



## CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

### **A.G.M. 2022-2023**

On behalf of the Management Committee of M.U.C.C.C it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to our A.G.M.

I am pleased to report that once again M.U. aC.C.C. has experienced another very successful year. The very positive report following our annual meeting with the NHSCC confirms that as a centre we are achieving our targets but most importantly we are providing a safe place where not only the needs of both child and contact parent are met but the health and wellbeing of our volunteers is acknowledged and addressed.

As a Management Team we recognise and are sensitive to the fact that it has not been an easy time for Vanessa. However undeterred by the myriad of challenges facing her she has dedicated herself fully to ensuring that in the year 2022-2023 MUCCC has remained fully operational... overseeing the running of the Centre and thoroughly and sensitively carrying out all duties commensurate with her role. For this we thank her.

Following the first "lockdown" in March 2020 it was noted only anecdotally at that time that the lack of a social life would surely affect children developmentally. Nearly 4 years on there is scientific evidence that those anecdotes are correct. David Bell (a veteran education policy maker in the UK) confirms that children's cognitive, language and social skills needs rapid intervention if these children are not to fall further behind. It is further alarming then to learn that children from separated families are most vulnerable from 9months to 9years of age. Following separation children may regress... display anxiety, irritability, and experience problems in social relationships.

When a marriage/ relationship breaks up it can be difficult for either one of the parents to have contact with their children. Professionals who can reduce children's suffering from the negative effects of separation are social workers, judges, court officers and mental health professionals but contact arrangements can break down for several reasons. Since it is impossible to maintain any relationship unless parent and child are in touch with each other public policy has increasingly sought to promote contact believing that "both parents should continue to have a meaningful relationship with their child after separation as long as it is safe." The U.N CONVENTION on the RIGHTS OF THE CHILD and EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS both support the rights of the child and in the case of the latter the rights of the parent to have contact.

What an invaluable resource a Contact Centre such as MUCCC is in enabling contact to take place. Studies indicate that contact between child and non-resident parent may mitigate against the negative effects of separation. It is imperative then that separated parents are given the appropriate advice enabling them to navigate their way to supported contact in “a safe neutral environment” which is MUCCC. Under the guidance of our competent, informed, and empathetic Coordinator Vanessa and her team of volunteers MUCCC continues to provide a safe, neutral, and positive environment for both child and contact parent. Despite the growing complexity of issues facing the families when initially referred to MUCCC the volunteers are there to support and enable contact to go smoothly. Often they share the joy they feel when they observe a strained first meeting grow into a rewarding and positive relationship between child and contact parent. How satisfying it is to observe parents move on from MUCCC to being able to make their own parenting time arrangements.

Volunteers in Contact Centres need to be impartial, discreet, and reliable. I can confidently state that the volunteers in MUCCC fully meet the criteria...indeed they excel. Their loyalty and commitment are commendable. As a token of our gratitude and appreciation our volunteers enjoyed a relaxing break at Kintala Resort & Spa Dungiven. It is a recognised fact that volunteering and helping others generates a sense of personal happiness. This feeling of joy and generosity of spirit is certainly evident among our team of volunteers... a spirit of giving as reflected in the words of MAYA ANGELOU.

**“I’ve learned you shouldn’t go through life with a catcher’s mitt in both hands. You need to be able to throw something back.”**

Full details of all practical sessions, training etc will be addressed in the coordinator’s report.

The challenges facing MUCCC in these difficult and worrying economic and political times are ever increasing but however testing or complex the referrals, we play a pivotal role in enabling families to experience the positives of a safe and impartial environment. It is this quality of supported contact led by Vanessa and her team of volunteers of which we as a Management Team can be justly proud. With an assured confidence in the fact that in MUCCC we work positively, are inclusive and fully focused on the needs of the families who use our centre I look forward to the ongoing development of our service in the coming year.

THANK YOU

Geraldine Mc Garvey.



