



Special Guardianship Order Team Annual Report 2021 – 2022

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Team: Fostering Team

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Introduction

Local authorities are required to make arrangements for the provision of special guardianship support services. These include counselling, advice, information, and such other services (including financial support) as are prescribed in the Regulations. The Regulations also provide for the assessment of needs for special guardianship support services, and the planning and the reviewing of those support services

Since June 2019, we have developed an SGO Support Team within Warwickshire. The SGO Support Team can offer extended support to aid placement stability.

The Special Guardianship Team is a countywide service, providing a range of support to SGO holders, individuals who have a child (previously Looked After) on a Child Arrangement Order and or are seeking a Special Guardianship Order.

(For the purpose of this report a Special Guardianship Order will be referred to as an SGO)

Support includes:

An SGO Duty Support Line.

Allocated SGO Support Social Worker.

A Family Support Social Worker.

Applications & Monitoring to the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic intervention.

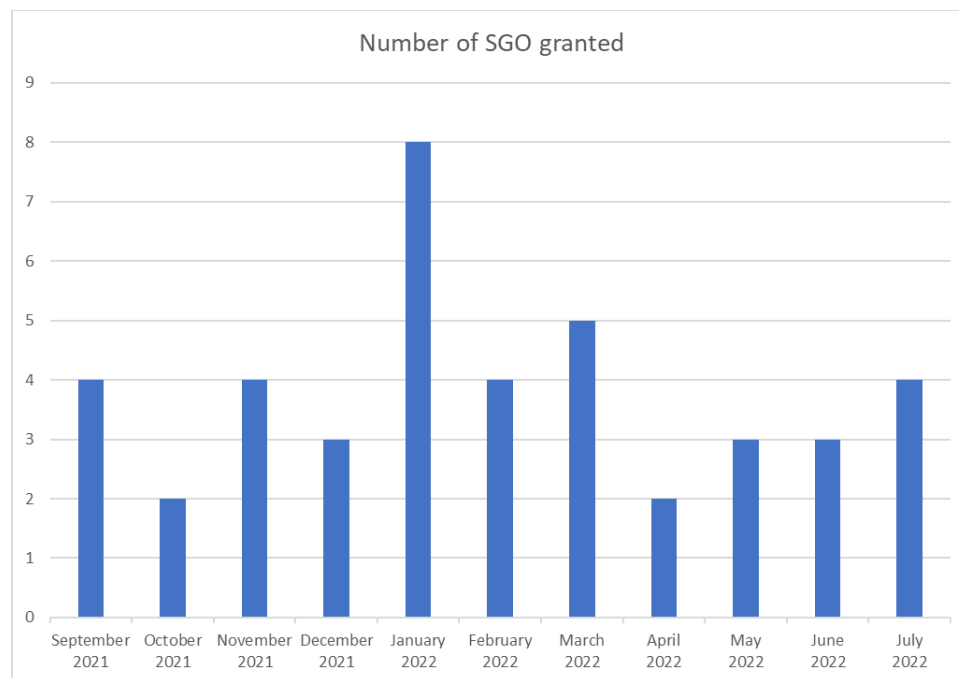
Quarterly SGO Newsletter.

Monthly Coffee Mornings.

