

“Every conversation starts with the child”

“Contingency plans.

What does it mean and why do we need them?



In recent months the development of robust contingency plans has been one of the focuses of our improvement journey. Plans for children are subject to change and should be constantly developed to ensure that they continue to address need and risk. Contingency planning forms a vital element of this planning and also provides parents and families with a clear understanding of what the LA believe to be in the best interests of the child should the current plan (either CIN, CP or CYPiC) not move forward within the child's timeframe, or in the event that parents are not able to safely care for their child/ren.

Contingency plans are often used within our own day to day lives. Having a “back-up plan” could be a short-term or longer-term solution, if the initial or primary plan can't or doesn't work for all sorts of reasons. During the current Pandemic many of us have had to develop a ‘back up’ or contingency plan in respect of our holidays as a result of COVID? We do this so that we are confident that we have a plan in place in the event that our original plan is not able to proceed *‘in the event that the Government restrict travel to Spain we will go to a cottage in Northumberland instead’*... The same principles apply when co-producing contingency plans with families. *‘What do you think would be the best plan for xx if you are not able to care*

for him/her yourself?' See a previous PSW blog (number 17 all staff file) for a conversation about co-production.

The Oxford English Dictionary describes a contingency plan as;

“A plan designed to take account of a possible future event or circumstance”

Contingency plans are vital for the children and families we work with in order that parents are able to understand the concerns and the likely actions of the LA if concerns regarding the children increase as a result of plans not being progressed. Having conversations with the family, as early as possible, helps to ensure these are agreed, recorded and shared with everyone involved, most importantly the child. This will mean that in times of crisis, or when plans are not progressing, there is a clear plan of what needs to happen to keep the child safe.

Contingency planning is a term more commonly used in the business arena. Plans are used to consider future risk and to plan for this in advance. This is not to anticipate the 'crisis' but rather to ensure that all parties are aware of what will happen if it does, In York we have been extremely effective in considering this in line with COVID restrictions and producing contingency plans for how we might visit children and their families when face to face visits may not be possible. Thinking ahead and identifying a plan is a positive way of supporting a family and ensuring that they are involved in understanding what the plan would be for their children if the current plan – which should also be co-produced is not effective.

There are many benefits to a contingency plan:

Effective contingency planning can prevent the need to consider emergency placements for children. Enabling children, where possible, to live with a relative/family friend/neighbour. As such this is much less traumatic for the child as this is someone they already know.

Considering this early with the family is working *with* them and shows that their views are being listened to. This is relevant to both the child, parents and wider family and is a much more systemic way of working. We need to work alongside families to prevent children coming into the care of the LA wherever possible and contingency plans should include family members who might be able to care of a child if this becomes necessary. Having a contingency plan may then avoid having to go to court or seek legal advice especially if this is only a short-term arrangement. Longer term planning may need some legal involvement, however this may not need to be as intense as these plans are much more family led.

Contingency planning *must* be in place for every child and needs to be recorded clearly on their file. This should be included in children's plans which include a specific section for contingency planning but they should also be included in the **case summary on the front page** to ensure that contingency plans are readily

available. This can then be seen by the Emergency Duty team or the duty worker in times of crisis. This may also be used where a child's file has closed and a further referral is received and could then limit the involvement required by the Local Authority.

It is vital that contingency plans are kept up to date to take into account the child's changing needs and circumstances. Child protection plans updated for review should always consider what has changed for the child and a review of the contingency plan needs to be undertaken in order to ensure that it remains the right plan for the child.

Contingency plans are important to parents; the following is some feedback from a SW with reference to contingency planning and includes information regarding the family and how they felt that the plan supported them in understanding what might happen if they were not able to care for their child.

"When I started my placement as a student social worker with the City of York Council I had no idea what a 'good' plan should look like. I had seen common phrases such as 'will seek legal advice' on examples and therefore started including this phrase within my own plans despite not knowing what this really meant/would look like. However, after attending one of the Effective Planning workshops, I developed a much clearer contingency plan for a child who was subject to a Child Protection plan. When I shared this document with a family, they expressed feeling relieved that they knew exactly what would happen to their child if they were considered as being unable to meet her needs; the family admitted that the phrase 'seek legal advice' had left them confused about the potential outcome for their child. The family also then made recommendations regarding other potential family members who they would like to be considered when contingency planning. I felt that this brought the family further into the decision making process regarding their child".

