

P-06-1161 Routine collection and publication of data of how many babies/children return to their care experienced parents care at the end of a Parent and Child Placement, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 28.09.21

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond to the document written by Sally Holland and send further comments. For the most part I am in agreement with her comments but she and the committee may not be aware of actual practice by Social Services. I only have one young person as an example but she tells me that she knows other care leavers who have lost their babies to adoption due to the stress they have been put under during their pregnancy and while in mother and baby placements. I will use this example but please keep in mind that it is unlikely to be the only case hence the reason for my petition.

"Parent and baby placements are used to assess parenting skills and are also designed to support (predominantly) mothers who are new parents. Placements can be made subject to Section 38(6) of the Children Act 1989, as residential assessments in the course of care proceedings. The progress of such placements and assessments is therefore overseen by the court and the parties to the proceedings, including CAFCASS Cymru and the child's guardian on behalf of the child. Alternatively placements can be entered voluntarily, without the need to issue court proceedings." The example mother was not subject to Section 38 but was forced to agree with a voluntary placement - she was told that if she didn't agree then it would be taken to court and the baby could be taken from her.

"Some registered foster carers also accommodate parent and baby placements." The example mum had made arrangements to come and stay with me after the birth as someone who she trusted and could support her with her new baby, I am also a registered Foster Carer. When Social Services became involved I then trained as a mother and baby placement but social services refused my offer of a placement.

"Where the parent is also care experienced, particularly where they are under 18 and remain subject to a care order themselves, the local authority has to manage its dual responsibilities to the child as the subject of the case but also to the parent for whom they share parental responsibility. I am aware that at times these placements can result in parents being separated from their often limited support networks, with a lack of available placements resulting in parents and their children being placed a significant distance from their home communities. Parents can become caught between their own support needs and needing to prove their parenting skills in unfamiliar surroundings, often whilst under intensive scrutiny or assessment" Although this is sometimes the only way to ensure a baby is safe, this can cause extreme anxiety for the parent. In the case of my example mother, she was

■ years old, concerns were historical and she had good support. Social Services could have put support in place in her own home as well as having the option of placing her with somebody she knew well.

I would urge that the committee takes note of the research undertaken by Cascade which highlights the need for change. I would also like to reiterate Sally Hollands comments that it is extremely important we reflect on all areas of the system to understand the effectiveness of the support and services provided. There is a need to reflect and enhance types of support available to all young parents, and to better understand how services respond to young parents who are care experienced.

I would urge the committee to follow Sally Hollands recommendations in seeking evidence from young people who have experienced such placements. I am sure my example mother would be happy to contribute. As Sally Holland points out, this would help to share best practice and to identify gaps in services. This should help provide alternatives to parent and baby placements so that low risk cases can be supported in their own homes.

For your information, this young mum was taken from hospital by social services only hours after a long labour and made to walk up two flights of stairs to pack her bags and carry them down to the car where she was forced to leave her baby and then taken to a placement away from any family and friends where she'd never been. I had personally asked the Social Worker to arrange an introduction to the placement prior to the birth - this was ignored. Mum was told it would be deemed negatively if she was on the phone to friends and family, she was told it would be deemed negatively if she spent time in her room with her baby alone - she took this very literally and desperately wanted some time to cuddle her baby away from prying eyes. Although it was supposed to be 'voluntary' she was told if she tried to go home they would have someone sat in her flat with her until it went to court and the baby would then be taken away. A psychological assessment stated that this mum was unlikely to harm her baby but this assessment was ignored. I firmly believe that if this mum had allowed the case to go to court for a judge to decide there would have been no case to answer and mum and baby would have been allowed home, unfortunately, fear of losing her baby made this mum follow social services suggestions causing her unnecessary anxiety. This baby is now ■■■■■ old and I haven't seen a better cared for, loved and thriving child who is meeting all her milestones. This care experienced mother had had enough negative experiences in her life and is now afraid to try for a second child as she is in fear of social services involvement again. I don't believe this is the only example.

I have been a Foster Carer for 8 years and have had many children in my care. Most have needed to be kept safe from abuse or severe neglect but for some, I have seen

the trauma experienced, not from the bad parenting or neglect, but from being taken into care when extra support in the home could have been provided.

Kind regards,