Therapeutic Life Story Work

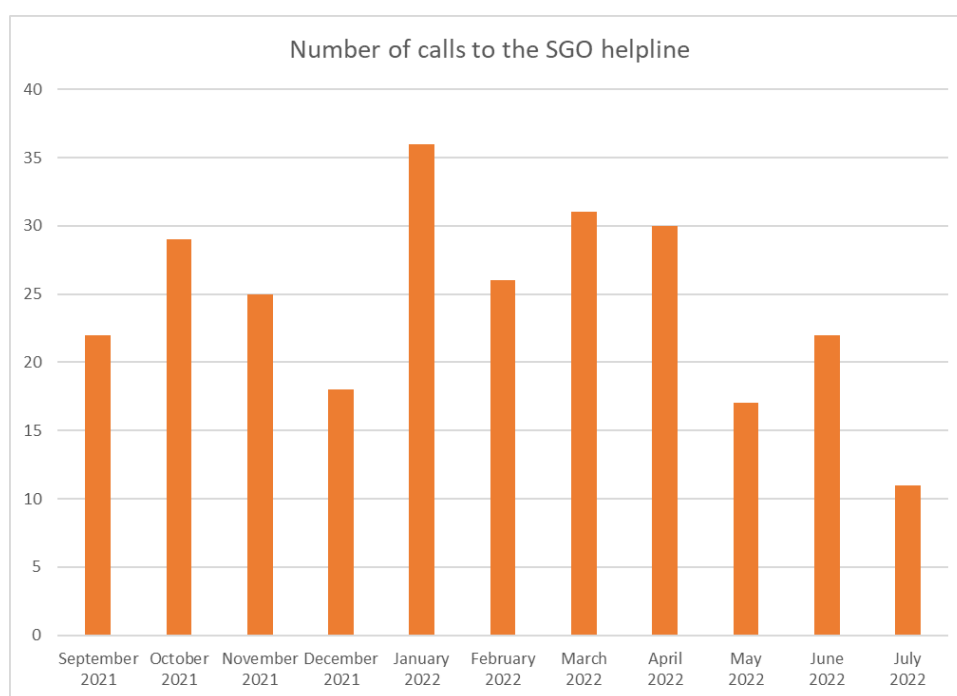
Warwickshire Fostering Data

Data received into the service indicates that month on month Special Guardianship Orders are increasing. Since formally recording within our service there have been 48 Special Guardianship Orders granted between September 2021 to July 2022.



We are consistently receiving four or more new referrals a month into our SGO Duty Support Line, requesting support for SGO caring Families. These referrals come from either the SGO carers themselves or professionals working with the SGO families either within Warwickshire or from other Local authority areas. Currently staff have a stable case load of up to 18 families. Two of the team members are also now Therapeutic Life Story Work (TLSW) trained, so within their case allocations, they also carry out one piece of Therapeutic Life Story work with a young person at one time. This has worked well, however the Special Guardianship Support Social Workers are still developing their skills in this area and have valued the support of other workers who are (TLSW) within Warwickshire.

We are now at a point where cases cannot be allocated immediately due to capacity, and work is allocated when workers have availability.



The number of calls into the Duty Support Line are recorded each month. The highest numbers recorded were in January 2022 at 36 and the lowest July 2022 at 11. Workers report that the summer holiday period can be quieter.

Calls are varied in terms of issues, but include family time issues, finance, and behaviour management, these calls can result in sign posting to other services, advice and guidance or a referral for assessment into our team for a SGO Support Needs Assessment.

Adoption Support Fund Data known as ASF (including new ASF criteria)

ASF Data for Warwickshire SGO Team

2021/22

Quarter 1

01/04/21 – 30/06/21	10 approved applications	£37,902.53
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Quarter 2

01/07/21 – 30/09/21	10 approved applications	£33,929.88
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Quarter 3

01/10/21 – 31/12/21	8 approved applications	£23,165.75
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Quarter 4
01/01/22 – 31/03/22** 0 approved applications

2022/23

Quarter 1
01/04/22 – 30/06/22* 17 approved applications £62,734.58

The Adoption Support Fund eligibility criteria changed from April 2022 widening its eligibility criteria which is as follows:

- From 1 April 2022, we will extend the eligibility criteria for ASF to include all children under a Residency Order or Child Arrangement Order who were previously looked after. This means that all children under permanence arrangements who were previously looked after will have the same access to the ASF.
- Additionally, from 1 April 2022 we will extend the eligibility criteria to those children that were previously looked after but whose Adoption, Special Guardianship, Residency or Child Arrangement Order placement has broken down, irrespective of any reconciliation plans. This will enable children to continue to receive support to improve future outcomes or potentially to aid a return home.

This has had a slight impact on the SGO support service as we are now receiving referrals for young people where their SGO placements have broken down, and also for children whose adoptive placements have broken down.

Structure of the Team

Team Leader Louise Dudley on an 18.5-hour contract
3 SGO Support Social workers. Hannah Douthwaite, on a permanent 30-hour contract, Vickey Hodgkinson on a fixed term 37-hour contract until March 2023 and Marta Teichert on a fixed term 37-hour contract until March 2023. The team also has access to Ria George Family Support Worker, who can offer family support services to SGO caring families.

