the description of the model together with Sara Skoog and Lisa Ekström from Save the Children, Åsa Lundström Mattsson from the Children’s Welfare Foundation Sweden, Maria Eriksson from Marie Cederschiöld University, and Angelica Tingström from Gothenburg City Mission.

Linköping 25.11.2022

Natalie Soderlind  
Analyst

Laura Korhonen  
Centre Director

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# Introduction

Violence against children is a public health problem that is both common and creates ill health. Several surveys show that of the approximately 2.1 million children living in Sweden<sup>1</sup>, around 10 percent have witnessed domestic violence.<sup>2</sup> In a national survey by the Children's Welfare Foundation Sweden, in which children responded anonymously to questions about violence from adults, 44 percent answered that they had, at some point, been subjected to some form of physical or psychological violence, sexual abuse, or neglect, or that they have witnessed violence between adults in the family.<sup>3</sup> It is thus not uncommon for children to grow up with a loved one who is being subjected to violence.

Experiencing violence from early childhood increases the risk of behavioural difficulties, as well as mental and physical health problems later in life.<sup>4</sup> In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children have the right to be protected from violence and other abuse (Article 19 of the Convention).

## Shelters as an intervention

Shelters are an important place for both children and parents who are forced to flee violence and other abuse. The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare calculated that between 31 July 2018 and 1 August 2019, approximately 6,200 children lived

together with a guardian in shelters for at least one night.<sup>5</sup>

Many of those subjected to violence and threats are in need of support. The support needs to be provided urgently, but also needs to be planned for the long term. Shelters offer temporary protection against threats and violence, but this needs to be combined with support to strengthen the individuals who stay there. This also includes the child in the shelter.

## A clearer child rights perspective

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, and has held status as Swedish law since 1 January 2020. The purpose of the Convention is to promote and protect the rights and interests of children in society. Children and young people must be given the opportunity for development, safety and security, participation, and influence. They should also be respected. All children, regardless of gender, age, origin, or disability, must have their rights fulfilled.<sup>6</sup> Children who have been forced to flee violence to shelters together with their parent constitute a vulnerable group where major improvements are needed to ensure that the rights of the child are complied with in accordance with the Convention.<sup>7</sup>

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1 Statistics Sweden, Sweden's population pyramid. (2021-04-08).

2 SOU 2001:72 Barnmisshandel – att förebygga och åtgärda; The National Board of Health and Welfare. Public Health Report. 2009. Stockholm.

3 Åsa Landberg, Carolina Jernbro & Staffan Janson, Våld löser inget! Sammanfattning av en nationell kartläggning om våld mot barn. Children's Welfare Foundation Sweden, 2017.

4 Hughes et al. (2017). The Effect of Multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences on Health: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Lancet Public Health*. (2017).

5 The National Board of Health and Welfare. Kartläggning av skyddade boenden i Sverige. 2020.

6 Swedish Ministry of Employment, 2021.

7 SOU 2017:112. Ett fönster av möjligheter.

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# ***The PUZZLE***

## ***– a model for enhanced protection, participation and support for children during a stay in shelters***

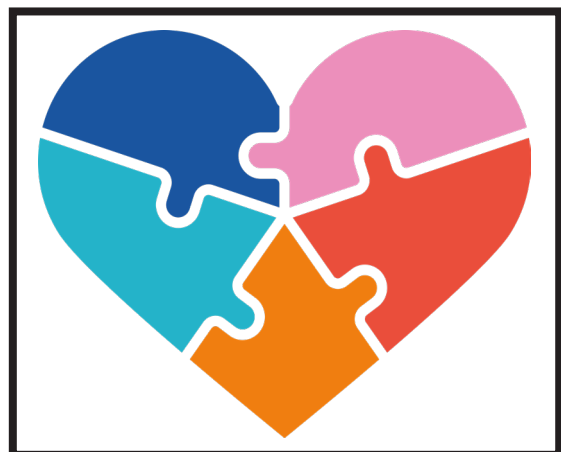
Within the After the Violence project, we have developed a model that was pilot-tested at six women's shelters in Sweden during 2021 and 2022. We have developed the model to ensure a children's rights perspective in shelters, with the aim of increasing children's rights to protection, participation, and support during their stay in women's shelters. The model is called the PUZZLE. When a child is placed in a shelter together with their parent, it is important that the child receives appropriate support and assistance, information about the reason for the stay, as well as information about what happens during and after the time in the shelter. It is then important that all professionals around the child work together and have the necessary knowledge of violence and trauma.

