

THE IN-HOUSE
MAGAZINE OF
THE NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
CHILD CONTACT
CENTRES

contact

M A T T E R S

Autumn ISSUE • 2005



**LAUNCH OF NORTHERN
IRELAND NETWORK**

Page 4



VIEW FROM THE FIELD

Page 6



CHILDREN STILL FIRST

Page 14



**NACCC CHRISTMAS
CARDS**

Page 15

contact
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CHILD CONTACT CENTRES

CHILDREN STILL MATTER

NACCC 2005 AGM and Conference

Page 8 - 11



NACCC News

NACCC Chief Executive

Following the resignation of NACCC's Chief Executive, Beverley J Brooks MBE, NACCC is in the process of recruiting a new Chief Executive, with interviews being held in October.

NACCC Chair

With regret, Pauline Bond has stepped down from the position of Chair, due to personal circumstances. At the September Board meeting Fiona McGill was appointed Chair of NACCC, and Pauline will continue as Vice-Chair for the coming year.

Divorce rate increases again

The number of couples getting divorced increased last year to the highest level since 1996 and the fourth successive annual increase. The number of divorces in the UK rose by 0.2% to 167,116 according to the Office of National Statistics.

- In 2004 there were 14 divorcing people per 1,000 married ones
- In 2004 69% of divorces were to couples where both parties were in their first marriage, while 10% were between couples who had previously been divorced.
- Men and women aged 25-29 had the highest divorce rates.
- The average age for divorce increased to 42.7 years for men and to 40.2 for women.
- The average marriage also increased from 11.3 to 11.5 years.
- 69% of divorces were granted to the wife. The most frequent fact on which divorce was granted to a woman was the husbands behaviour, while for a man it was separation for two years with consent.
- More than half the couples getting divorced in 2004 had at least one child under 16 years old.
- 149,275 children aged under 16 were in families where the parents divorced, with 23% aged under 5 years and 64% aged under 11 years.

(Information supplied by the Office of National Statistics)

Supervised Child Contact Centres Conference

NACCC, in conjunction with the Child Contact Centre Implementation Group, is holding a conference to firstly share, develop and evaluate good practice and secondly to ensure that Supervised Contact is being organised and run both consistently and safely.

To be held at: The Trinity Centre, Church Hill, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham on **Tuesday 8 November 2005 – 10 am to 4.30 pm**. This conference is being sponsored by the DfES. Full NACCC members will not be charged to attend. Buffet lunch will be provided.

There will be a speaker at the beginning of the day and time for questions at the end, but the bulk of the time will be made up of a series of workshops focussing upon:

- Premises
- Funding
- Staffing/training
- Referral forms
- Risk Assessments
- Contact Agreements
- Recording Procedures, to include assessments and reports
- Information for referrers and users
- Evaluation of service delivery

An existing Service Provider will facilitate each workshop. Delegates will be given the opportunity to contribute from their own knowledge and experience. It will be an opportunity for everyone participating in the workshop to share, listen and learn.

At the end of the conference each workshop leader will be asked to provide a summary of what the group consider to be best practice drawn from the input of delegates throughout the day. The material will then be used to help to move towards best practice and minimum standards for Supervised Child Contact Centres.

There will also be an opportunity for delegates to develop and become involved in one or more regionally based support networks.

All NACCC Supervised Contact service providers will be sent an invitation to this conference shortly. Please note we are only able accommodate two delegates per centre.

Launch of Northern Ireland Network of Child Contact Centres

Over the past four years, the operational Child Contact Centres in Northern Ireland have met together, initially as a forum for sharing practice issues and supporting each other. Recognising the need for an organisation to provide a voice in order to participate fully in the debate about Contact services in Northern Ireland, the Network was formed and a constitution and framework was developed.

The Northern Ireland Network of Child Contact Centres (NINCCC) was officially launched on 12 May 2005 at the Island Civic Centre in Lisburn.

About 150 delegates / guests attended the event, NINCCC was delighted by this response, particularly by the delegates from Eire – one group were already organising a CCC on an informal basis, others wanted to set up a service.

The speakers were not only interesting but also engaged in a philosophical debate around issues relating to Human Rights, Domestic Violence, and Child Safety within the context of contact.

One of the key advantages of the day was the networking that occurred on all levels.

The launch was chaired by Lady Eames and the speakers were The Hon Mr Justice Gillen, Judge of the Family Division of the Supreme Court of Northern Ireland, Professor Monica McWilliams, University of Ulster, Muriel Orr, Chair of the Northern Ireland Network of Child Contact Centres and Judy Birchall, Support Manager (North), National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC).

Mr Justice Gillen, who is a patron of NINCCC spoke about "Balancing human rights in contact disputes." He remarked that "the growth of contact centres is probably the most significant development to occur in the management of contact

disputes and the balancing of human rights in recent years" as they "operate at grassroots level providing a vital practical service to ensure that justice is given an opportunity to flower". Judge Gillian also expressed his concern at the small number of centres operating in Northern Ireland and his hope that contact centres would be given a higher profile both economically and physically and asked the government to face up to the challenge.

