



Centre for
Child & Family
Justice Research



Department
for Education



Supporting families after care proceedings: supervision orders and beyond

Professor Judith Harwin and Lily Golding

Care proceedings, supervision orders and care orders at home: a reform agenda

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About the study and its context

- The PLWG on supervision orders - first review since the CA1989
- Main catalysts
 - ‘relentless’ rise in care proceedings
 - Chief social worker – reasonable to make a supervision order but necessary?
 - Concerning findings from our national follow up study of supervision orders (2019)*
 - 20% of the children at risk of further care proceedings within 5 year
 - Marked regional variations in their use
 - Professionals had very mixed views of their contribution
- No studies of parents’ views and experiences of supervision orders
- None since 2014 of parents’ views and experiences of care orders at home or of care proceedings
- * [The contribution of supervision orders and special guardianship to children's lives and family justice](#)

About the study of parental perspectives



- Funded by DfE to inform the work of the PLWG
- Interviews with 44 parents (20 with supervision orders) across 13 local authorities (England and Wales)
- Focus groups with a sub-set of parents to make recommendations for reform
- Eligibility criteria – care proceedings took place from April 2014 & the child returned home after proceedings ended (or had never left home)
- Domestic abuse, substance misuse, mental health difficulties, removal of previous children & child behaviour or health needs present in most cases
- Central question: what has worked well or not so well?
 - Pre-proceedings, the proceedings, the supervision order and/or care order at home

The findings: care proceedings: problems and parent solutions

- 'Just a cog in the machine, a case rather than a person' ...'inhumane'
- The court did not understand parents' mental health, substance misuse & domestic abuse problems > harder to present their case well
- Some parents from ethnic minorities reported a lack of respect
- The process was difficult to understand
- Parents felt scared in court if domestic abuse involved
- Parent lawyers and judges singled out as helpful
- Most parents did not care which order they had- they just wanted their child home

- Treat parents with respect and understanding
- A more supportive process – not a battle
- Introduce 'a parent supporter' throughout the process
- Use everyday language & signpost next steps clearly
- Information leaflets should be co- produced by parents and professionals
- Care plans with accountability
- More flexible use of the 26 weeks timeframe

The findings: supervision orders – problems and parent solutions

- Mixed views on the help it had provided
- The best provided the package of support in the care plan and beyond by ‘amazing’ social workers
- The worst – ‘a waste of space’
- Very limited help for domestic abuse
- The majority view – the supervision order could work better

- Keep but revamp the supervision order
- Services must address housing & poverty as well as parenting and therapy
- More multidisciplinary input
- A more consistent framework
- regular reviews at 9 months or earlier
- independent of the LA
- A proper ending process
- Support should continue after SO ends if requested

The findings: care orders at home – problems and parent solutions

- Most parents felt helped by care orders at home
- They delivered support, services and financial assistance for parents and their children in a consistent framework
- Preferred to a supervision order
- But could be intrusive, (e.g. contact & restrictions on personal autonomy)

- Retain the care order at home but it needs a clear endpoint
- Parents should have more say in contact arrangements to ‘create lasting bonds’
- The care plans should be updated in light of progress
- Fully independent reviews
- Provide support after the order ends

Our recommendations for reform

- They build closely on parents' recommendations
- DfE should issue statutory guidance on supervision orders to underpin a national best practice framework
- Enhance multidisciplinary support and services for families with a supervision order
 - Services for parents as well as children –counselling, mental health, domestic abuse, substance misuse
 - Guidance on managing difficult child behaviour
 - Therapy for children
 - Practical assistance: housing, benefits, guidance on education & training opportunities
- Provide ring-fenced funding – otherwise supervision orders risk being an empty shell

The reform agenda – doing nothing is not an option

- What we've learnt from parents
- A new PLWG sub-group is starting this month to consider how to make care proceedings more humane, compassionate and accessible
- Supervision orders are not fit for purpose but will be the main way of supporting reunification after care proceedings because of PLWG guidance to restrict use of care orders at home
- Can the reform of supervision orders incorporate what parents valued in care orders at home?
- There must be as much attention to helping parents stay together after care proceedings as to earlier family support
- Tracking outcomes to monitor reforms
- The sector must be ambitious for supervision orders



Contact:

Web: <https://www.cfj-lancaster.org.uk/>

Email:

Judith Harwin: j.e.harwin@lancaster.ac.uk

Lily Golding: l.f.golding@lancaster.ac.uk