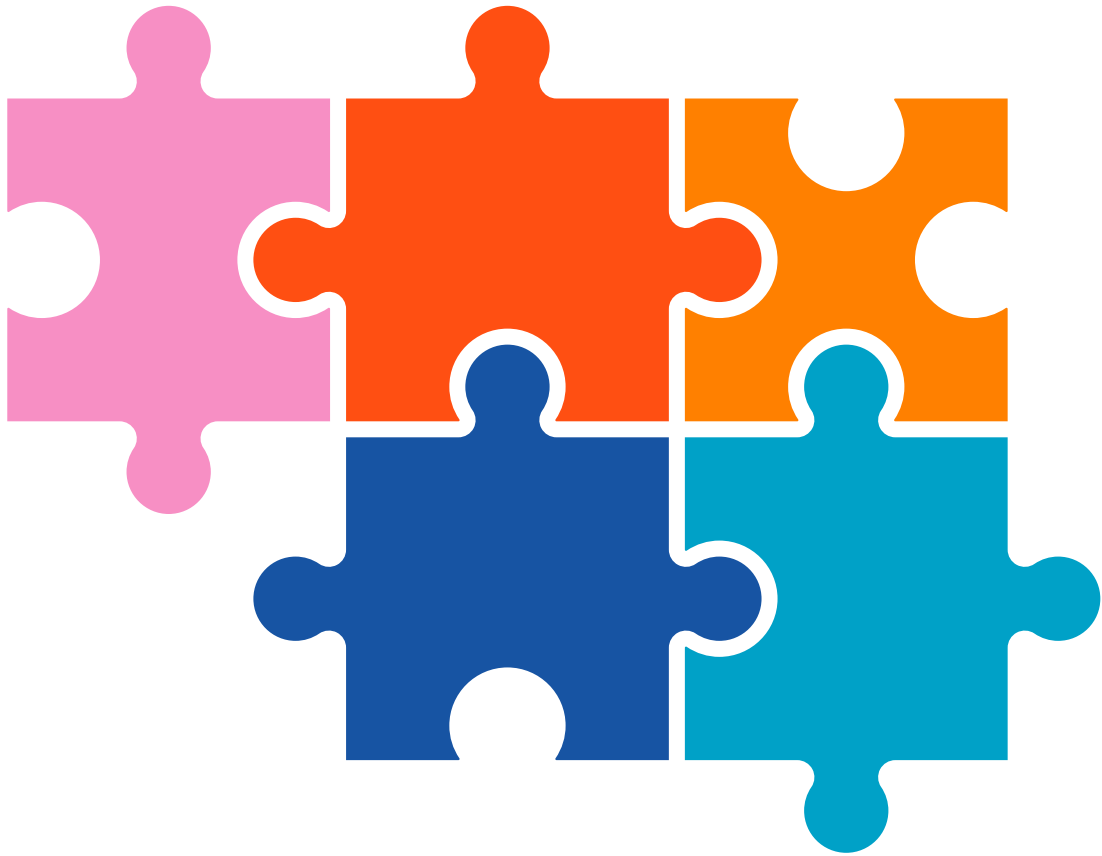
A child who comes to a shelter has often experienced violence and the consequences of violence. They must be given the opportunity to recover and to be involved in the process. The PUZZLE model therefore comprises elements that provide necessary knowledge violence against children, along with a training package to help shelter staff

and social workers meet each individual child's unique needs.

