



WCF's contact and family time service.

Alice Gillett
Group Manager
Through Care

The Contact service/ Family Time team.

Who are we?

Group Manager – Alice Gillett

Team Manager - Jemma Neale

Business Support Officer - Adrienne Thomas

15 permanent contact workers (full and part time)

3 Sessional workers

The service

What we do

- Currently working with 280 families (some with more than one parent or family member).
- Per week average - 175 contacts (half term week is busier)
- Per month - 680 contacts

Where we do it

Our own venues –

- Bromsgrove - The Birches and The Firs
- Redditch – Downsell Road
- Worcester – Cranham and Green Gardens
- Kidderminster – Radford Avenue although will be moving to 2 different venues in 2023
- Malvern – Poolbrook

Others-

- Hire out venues in Evesham - Wallace house or the library
- Schools
- Independent Fostering Agency buildings.

Our duty to promote contact/family time.

If children are on a Care Order (this may be interim or final), Worcestershire Children's First share Parental Responsibility with their birth parents and within court proceedings the plans for contact between children and their parents/family is a key part of care planning.

- **Under section 34 (1) Children Act 1989, Children's Services must allow the child reasonable contact with:**
- his parents;
- any guardian;
- any person who held a Residence Order or Child Arrangements Order for residence immediately before the Care Order was made; and
- any person who had care of the child under wardship immediately before the Care Order was made.

When we don't promote contact/family time.

There are examples whereby we do not promote contact between children and their family for a variety of reasons, despite our legal duty.

Section 34 (4) of The Children Act 1989 covers this; *On an application made by the authority or the child, the court may make an order authorising the authority to refuse to allow contact between the child and any person who is mentioned within the order.*

Examples where this may apply

- An ongoing criminal trial.
- Child's voice.
- Evidence where seeing family triggers previous trauma in children.

Some children may be very clear in their wish for family contact and a decision be made that this is harmful for them, this is based upon social work assessment and the involvement of the team around the child.

A section 34 (4) order is permissive in that permission is given to stop all contact but it can be re-introduced when safe.

- Virtual contact can be a starting point ~ letters or video calls.
- A child is always represented in court where such decisions are made, by a Children's guardian and a solicitor – all about the child and not for the local authority or family.

Supporting children to feel safe seeing their family.

Promoting family connections.

- Children and young people often re-connect with their families as young adults even after separation.
- Safely managing contact, even when there are risks, is a key part of supporting a child who is Looked After.
- Identity and life story; aids how a child makes sense of things when they are adult or a parent themselves.
- Some children will feel confused/ conflicted/ uncertain. Emotional support.
- Carers may struggle with children returning to the source of harm. They are supported to promote this by their own supervising social workers.

Supervised family time – the benefit.

- Safe and neutral venue.
- Observations of interactions – inform assessments.
- Staff ensure physical and emotional safety. Can be more than one staff member if required.
- If family members/ parents are in an unsafe state e.g intoxicated, the contact may not start – minimise harm.
- Contact/family time can be stopped if the child is distressed or uncomfortable.
- Where safe, in community, with supervision.
- Where possible, family or safe adults can supervise.

The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

Every Looked After Child has a Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who works to ensure that their care plan is meeting their needs.

Family time and contact is key.

At a review meeting, every six months, the IRO may agree a change to the frequency or duration.

Child's needs and wishes change as they grow or settle.

Often becomes more natural, relaxed or less supervised.

IRO may agree to a reduction to the level agreed at court.

Care Order - gives the Local Authority the right to make these decisions without a return to court.

Any questions or
queries?