Introduction to Special Guardianship Orders for Carers
Introductions and training objectives

The purpose of this training is to explore:

1) What is a SGO (Special Guardianship Order)?
2) Why are you considering becoming a Special Guardian?
3) What is involved in becoming a Special Guardian?
   • How does the Local authority determine if a child should be made subject of SGO
   • How does the local authority assess you or other parties as suitable to be a guardian
   • How does the local authority decide what financial support you should receive
4) What happens after the SGO is granted?
   • What is the local authorities involvement
   • Parental responsibility
   • What support can you expect
   • Behavioural issues
   • Contact issues
What is a Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

• SGOs came into force under the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

• SGOs are intended to meet the needs of children:
  • who cannot live with their parents,
  • for whom adoption is not appropriate,
  • who would benefit from a legal secure placement.

• A SGO is a court order appointing one or more individuals to be a child’s special guardian.

• A guardian must be over 18 years.

• A foster carer can become a guardian.
Why are you considering becoming a Guardian?

I don’t want the children to live with strangers

It feels like the right thing to do

I have been asked to consider it, but don’t know much about it

It’s a temporary situation until birth parents get back on their feet
What is the process of becoming a Special Guardian (SGO)?
Assessing the needs of the Child

- Adoption?
- Fostering?
- Child arrangement order?
- Connected carers?
- SGO?
### Assessment Process - Key Documents

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**Care Plan**

- Prepared by Child’s Social Worker (SW);
- Looks at needs of the child and recommends care options.
- This plan will be filed at Court.

**Viability report**

- Purpose: To determine if you are a viable candidate to be a guardian of the child.
- Prepared by the child’s SW. Usually done in 1 meeting.
- Explores:
  - You and your family
  - Home environment
  - Occupation
  - Ability to meet the needs of the child

**SGO Assessment**

- Purpose: To assess if you could be a SG carer for the child. Prepared by an Assessing SW. Takes about 10 weeks and includes 5-10 visits with SW.
- Explores:
  - Ability to meet child’s changing needs over time
  - Your childhood and upbringing (e.g. family life; education)
  - Current and past relationships
  - Employment and financial history
  - Emotions towards caring for a family/friend’s child
  - Ability to prioritise child’s needs over those of other family members

You will also need to complete a **medical and DBS check** and provide referees for written references and interview.

This report will be filed at court.
Outcome of Assessment

- The outcome of the Assessment is either a positive or negative recommendation.
- All Assessments are filed at court, regardless of the outcome.
- The final decision is made by the court.
SGO Support Plan

• Your SGO Support Plan is very important. The Assessing Social Worker will complete this alongside your assessment.
• The Support plan will also be filed at court.
• The SGO Support plan is where you will have the opportunity to discuss with the Social Worker what you feel you and your child will need.
• You will need to read, agree and sign this before the order is made.
Financial Support Assessment

- As part of the process you will be asked to complete a Financial Assessment which aims to provide a snapshot of your financial position.
- It is important that you return the assessment form (with supporting documentation) otherwise we will be unable to assess you for financial support.
- If you need assistance completing the form we can help you.
Terms of Financial Support (2 of 2)

Carers must be mindful that financial support can change and is subject to the following:

- Financial support will be reviewed annually and subject to means testing.
- If you do not complete the annual financial review, your payments may be suspended or withdrawn.
- There is no guarantee financial support will be given until the child turns 18.
- The local authority may continue to provide financial support once a child turns 18; circumstances may include when a child is in full time education.
- You must let us know immediately if your contact details change.
- You must let us know immediately if your circumstances change, affecting the level of support required.
- Overpayments will be recovered from the date of any change.
Legal Support

• The local authority will pay for you to have a meeting with a solicitor, who is independent from the local authority, and can answer your questions.
• We really urge you to use the meeting to get clarity over the SGO process and what it means for you.
• If the SGO is contested by birth parents at any point after the order has been granted, the SG carer can apply for, and be assessed, for further legal support.
What happens after the SGO is granted?
What is the Local Authorities involvement?