**Knowledge about violence is the framework**

The goal of the project is for children in shelters to have the right access to protection, support, and treatment together with increased participation, play, and activities. For this to be possible, professionals must be knowledgeable about violence against children, and in order to implement appropriate measures, this knowledge must include the different types of violence that exist, the mechanisms of violence, and how to respond to and talk to children. That is why knowledge about violence is the framework of the working model.





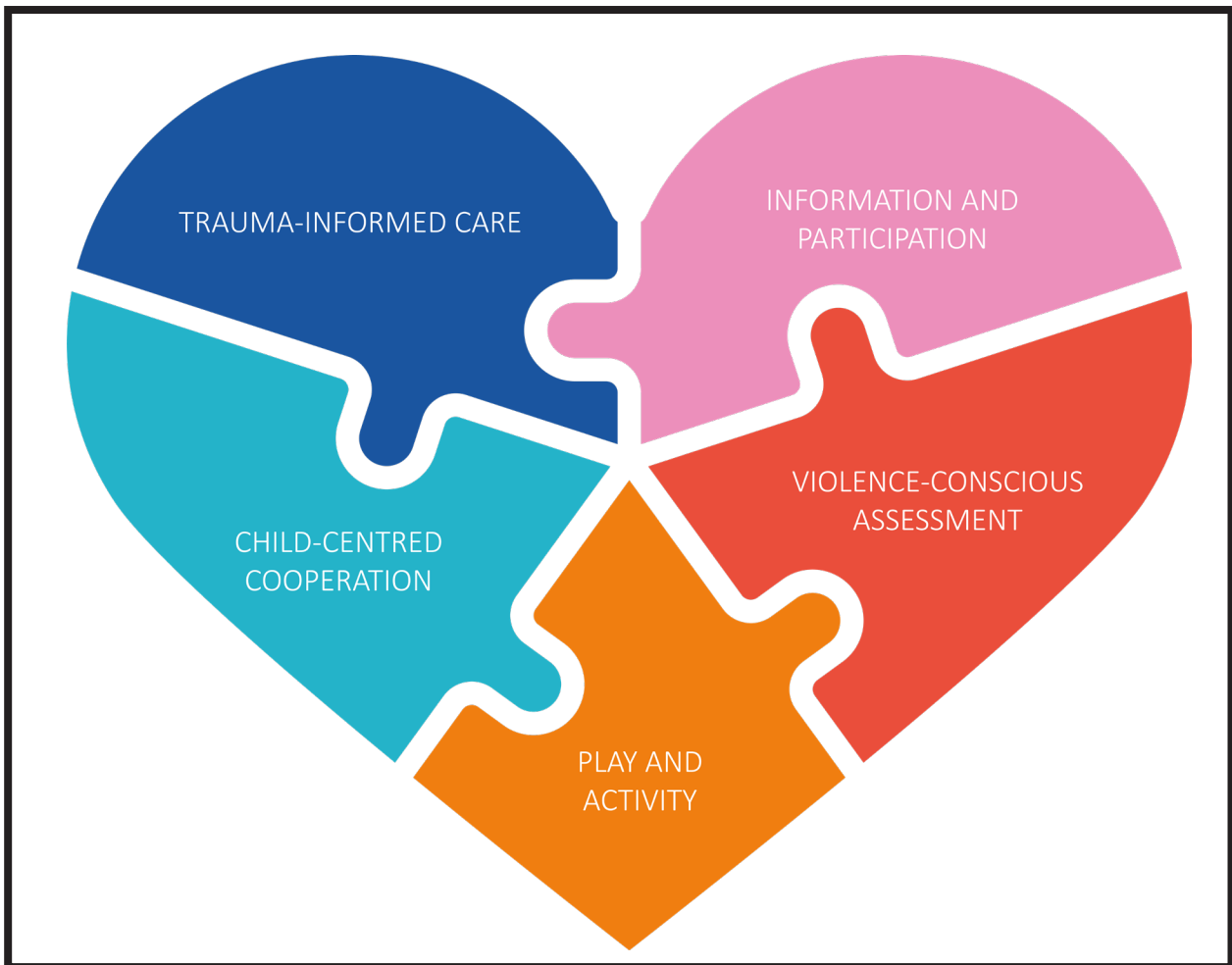
The model is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is central to ensuring a focus on a child rights perspective when in contact with a child in a shelter. We have compiled a selection of the articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on which the model's puzzle pieces are based:

