

Report on Special Guardianship Orders

Background

As part of the Out-of-Home Care Reform Plan, the Department for Child Protection and Family Support (the Department) is working towards a system that values and promotes stability and certainty for children in line with its permanency planning policy. Where appropriate and in a child's best interests, this includes pursuing and supporting permanent care arrangements for children via a protection order (special guardianship) (SGO).

At 30 June 2015 there were 483 children who were the subject of a SGO. Of these children, 236 were Aboriginal. As emphasised in the *Out-of-Home Care Strategic Directions in Western Australia 2015-2020 Discussion Paper*, one of the key drivers for reforming the current out-of-home care system is the increasing complexity of the needs of children.

The Department is currently undertaking a range of strategies to strengthen pre-planning, assessment and support for SGOs, including a review of case practice guidance and a checklist to support the pre-planning process. This report will inform the review and future planning to better support special guardians and children in their care who are subject of a SGO, including funding requirements.

Attachment one outlines the services and supports provided to carers and children subject to similar guardianship orders in other child protection jurisdictions. In particular, the services and supports provided by Families SA and the Department of Child Safety Queensland are quite comprehensive.

Interviews with special guardians

A random sample of long term, medium term and new special guardians were approached¹ to take part in a face-to-face or telephone interview during August 2015 to gather their feedback about their experiences and identify the support needs of special guardians.

Eighteen special guardians², from both metropolitan and country areas, agreed to take part in an interview. Due to the small sample size, the findings cannot be generalised to all special guardians.

Country interviews were conducted by telephone. A copy of the interview questions can be found in Attachment two.

An analysis of the interviews, including some comments made by special guardians noted by the interviewer, is outlined below.

Demographics

Special guardians

Location

Nine of the special guardians resided in the metropolitan area (one couple) and nine resided in the country (two couples). All Aboriginal special guardians interviewed lived in the country.

¹ At least one household from each district was randomly selected to participate. A letter and information sheet was sent to 21 couple or single special guardians inviting them to take part in an interview. In addition, five couple or single special guardians who had previously contacted the Department in relation to the SGO were contacted directly, and an information sheet was forwarded to them about the interview process with a request for their involvement.

² Three interviews were conducted with both special guardians of the household. Fifteen interviews were conducted altogether, and no children under a SGO were present.

Age and gender

The special guardians ranged from 35 to 73 years old, with the average age being 51 years. Fourteen special guardians were female and four were male. Three male special guardians were joint special guardians with their spouse or partner.

Carer category prior to the SGO

Table 1 below shows the special guardian's carer category before the SGO was granted. Of the three couples interviewed, two were general carers and the other was relative carers.

Table 1 – Category of carer prior to the SGO

Relative	General	General (specific child)	Home for Life
6	10	1	1

Length of time as a special guardian

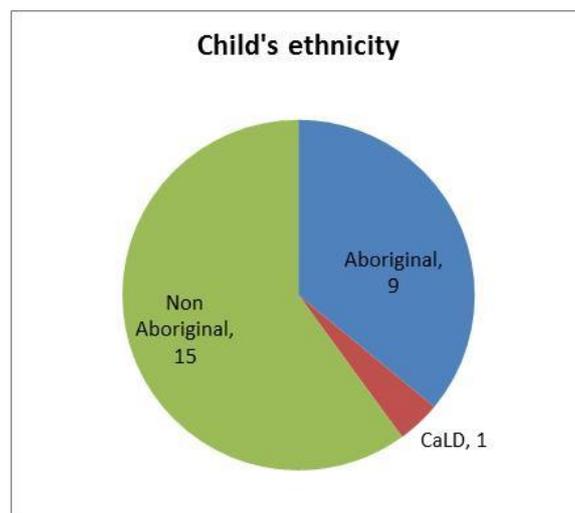
Over half of the participants have been special guardians for two or more years. Table 2 shows the year that the SGO was granted for the children.