Professor Monica McWilliams spoke about "Making Contact Safe – some lessons from research". She reminded attendees of the effects of domestic violence not only on adults but also on children and the importance of this being taken seriously and appropriate measures being put in place to ensure the safety of the child/ren and resident parents. She emphasised the need to ensure that families who have experienced domestic violence are provided with the most appropriate support and venue, whether this is supervised by social workers or supported in a child contact centre. (Northern Ireland has no supervised centres and no CAFCASS). Professor McWilliams closed by encouraging those involved in child contact centre work to hold on to the hope that by putting "good contact" in place, we are helping to create healthy family relationships.

Muriel Orr, Chair of NINCCC, gave an overview of the work and development of child contact centres in Northern Ireland over the past 6 years. In the past year, the three Child Contact Centres in Belfast (Central Belfast, Cloona and Knock) plus the Mid Ulster CCC in Cookstown had facilitated 245 families with 342 children. There were over 3,000 family visits and over 4,000 children's visits. In 2005 further CCC's will open in Ballymena, Armagh, Foyle and Omagh. Other projects are being planned in Carrickfergus, Coleraine and Craigavon.



From left to right, Child Contact Centre Coordinators: Myra, Central Belfast; Ilene, Cookstown; Judy, NACCC; Anne, Cloona; Elizabeth, Foyle and Muriel, Knock.

Judy Birchall then provided a national perspective on Child Contact Centres explaining NACCC's role in support, training and accreditation and quoted figures based on average statistics received by NACCC from their member Centres for 2003/4, that 154,056 hours were freely given by 5,502 Volunteers. If the minimum wage of £4.50 – £4.85 (21 years) was paid, this would require £693,252 per annum rising to £747,142 p.a. in wages alone. At an average Social Work Assistant rate of £10 per hour, this would represent £1,777,190 p.a. in wages alone.

All of the speakers recognised the need for funding to be made available for these services to continue and to expand so that there are Child Contact Centres available to all children who need them throughout Northern Ireland.

In June 2005 NINCCC evaluated the event and recognised that as a voluntary group with no core-funded or paid worker NINCCC had held a very successful launch.

NINCCC is actively working to develop Child Contact Centres in Northern Ireland; playing an active role in NACCC and hopefully in Eire. The future looks exciting, it will involve much hard work, making funding applications, and partnership working.

Vera McElhone, Muriel Orr and Judy Birchall

Going for Gold

Although ALL Child Contact Centre volunteers are worth their weight in gold...

What a fantastic response to the new Long Service Certificates awarded to Child Contact Centre Volunteers. The number of Certificates issued is as follows: 65 Gold for over 10 years service, 93 Silver for over 5 years service, and 75 Bronze for over 3 years Service. The total is 1,445 years service given to local Child Contact Centres. What dedication and commitment this shows. Congratulations from all the Trustees and staff at NACCC. It can never be said enough – Child Contact Centres could not operate without YOU. Thank you.

The following list indicates the number of each level of certificate awarded since the last publication of Contact Matters in March. The number in brackets indicates the total number of years service given to that Centre:

Halton Child Contact Centre:
9 Volunteers 6 Gold, 3 Silver (88)

St Mark's Child Contact Centre (Chester): 17 Volunteers 9 Gold, 1 Silver, 2 Bronze (116)

The Dorchester Child Contact Centres: 8 Volunteers all Bronze (32)

Buttershaw Child Contact Centre (Bradford): 4 Volunteers 2 Silver, 2 Bronze (17)

'Jimmy's' Contact Centre (Buckhurst Hill): 7 Volunteers 4 Gold, 2 Silver, 1 Bronze (53)

Oswestry Child Contact Centre:
6 Volunteers 4 Gold, 2 Silver (62)

Child Contact Centre Accreditation

Congratulations...
to all the Child Contact Centres listed below. By the July NACCC Board Meeting all had achieved Accreditation.

- Aberdare Childrens Contact Centre
- Salford Child Contact Centre
- Abington Avenue URC Child Contact Centre – Northampton
- Shrewsbury Child Contact Centre
- Aire Valley Child Contact Centres, Keighley
- Skipton Contact Centre
- Aylesbury Child Contact Centre
- Slough Child Contact Centre
- Bath Child Contact Centre
- Springfield Contact Centre, Upminster
- Billericay Child Contact Centre
- St Andrew's Child Contact Centre, Sheffield
- Boys & Girls Welfare Society, Stockport
- St James' Child Contact Centre, Colchester
- Brixton Family Services
- Stafford Contact Centre
- Castle Hill Child Contact Centre (Northampton)
- Stoke on Trent / Hanley Contact Centre
- Chesterfield Child Contact Centre
- Sunderland & South Tyneside Child Contact Centres
- Child Contact Centre, Maidenhead
- Sutton Welcare Family Contact Centre
- Cove Family Contact Centre, Farnborough
- The Crescent Project Contact Centre, Caerphilly
- East Lancashire Contact Centre, Accrington
- The Little House Contact Centre, Exeter
- Eastleigh Child Contact Centre
- The Meeting Place Child Contact Centre, Scarborough
- Enfield Family Contact Centre
- Time for Children, Tower Hamlets
- Family Action In our Region, Rushden
- Welcare Accord Contact Centre, Kilburn
- Greenfinch Contact Centre, Herne Bay
- Whitchurch Child Contact Centre
- Kidlington Contact Centre
- Wrekin Child Contact Centre, Telford
- Knock Child Contact Centre, Belfast
- Macclesfield Child Contact Centre
- Merthyr Tydfil Child Contact Centre
- Oswestry Child Contact Centre
- Pontypridd Children's Contact Centre
- Portsmouth Child Contact Centre (ECRC)
- Romford United Reformed Church Child Contact Centre