Functions of the Teams

The SGO Support Team offers a duty support line which is available Monday to Friday 9am to 5.30pm. Professionals within Warwickshire and outside of county boundary can call and seek advice and guidance in respect of Special Guardianship in relation to any children or young people who were previously looked after by Warwickshire Children's Services,

Professionals can also refer into our service any SGO carers living in the Warwickshire area post the three years of an SGO order being granted in another local authority area.

SGO carers themselves can also contact the SGO duty support line to discuss any worries or concerns. Referrals into the service can be made through the duty line or by Warwickshire staff through Mosaic. Staff each do one week at a time on duty.

As a team we have been increasingly asked to attend meetings with workers and potential SGO carers to give information about the SGO support offer within Warwickshire. The feedback from these meetings is that carers interested in securing an SGO have found these beneficial.

The SGO Support Social Workers work restoratively with families to support in times of need and crisis. Social workers complete an SGO Needs Assessment to ascertain current need and challenges and look towards supporting these needs. A recommendation from an assessment could be to apply for ASF funding to support with the therapeutic needs of the family. At times SGO Support Social Workers contribute to the planning and support of Early Help and Child In Need Plans, as the families open to our services can also have Children's Services involved in their lives. SGO Support Social Workers also refer into the Front Door should safeguarding concerns arise.

Training for SGO carers

Warwickshire SGO Support Team was a member of the Special Guardianship Project Group; this group was formed to devise a training program for those people who were interested in securing an SGO Order. This project has now concluded and a training program consisting of four areas has been devised. Here in Warwickshire conversations have been had to identify how we implement this training. Meetings have been held with the Fostering Training Manager to look at the detail as to how Warwickshire can facilitate this training. Initial thoughts are that there is enough content to cover a 5-hour training session, work with our Permanency Co-Ordinator has started to identify potential attendees, for the first training session.

In addition to the specific training SGO carers can have access to all the training available to mainstream foster carers.

Challenges to the SGO Team

Working within the new remit criteria of the ASF brings challenges, including an increase in referrals to work with SGO and Adoption breakdowns. The logistics in terms of ASF applications and allocation of children. In addition to working with an increase in breadth of this work. This leaves the service in a position where a waiting list for allocation will be required.

The new remit of the ASF has not been cascaded through to social work teams, whilst a decision is made as to who will take responsibility for this an interim measure is in place that and the SGO team has picked this up.

Moving forward this will need to be managed by a service who has access to the ASF and has a clear system to meet the financial accounting requirements and annual audit. Currently in Warwickshire, only the SGO team has this. The promotion of the widened ASF criteria has not been changed in our current leaflets. They will be changed when a decision has been made about who will lead on this. There is no specific budget for the SGO team. Therefore, all materials for therapeutic life story work, facility costs and artwork come from the main fostering budget.

The SGO support team continues to evolve however staffing constraints hamper resources to facilitate the SGO carer training and all the development work and services that could be provided to SGO carers, these could include a buddy service, respite care, activity days, walks, teenage support group, letterbox contact service, online support groups.

SGO Carer spreadsheet

This needs to be a far more robust spreadsheet to enable the collection of new data in respect of SGO carers and the existing data of SGO carers currently living in the boundary of Warwickshire. This will enable us to connect with all SGO carers and inform them of support services, allow us to proactively support carers rather than working with them at a point of crisis.

Summary

The total spends for ASF applications for 2021-2022 is £54,470.96 and it is anticipated this will increase in 2022-2023, the indication from the second quarter figures in 2022, is that we have already applied £70,298.58 worth of funding.

Special Guardianship Orders are increasing in Warwickshire and Nationally, therefore, it is reasonable to expect that this service needs to expand. If the decision is made that the SGO support team is to take on the additional responsibility of SGO, Adoption, Child Arrangement Order or Residency breakdowns (where a child has been Section 20) for therapeutic services from the ASF we do not have the ability to meet this demand without additional staff. Out of the 3 social work staff we have, 1 post is the only permanent one.

It is imperative that to meet the demands of the service and the growing need of SGO carers in a situation where we are seeing a significant growth in SGO's being granted that consideration is given to the expansion and development of the team to ensure that we have a stable, knowledgeable team that will enable us to offer and develop the service to meet the needs of SGO carers and the children that they care for.