- » Article 3. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
- » Article 12. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
- » Article 19. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.
- » Article 24. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.
- » Article 31. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

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# *The model's five puzzle pieces*

In this section, we present the pieces that make up the puzzle. These pieces are: Trauma-informed care, Information and participation, Child-centred cooperation, Violence-conscious assessment, and Play and activity.





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# Trauma-informed care

Trauma-informed care is a research-based approach that aims to create environments that promote healing and recovery for children who have been through difficult experiences. In Save the Children's basic training course in Trauma Informed Care (TIC), staff at shelters gain a basic knowledge of trauma, and how they can understand and respond to the needs of vulnerable children and young people in a way that creates a sense of security and provides positive relationships and good coping strategies. This leads to an everyday environment that promotes healing and recovery for children and young people who have experienced severe stress and trauma. The training course in TIC provides a theoretical basis for understanding trauma, such as knowledge of how a child's brain, health, and development are affected by trauma. The course also focuses on eventual behavioural and emotional difficulties in children and young people who have been subjected to trauma and severe stress. The knowledge of TIC is deepened and applied practically through exercises, joint reflections, and group discussions.

The course runs over two full days and is geared towards important adults who in their everyday lives come into contact with children and young people with experience of traumatic experiences and who have been subjected to various forms of severe stress.

*The TIC course has helped us to strengthen the role we have in the women's shelter and when in contact with the children.*

**Staff at a women's shelter involved in the project**

*All staff share a common ground in that we work with the same approach, we meet the children in the same way, and we have a basic understanding of what these children bring with them.*

**Staff at a women's shelter involved in the project**

# Information and participation

Children who come to shelters need to feel a sense of participation by getting answers to their questions and the opportunity to express their thoughts about the situation. 'Good Dialogues' is a model developed by the Children's Welfare Foundation Sweden to guide staff in how to talk to children aged 7-18 about their need for information and support. It is an offer of conversation from a child rights perspective, and the child always decides the content of the conversations. The guiding principle for Good Dialogues is to see the child as an individual with personal agency who has the right to express their own need for information and support. The purpose is to increase the child's participation and room to manoeuvre by giving the child the opportunity to formulate their needs without adults setting the agenda. In the long term, the goal is to strengthen the child's development and to prevent mental and physical ill-health. The rights of the child serve as a starting point in communication with parents and children.

The child has the right:

- » to know – to ask their questions and get information about what is happening
- » to receive help – for themselves
- » to feel good and feel safe – it is not the child's responsibility to solve adults' problems
- » to school, leisure, and rest – to be able to devote themselves to their own activities and school work
- » to be able to express themselves and be

listened to – adults should listen to what the child wants

Circle dialogues are used as a tool to help the child express themselves and for staff to let the child control the conversation. With the help of colours and different themes, the child can describe their need for information and support. Training in Good Dialogues is conducted over two full days at approximately 4-week intervals. The course involves lectures, dialogue, exercises, and role-playing. The model was originally developed for conversations with children who are relatives of a parent with some kind of serious illness, addiction, or other difficulty.

*Good Dialogues contribute to a completely different way of thinking about children and conversations, where the child controls the conversation in the agenda, and where they themselves get to define what they want information about and don't want information about*

**Staff at a women's shelter involved in the project**

*The strength of Good Dialogues is that you can adapt it to the individual child*

**Staff at a women's shelter involved in the project**

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# *Child-centred cooperation*

When a child accompanies a parent to a shelter, a number of different actors with responsibility for the exercise of authority and support need to work together to ensure that the child's rights and needs are fulfilled. The cooperation model involves how different actors can work based on the rights of the child and with the child at the centre.

