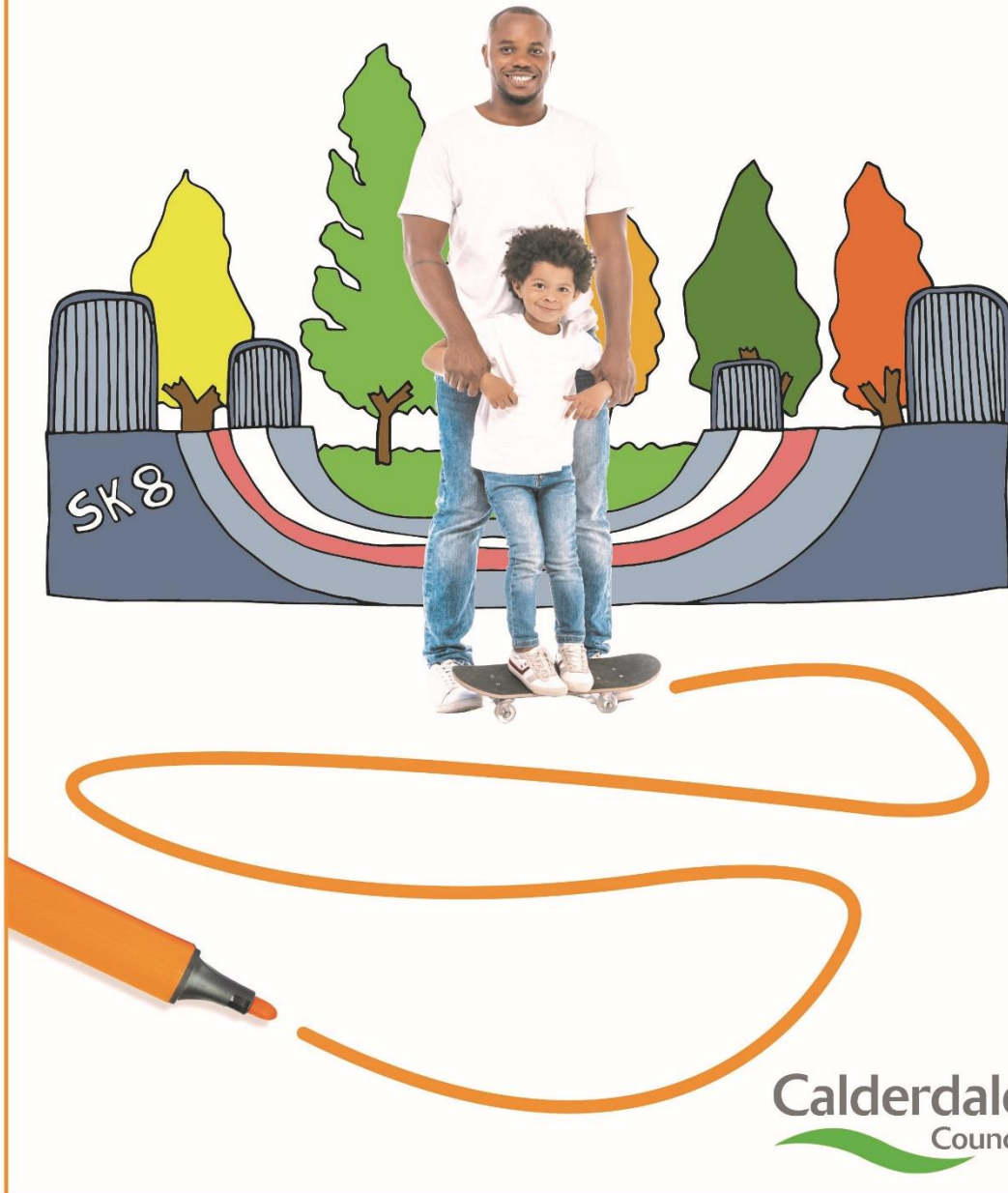


Special Guardianship

Offer



Special Guardianship ‘Offer’ – information for Special Guardians

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About

The Calderdale Special Guardianship Order (hereon referred to as SGO) Offer is constantly evolving to ensure that all Special Guardianship families have the right support and resources available to them. It will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure the information given to you is up to date.

