**Submission to the Inquiry into Foster and Kinship Care**

Prepared by: [Give your name if you want to. It is fine to leave this blank.] Example text: Mary Smith

Date: 23.2.22

**About me**

[Give the Inquiry a bit of information about yourself and your family]

Example text: I am a foster carer and have been for the last 4 years. I have one biological child aged 9. Four years ago my husband and I began fostering Jim. He was 2 years old when he joined our family. He is now 6. We hope that he will live with us forever.

**Why I am writing this submission**

[Give the Inquiry some context for why you are writing your submission]

Example text: On 3 February 2021, two DCP staff arrived unannounced at my home and told me they were taking Jim away because a serious care concern had been raised against a member of my family. They refused to tell us what the concern was, or even which family member it related to. Jim was removed. The care concern was investigated and found to be unsubstantiated and Jim was returned to our family 83 days later. While I understand that serious care concerns need to be investigated, and that children need to be kept safe, I am appalled at how this removal and return was handled. The whole experience was distressing, and traumatising for me, for my husband, for our biological child, for our extended family and for Jim.

**What I would like the Inquiry to find and recommend**

[Set out what recommendations and findings you would like to see in the Inquiry’s final report. Remember to focus on findings and recommendations that you believe will benefit Carers.

Example text: I would like the final report of the Inquiry to make the following findings and recommendations:

* That the process of managing Care Concerns be made much clearer, fairer and faster for Carers
* That Carers are treated with respect when a child is removed
* That the interests of biological children are also taken into account

**Why I want these recommendations and findings**

[Set out the reasons you want each of the recommendations and findings you have listed above in your dot points. One easy way to do that is to make each dot point a heading. The example text below is fairly concise, because it is an invented example. Write as much as you like. Tell your story. Say what went wrong. Say what you would like improved and how.]

**Example text: Managing Care Concerns need to be clearer, fairer and faster**

We were so shocked when this happened to our family. We had no idea there was a problem. We were given no explanation other than there was a serious care concern. We looked on the DCP website to find out about care concern management and the Care Concerns Investigation Unit (CCIU). There was nothing. We were given no explanation about the process, what would happen next, how we might appeal against the decision, who we might contact to see if Jim was OK, how we would be kept up to date about the process.

We were not provided with natural justice. Initially we were not even told what the allegations were. It took five weeks to find out even who the allegation was against. The allegations where not put to us by DCP so we could refute them.

For the system to be fair and transparent Carers need to be given clear information about how Care Concerns are investigated. A copy of the DCP policy should be on the DCP website. It should also be handed to a Carer when a DCP staff member talks to the Carer about a care concern. That written information should include material to help the Carer - an explanation of the process, what is going to happen next, where Carers can go to get help (eg CF&KC-SA), what Carers rights are (eg internal and external review rights, the right to complain about staff behaviour), how Carers will be kept up to date about the welfare of their foster child, etc.

Carers must also be given natural justice. They must be provided with care concern allegations at the earliest opportunity and given the opportunity to respond to them.

It took us 83 days to get Jim back. That was awful for us and for him. The Care Concern could have been resolved much, much quicker if we had been advised of the allegations earlier. Resolving care concerns that lead to a removal must be the HIGHEST priority. To keep a child from the people he considers his parents is cruel.

**Carers need to be treated with respect**

We have been Carers for 4 years. We have been advised during that time that we have done a fantastic job with Jim. He has not always been an easy child. Our whole family has worked extremely hard to take Jim into our lives and keep him secure and safe. We love him. We have also worked very co-operatively with our agency and with DCP. We have attended training, facilitated access, supported other Carers. In short, we have tried to do all the right things.

None of that counted for anything when Jim was taken away. DCP staff treated us with disdain. They were rude. They appeared to assume that the allegation against us was truthful and correct. (It was shown to be neither.) We felt like we were treated as the enemy by a department that had chosen us, vetted us, trained us and entrusted us with a child. It was shocking!

This has been made even worse by the fact that we still have to deal with the staff members who took Jim away. Our relationship is now very strained. They have never acknowledged their part in what for us was an awful time. They have not apologised for their rudeness. This continues to impact on our relationship with them and with DCP generally.

**Biological children need to be taken into account**

DCP is the department set up to protect children – all children (not just foster children). Jim was removed in the presence of our biological child. She regards Jim as her brother. Not surprisingly she became terribly distressed when Jim was taken. She was later interviewed by Police (during a school day) without an adult present. She still has nightmares about this. She now is distrustful and anxious of figures of authority. I can’t believe that a department that is supposed to care for children showed so little care for her. We now have to deal every day with the aftermath of DCP’s lack of concern for her. That includes getting her some psychological help. That is a cost that we have to bear – even though it is a consequence of DCP staff behaviour.

Any policy on DCP care concerns and particularly removals needs to include an express direction to consider the welfare of biological children.

It would also be great if the Department provided free access to psychological support for biological children in relation to issues as a consequence of being in a foster family.

**Contact details** [Give this information only if you want to. It is fine to leave this whole thing blank or delete it]

I would be happy to be contacted by the Inquiry about this submission. My contact details are

Email:

Phone:

The best time to phone me is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Other information** [Give this information only if you want to. It is fine to leave this whole thing blank or delete it]

I am a:

* Kinship Carer
* Foster Carer
* Respite Carer
* Emergency Carer
* Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I deal with

* the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ office of DCP
* the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_DCP Kinship team or
* my support agency is: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

[Note: We recommend that you read the CF&KC-SA Carer Guide on Legal rights and risks before you send your submission in to the Inquiry, particularly if you

* refer to an identifiable child or young person in your submission
* make adverse allegations about an identifiable DCP or agency staff member
* are considering mentioning anything that might lead a person, on reasonable grounds, to suspect a child has been, or may be, at risk
* your concern has already been investigated by the Ombudsman or ICAC.

For more information on Legal rights and risks call CF&KC-SA on 1800 732 272