Whitchurch Child Contact

Centre: 6 Volunteers 5 Silver
1 Bronze (33)

Shrewsbury Child Contact

Centre: 13 Volunteers 3 Gold,
7 Silver, 3 Bronze (95)

Wrekin Child Contact Centre:

6 Volunteers 5 Silver, 1 Bronze
(50)

Bury St Edmunds Child Contact

Centre: 5 Volunteers 1 Gold,
1 Silver, 3 Bronze (32)

St Paul's Family Meeting Place

(Bracknell): 17 Volunteers
11 Gold, 2 Silver, 3 Bronze (141)

St James' Child Contact Centre

(Colchester): 4 Volunteers
2 Silver, 2 Bronze (19)

Skipton Child Contact Centre:

28 Volunteers 11 Gold, 8 Silver,
9 Bronze (177)

Loughborough Child Contact

Centre: 30 Volunteers 16 Gold,
10 Silver, 4 Bronze (222)

Abington Avenue URC Child Contact Centre (Northampton):

28 Volunteers all Bronze (84)

Billericay Child Contact Centre:

5 Volunteers All Silver (25)

Hemel Hempstead Child Contact

Centre: 1 Volunteer Silver (7)

Macclesfield Child Contact

Centre: 33 Volunteers 30 Silver,
3 Bronze (63)

South Bristol Child Contact

Centre: 7 Volunteers All Silver
(42)

Altrincham Child Contact Centre:

1 Volunteer Gold (14)

Do let me know in writing if you have volunteers who you would like to thank and congratulate by issuing them with one of NACCC's new certificates.

Carolyn Cottam,
Membership Administrator,
c.cottam@nacc.org.uk

For any of the Child Contact Centres who are still working towards Accreditation, please do not put yourselves under pressure, remember that your local Support Officers are available to help and support you through the process.

North West – **Alex Cairns-Lawrence**
(plus 4 Child Contact Centres in Wales)

Norman Yates

Judy Birchall

South East England – **Don Kelly**

London – **Marilyn Schwarzenberger**

Central South England – **Graham Gage**

East Anglia – **Peter Farley**

South West England – **Charmaine Bryant**

The Midlands – **Russell Collard**

North East England – **Steve Eales**

Please contact the NACCC office
0845 4500 280 for contact details
for the Support Officers.

Celebrating Accreditation!

Earlier this year our Contact Centre achieved accredited status.

Yes, it did take some time to compile the portfolio, but we now have a document which contains all the relevant information in one easy-to-use place. The management committee were supportive and the volunteers were kept fully informed about the process, but from their point of view nothing appeared to change as we have always worked to the national guidelines.

Also this year, many of our volunteers became eligible for their 3 year certificates from NACCC.

I decided to raise the profile of these achievements by organising an 'Accreditation Party' for volunteers and their partners with a 'pub games' theme.

We set up the room that we use for the older contact centre children as though it was a normal session. The bagatelle, air hockey, table skittles, shove halfpenny and table football proved to be as popular with the adults as with our contact centre children. The adults were certainly noisier and

more competitive! Pencil and paper quizzes were available for those who preferred a quieter activity.

Half way through the evening we enjoyed a 'bring and share' supper followed by our Prize-giving. Duncan Gore presented the Accreditation Certificate to the Co-ordinator and explained the importance of achieving accreditation

Rev. Mark Westerman, the minister of the church with whom we are in partnership, presented the volunteers with their 3 year certificates, thus demonstrating that the Church, as well as NACCC, values the work and commitment of the volunteers.

The party was extremely successful and raised the profile of the service that the volunteers give to our Child Contact Centre as well as celebrating our achieving accreditation.

Accreditation Parties are to be recommended!

Ruth Readhead, Abington Avenue Child Contact Centre Northampton

View from the Field

Twelve field staff support NACCC's Full and Associate Member Child Contact Centres in the following ways.

There are three Support Managers, Judy Birchall in the North, Duncan Gore in the Midlands and Barbara Majumdar in the South. They are responsible for:

- Designing and delivering training to Member Centres, Judiciary, Solicitors and other Agencies.
- Working with new Centres, supporting them in setting up.
- Working with new Supervised Centres.
- Keeping up to date with legislation, the voluntary sector, Green papers, consultations etc.
- Support all Member Centres.
- Support and manage the Support Officers.
- Work with Support Officers to help Centres achieve Accreditation.
- Working in partnership with other agencies i.e. Judiciary, CAFCASS.
- Having an input into our publications i.e. Guidance Manual.