After the SGO is granted:

- The child will no longer have a Social Worker meaning the Local Authority will not be involved with the child (if no other order is granted)
- The child will no longer be a ‘Looked After Child’
- The Local Authority will provide support in terms of information and advice (if needed).
- **You will have parental responsibility** for the child until they reach adulthood.
Parental Responsibility & Exceptions

• An SGO gives you parental responsibility for the child and the right to make decisions about how the child is raised (e.g. education, medical treatment etc)

• Unlike adoption, the SGO does not remove parental responsibility from the birth parents **BUT** there are very few decisions they can make whilst the SGO exists.

• However there are some things you cannot change without the consent of the birth parents:
  – a child’s surname
  – take the child abroad for more than 3 months
  – Place the child for adoption
Post SGO Support

• The North London Consortium is made up of 6 boroughs: Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington. Therefore, as a Barnet SG Carer you will be able to access the following in any of these boroughs:
  – SGO Support groups,
  – Training sessions (e.g. on welfare benefits and contact issues)
  – Ad hoc activities (e.g. xmas party, fun days)

• Barnet will also provide the following support:
  – An annual review of your Finances
  – Support and advice from the SGO Post Permanence Team (as required)
  – Currently Barnet has a contract with PAC-UK to provide therapeutic services (this may change in the future).
Educational support

If your child has been ‘looked after’ prior to the SGO being granted, you will be entitled to:

• Pupil Premium Plus (up to £1900 per child to be used by the school to meet the child’s needs within the educational system).
• Priority for school admission.
• 15 hours free nursery / child care for children who are 2 years old.
Children’s Behaviours

• Many of our children have experienced trauma in one form or another, hence the reason why they cannot live with their birth parents. Therefore, a key role of a SG Carer’s is to provide a **stable and consistent** environment for the child.

• For some children, moving to a new home, experiencing contact and having a new ‘parent’ maybe distressing and confusing, and this may cause temporary changes to their behaviour.

• For others, earlier trauma experiences may manifest at a later stage as difficult behaviour.

• The SGO Post Permanence team are here to provide support and advice in such cases.
Contact

• When a child is living with you under a SGO they should be able to stay in touch with their birth parents and siblings. This is called **contact**.

• You should think about how to make the child feel **safe and secure** when they are having contact with parents, siblings or other family members.

• It maybe helpful to draw up a **signed agreement** with the family to manage contact and boundaries. The Post Permanence team can help with this.

• The agreement should cover:
  – Type of contact: face-to-face, telephone, greeting cards, email, Facebook, other
  – Where: at home, in the community
  – Frequency and duration

• The SG carer has the authority to change contact arrangements if they have evidence it is not in the best interest of the child.
Issues around contact

- How should you and the birth parent behave at contact?
- What are changes communicated or disagreements resolved?
- What do you do if contact is affecting the child or you do not feel it is safe?
- What happens if one party is under the influence of drugs/alcohol?
- What should you do if one party turns up unexpectedly?
- What happens if the birth parents undermine your care?
- Can contact be supervised, if so how?
- What should you do if one party fails to arrive at the agreed time?
Who can support contact post order?

• The SGO Post Permanency Team can provide you with support on issues you may experience with contact.

• It is also possible to have limited supervised contact via Barnet’s Family Resource Centre in Southgate. All referrals must come via the SGO Post Permanency Team and are limited to a maximum of 6 sessions.

• The National Association of Child Contact Centres is also able to provide supervised contact. In North London, they have 2 centres based in Palmers Green and Muswell Hill.

• Their contact details are as follows:
  • https://www.naccc.org.uk/contact-us
  • contact@naccc.org.uk
  • 0845 4500 280
Voluntary Agencies who can help

- Grandparents Plus
  - Website: [www.grandparentsplus.org.uk](http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk)
  - Phone: 0300 123 7015
  - Email: Advice.gpc@grandparentsplus.org.uk

- Family Rights Group
  - Phone: free phone 0808 801 0366
  - Website: [www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk)
FAQs

• Will I get support with contact?
• Can the children return to the care of their parents?
• What if my circumstances change?
• Can I change a child's name?
• Can I move abroad?
• Can I stop contact?
• What happens if I die?