

## **Understanding how children’s connections to birth families are being managed in the context of “social isolation” and “lockdown”.**

**Funder: Nuffield Family Justice Observatory**

**Research Team: Beth Neil & Ruth Copson. Centre for Research on Children and Families (University of East Anglia).**

### **Why is this research needed?**

In response to the global pandemic of the COVID-19 virus, the British government have given directions to the public to severely restrict in-person contact and travel outside the home. This presents significant barriers to children who are in care, in kinship care with special guardians, or adopted being able to have face-to-face contact meetings with members of their birth family. It is important to understand as soon as possible what other means agencies are putting in place in order to support children to keep in touch with the significant people in their lives. Agencies are likely to be experimenting with more virtual forms of contact such as video calls, but how this is working is unknown.

This research project aims to find out what is happening in practice as it unfolds in real time. There are two main aims of the research:

- To develop guidance that can be helpful to professionals and families in managing “virtual” contact during the current time where in-person contact is restricted.
- To learn about what works and does not work in relation to digital forms of contact in order to inform the development a prototype for digital contact software that could be used alongside (or instead of) ‘letterbox’ contact.

### **How will the research be carried out?**

- Initial ideas and experiences will be gathered by asking for comments on Twitter.
- People who want to share more detailed experiences will be invited to email the researchers or take part in an online survey (see below).
- Professionals, birth parents/relatives, foster carers, adopters and special guardians/kinship carers will be invite to complete the anonymous online survey about their experiences of contact during lockdown.
- Approximately 20 people will take part in telephone interviews to gather more detailed feedback about different ways of managing contact.

Across all types of data collection, the aim is to gather feedback from professionals *and* people personally affected. Data will not be collected directly from children or young people.

### **What is involved in taking part in interviews?**

If you would like to take part in an interview please email the research team (contact details below). Interviews will be carried out by telephone at a time convenient to interviewees. We aim that interviews should last no more than half an hour. We would like to hear your experiences of keeping children in touch with family members whilst in-person contact is restricted, and your views of what is working well or not working. We would like to hear about any guidance you have developed or been provided with. You do not have to answer any questions you are not comfortable with and you can pause or stop the interview at any time.

The interviewer will be taking notes whilst talking to you, but the conversation will not be recorded.

We will not use your name or anyone else's name, or the name of the agency you are connected to, when we write up the study. We will also leave out or anonymise any other information about you, your family, or the agency you work for, that would enable you to be identified.

Anything you tell us in the interview will be kept confidential and used just for the purposes of this research study. The only exceptions to this are if you tell us anything about a serious safeguarding issue (i.e. where a child or vulnerable adult is in serious and immediate danger), in which case we may be obliged to pass this information on to the relevant authorities (though negotiating this with you whenever possible).

### **What is involved in sending in my views by email or via the survey?**

If you prefer to write down your experiences and send them to us by email then this data will be used as part of the research study and for no other purpose. The same guidelines regarding confidentiality will be used as set out in relation to interviews (above).

If you want to find out more about the survey or take part in it, you can click this link.

[https://ueapsych.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_cuveYvQ4bpzct01](https://ueapsych.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cuveYvQ4bpzct01)

The survey responses will be collected **anonymously** unless you choose to give your contact details.

### **What are the benefits or risks to me of taking part?**

We do not anticipate that taking part in this research will be risky for you. Taking part in the research may be inconvenient, particularly as we know that everybody is under a lot of pressure during this pandemic. For that reason, we only want you to take part if you really feel you can spare the time. We will try to carry out interviews at a time that is convenient for you. The survey can be filled in at any time that works for you. We will also quite understand if you want to withdraw from the research at any time, including during the interview.

It will be up to you what you tell us, what questions you choose to answer and we will not push you to tell us about any sensitive topics. However, it is possible that in talking about children's contact difficult emotions may come to the surface during the interview (or when filling in the survey). If this happens we will try to manage this sensitively, and will ask you if you want to take a break or finish the interview. There is information about support organisations at the end of the survey and we can also provide these details after interviews.

There are no direct benefits to you of taking part, though it is possible that some people might appreciate the opportunity to talk about these issues. We hope the research will benefit children, families and practitioners by rapidly developing ideas about how children's family connections can be maintained during the current period.

### **How will my data be protected?**

The information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Sheet. Data management will follow the GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2019). Your information will be stored securely and your identity (and your child's identity/agency's identity) will not be recorded. The only people who will **access** the data are members of the research team. Only anonymised data will be shared with the funders.

### **What if I would like further information about the study?**

You can contact the research team as follows:

Ruth Copson: [r.copson@uea.ac.uk](mailto:r.copson@uea.ac.uk) or by phone/text on 07858 134673.

Beth Neil: [e.neil@uea.ac.uk](mailto:e.neil@uea.ac.uk)

### **Will I be told the results of the study?**

If you would like, we will send you a summary of the research findings. We will store your contact details in order to be able to send you this information. The results of the study will also be published on the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory website.

<https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/>

### **Will you contact me again in the future?**

If you are willing to be contacted about any future research on this topic that the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory or Centre for Research on Children & Families carry out, please let us know – if you agree we will store your contact details for this purpose and share your contact details with the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory.

### **What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?**

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the University of East Anglia's School of Social Work Research Ethics Committee. If there is a problem please let Beth or Ruth know.

**If you would like to speak to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of the School of Social Work, Professor Jonathan Dickens – [j.dickens@uea.ac.uk](mailto:j.dickens@uea.ac.uk).**

## **If you would like to take part:**

Click on the survey link below

[https://ueapsych.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_cuveYvQ4bpzct01](https://ueapsych.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cuveYvQ4bpzct01)

or

Contact the research team:

Ruth Copson: [r.copson@uea.ac.uk](mailto:r.copson@uea.ac.uk) or by phone/text on 07858 134673.

Beth Neil: [e.neil@uea.ac.uk](mailto:e.neil@uea.ac.uk)

**THANK YOU and STAY WELL!**