This Offer Leaflet is to be discussed with your child/ren’s social worker (and your supervising social worker, if you are a Foster Carer) if you are considering applying for, or already within the SGO process to ensure there is transparency about eligibility criteria for certain areas within the offer. It may be that your child requires specialised

support which is not specified within this Offer leaflet and therefore any tailored support should be discussed and agreed within the assessment process with the professionals involved, including at Service Manager level, and contained within your child/ren's specific Special Guardianship Support Plan.

Within this offer leaflet, in the different sections, we refer to contacting us to access further information, advice or support post-order. There is one email address and telephone number to be used to request SGO support and the details of these are at the bottom of this leaflet.

Pre-Order Support

Applicants who wish to apply for Special Guardianship will be allocated an assessing social worker who has a good understanding of Special Guardianship. The assessing social worker will need to prepare a report for the Court, following the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 (updated in 2016). There is a leaflet available to help you understand the purpose of Special Guardianship Orders and the assessment process in more detail.

All prospective Guardians will receive a robust support plan for each child they propose to care for under Special Guardianship. This support plan will accompany the Special Guardianship assessment and both documents will be submitted to the court. Applicants are encouraged to seek independent legal advice upon receiving their completed assessment and support plan. The Local Authority will support funding for legal advice in relation to the Special Guardians application once they have received their assessment and support plan as per the Calderdale SGO policy.

Post-Order Support

We appreciate the role of our Special Guardians and want to ensure that they families continue to feel supported and know where they can access additional advice, guidance and support at any time after the order is made. We understand that when families reach out for support, they want reassurance that they have reached someone who can offer a listening ear and help a situation move forward positively.

In November 2022 we formed an SGO Single Point of Access for SGO families, and professionals that work with SGO families to contact for information, advice or support bespoke to the unique and differing needs that SGO families might have. The SGO Single Point of Access sits within the Connected Carers Pod in the Calderdale Fostering Service. This means that Special Guardians in need of support can be assured that their voices will be heard and responded to efficiently by the right professionals who can approach each family with a holistic view.

Currently the way to request support is through the Special Guardianship Support inbox. The email address is SGO.support@calderdale.gov.uk or you can request a call back through Fostering Business Support on 01422 266020. With your consent, a professional who is working with your family can also contact us to discuss your families' support needs. We will always aim to ensure that you receive a callback within 2 working days or sooner.

Our team will give space to answer any questions you may have, listen and talk through any support needs or difficulties you are having, to help you feel confident in finding a way forwards. Via the SGO Single Point of Access you can request information regarding training, support groups and services that could be helpful to you as Special Guardians. You can also request general advice and guidance for anything that you feel worried about. If eligible, you can also request an Assessment of Need to access the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) for further therapeutic support for your child/ren.

In addition to information and advice, it may be that you feel your family would benefit from additional support from our team or another service for a short period. For an Assessment of Need or on-going support to families, we accept referrals from Special Guardianship households and/or from any professional working with Special Guardianship households. As Special Guardianship Support practitioners, we meet on a monthly basis to discuss new referrals and agree the most helpful way to respond to requests for support. Our team can work with you to understand needs of your family and explore what has been happening. We will decide what support our service can offer you based on your family's need.

At times, there may be a waiting list for support, however we will always aim to ensure that families have access to advice and guidance that may help in the interim through our core offer, which is readily accessible and comprises of training, workshops and support groups.

If you are unsure about what support you need, our workers can help you think this through and get you to the right place.

Support with Education

The Virtual School has a duty to provide advice, information and guidance to schools, parents and guardians on how to support previously looked after children. This can include issues such as school admissions, transfer between schools, appropriate use of Pupil Premium, challenging exclusions and post-16 options. The Designated Teachers for previously looked after children can access all training offered by the Virtual School.