## **Co-ordinator's Report for AGM Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 Zoom**

The Mid Ulster Child Contact Centre provides a neutral venue where children from separated families can meet parents and/or other family members in a safe, welcoming environment.

Mid Ulster Child Contact Centre is currently focusing provision from Gortalowry House due to volunteer numbers and referral turnover. We are slowly increasing volunteer numbers and numerous efforts have been made to drive recruitment. However, since Covid volunteer recruitment and retention has been difficult for many centres and voluntary organisations.

We have also found that referral turnover has been more transient, and courts are quicker moving families on. This has benefited us greatly in our current situation and has enabled us to allow more families access in the Cookstown Centre. Enquires have been made with a suitable venue in Magherafelt that we hope to avail of when staffing and numbers make it feasible to resume.

Increasing complex cases have also been an obstacle in placing families and it is felt they need to be in a venue that is well supervised, secure and the co-ordinator to be present to deal with arising issues.

During 2022 - 2023 Mid Ulster Child Contact Centre facilitated 150 Contact Sessions attended by 29 families with invaluable volunteer hours. We received referrals from the Courts, Solicitors and Social Services.

### **Volunteers**

The Volunteers are the 'Heart' of Mid Ulster Child Contact Centre, and the reason it is a successful organisation. It is only with the dedication and commitment from our volunteers that we can provide such an important service to the Mid Ulster Community. The role of the volunteer is varied and can be difficult at times, but also very rewarding: Not forgetting the important role of our Management Committee volunteers who keep us on track and provide invaluable support for myself especially in difficult and extraordinary times.

We have currently 23 volunteers from all different backgrounds who bring their own unique experience. Their length of service ranges from one month to over twenty years. The wealth of knowledge and expertise is an invaluable asset to MUCCC.

Throughout 2022/2023 our volunteers have given over 1000 direct contact hours to support family contact, they also give their time generously to volunteer fairs, collections and training. Our management committee who are also volunteers have given roughly 250 hours of service between committee meetings, executive meetings, and the valuable support they offer me.

All the above are approximate values and I would be unable to calculate exactly how much time and effort was given from everyone; I am confident it is more.

We were able to show our volunteers a small token of our appreciation by treating them to a team building event at Kintala Resort. This was a great success and a much-needed team event enjoyed by all.

The role of the Co-ordinator is both complex and challenging but with everyone's continued support, I hope to do my best for the service, volunteers and the children and families we support. I'd like to thank everyone for their ongoing support and guidance especially in difficult times.

### **Evaluation**

Mid Ulster Child Contact Centre uses evaluation forms, observations, reviews, briefs/debriefs, committee meetings and AGMs to review service delivery.

How MUCCC has helped the service user.

Comments:

"I'd just like to express my gratitude to all the staff and volunteers, especially to Vanessa. It's not easy for a parent to leave their child with strangers but they made a very tough experience a little easier. Also, it was nice to meet the staff as it gave me a little more sense of security knowing who I was leaving my son with."

"MUCCC has been vital to my son and I being able to have a relationship while the court process is ongoing."

"MUCCC helps in contacting child with parenting in a safe neutral space. Just thank you."

### **Multi Agency Working.**

Networking with other agencies continues to be a vital element in the role of Coordinator, the links formed with the Court Children's Officers, Solicitors, Social Services, Volunteer Centre, Women's Aid and other community groups assist greatly in easing the pressure encountered by some families and providing training opportunities for our volunteers.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support given to us throughout the year.

Special thanks to:

- All the volunteers.
- Geraldine and the Management Committee for all their continued valuable support and guidance.
- Avril our Treasurer for looking after the finances.
- Frances for her supervision and for providing guidance and valuable help.
- NINCCC and the network of co-ordinators for all their support and guidance.
- The Management Committee and staff of Gortallowry House.
- Magherafelt and Cookstown Volunteer Centre for promotion of MUCCC, Access NI checks and recruitment of volunteers.
- The Northern Health and Social Care Trust who fund the project.

***Vanessa Haddon***

***Centre Coordinator.***

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_