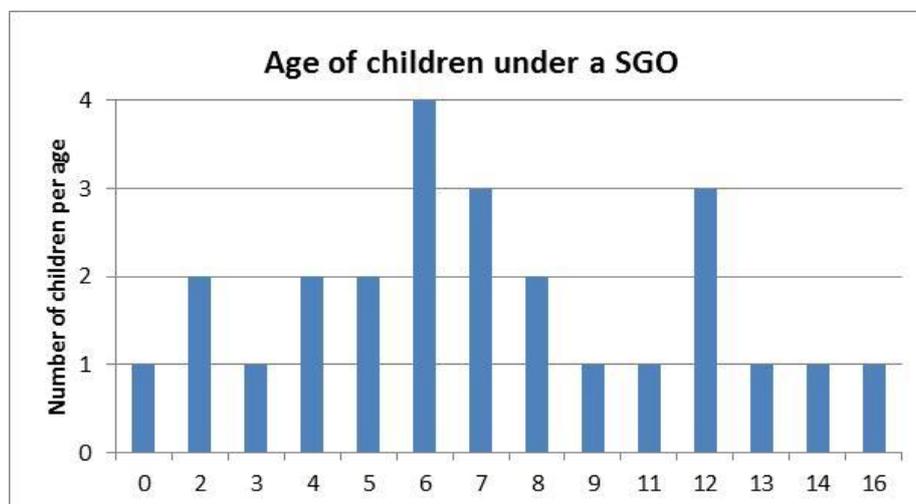
Table 2 – Year that the SGO was granted

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
No. of SGOs granted	3	5	1	5	0	11

Children

There were 25 children under a SGO in the 15 households interviewed. Sixteen children were male and nine female. Charts below show the children's ethnicity and current age. Only one Aboriginal child was not placed according to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle. In this instance, the special guardian was a Home for Life carer prior to the SGO being granted.





Over half (56%) of the children had been in the placement with the carer for more than three years prior to the SGO being granted. The shortest time was approximately six months.

Six households had more than one child living with them who was under a SGO; one household had five children, one household had three children, and four households had two children. Five children in the care of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) were also living in three of the special guardian households.

Feedback from interviews

Becoming a special guardian

Most special guardians (14) heard about SGOs through the Department. In one instance, the special guardian advised that she had a good relationship with the children’s mother and the Department had approached her about applying for a SGO for the two children at the mother’s request.

Fifteen special guardians told the interviewer they had some form of relationship with the children’s parents before applying for the SGO; six special guardians (including one couple) were relative carers. Two special guardians (previously general foster carers) said³:

“We had a well-developed relationship with the children’s birth family”.

“We know the kids family quite well and they were very happy with us taking over their legal guardianship”.

Some special guardians (8) noted one of the reasons for applying for a SGO was the ability to make their own decisions regarding the child/ren. One stated:

“We wanted to become a special guardian as we wanted to get rid of the frustration of having to ask for every plan we had with the child and having to put up with all the delay associated with it – even for a haircut you have to ask the Department and wait for its approval”.

Seven special guardians said they considered the SGO because it offered stability for the child/ren.

Information about SGOs

Generally, special guardians advised that the Department had given them limited and/or inconsistent information about a SGO.

³ All quotes in this report are written verbatim from the interview sheet.

Four special guardians had contacted the Department to get information about legal procedures and/or where to get legal advice; however, they were advised that the Department was unable to help.

Common feedback included the lack of information provided about the child's medical history, how to obtain a Medicare card and immunisation records, and Centrelink entitlements that may be claimed (for example, a Health Care Card and Child Care Benefit).

In two cases, a passport had not been obtained for the child before the SGO was granted. Both special guardians noted the issues this had caused. One stating, *"I think this should have been sorted by DCP as they have better means to deal with complexities like these than us"*.

Special guardians were also asked to think about information that would have been helpful to have either before or just after the SGO was granted.

Many special guardians noted that information about the court process and where or how to seek legal advice about SGOs would be helpful. Other common themes include:

- general information on what a SGO means, including the child's eligibility for a Health Care Card and priority access to services;
- a checklist on what to do once the SGO is granted, for example, informing the school, Centrelink and family doctor about the change in guardianship, and obtaining a Medicare card;
- how to obtain documentation from the Department, such as the child's birth certificate, school reports, medical records and health appointments, and other pertinent information; and
- what support services are available to special guardians and who to contact for support once the order is granted.