In the work to develop a model for cooperation centred on the child, PUZZLE considered children in shelters to be both "in development" and as "social actors", that is, as individuals and protagonists in their own lives with their own ways of creating meaning and ways of managing their life situation. From this dual perspective on the child, it follows, among other things, that children's agency and participation become a central issue in the treatment of children in shelters. The dual perspective on the child also means that immediate efforts must be combined with a more long-term perspective to counteract long-term adverse consequences of previous experiences of violence.

The IDEAL model for child-centred cooperation focuses on the different phases of a placement process: when the child arrives at the shelter (In: I), the time spent in the shelter (During: D), planning for leaving and leaving the shelter (Exit: E), the transition to life after the shelter (After: A), and it also aims to provide more long-term support in the child's recovery after experiences of violence and living in a shelter (Long term: L).

## **Want to read more about IDEAL-Cooperation?**

Read more here: <https://mchs.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1710311/FULLTEXT01.pdf>



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# ***Violence-conscious assessment***

Violence cases are a particular challenge for social workers. Those involved frequently offer conflicting information based on their different perspectives and motives. The room to manoeuvre can be narrow and the testimony and behaviour of victims of violence can sometimes seem irrational based on trauma symptoms and hidden loyalties. For children to receive appropriate interventions after living with domestic violence, there must be social workers with in-depth expertise in violence.

The training course on violence-conscious assessment is geared towards social workers who handle cases where there is a need for protection, as well as people in leading positions at the units where the social workers work. The purpose of the course is to increase competence, understanding, and safety when it comes to handling these cases. The goal is to achieve safe, secure, and knowledgeable treatment and ensure appropriate efforts for vulnerable children.

The course increases knowledge about violence in close relationships, including honour-related violence and oppression as a phenomenon and social problem, the mechanisms of violence and how violence in close relationships affects the individual's well-being and development, attachment patterns, and parents' capacity for caring. The knowledge is then linked to the practical parts of the case work, such as legislation, perspectives on the problem of violence, risk assessment, safety, and the design of interventions to provide the basis for what we call Violence-conscious assessment. This

should lead to the processing work being based on the best available knowledge, the specific context of violence, the professional's experience, and the opinions and wishes of those concerned. At the last training session, the knowledge is related to one's own professional role through reflective dialogue with other participants.



# *Play and activity*

Children placed at shelters often have limited opportunities for leisure activities. By having trained volunteers who can play and offer activities for children and young people in shelters, the right to play and leisure according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child is made possible. The focus is on enhancing the child's well-being and recovery by creating positive experiences in an otherwise difficult everyday life. It also aims to counteract passivity and isolation and enables more children to have access to safe adults, positive role models, and valuable experiences of positive interaction where the child can be in focus.

In the After the Violence project, volunteers from Save the Children have worked with play and activity through the activity The Puzzle Piece. Save the Children has developed this method through its established collaborations with shelters in a certain municipality. The volunteers have organised various activities for the children, and sometimes even for the parent. The activities have been adapted based on the children's need for protection, and can be carried out both in the shelter, at a secret venue, or in public places such as libraries, theatres, and playgrounds.

Methodological material is available for those who want to start The Puzzle Piece in a new locality: Pusselbiten – att starta direktstödsverksamhet för barn som upplevt våld i hemmet (Eng: The Puzzle Piece – starting direct support activities for children who have experienced domestic violence), and methodological material aimed at volun-

ters: Volontär inom Pusselbiten – att vara lek- och aktivitetsledare för barn som upplevt våld i hemmet (Eng: Volunteer in The Puzzle Piece – being a play and activity leader for children who have experienced domestic violence). An important aspect of the activities is the safety and security of the children and parents who participate in The Puzzle Piece's activities.

