

Professor Judith Harwin

Special Guardianship and the Early Years: Opportunities and Challenges in Practice and Policy

Abstract

Special guardianship, first introduced in the Adoption and Children Act 2002, was originally designed to offer a permanent home, mainly with relatives or friends, for older children and those who by virtue of close family relationships, culture and religion needed an alternative to adoption. In recent years special guardianship has become the fastest growing route out of the care system, overtaking adoption, and the percentage of infants placed within the family network on a Special Guardianship Order has also increased.

In this talk I will examine the particular set of psychosocial and systemic challenges of parenting infants and very young children subject to a Special Guardianship Order. I will draw on the evidence from national research and the lived experience of special guardians and consider the main challenges for practice and policy.