Overall experience of being a special guardian

Most special guardians reported that their experience had been a positive one. Feedback included:

"I always tell people that it's the best thing I've done in my life"

"From a parenting and the children's point of view – very lucky and grateful experience".

"Really, really rewarding as it's such a success".

However, three special guardians did not have a positive experience, and noted the following:

- The Department did not provide enough information about SGOs to make an informed decision, so the special guardian would be more hesitant about applying for a SGO in the future.
- The special guardian would recommend a SGO but also recommended that the Department improve their process so it is not a burden to achieve a SGO (as the process took too long).
- Concerns about the support provided by the caseworker and team during the process (but noted that the placement officer was helpful).

Support needs

Overall, the support needs and challenges highlighted by Aboriginal special guardians were the same or similar to those outlined by others interviewed. When asked if they needed any support as a special guardian, many (10) said they access support as required through their family and friends or a support network.

Two special guardians said the main issues were encountered prior or just after the SGO was granted.

A few special guardians said it would be useful to have been linked in with people who had already gone through the process. One person said it would be good to have a webpage on the Department's website for special guardians where they can chat and discuss any issues. One special guardian had learned there was a Facebook support group that potential or new special guardians could access. The special guardian said, *"The site is well administered by experienced carers, it is safe, and placement services or FAS will know how to get to it"*.

Contact was mostly going well, however the following issues were highlighted:

- When there are other siblings in care, the children subject to a SGO have to fit into the schedule developed by the Department for the children in care as parents are more familiar with this model, but the special guardian/s can be left out of the loop.
- Contact can be stressful for the child and special guardian when there is long travel involved (in this case, the mother of the child lives in another state).
- A neutral person would be good to have when parents are unstable and contact starts to breakdown.

Most special guardians (13) told the interviewer that the SGO had worked out well for them. One stated, *"SGO worked great for me and the kids. It gives everyone emotional stability"*.

Change in needs

The interviewer asked special guardians how their needs have changed over time. Feedback was varied.

Eight special guardian households said that nothing had really changed for them.

A few special guardians mentioned the medical and/or educational needs of the child had changed, or may change in the future, and this will affect them financially.

A couple of special guardians noted that the Department had not provided them with enough background history of the child, therefore it is hard to predict future needs. One special guardian stated:

"Not knowing what you don't know – very hard to tell what you may need in the future ... we know there will be a predisposition to mental health for the kids but we haven't been given much historical info post the SGO – who can provide this?... we have not been given a genogram – is there extended family?"

Two special guardians said that the SGO subsidy really helps.

One special guardian noted that they had given up full-time work to look after the children, and this had affected their financial situation.

Providing support in the future

Special guardians were asked, if they could design a completely new way of providing support, what it would look like.

Fifteen special guardians would like a dedicated service, run by either a government department or non-government provider, which has staff with good knowledge of the SGO process including legal advice, or where they can go to get advice. Most wanted the service to be available face-to-face, but a couple thought it could be a telephone service.

Some special guardians would like the service to have access to the child's Department records, and that of the family for background history.

Other feedback included a fact sheet or information on the Department's website for potential special guardians on what a SGO is, what it involves, services and supports available, and where to go for assistance if needed.

Two special guardians thought that Department workers should have more training on the SGO process.

Supports for children under a SGO

Special guardians were asked if they felt there are enough supports in place to help children under a SGO.

Again, feedback was varied. Some special guardians thought there were enough support services, however they reported the issue of children being placed on long waiting lists (mainly for health services). These special guardians felt that children who were subject to a SGO, due to their past circumstances, should receive the same priority access to services and funding for associated costs as children in care.

One special guardian said that programs provided through youth groups, such as Zone Youth Space and the Capel Youth Advisory Council, can be of assistance to children.