There are nine Support Officers who work an average of 10 hours per week. There are four in the South, **Charmaine Bryant, Graham Gage, Don Kelly** and **Marilyn Schwarzenberger**. **Peter Farley** and **Russell Collard** cover the Midlands and **Norman Yates, Steve Eales** and **Alex Cairns-Lawrence** cover the North. Every Member Centre will have been contacted by their Support Officer who works with the Centres to help them achieve Accreditation.

As well as his role as Support Officer, Alex Cairns-Lawrence also has another role, which is Fundraising Officer. He works with Centres to help them with fundraising issues and he also raises funds for NACCC.

There are just never enough hours in the day and for some of the Support Officers the job at NACCC is not the only employment they have. The best part of the job is meeting our Members and hearing about the brilliant work you all do – and you always make us all feel so very welcome. Thank you.



Field staff after a training session – Judy Birchall, Angela Graham, Steve Eales, Duncan Gore, Alex Cairns-Lawrence, Charmaine Bryant, Marilyn Schwarzenberger, Graham Gage, Barbara Majumdar and Don Kelly.

NACCC Field Team



Promoting Volunteers

*Is your Child Contact Centre taking part in the Week
or the Year of the Volunteer?*

Year of the Volunteer

2005 is the Year of the Volunteer, a year-long celebration of the amazing work volunteers do and a call to action to get more and more of us volunteering.

Early in 2004, Chancellor Gordon Brown designated 2005 as the Year of the Volunteer. The Home Office, as the government department with responsibility for encouraging active citizenship, is working in partnership with two well-established volunteering organisations Volunteering England and CSV (Community Service Volunteers) to coordinate the Year.

Aims of the Year

The Year's main aims are to:

- Increase the number of volunteers, particularly individuals from marginalised groups and young people
- Open up more volunteering opportunities in the public and voluntary sector
- Raise the profile of the work volunteers are doing nationwide

- Thank volunteers everywhere for their time and commitment

Volunteer organisations and the Year

All volunteer organisations are encouraged to participate in and benefit from the Year of the Volunteer 2005. It's a chance to increase engagement by providing opportunities for the public to volunteer, and to increase awareness of volunteering in general.

If your Child Contact Centre would like to get involved in the Year of the Volunteer campaign, please go to the website www.yearofthevolunteer.org

Volunteer Week: 1 – 7 June each year

Volunteers' Week is a national celebration of volunteers and volunteering which takes place from 1 – 7 June of each year. The Volunteers' Week team at Volunteering England leads the planning and development of Volunteers' Week. The volunteer development agencies across the

UK Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Volunteer Development Agency (Belfast), Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS) and Volunteering England work together to shape the major themes for the Week.

2005 saw the UK's 21st Volunteers' Week with volunteer managers holding events across the country to publicly thank their volunteers and highlight their contribution to local groups and the wider community. Every year Volunteers' Week plays a huge part in raising the profile of the UK's 22 million volunteers and encouraging others to find out about getting involved.

To find out more about the Volunteer Week, please visit www.volunteersweek.org.uk

If any NACCC member Child Contact Centres have held, or are planning to hold, an event for Volunteers Week please contact Judith Miller with details so that we can highlight this excellent celebration of volunteering in the March edition of *Contact Matters*.

CHILDREN STILL FIRST

CONTACT – CARE – CONTINUITY

NACCC's 2005 AGM and Conference were held on Saturday 2 July at Warwick University. Feedback has been excellent and the day was a tremendous success. The venue was ideal and fortunately the weather was kind to us.

The title of the event, 'Children Still First' was so relevant to the work undertaken by the entire member centres network as well as NACCC. This was illustrated perfectly by all the speakers and seminar facilitators who were passionate about their work and successfully enthused an already dedicated audience.

The AGM covered:

- The 2004-5 Trustees' Report – presented by the Chair, Prue Bray.
It was Prue's last AGM as NACCC Chair and in her speech she outlined the changes and achievements that had occurred since her appointment as Chair. Prue thanked everyone and wished NACCC well for the future and commented that she had been very privileged to be involved in such an organisation which has always put 'Children first'.
- 2004-5 Accounts – presented by the Treasurer, Gordon Anderson

- Review of the year by the Chief Executive, Beverley J Brooks MBE. It was also Beverley's last AGM as Chief Executive. Beverley took the opportunity to explore NACCC's developments to date, the way forward and working with partner organisations. She thanked everyone that she had had the pleasure to work with during her years at NACCC.
- Resolutions – all voted for:
 1. That the annual subscription payable by NACCC members for the year commencing 1st April 2006 shall be £80 and that accordingly the subscriptions to be paid by all other categories of non-voting members shall be such proportion thereof as the directors of NACCC shall in their absolute discretion determine.
 2. That in accordance with section 385 of the Companies Act 1985 Clayton and Brewill of Cawley House, 149-155 Canal Street, Nottingham, NG1 7HR are to be reappointed as auditors for the year ending 31st March 2006.**Special Resolution**
 3. The Articles of Association shall be amended at paragraph 38A thereof to provide for the term of office of the chair to be reduced

from 5 years to 3 years and the term of office of the Vice-Chair be reduced from 5 years to 3 years.