Schools that have children who are previously looked after, and are subject to a Special Guardianship Order, are eligible to claim pupil premium plus and can do so through the October census. Guardians must declare their child's Special

Guardianship status directly to the school before the school completes the October census. The funding is then sent directly to the school.

Although funding is not ring-fenced to individual children, schools should be aware that the needs of previously looked after children are different and therefore should consider the most effective way to utilise the pupil premium grant to meet the child's needs whilst in education. Funding for former looked after children should be used to address some of the subsequent difficulties they face within education. For example, with issues such as academic under achievement, social and emotional difficulties and school awareness of trauma and attachment needs. However, for children under Special Guardianship Order's, schools are not expected to spend the grants entirely on individual children.

Early Years settings can also claim Early Years Pupil Premium for children who were previously looked after aged three and four who are in receipt of the funded early education entitlement. Guardians of two-year-old children will receive 15 hours free funding for education, the term after the child turns two, and in some families a further 15 hours (totalling 30 hours) when their child turns three, subject to additional criteria. Criteria can be found on the government website: www.gov.uk/apply-30-hours-free-tax-free-childcare

For any advice or support regarding issues surrounding education, please contact us via the post-order support contact information (detailed at the bottom of this information leaflet).

Family Time and Identity

Maintaining family connections and relationships can have many benefits for children and allows them to have a sense of identity and their key relationships. We also understand that it can be tricky navigating relationships within a household where children no longer live with their birth parents. Sometimes there may be difficulties with managing family time with parents and other birth family members. There may also be struggles that your child is facing in relation to their identity and life story.

We can support you leading up to the making of the Special Guardianship Order to feel confident in overseeing future family time if this is difficult for you.

Post-order, our team will be available to talk through any uncertainties or challenges and support you to feel more confident about your decision and next steps. We can provide you with training, resources and give you advice about venues that can offer a safe place for family time to take place. Family time may go well for a period but then it may become challenging; during these times we can work together with you to progress this.

We can also help by organising a family meeting to see who in your family can support you as well. On rare occasions children are unable to see their parents, in these

instances we will support you and the child/ren to think more creatively about how family time is managed.

We are not able to complete risk assessments, supervise contact or influence changes to contact arrangements that have been agreed in court. What we can do, is help you think things through and support you to feel confident in facilitating family time in a way that feels most appropriate for your child/ren.

Where children have been looked after prior to a Special Guardianship Order, they will have a Life Story Book to assist you, and them, with talking about their life narrative. This will be provided to you, by the Child's Social Worker, within an agreed timescale, as outlined within the SGO Support Plan.

Our Calderdale Therapeutic Service offer 'My Life and Me' Life Story Clinics can help Special Guardians to think a little more about their child's story in a child-centred and age-appropriate way. Please contact us at SGO.Support@calderdale.gov.uk if you wish to access any support and guidance around children's identity and their life-story.

Emotions and behaviour Relating to Children and Young People

Unfortunately, most children who live within Special Guardianship households have suffered trauma and uncertainty in their early lives. Children can communicate their trauma through their behaviour and there may be times where it feels complicated for Special Guardians to know where to go next with working through behaviours, emotions and feelings.

Special Guardians can access training through the Calderdale Fostering Team on a variety of topics such as attachment, therapeutic parenting and safeguarding. We have a variety of training courses available online and in classroom-based settings.

In many instances, support for your child can be accessed via your GP who can make a referral to CAMHS or other services in your local area, however, at times the child/ren that you care for may require further specialist support from a qualified clinician. If you are unsure about where to seek support from, a discussion with our Single Point of Access workers can help guide you here.

In some circumstances it may be appropriate to think more deeply about the needs of the children with professionals who have further insight into Special Guardianship households. If eligible, Calderdale can offer a space for Special Guardians to explore difficulties and needs, promote understanding and whole family thinking. If qualifying criteria are met, Calderdale will support you to apply for funding for specific therapies through the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF).

Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF)

In 2024 the Adoption Support Fund was renamed the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund in recognition of Special Guardianship families' entitlement to the ASGSF support. There still remains eligibility criteria around accessing the ASGSF, and sadly not all Special Guardianship families are eligible to access this.

