

Findings from the NLAFC survey

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NLAFC Survey responses

Borough	Survey returns
Barnet	8
Camden	6
Enfield	13
Hackney	5
Haringey	14
Islington	15
Total	61

Background

- 61 SG responded (in respect of 81 children)
- 17 SGs were caring for more than one child under an SGO
- Time as an SG ranged from less than a year to 9 years
- Most common carers: grandparents, followed by aunts and uncles
- Few former foster carers responded to the survey
- 57% of carers reported that children entered care in response to abuse and neglect
- 27% 3+ issues affecting parenting capacity

Issues affecting parenting capacity

Issue affecting parenting capacity	Number of families
Domestic violence	27
Drug misuse	25
Alcohol misuse	23
Mental ill-health	23
Learning disability	12

The children

Age (years)	Number of children	Percentage of the sample
Under 5	22	27%
5-12	47	58%
13 plus	10	13%
Missing data	2	2%
Total	81	100%

Contact

- A common reason for applying to be an SG is so a child can retain a link with their birth parents
- Survey revealed diverse arrangements and perspectives on contact
- Birth mothers higher level and frequency of contact than fathers
- Separated siblings most commonly met less than once a month, or had no direct contact at all
- Questions surrounding contact revealed that a small number of children had experienced bereavement

Reflections

The parents can only see their child supervised and they resent this. The child is aware he can only see his parents supervised. His mother's contact was stopped due to her non co-operation and mental health problems. Now she's moved away and he misses her very much (Child aged 10)

Reflections

Contact is agreed between the birth mother and I which works out very well (Child aged 5, monthly contact)

She [birth mother] undermines me and the boys play up and come back with bad attitudes (Children aged 7 & 9, supervised contact twice a month)

Contact and seeing them makes him regress (Child aged 3)

In total 1 in 4 SGs said one or more of the children placed with them would benefit from help understanding why they were not living with their birth parents

Emotional and behavioural difficulties

- 38% of carers reported that one or more SG children in the family had emotional or behaviour difficulties
- Most common issues: defiance, verbal aggression, anxiety or sadness
- Data from Wade et al. (2014) 11% of children had serious emotional and behavioural difficulties and further 40% had moderate problems
- 30% of carers reported that one or more children in their care were struggling with school

Reflections

[Child's] needs can be very draining for me and this takes away time for me to spend with my birth daughter (SG for less than a year, child aged 2 years)

I have left messages three times in the past three years. No one called back. The crisis passed. I felt very isolated. You need someone outside the family to talk to (SG for 3 years, 2 children aged 7 and 14)

Demand for services: which would your child/family benefit from?

Service	Received/receiving	Child/family would benefit from
Help managing child's behaviour	8	11
Professional support managing birth family contact	9	13
Respite care/short breaks	N/A	11
Helping your child understand their past	5	15

Demand for services: which would your child/family benefit from?

Service	Received/receiving	Child/family would benefit from
Access to CAMHS/therapy	10	14
Support groups and family events	9	15
Access to an out of hours service	N/A	8
Emergency helpline for advice and support in a crisis	N/A	12

Support (Wade et al., 2010 and 2014)

- Not all guardians wanted continuing contact with social workers and a desire to establish a normal family life was uppermost for many
- Support needs not static: changes in needs and circumstances over time
- Challenging behaviour likely to emerge when children are aged 10+ (Roth et al., 2012)
- Large studies of adoption and fostering has also suggested that placement breakdown is most likely to occur during adolescence (Sinclair et al., 2007; Department for Education, 2011; Selwyn et al., 2014).

Support

- Over the follow-up period, a sizeable minority of children had accessed therapeutic (34 per cent), behavioural (25 per cent) or educational (32 per cent) support services at some stage
- Many guardians were appreciative of this help, some found these services to be ineffective while others, who desperately needed them, had been left to cope with the challenging behaviour of their children alone

Overarching issues (survey and wider messages from research)

- Difference in policy intent and use of SG
- Age profile of carers in the context of a move towards graduated and extended transitions to adulthood (Wade et al. 2014: three-in-ten of the index children aged nine or younger were placed with or living with a carer aged 50 or over)
- Concern about the discretionary nature of support and the postcode lottery
- Work in progress to develop responsive support....