

Havana, Cuba
Child Protection Centre



The Child Protection Centre in Havana is located in a house in a residential area of the city. This was a deliberate strategy to create a reassuring and friendly environment that did not have the appearance of an official building. To the side of the house is a car park where the child will arrive and then walk through a small garden into the front door.



This leads directly into an adjoining room, where toys are available for the child to play. The facility is staffed by trained child protection specialists including psychologists and social workers. It is designed to provide a service to the child victim and the family.



There is also a further garden at the rear of the house and here the child can play at any time during the visit to the Centre.



The evidential interview does not take place with the child until all the preparations have been completed. This may involve obtaining background information on the child from school teachers, family doctor and so forth.

When preparations have been completed, a trained police officer, not in uniform, will attend the unit and will be briefed by the social worker and psychologist.. The child is introduced to the officer and taken through to the interview suite, on the way they go into the equipment room and meet the operator.



There are three elements to the equipment; on the far left of the picture is the Neol evidential recorder identical to those used in police forces throughout the UK. It records two DVDs of the interview simultaneously and an audiotape of the interview to facilitate transcription. The second element in the centre of the photograph is a voltage converter to change the 110 volts of Cuba to 240 volts to power the Neol recorder, a format converter to enable the DVDs recorded to European format to be transferred to a VHS tape recording in North American format. The third element of the equipment on the right of the operator is the video monitor and camera controls. There is also a microphone to enable the operator to speak to the interviewing officer through an earpiece.



The interview room has been designed to create a child friendly environment. The windows are double-glazed to reduce noise penetration from outside and the room has a suspended ceiling with tiles to enhance the audio quality. The child sits on the settee opposite the officer sitting in the chair in full view of the camera. If the child wants his or her mother to be present, they can sit on the settee with the child.



There are two cameras located behind the interviewing officer. The upper camera is fixed to give a wide-angle view of the entire room. This is to enable the court to see who is in the room at all times and appears as a small picture-in-picture in one corner of the main picture. The second camera can be moved and zoomed in or out from the child.

There is also a facility for the equipment operator to talk with the interviewing officer through an acoustic loop in the interview room using a small earpiece.

The Centre has a very strong multi-agency philosophy. The welfare of children and the family are at the heart of the work. The investigation of the allegations of sexual abuse is one part of a much wider response to the needs of the child and the family. Before the introduction of the video recording of the interviews every child had to recount his or her experience to a number of professionals; the police, the forensic doctor, the social worker, the psychologist, the prosecutor, the judge, and others. The interview with the police officer should now be the only time the child has to relive the details of the experience of abuse; the other professionals can watch the recording. In addition, those professionals can watch the interview as it takes place through a live video and audio feed into a conference room at the centre.



After the interview, the police investigation will continue and the case may lead to a criminal trial. The video recording of the interview can be used at court to further reduce the need for the child to recount the details of the abuse.

The staff at the Centre will provide continuing support and counselling to the child and the family. If there is a need for referral to other specialist, this will be done by the Centre.

Information from all cases referred to the Centre is entered on a database. The analysis of the database is being used to identify further opportunities for developing prevention and education strategies and to raise public awareness to encourage children to report allegations of sexual abuse. In the first 2 years of the operation of the Centre almost 900 cases have been referred to the Centre. The Centre is an example of professional excellence and is unique in the Caribbean and Central American region.

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