- Announcement of new NACCC Trustees:
Pauline Bond is the new Chair of the NACCC Board of Trustees until the NACCC AGM 2008, following the end of Prue Bray's term as Chair of NACCC.
Phil Doughty – Regional Trustee, South West (3 years – to AGM 2008)
Carol Meunier – Regional Trustee, South (co-opted for 1 year)
Carol Peeke – Regional Trustee, Wales (3 years – to AGM 2008)
Allan Thomas – General Trustee (co-opted for 1 year)
Aliona Laker – Regional Trustee, East (co-opted for 1 year)
Richard Sant – Regional Trustee, Central (co-opted for 1 year)

The new Vice-Chair to replace Pauline Bond will be voted for at the NACCC Board meeting in September 2005.

Full minutes to be circulated to all full NACCC members at a later date.



The Conference

NACCC managed to overcome a number of changes to the speakers and a huge thank you is sent from all of us to Honor Rhodes, Chief Executive of Coram Family, who stepped in at the last minute to be the sole speaker for the day.

Honor's presentation, 'The Price of Love: Children and Contact', was inspirational and her experience in both social and legal work, along with her contagious enthusiasm, makes her a fantastic advocate for child contact.

The price of Love: children and contact –

Who is paying the price?

- Looked at children's needs, emotions, wants and how they are affected by their parents' separation.
- Showed how big the problem is – i.e. nearly half of all children in the UK will see their parents divorce. Mitigating factors – strength of a child's relationships with both parents, siblings and kin, along with support from wider family and friends.
- Discussed good parenting and what parents have to do after divorce and separation.
- Contact Centres see lots of children and young people's emotional and behavioural problems ranging from insecure behaviours i.e. bedwetting, and nightmares to exhibiting problems such as drug & alcohol use.
- Things we know that help children – why are they so hard to achieve? i.e. openness and candour at an age appropriate level, questions answered, spending time and not rushing, reliability, normality with as few changes as possible.
- Who else is paying the price? Parents, grandparents, step & half siblings, wider kinship network, teachers, health professionals, mental health workers and Child Contact Centre staff and volunteers.
- The cost of matrimonial breakdown - £11 billion is a conservative estimate of investment in relationship support.

The presentation was interspersed with quotes to demonstrate some of Honor's experiences of the difficult situations children have to face. For example:

- "I know he was really violent to my mum, I still love him and I could feel guilty about that too."
- "I can't concentrate on anything now, I worry all the time about the smallest things, will I lose my watch? Will I remember what my old room was like? Will my Dad's girlfriend have a baby?"
- I love my Mummy AND my Daddy. I want Daddy to read me my goodnight story. I want Daddy to play in the park with me, I want to see Eggy (the dog)."

2005 Conference Seminars

The seminars were interactive and used both presentations and workshop activities to explore each of the subject.

- What does current research into Child Contact Centres tell us about the benefits to the child?
Facilitated by Christine Harrison, Deputy Director, Department of Health and Social Studies, Warwick University
- 'Free From Fear' – The effects of domestic violence on child contact for the child.
Facilitated by Damian Carnell, Nottinghamshire Domestic Violence Forum.
- A child makes front-page news – how to deal with the media.
Facilitated by Sheila

Lashford, Associate Director, Message Makers Ltd.

- **Child protection, making this real for the child.**
Facilitated by Jackie Perrin, Children's Guardian and Michelle Hines, Social Worker.
- **How can you work with fathers to make contact a success for the child?**
Facilitated by Steven Eales, Fathers Worker, Sunderland and South Tyneside Child Contact Centres.
- **How do you make supervised contact meaningful for the child?**
Facilitated by Peter Nowland, Katie Thorpe, Grassroots Child Contact Service and Hilary White, Deputy Head of Service, Coram Child Contact Service.
- **Safe contact for children through Accreditation.**
Facilitated by Judy Birchall, Duncan Gore, Barbara Majumdar, NACCC Support Managers.

The NACCC Office holds brief details of the seminar presentations and some of the handouts, so please contact us if you would like to receive any of this information.

Making a difference

At the NACCC AGM 'making a difference' cards were handed out inviting Child Contact Centres to share one thing that they feel makes a difference to the children and adults who use their Centre. The suggestions were all displayed at the AGM, but for those of

you who weren't able to see them on the day, here are ten of the excellent ways to make a difference:

- We try to make our Centre a place where the families can be relaxed, at ease and feel at home. A fun place for children to be. We provide toys and games that dads can enjoy playing with their child and also involve the dads in sorting out the toys and fixing them; something they may do in a normal family environment. We listen to their worries, concerns and fears. This we hope makes a difference.
- We ask that families coming to the centre for their first visit arrive 30 minutes after our opening times. This allows for a volunteer to be available to reassure the parents and briefly show them around and answer any concerns that they may have.
- We have just piloted a parenting programme for (mainly) resident parents, to run while contact is taking place which we hope (pending funding) will 'take off' in a huge way. Volunteers were welcome to this too.
- With the other six centres in Berkshire we meet twice yearly as a Partnership of Child Contact Centres which includes representatives from our CAF/CASS office, a local family court judge, magistrates, solicitors and mediation services. We hold a joint training day each

year for our volunteers and are working towards filling the gap in our area for a Supervised Contact service.

