

## The Journey So Far

Sharing Stories has worked with birth mothers, birth fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles and with careful planning an older sibling.

Sharing stories has met birth families in their own homes, in offices, after contact sessions, in prison and out in public – being flexible to whatever feels most comfortable to the birth family.

Sharing Stories has helped birth families produce and share important information about the child's family background and experiences. This has been in the form of homemade books, photographs, letters and mementos. Some of these birth families had refused to work with their Local Authority, others were working with their Local Authority but felt more able to contribute information with the support of Sharing Stories.

Although initially apprehensive, birth families and EP carers have felt benefits to engaging with the project whilst the Court processes is still ongoing. Some have felt more able to engage after the final hearing, others have started before the final hearing and then paused for a while after placement orders have been made, re-engaging at their own pace.

EP carers have told us *“I didn't know what to expect and there were times when it was really emotional but I am so glad we had Sharing Stories involved”*.


## How to Refer


Anyone can make a referral to Sharing Stories and birth families are also able to self-refer. All that is needed is the name of the birth parent(s), and any contact details that you hold for them. Sharing Stories can then take the referral forward alone, or can arrange joint visits with professionals to introduce the Sharing Stories project and answer any questions that birth families and professionals may have. Referrals can be made by telephone or e-mail using the contact details below.

## A Bit about Sara

Sara Stocks is a legally trained mediator with experience of mediating adoption cases in the US. From a first career in early years education and training she took a law degree, post graduate law qualifications and re-trained as an adoption mediator. She has experience as a guardian-ad-litem in the Boston Juvenile Court and as an adoption mediator for Children's Services of Roxbury, Massachusetts where she mediated contact arrangements for SGO and Adoption cases. She is now the lead mediator and project development worker for Sharing Stories, run by CCS Adoption in Bristol.

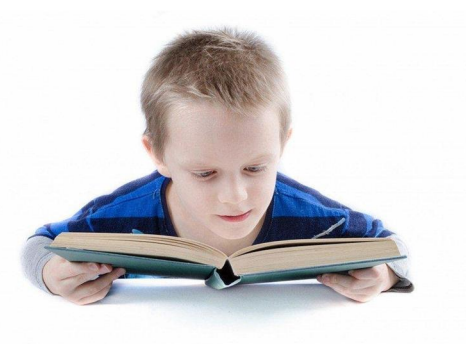
## Contact Details

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# Sharing Stories Information for Social Workers – Frequently Asked Questions



## **What is Sharing Stories?**

Sharing Stories is an innovative project, launched in March 2017 that encourages and enables birth families to share detailed and meaningful life story data, for use by EP carers, adopters and professionals to help children understand their life story. The project also supports EP carers and adopters to accept and use the information gathered in a positive, child focussed and therapeutic way.

### **How does it work?**

Sara Stocks, Mediator, will meet with the birth family (parent(s), grandparents, aunts and uncles etc) in whatever setting is comfortable for them. Over a course of sessions Sara will support them to share their story in whatever way they feel able e.g. through letters, photographs and Sara writing down their accounts. Sara will then work with Early Permanence Carers or Adopters to help them process the information gathered and think about when and how to share this information.

### **Why use Sharing Stories?**

Our goal is to improve the quality of the life story information available to children, families, social care teams and therapists both immediately post placement and in the future and to resource adopters and relevant professionals to support the child in their recovery from trauma.

Birth families can struggle to engage in sharing detailed life story data with Local Authority workers due to their feelings and emotions about Court proceedings.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Is this social work?**

No. Sharing Stories is supported within a social work environment but Sara is a trained mediator not a social worker.

### **Why mediation?**

Families who are involved in child protection cases can struggle to engage with services and their community. Their complex needs can leave them excluded and disengaged. Mediation techniques enable birth parents to see the role they can play in helping their child understand their history, even if the child is adopted. We set the scene for enabling parents to maintain ongoing family engagement both with services and with any agreed ongoing contact.

### **What sort of data do you collect?**

Anything and everything. We have much more time available to us to do this work than social work teams have and we can meet with anyone we feel will have relevant information to add to the data store. The better the data the better the life story work.

### **How much of the social worker's time will this take?**

Very little. The referral process is deliberately very easy. A phone call is all that is required. You will be kept updated as the process develops and encouraged to participate in information sharing if you are able. Professionals who have used this project say that it saves them time and that the information we can provide is valuable to all parties.

### **What are the benefits?**

Better life story support for adopters and children, better support for birth families including signposting opportunities, support for overworked social work teams, better ongoing relationships between birth families and the local authority that support positive letterbox and other future contact and a wider understanding of the importance of life story work as an underpinning structure for successful adoption outcomes.

### **What if parents or families are not engaging or are hard to find?**

We will meet families (birth parents and wider birth family members) wherever they are and we make many attempts to contact potential participants. We are not social workers and we are not involved in the progress of the case which can help families to engage with us where that might otherwise have been difficult. Our confidentiality policy is designed to encourage participants to share information with us, always maintaining safeguarding and risk assessment as a priority.

### **What happens if the child returns to their birth family?**

We will work with the EP carers to support them in this difficult transition. Birth parents may want to know more about their child's time in care and we facilitate the exchange of information both ways.

### **What does this cost?**

Nothing. Sharing Stories is currently DfE funded and co-ordinated by CCS Adoption.