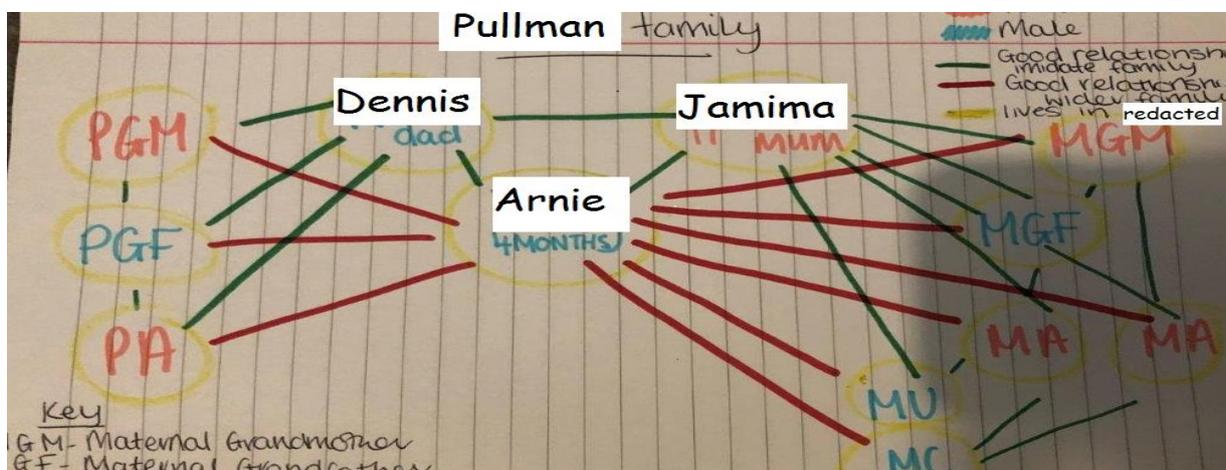


Some questions/things to consider:

- What will happen to the child if progress against the current plan is not as expected?
 - How can the child be kept safe?
 - What do we need to do to make this happen?
 - What do we know about the extended family, is there anyone who could care for the child.
 - Have viability assessments been considered/undertaken?
- What is the child's view about where they might live if they are unable to remain with their current carers?
 - What are the parents/carers views?

- What legal processes need to take place to progress the contingency plan – application to the court for a S31 order, Instigate the PLO process (LBP), LGM, move the child to the care of an extended family member accommodate the child?

Very early in your work with a family you should give consideration to the contingency plan for the child. Completing a cultural genogram or ecomap will support you in this and will help you as a worker consider and understand who is part of the child's life, who they already spend regular time with and have built up good relationships and as such who may be able to care for them long or short-term should their parents or current carers not be able to meet their needs. See previous PSW blog 11th June 2020, number 10 – all staff file, for a discussion about social genograms.



How contingency plans can work in social work practice

Make sure that the plan is clear and is focused on the outcome. Ensure it is written in plain language which families can understand;

The plan for the children will be reviewed regularly at each core group. If there is no progress within the timescales set out in the plan and the risk to the children increases, the LA will present the children's case to the court to seek an order so that the children can be cared for by Auntie Jean who has been assessed as a viable carer for them.

What it should **not** be is a statement which indicates that the contingency is 'to seek legal advice' advise the IRO of escalating concerns'.

IRO's are an integral part of the child protection process and should be advised regularly if concerns are increasing. They should be advised of the progress of the plan via the core groups and regular conversations with SW's.

Remember - The threshold for child protection plan is S31 Children Act 1989 and as such if a child is already subject to a plan the threshold is already met. Seeking legal advice at this stage is appropriate but should not delay the progress of the case or add potential for delay in a case. Legal colleagues are available to offer advice regarding whether a case is ready to go to LGM at any time during the progress of the case.

The next Children's Social Work Matters Festival of Social Work conference will be taking place virtually over three days between Wednesday 18th and Friday 20th November. Registration is currently open and you have until **Friday 25th September** to express your interest to Karen Darley (SD lead). Only 30 delegate places are available, so if you want to attend please let Karen know ASAP. Places will be allocated, but in the meantime if you want to attend please *save the date*.

The theme this year is "**Managing Uncertainty**" with an ambition to stimulate discussion and shared learning around managing risk, uncertainty and resilience. The overall aim for the day is to inspire and motivate social work practitioners and managers, to learn from industry experts as well as to share knowledge and showcase good practice across the region.



Word Festival of
Social work info.doc

Finally and importantly, a message from Amanda Hatton;

"I am sure you know this week we have been working with a team of peers from across the region to review the health of our MASH arrangements. The team looked at appropriateness of thresholds, management oversight and decisions, quality of decision making and assessments, partnership working and quality assurance. I am really pleased to say the team were able to identify a real shift in culture and a passion for continuous improvement and getting it right for children every time. They also saw some really strong practice and effective decision making. They reflected back to us some areas where we still need to improve but these are areas we already have plans in place to develop and build our confidence. We will get a letter with more detail which I will send to all of you once it's signed off, but wanted to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you. Whilst this was a front door review it evidenced the change in culture and practice across the service. That is validation

of all the hard work you have all done – thank you – you have made things safer and better for our children”.



Please let me know your thoughts and any ideas for future blogs, areas of social work practice which you are particularly interested in. I look forward to seeing you next week in the Systemic Practice introductory sessions which I know will generate a great deal of debate and discussion – **if you haven't booked your place you can still do this through MYLO.**

What is going well	What is not going well	What would you like to change
Comments		

Principal Social Worker principalsocialworker@york.gov.uk

Dallas

Donna Davies, Advanced Practitioner