- All volunteers wear the same polo/sweatshirt (which is green) along with our name badge. This makes it easy for the children, mums and dads to identify us.
- At Christmas we provide a modest present for each child, the funds come from profits made from running our coffee bar. The gifts are wrapped and sorted into boxes according to the age range. The children dip into the appropriate box.
- We have banned the use of mobiles during contact completely, and sent out an update on our rules to remind parents. This

ensures parents are not distracted from their child during contact and also makes it easy to tell parents – no mobiles, as it's the rule!

We also have a giant Sully (from Monsters Inc.) Everyone loves him and the kids enjoy jumping on him. He is a lovely distraction/focus for parent and child.

- By sending a copy of Ben's story to all the children before they attend and by encouraging the resident parent to stay and let the child/ren play for approximately 3/4 of an hour on their pre-contact visit, we find the child/ren are happier and settle quicker on their first contact session. We do not charge for refreshments,

which are basic, nor do we sell sweets and crisps etc, as this can cause conflict between the parent and the child/ren.

- A pre-visit by resident parent and child helps considerably so that the child is familiar with surroundings, toilet, toys, refreshments, etc. One less unknown for them to cope with. Big welcoming smiles too!
- We try to create and maintain a relaxed atmosphere at the centre. We use taped/recorded music, which I believe contributes towards this, it also has the advantage of enabling conversations to maintain a degree of confidentiality.



A FAMILY LAWYER'S ROLE IN CONTACT ARRANGEMENTS



Often when a client comes to see me about problems with contact, it is shortly after the parents have separated. Emotions are still very raw and sometimes children matters are only one issue to be addressed. I am also asked to advise on divorce and financial matters too.

I am instructed by fathers and mothers, in relation to contact issues but for the purpose of arranging contact the general options/advice is basically the same. That is:

- Contact is the right of the child.
- Generally, a relationship with both parents benefits the child although if domestic violence is involved, then the child's and the other parent's safety must be a factor considered when arranging contact.
- It is important to the child to maintain continuity after parents separate.
- A regular pattern of contact helps to establish a new routine for the child (and often assists parents in coming to terms with changes too)
- It is better for contact to be agreed between parents than for the Court to have to order it.
- If contact cannot take place immediately, then indirect contact (i.e. telephone calls, letters, birthday cards etc.) is a way of a child knowing that the parent who is not living with them still loves them and cares.

In a situation where the parents agree to discuss issues directly with one another, but need help to decide what is best for the child, then mediation is often a successful option.

To arrange mediation, solicitors liaise with each other and their clients. The clients will then contact the agreed mediator who sends forms to both parents and sets up a first meeting. Mediation is beneficial because the parents themselves decide on a contact plan and do not have decisions made for them. If a solicitor is also a trained mediator, he/she cannot act as both mediator and solicitor for a client. Sometimes a judge will recommend the parties attend mediation to try and resolve matters.

If there are any reasons why contact cannot take place at the home of the parent with whom the child lives, then an alternative venue is explored. In these circumstances contact could take place at a mutual friend's or grandparents' home or sometimes arrangements can be agreed for an intermediary to collect the child and drop them off, so that the parents do not meet.

However, a useful alternative is a contact centre. It is surprising what people's general concept of a contact centre is. Many see it as attached to the Court or a place where their interaction with the child is going to be "spied" on and reported back to the court or the other parent's solicitor.

If the parents both agree to contact taking place at a local contact centre then their respective solicitors liaise as to contacting the co-ordinator and completing referral forms etc.

Finally, if attempts to resolve a contact dispute have failed then either party can make an application to the Court. The Court starts from the premise that child's welfare is paramount and a judge has a wide discretion when making orders in the best interest of the child

The court process involves an initial hearing, at which a family Judge and a CAFCASS Officer will try to assist the parents to reach an agreement over contact. If this is not possible, then the Judge usually orders a report to be made. This involves the parents being interviewed and, if appropriate, the child. A return date is set for a future hearing when the Judge will be in possession of the CAFCASS Officer's recommendations and, if appropriate, make an order for contact. One option open to a Judge is to order contact to take place at an appropriate contact centre for supported or supervised contact.

A solicitor's role on the Court procedure is to make sure the client is adequately represented – sometimes a specialise barrister (referred to as "Counsel") is instructed for representation in Court and the solicitor will provide a written Brief to Counsel setting out the background to the case. In this situation, choice of the right Counsel to represent the

THE PRIVATE LAW PROGRAMME



client is important and the lawyer's role in advising the client is key.

Family lawyers are bound by good practice rules set out in The Family Law Protocol. These specifically state that when dealing with family matters it is the lawyer's duty to encourage a constructive and conciliatory approach to the resolution of family disputes. Also to minimise any risks to the parties or the children and to bear in mind the children's interests and long term family relationships. This means thinking ahead as far as possible to take into account children's changing needs as they grow older.

I have not covered areas of domestic violence or abduction here as contact in such cases is usually more complex. In these circumstances a solicitor discusses issues of safety with their client and advise on appropriate arrangements for contact.

Child Contact Centres provide a much needed service in society today. I work as a family lawyer in a Central London firm and also as a volunteer at my local Child Contact Centre at weekends. My employers are very supportive of the work carried out by Child Contact Centres and at Christmas those in the firm who decided not to send cards to other members of staff made a donation to my local Child Contact Centre instead. Our Co-ordinator was delighted, as funds were extremely low at that time because of lack of time to fundraise.