Advice to others about becoming a special guardian

Special guardians provided mixed responses to this question, although some common themes were evident. These were:

- The person would need to be committed long term to taking on the care responsibility for the child.
- It may not be appropriate for people who cannot afford to support the child financially, particularly where there is limited income (for example, a single parent), as they will be very much on their own.
- Would only suggest a SGO if the child was part of the person's family (for example, a grandchild) and there were no relationship problems, or where there is a strong bond established with the child and no issues with the birth family.

Two special guardians noted that they would advise any person thinking about a SGO to make sure that all arrangements agreed to with the Department, such as financial assistance for the child's medical costs, are written down and discussed formally in court proceedings.

One special guardian said they would suggest that carers are mindful when the child had other siblings in care as this can cause some issues, particularly for contact.

Other information special guardians wanted to share

Points that special guardians wanted to share were:

- There needs to be more cultural awareness training for "mainstream carers" (special guardians) looking after children from Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and links to specific services to support the children's culture.
- There needs to be more training for staff and carers (from the onset) about working towards stability through long-term out-of-home care via SGOs.
- Carers need to understand the different developmental stages of children.
- Special guardianship is particularly hard at an age when people are thinking of retirement – for financial and other reasons – and this should be taken into consideration.

One special guardian recommended a resource book from the Mirabel Foundation – *When the children arrive* - saying, "It generally answers most of my questions".

Another special guardian asked if the outcome of the survey could be communicated to carers at the next Foster Carer Conference.

Most special guardians were keen to hear if the forward plan regarding SGOs would be available for public comment.

Summary

With the implementation of the Department's new permanency planning policy, the use of special guardianship arrangements to provide stability and certainty for children who are unable to be reunified with their parents is likely to increase.

Also, children who have suffered abuse and/or neglect will usually have significant and complex needs that may not be evident at the time that a carer is considering a SGO, particularly where decisions need to be made within 12 months for children less than 3 years of age. Therefore, it is vital that the child's current and future needs and how this relates to the capacity of the proposed special guardian (carer) is carefully considered during the SGO assessment process, including the carer's age, financial situation, health and training needs (for example, child development, trauma experiences and cultural awareness training).

The child's culture and identity is an integral part of the SGO assessment process. Providing the special guardian with a copy of the child's genogram and eco-map can be useful in supporting the child to preserve family connections and their identity. An Aboriginal practice leader (or another Aboriginal officer) must be involved in assessment and planning for an Aboriginal child.

If the application for a SGO is recommended, the support needs (including special needs loading or other financial assistance) and contact plan should be documented in the case plan. The proposed special guardian must be aware of the Department's recommendation to the court regarding contact (particularly in cases where other siblings are in care), as they will be responsible for implementing the contact arrangements as specified in the conditions of the order.

Obtaining a passport for the child is another important part of the pre-planning process when a SGO is being considered (this is now a practice requirement). In addition, the proposed special guardian must be fully informed of the child and family's background history and given copies of all essential documents, such as health reports, should they or the child need to refer to them in the future.

Overall, special guardians highlighted the importance of receiving or having access to reliable information about SGOs, including where to obtain legal advice. It is apparent that this is imperative when a carer is considering a SGO. It also highlights the importance of the Department having a thorough pre-planning process with each potential special guardian and child to identify assessment considerations, current and future support needs and what general information is required.

It may be appropriate for consideration to be given to the establishment of a specialised service for carers, special guardians, and children subject to a SGO to provide consistent and up-to-date information and support about SGOs. The service could be provided within the Department or by a community services sector organisation.

Information on other Australian child protection jurisdictions, the United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US) regarding guardianship of children in care