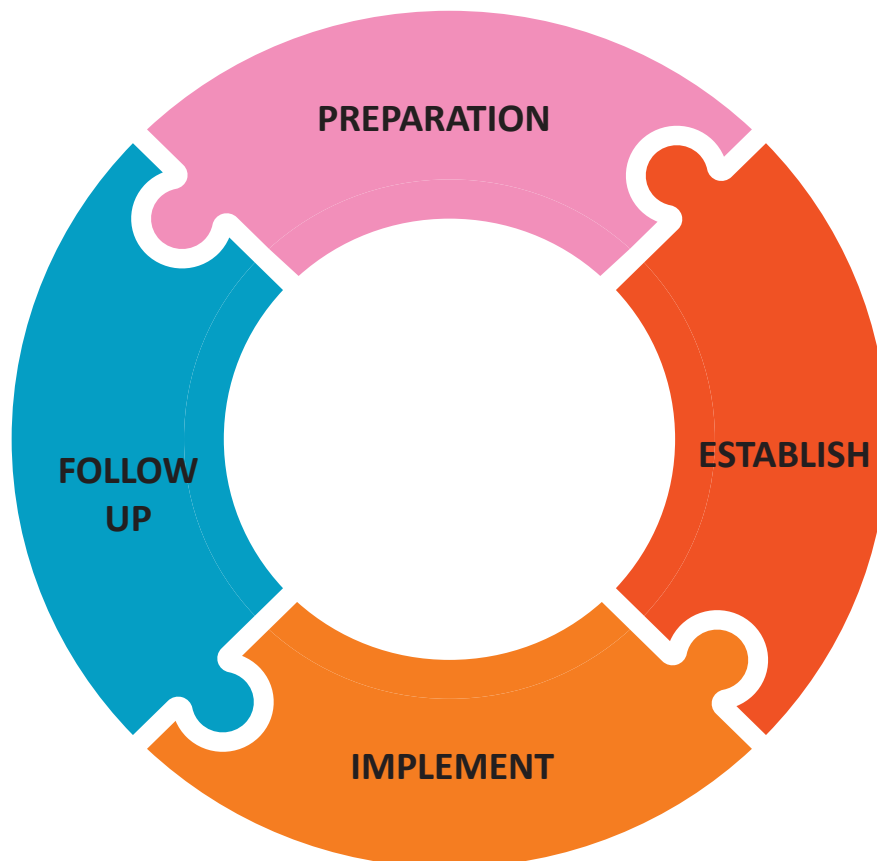
*The Puzzle Piece offers a break in everyday life as it can be quite tough and exhausting for a child to live in a shelter*

**Staff at a women's shelter involved in the project**

*Children and mothers find each other in play, that they have something in common, and the children saw that their mothers also got something out of it*

**Staff at a women's shelter involved in the project**

# *How to use the model*



## **Work on the model can be divided into four stages:**

- » Preparation. Familiarise yourself with the model. You may already have some of the puzzle pieces in place, or you may want to deepen your knowledge in some pieces.
- » Establish. Make sure that staff within the organisation have time and space to attend training courses, as well as time for practical training.
- » Implement. Staff take the training course. Ensure that the course is included in your routines, such as when hiring new employees.
- » Follow up. Has the model contributed to increased participation, protection, and support for children? What do the staff, children, guardians say?

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## ***Why use the model?***

When a child is placed together with his or her guardian in a shelter, it is important that he or she has his or her rights fulfilled. This model serves as a tool to ensure that the focus is on the child. Among other things, the model provides the appropriate conditions for ensuring the child's participation throughout the process, and that the adults around the child have the knowledge and tools they need to ensure that the child's rights are met based on the best interests of the child.



## ***Concluding remarks***

That children grow up with a loved one who is subjected to violence is not an uncommon phenomenon. It is also not uncommon for a child to be subjected to violence by someone close to them. When a child is forced to flee to a shelter together with his or her parent, it is important that all professions in contact with the child have equivalent knowledge of the different mechanisms of violence. This applies to everyone from the individual social worker to the staff who work at the shelter. Knowledge of violence is important, but functioning cooperation must also be ensured during – as well as after – a child's stay in a shelter.



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# Want to know more about the project **After the violence?**

Please visit our website  
[liu.se/forskning/barnafrid/euprojektet-avec](https://liu.se/forskning/barnafrid/euprojektet-avec)