My work at the Child Contact Centre has helped my understanding of the practical side of helping clients to make contact arrangements and has enabled me to explain better to my clients how contact at a Child Contact Centre really can benefit parents and children in difficult circumstances.

Frances Kelly
(Fellow of the Institute of Legal Executives)
CUMBERLAND ELLIS FAMILY
LAW DEPARTMENT
Tel: 020 7242 0422
Email: franceskelly@cumberlandellis.com

This is currently being introduced on a gradual basis across England & Wales building on existing local schemes. It is being introduced after local consultation meetings, which centres should try to find out about and attend if they have not already happened.

Some areas may therefore experience greater change than others. One procedure now being introduced nationally, which before only existed in certain areas, is a Dispute Resolution First Hearing. This means that in every disputed family application there will be an early (within 4-6 weeks of proceedings starting) first hearing at which the court will

1. Identify any immediate safety issues
2. Set out a timescale for the case
3. Identify the issues in dispute
4. Examine the opportunities immediately available for support and assistance including mediation, conciliation, therapy and referral to a contact centre.
5. Have a CAFCASS officer available to assist the family whose priority is to end the dispute rather than prepare a formal report

Centres may therefore find an increase in referrals of families at an earlier stage in their break up.

Hopefully this will mean attitudes are less entrenched & the gap between the non-resident parent having last had contact much reduced.

Centres should note that the Programme Guidance states that "the Designated Family Judge responsible for each family hearing centre shall liaise with court staff and CAFCASS and local service providers and shall set out in judicial listings and in parent & child information sheets the procedures arrangements &

FAMILY JUSTICE COUNCILS



facilities that are available to the court and families in the local area.”

Centres should write to their local Designated Family Judge to ensure that their details are correctly contained on those sheets.

CAFCASS is now only to be asked for a report when it is necessary and then just for key issues, this means that a CAFCASS report will not be automatic in every dispute. This could lead to a co-ordinator being put under greater pressure to give evidence by a family and co-ordinators should be particularly cautious about any comments they make to the parties solicitors, as these are now more likely to be used in court in the absence of a CAFCASS report.

The Guidelines specifically refer to the need to gain the consent of any agency to report back to the court on the success of the first contact handover and centres should ensure that they have been consulted. If they haven't and they are presented with an order they should write to the judge quoting section 23 of the Procedure.

Section 24 states that arrangements for notification should have been agreed during the consultation period – all the more reason to take part.

Centres should also write to the Designated Family Judge for a copy of the scheme applicable in their area as this will contain useful information such as the names of all Judges in the area dealing with family matters and which courts they attend as well as a list of local CAFCASS personnel.

Judy Birchall, NACCC Support Manager North,
jab@birchalls.fsnet.co.uk

The Family Forum has, in the past, proved a really useful forum in Nottinghamshire for sharing information about Contact Centres with a wide variety of disciplines, e.g. Resolution (formerly Solicitors' Family Law Association), CAFCASS, Social Workers, and almost any organisation you care to name which have any impact at all on what happens to children in any kind of difficulty. These Forums (or, as I think they're beginning to be called, Family Justice Councils) meet two or maybe three times a year when, certainly here in Nottingham and presumably in other parts of the country, there is often a presentation about a particular topic, which interests those who attend.

I've heard up to date news about how domestic violence victims are being cared for in Refuges and when they go to A & E. Recently my local CAFCASS officer and I, together with the Co-ordinator for the supervised Centre here in Nottingham were asked to tell everyone about Contact Centres, the difference between supported and supervised Centres and what we all have to offer families locally.

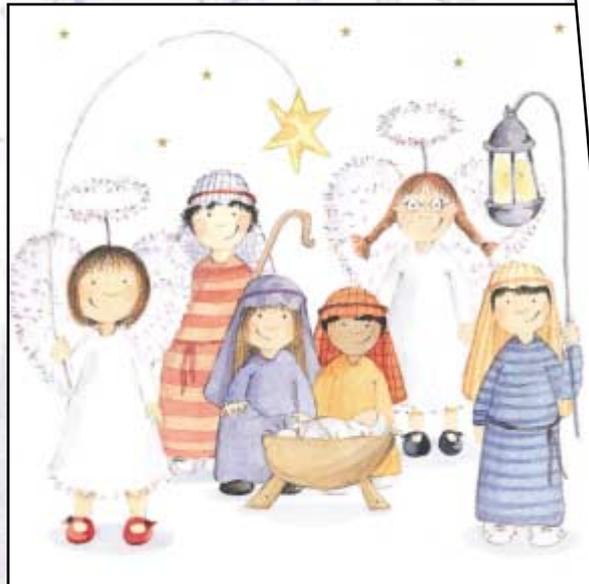
If we've had any difficulties we have been able to air them, for instance letting everyone know that new referrals are being put on hold for a while because of an overloaded list, safe in the knowledge that Minutes are being prepared for circulation to everyone who doesn't attend, thus ensuring a wide circulation of any messages we need to get over.