NAME OF CP LEGAL AUTHORITY	NAME OF ORDER	CIRCUSMTANCES AND/OR ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CP AGENCY/SERVICE	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GUARDIAN	USEFUL RELATED RESOURCES
Families SA	Other Person Guardianship (OPG)	Child's needs and the carer's circumstances are assessed and determined by the OPG assessment, agreed to in the OPG Care Plan and annexed into the OPG Court Order.	Families SA can provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the same level of carer payment as when the child is under the Guardianship of the Minister (not income-tested); • the same entitlements to services (including case management support, access arrangements, priority services, and financial support) as provided to all children under the Guardianship of the Minister; • financial support to carers who do not qualify for Legal Aid (for legal advice); • placement support (i.e. arranging, transporting, facilitating and supervising access visits); • loadings and incidental payments as agreed to in the OPG Care Plan. 	OPG carer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is encouraged to be part of the legal proceedings. • Can be carer of children that have not been placed in state care before guardianship was transferred to the new guardian. • Must sign a Statutory Declaration on an annual basis to confirm the child is still in their care. • Must comply with annual reviews where they have agreed to additional financial and other Families SA supports. • Is not legally obliged to work with or access support services through Families SA, however they are legally responsible to comply with the conditions of the order. • Can travel anywhere with the child as long as the travel arrangement would not 	Three factsheets on the OPG programme . The factsheets include general information concerning the OPG, and information for carers, parents and families.

NAME OF CP LEGAL AUTHORITY	NAME OF ORDER	CIRCUMSTANCES AND/OR ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CP AGENCY/SERVICE	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GUARDIAN	USEFUL RELATED RESOURCES
				<p>contravene existing access arrangements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must use pre-agreed dispute resolution process, if any disagreement, to resolve the issue. 	
Department of Community Services (DoCS) - NSW	Sole Parenting Responsibility (SPR)	Child's needs and the carer's circumstances are assessed and determined by the SPR assessment, agreed to in the SPR Care Plan, and annexed into the SPR Court Order.	<p>DoCS provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support to those children who have extensive or ongoing needs requiring continued DoCS involvement; • financial support – payments are not income-tested; • loadings are payable following assessment of the child's needs. <p>Post Adoption Services provides some support on an as needed basis e.g. making referrals for low-key minimal support.</p>	<p>SPR carer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be a party to the legal proceedings. • Must pay for any legal costs incurred as a result of the SPR application. • Can only apply for children that have been placed in state care for at least two years, before guardianship is transferred to them. • Is aware that the child will not be eligible for priority services once the order is granted. 	
Office for Children, Youth and Family Support (CYFS) - ACT	Enduring Parental Responsibility (EPR)	Once the EPR Order is granted, the child's case is closed by the local office and transferred to the Adoption & Permanent Care Unit (APCU) within CYFS.	<p>The APCU provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • management and/or facilitation of contact/access visits with birth family; • priority services in relation to medical and therapeutic needs of the child; • an EPR allowance that is set at the mid-point of usual subsidy payments, is not age-related, and is not income-tested. 	<p>EPR carer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have cared for the child for the past two years, or for two of the past three years. • Must prove that he/she has the capacity to manage without ongoing placement support. <i>[CYFS recognises that this is an area that may need to be reviewed.]</i> 	

NAME OF CP LEGAL AUTHORITY	NAME OF ORDER	CIRCUMSTANCES AND/OR ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CP AGENCY/SERVICE	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GUARDIAN	USEFUL RELATED RESOURCES
			<p>Loadings and incidental payments are also payable following assessment of the child's needs.</p>		
<p>Department of Human Services (DHS) - Victoria</p>	<p>Permanent Care Order (PCO)</p>	<p>Support continues as assessed for family. This is facilitated by the Adoption and Permanent Care (APC) unit within DHS.</p>	<p>The APC unit provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support in relation to contact/access with family of origin; • priority services in relation to medical and therapeutic needs of the child; • subsidy payments (the same as carer subsidies), which are not income-tested. <p>Loadings are also payable following assessment of the child's needs.</p> <p>If the PCO carer was a kinship/relative carer, they will be eligible for limited placement support from a newly developed Kinship Care Program.</p>	<p>PCO carer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have looked after a child that has been in state care for at least six months. If the child has been matched with a pre-approved permanent carer, then there will be 12-24 month period of support and supervision prior to the PCO being finalised. • Is aware that the child is no longer eligible for priority services. 	<p>Permanent Care Process – Flow Chart</p> <p>Pathway for children into adoption & permanent care (a&pc)</p>
<p>Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) - Tasmania</p>	<p>Transfer of Guardianship (ToG)</p>	<p>Children on a ToG are not eligible for priority services.</p> <p>Children with special needs, and requiring additional services and supports, are unlikely to be</p>	<p>Once a ToG is granted, the child is no longer actively case managed by DHHS. However, DHHS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may assist the child and carer to send written communication and/or photos to the birth family (but won't assist with formal contact/access visits); • provides subsidy payments (not 	<p>ToG carer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be party to the legal proceedings. • Must apply for a child that has been placed in state care before guardianship is transferred to them. • Receives limited advice and support. 	

