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*The Barnardos supervised contact service enables children to spend time with a parent or other family member who they would otherwise not get to see – and it's Children's Champions like you who make this service possible.*

Here, we share the story of a family who have been using the service for several years and the wonderful effect it has had on the daughter's relationship with her father.

When Rodger and Marie's relationship broke down eight years ago, their daughter Ashleigh was just two years old. At the time, Marie could not trust Rodger to look after his daughter properly, so, through Barnardos, he started attending supervised sessions with Ashleigh.

Rodger says, "When I first came to supervised contact, I wasn't sure what to expect. But I didn't let that concern me too much, as all I wanted was to see my daughter."

The sessions were initially challenging. Barnardos contact supervisor Lois remembers, "Ashleigh was a very angry little girl and used to say things to Rodger that made us cringe. But he never gave up attending and slowly he regained her trust."

Rodger says, "I was brought up in a children's home for nine years and my dad would come to visit me every two or three weeks. The fact he did that made me determined to be there for Ashleigh too, as my dad was for me. She means the world to me."

Rodger and Ashleigh still attend supervised contact today, and their relationship has come on in leaps and bounds. Ashleigh really looks forward to the visits with her dad and enjoys her time at the centre so much that she often hides when her mum comes to pick her up! Ashleigh and Rodger work on all sorts of fun activities together, and Rodger even helped her to make a pink play dough wedding cake. Lois remembers, "It was amazing to see this petrol-head guy explaining the tiers of a wedding cake to his daughter and helping her make the rose decorations to put on it!"

A great strength of the Barnardos contact service is that it provides a space where both child and parent feel safe, and the equipment for them to engage in activities together, so they can talk about what they're doing rather than the outside world. They play and create things together, and this eventually makes communicating about other things easier too. The diversions of play create a more relaxed atmosphere.

As Rodger and Ashleigh's sessions have progressed, Rodger has regained his ex-partner Marie's trust too, and she has been impressed by the change in him. She says, "The years of meeting at the contact centre have taught Rodger a lot of patience. He's mellowed thanks to the time he and Ashleigh have spent there, so I can trust him to take good care of her now. He's like a different person."

The family is grateful to Barnardos for providing a service that has allowed Rodger to continue seeing Ashleigh under what have at times been extremely challenging circumstances. Marie says, "It's been brilliant – there's no way Ashleigh would have the relationship she has with her dad if it wasn't for Barnardos. Without Barnardos, I don't know what we would have done."

The family now has high hopes for the future. Rodger and Ashleigh enjoy seeing each other outside of the supervised sessions and take trips to the park and the swimming pool. Marie says, "I'm looking forward to Ashleigh and Rodger transitioning to unsupervised visits where it's just the two of them – once Rodger has sorted out a steady place to live, that'll happen. Ashleigh's older now and is really looking forward to that time with just her dad."

Rodger concludes, "My advice to any parent considering supervised contact would be: don't hesitate. Keep any negativity at home, and respect the place and your child. You're with your child and that's all that matters."

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