You will gather that this really is a good forum to get involved with. Do contact the local Family Court section of the County Court and if you have any problems then I'm sure that your CAFCASS contact will do their best to get you included. Now is the time to try as the Family Justice Councils are being instituted and their Constitution, as set by the government requires them to seek representation from the voluntary sector, so the door's open – try going in!

Mary Lower, President, NACCC

Christmas Cards

NACCC is offering another selection of Christmas cards this year. The cards come in packs of ten and cost between £2.00 and £2.35. To order your Christmas cards please complete the order form enclosed in this edition of Contact Matters. Please photocopy the forms as required or contact the NACCC office on 0845 4500280 to request further order forms.



Key Ring

- Do you ever curse at the supermarket because you haven't got a pound coin for the trolley?
- Do you ever want an inexpensive little thank you present for your volunteers or colleagues?

One great way to overcome these dilemmas is the NACCC trolley token key ring!



Key ring quantity	1	10	50
Member Centres	£1.50	£13	£60
NACCC Affiliates	£1.75	£15	£70
NACCC Friends	£1.75	£15	£70
Non-members	£2	£17	£80

Please use the enclosed order form, which you can photocopy as required, to order key rings from the NACCC office.

Dear NACCC



Please send your letters to Judith Miller at the NACCC office. NACCC staff and trustees will be pleased to answer any queries and include them in the next edition of Contact Matters.

Dear Peter Farley (NACCC Support Officer for the East Anglia region)

I am writing to say how much I valued the accreditation process.

Although it was hard work assembling the evidence, it highlighted the areas where we were falling short of best practice. By completing the accreditation process, our policies, procedures and working practices now meet NACCC national standards. This not only enables us to provide a more effective, efficient and professional service to our users, but also provides more fulfilling opportunities for our volunteers.

Thank you for all your help with the process – without your narrative, I wouldn't have known where to begin! The reward of all the hard work, however, was achieving accreditation for the Centre, and that makes it all worthwhile.

*Agnes Thorn, Co-ordinator,
Basildon Child Contact Centre*

Dear NACCC

I am writing in response to the article 'An Accreditation Tale' (Spring 2005 issue). Unlike many Child Contact Centres we have a policy of asking that the parents do meet, this is based on a child-centred perspective. We feel that it is not in the best interests of children for them to be left with a volunteer or member of staff, even for a short time, in order to avoid parents meeting. Consequently, we ask that the adult bringing the child remains in the contact room until children are settled with the other parent. The article in question suggests the outcome of parents meeting may mean heated arguments in front of the children. It is our experience that the majority of parents respect and understand that we will not accept inappropriate behaviour. We believe that our policy assists parents with making future arrangements for contact, supporting them to put aside their conflict and focus on the needs of their children.

*Sarah Oliver
(Contact Service Co-ordinator)
NCH Seaham Family Centre*

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your letter. The great thing about Child Contact Centres is their individuality – you all run to the same high standards, but how you do it differs immensely over the Country. Most Supported Child Contact Centres work on the basis that parents do not want to meet – or they have a system to show which parents do or do not want to meet. The child's needs must come first and the situation needs to be managed sensitively. We are all aware that emotions are raw after parents separate and a family may attend the Contact Centre without any problems for many weeks and then something triggers off bad feelings and lost tempers. If parents do not meet in the Centre, then the child does not get involved and in a child-centred environment, that is the prime concern.

Your Centre obviously works very well with your policy of parents meeting, which is very encouraging that they are putting the needs of the child above their own, which is something every Child Contact Centre endeavours to do!

*Regards
Barbara Majumdar, NACCC*

Dear NACCC

NACCC wouldn't provide a list of child contact centres – utilising the argument that violent fathers might learn where they were and take action. NACCC's helpline is terrible; they won't give the answers that parents want. More and more parents are acting in person and need to know details of child contact centres. NACCC receives millions of public funding and it is a disgrace that they should not publish open lists.

Name withheld

Dear Sir

Firstly, I agree that more parents are acting in person and when the NACCC information line receives a request for contact centre details, as long as the

Child Contact Centres has confirmed that they accept self-referrals, we happily provide the details. As volunteers run a large proportion of Centres and some of the referral numbers are home numbers, we have to be guided by their decision on this matter.

Contacting a Centre directly is the best way to confirm other details e.g. waiting lists as NACCC doesn't hold this information.

Secondly, I wish it were true that NACCC received millions of public funds and I also wish it was increasing! The public funds, which are managed and administered by NACCC, go directly to Child Contact Centres following open and transparent application processes. NACCC receives only a very small

management fee, as reflected in our Annual Review, together with a specific fund to enable us to employ Support Officers to work directly with Child Contact Centres on the Accreditation, but this finishes in March 2006.

NACCC Affiliate membership is open to organisations whose work is related to Child Contact Centres and who are willing to work with the information in accordance to NACCC's Values and Mission Statement. A NACCC Directory of Child Contact Centres is only one of the benefits of Affiliate membership. Please contact NACCC if you are interested in taking up NACCC Affiliate membership.

Beverley J Brooks MBE, NACCC Chief Executive

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National Association of Child Contact Centres, FREEPOST MID30406, Nottingham, NG1 1BR