NAME OF CP LEGAL AUTHORITY	NAME OF ORDER	CIRCUSMTANCES AND/OR ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CP AGENCY/SERVICE	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GUARDIAN	USEFUL RELATED RESOURCES
		considered for a ToG as DHHS policy is to reduce its role when guardianship is transferred – and this would be unhelpful for children requiring higher levels of support.	<p>income-tested);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> loadings are payable following assessment of child need. <p>Adoptions and Permanency Services review the child’s circumstances 12 months after the ToG, and will continue to provide some limited additional support and referral for guardians and the child until he/she reaches 18 years old.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is aware that the child is no longer eligible for priority services. Is responsible for any incidental payments. 	
Families and Children Department (FCD) - NT	Parental Responsibility to a Specified Person order (PRSP)	Special eligibility and/or circumstances apply.	<p>Case management services are not provided to the child; however, there is nothing precluding the carers from seeking such support from FCD if they wish.</p> <p>FCD provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ongoing subsidy payments (not income-tested); loadings and incidental payments following assessment of the child’s needs. 	<p>PRSP carer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be party to the legal proceedings. Can seek case management support from FCD if required. Is aware that the child is no longer eligible for priority services. 	
Department of Child Safety (Child Safety) - QLD	Long-Term Guardianship to Another Suitable Person (LTGASP)	Child’s needs and the carer’s circumstances are assessed and determined by the LTGASP assessment.	<p>Child Safety provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> subsidy payments (not income-tested); various financial supports as applicable e.g. regional remote loading, high support needs allowance, child-related cost reimbursement, and/or dual fortnightly caring allowance; 	<p>LTGASP carer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be party to the legal proceedings. Must allow Child Safety to have contact with the child at least once every 12 months. 	Long-term guardianship to a suitable person – Information for Carers (booklet)

NAME OF CP LEGAL AUTHORITY	NAME OF ORDER	CIRCUSMTANCES AND/OR ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CP AGENCY/SERVICE	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GUARDIAN	USEFUL RELATED RESOURCES
		<p><i>Note: Historically children on LTGASP orders were not provided with case management or eligible for priority services.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assistance with family contact – guardian remains responsible for providing opportunities for family contact, including transportation; • casework in response to emergent issues – support may be provided for up to three months where circumstances arise that are likely to affect the stability or quality of the care arrangement; • information, support and advocacy; • referral for active intervention services (up to six months); • access to the carer support line; • access to counselling and training. <p>If the LTGASP receives a high support needs allowance on an ongoing basis, or child-related costs for a period of more than 12 months, Child Safety is required to review the case plan every 12 months.</p> <p>In addition, Child Safety will contact the child every 12 months to give the child an opportunity to make comments or queries about, or ask for a review of their case plan.</p>		
<p>UK There are 56 child</p>	<p>Special Guardianship</p>	<p>Necessary supports are determined by</p>	<p>The relevant local authority arranges for children who meet these criteria to</p>	<p>The SG carer must be party to the legal proceedings.</p>	<p>Appendix 3: Standard Means</p>

