



Many of us will not have heard of a Child Contact Centre, or realise one meets upstairs in our Community Centre twice a month. From early beginnings in our Church, over 26 years ago, the need was seen by a Church Member and Social Worker, Janet Lawrence. Several of us came forward to help, were interviewed and waited for our police clearance. At this stage all the staff were members of this Church, toys were obtained with help from the William Harding Charity (which still happens today) and the Centre started opening just one Saturday a month.

Over the years this has gradually changed, first the WRVS joined us, when we were then able to open 2 Saturdays a month. Funding was needed for a Co-ordinator to deal with all the paperwork, interviewing of parents and overseeing the Contact sessions, and also to pay rent and purchase toys, tea, biscuits, etc. and this comes through applying to various Charities.

So what is a Contact Centre? The Centres are there to help parents whose relationships have broken down, and who need help to sort out access to their children. For the non-resident parent, not seeing their children is often painful, and equally the resident parent may be nervous and upset about leaving their child/ren. The Centre provides a place of safety and support for both parents, and even grandparents, giving quality time for them to see, play, talk with the children they would otherwise have no or little contact with. Parents often say that they don't know what they would do without the Centre, and that it has enabled them to regain their greatest loss, that of not seeing their children. Children of all ages come; at present our youngest is a baby of 7 months, and the oldest are young teenagers.



However, it is not a walk-in Centre and parents need to apply and have a pre-visit before using its facilities. In the earlier days nearly all our referrals came through the Courts, but now with the lack of Legal Aid it is often through self-referral. Many parents do not know where to turn, and so we

also need to turn our hand at advertising and showing that this service is available.

Volunteers and the Centre Co-ordinator are there to provide safety and support for both parents and children whilst at the Centre. Listening to parents and children in a non-judgmental way, but often with the satisfaction of seeing families enable their children to have some sense of normality, eventually leading to contact outside the Centre. It's a completely free facility to both parents.

For volunteers, as well as listening and playing, we make endless cups of tea and coffee and normally work 1 session each month, besides 3 training sessions over the course of each year.

Safeguarding is of the utmost importance, and here we are lucky enough to be able to hire the self-contained facilities here at the Church on the first floor, which offers rooms to play, an interview room and waiting room and of course the important kitchen.

As is usual in Charity work, we are very short of volunteers. We all work either a morning or an afternoon once a month and swap around with each other as needed. I can't offer that you come and see us in action, but if anyone is interested in volunteering or knowing more, please chat to Pauline Noble, Julianne Wilderspin or Pat Starr, who are all members of this Church and volunteers at the Centre, or visit aylesburyvalechildcontactcentre@gmail.com

Pauline Noble