

Introduction

1 The four children involved in this case were removed from their mother in the neighbouring authority due to physical and sexual abuse. In addition to this, one female child was systematically sexually abused by an adult neighbour of the family; this male later received a substantial prison sentence.

All four children were made subject of a Care Order October 2008. They had been placed with foster carers employed by an independent fostering agency in July 2006. The final care plan was for them to remain with the carers on a full Care Order. The carers were then successful (assessed by the neighbouring authority) in 2012 in seeking Special Guardianship Orders for all 4 children.

Northumberland

The children first came to the attention of Northumberland County Council May 2013 but due to the case being the responsibility of a neighbouring authority, that authority dealt with the situation. The incident was following one of the male siblings disclosing physical assault by the male carer, no further action was taken at the time. After a case transfer in November 2013 following an initial assessment in October 2013 where the carers were described as 'exemplary' carers, Northumberland took the case over.

Context

There then emerged a pattern of events where it was concluded that the carers did not recognise their own mental health issues or domestic abuse were impacting on the children

There were a number of allegations made regarding them involving physical abuse and they lacked the capacity to parent these vulnerable children. All four siblings were removed as a result of these concerns in 2015.

The judge in this case highlighted longstanding concerns about the foster carers with an independent fostering agency, breakdown of placements involving other children placed with them previously.

The current situation and arrangements:

All of the children have been affected by historic abuse, some of which occurred prior to the care provided by the foster carers. This abuse has significantly impacted on the children's emotional health and well-being. All of the children are accommodated in alternative placements and are safe.

Learning

Assurances should be sought that when a case has been **transferred** from another authority, all reasonable efforts have been made to obtain all relevant information in order to make **accurate risk assessments**.

When carers have been employed by an independent fostering agency, assurances should be sought and documented regarding any **previous concerns**.

Medical opinions should be seen as part of a wider, holistic risk assessment as opposed to being seen as expert opinions in their own right, out-weighting other information.

Children who disclose abuse may often retract to ensure this information remains important in all risk assessments

Recognition of the **impact on children of domestic violence** in situations where other complex issues exist

Emerging themes

5 The children were visible and were spoken to in person regularly. Where assaults occurred, any injuries were appropriately assessed by a paediatrician. There were disclosures of physical abuse and subsequent vehement retractions and it was therefore very difficult for these to be progressed. The siblings on denying allegations, tended to blame the challenging and difficult behaviours on an older brother.

Emerging themes

One of the features of this case was the impact of the SG parents' behaviours in the way they were able to influence decision making. There was evidence of disguised compliance, manipulation and coercion of both professionals and the children in their care by both SG parents.

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'P Family' Deep Dive Review



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