NAME OF CP LEGAL AUTHORITY	NAME OF ORDER	CIRCUSMTANCES AND/OR ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CP AGENCY/SERVICE	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GUARDIAN	USEFUL RELATED RESOURCES
protection local authorities across UK. Each has its own procedures developed regarding the <i>Special Guardianship Regulations 2005</i> and <i>Children Act 1989</i> (UK).	(SG)	<p>the local authorities who, under the Regulations, are required to make arrangements for support services.</p> <p>Children who were looked after by a local authority immediately before the making of a SG order may qualify for advice and assistance under the <i>Children Act 1989</i>.</p> <p>Financial support is means tested.</p>	<p>receive advice and assistance in the same way as for any other child who qualifies for advice and assistance under the <i>Children Act 1989</i>.</p> <p>Support services include counselling, advice, information and other services (including financial support) as prescribed in the <i>Special Guardianship Regulations 2005</i>.</p>	<p>If the person is a Local Authority foster carer, then the child must be in state care and been residing with them for a minimum of 12 months before a SG order can be considered.</p>	<p><u>Tested Assessment Model</u> – in the document on Special Guardianship Orders (Lancashire)</p> <p><u>Special Guardianship Orders – Lancashire</u> guidelines for assessment and support</p>
US Similar to Australia, each US State has a different child protection agency – e.g. Alabama - Department of Human	Long term / permanency kinship care	Support varies depending on whether the family is involved with the child protection system. It is important to note that relative foster parents are not always offered the	<p>Funding of various related programs, assessment, referral and assistance vary from state to state.</p> <p>In some states, such as the Department for Children and Families in Cuyahoga, the CP agency is the major funder and refers families to a specific program.</p> <p>The Department of Human Resources in</p>		

NAME OF CP LEGAL AUTHORITY	NAME OF ORDER	CIRCUSMTANCES AND/OR ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CP AGENCY/SERVICE	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GUARDIAN	USEFUL RELATED RESOURCES
Resources; New York - Office of Children and Family Services etc.		same level of services as non-relative foster parents, even though they have the same or even greater needs. Other kinship families, particularly those whose children have not come to the attention of the child protection system, often have little support beyond access to Temporary Aid to Needy Families Child-Only Grants and Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program.	Alabama provides funding and oversight of a specific program. The Office of Children and Family Services in New York administers and oversees a specific program – local departments of social services and Juvenile Justice are responsible for making referrals, eligibility determination, and enrolment decisions. Financial support to carers granted a long term/permanency kinship care order is means tested.		

Interviews with Special Guardians of Children Subject to a Protection Order (Special Guardianship) – August 2015

Interview questions

1. Tell me about how you came to be a special guardian?

Prompts:

- *How did you first hear about this option? Did the case worker or another person suggest it or did you raise it with the case worker?*
- *Why did you decide to become a special guardian?*
- *How old was the child/ren when they came into your care?*
- *How old was the child/ren when you became a special guardian?*

2. What were you told about becoming a special guardian?

Prompts:

- *What information were you given?*
- *What supports were you advised of?*

3. Can you think of any information that would have been helpful to have either before or just after you became a special guardian?

Prompts:

- *How should this information be provided?*
- *Would training have been helpful?*

4. Overall, how would you describe your experience of being a special guardian?

5. Have you felt that you needed any support as a special guardian?

Prompts:

- *If yes, what types of issues related to your support needs?*
 - *How did you manage the issues?*
 - *What services or supports have you accessed (formal, informal or community supports, frequency)?*
- *If not, why do you feel you did not require any additional support?*
- *Have there been issues with managing contact visits with parents/family?*
- *Have you ever thought that the Protection Order (Special Guardianship) might not be working for you?*
 - *If yes, what were the reasons?*

6. Can you tell me how your needs as a special guardian have changed over time?

Prompts:

- *What did you need when you first became a special guardian?*
- *What do you need now?*
- *What will you need in the future?*
- *Have life events or the age of the children influenced your support needs?*

7. If you could design a completely new way of providing support to special guardians, what would it look like?

Prompts:

- *What type of supports would it offer? Financial/non-financial, legal, practical or emotional?*
- *How would you like to access that support (telephone / in person / internet)?*
- *When would you like to access that support (day / evening / as problems arise)?*
- *Would you prefer a government or non-government provider?*
- *Would you prefer an Aboriginal specific provider?*

8. Do you feel that there are enough supports in place to help child/ren on a Protection Order (Special Guardianship)?

Prompts:

- *Has the child asked for help?*
- *Have there been any times that you did not know how to help?*

9. If someone asked your advice about whether to become a special guardian, what would you say?

10. Is there any further information you would like to share about being a special guardian?