Information is accessible from Kinship either via their advice line, or their website: www.kinship.org.uk/special-guardians-and-the-adoption-support-fund/ in relation to the ASGSF, eligibility and what funding can be used for.

If you meet the criteria for ASGSF funding, you can request an Assessment of Need to access the ASGSF for your child by contacting us through the SGO Single Point of Access. The Local Authority is responsible for completing the Assessment of Need, in line with our SGO policy, prior to any application being made. This will always be in consultation with families and other professionals working with families however it is important to note that the SGO support service have a duty to assess need and make applications to the ASGSF appropriate to what we have assessed that need to be.

Managing your own Emotions and Feelings

As well as feelings and emotions being difficult for your young person/people, it can also feel particularly tricky for Special Guardians who can feel frustrated, isolated or alone at times. You are not alone. Special Guardians can attend Calderdale Support Groups for emotional support, the purpose of which provide space and an empathetic ear for those who are tasked with the emotionally challenging role that parenting through Special Guardianship can bring. Attending Support Groups can also offer a sense of community and an opportunity to socialise with others in Special Guardianship households.

Calderdale also commission support through the charity Kinship, who can offer independent support via their advice line and support groups both locally and nationally. This support can range from information and advice, support groups and family activities, peer support, or dedicated support in times of need. Special Guardians in Calderdale have priority access to the Kinship advice line, access to local Kinship support groups, online support groups and workshops. Where appropriate, referrals can also be made for additional 1:1 support from a Kinship project worker.

There is the opportunity for us to facilitate a family meeting to help you navigate the support you need from your wider network as a Special Guardian, this can help open conversations with those around you about what you might need from your family and friends as you support your child/ren in the long-term.

If you were a former Calderdale Foster Carer, as a Special Guardian, you can receive a Calderdale Foster Carer Association (CFCA) associate membership which is an additional source of peer support and guidance for Special Guardians.

Financial Support

Special Guardians who fostered the child prior to becoming Special Guardians will continue to receive their current fostering maintenance and allowances, at the current rate minus child benefit. You will also benefit from any inflation increases that are applied to foster carers. Fostering allowances/grants such as birthday, festival and uniform grants are not paid to Special Guardians.

Please discuss the financial support offer with your Fostering Social Worker, or Child's Social Worker if you would like further information. In Calderdale, we aim to ensure there are no financial barriers to progressing with SGO.

In all other circumstances, a financial assessment will be offered to ensure appropriate financial support is available to those progressing with Special Guardianship. This will be reassessed on an annual basis, post-special guardianship order.

Special Guardians can request advice in areas such as benefits, allowances and wills. There are several calculators widely available to support people with calculating benefits via the UK Government website – these tools are “entitledto” “Turn2us” and “Policy in Practice”.

Post 16 financial support is discussed in the section Leaving Care/Post 16 support, within this document.

Health, Leisure and Community

All Special Guardianship households with children who were formerly looked after prior to the SGO order can access Calderdale Council Leisure Facilities for free as described below:

- Use of all four fitness studios across Calderdale, to junior gym sessions and access at any time for 14 and 15 year olds.
- Use of all three main swimming pools at Brighouse, Sowerby Bridge and Todmorden, plus the teaching pools at Brighouse and Sowerby Bridge.
- Over 90 fitness classes per week for children 14 and 15 years old.
- Junior swim fit classes.
- Plus 1 coaching course from swimming lessons, football, basketball, ducklings and synchronised swimming.
- Adults - classes, swimming, sauna, off-peak racket sports, gym

Special Guardianship families are also entitled to a MAX card (www.mymaxcard.co.uk) which helps families to access more affordable fun days out due to discounted and/or free entry at lots of family friendly venues. You can contact us to request this if you are eligible.

In addition, there are clubs and activities that children and young people in Calderdale can access through the Play Development Service, including clubs for 5 – 14-year-olds and groups targeted at older young people. For further information, please contact Play Development Service on 01422 380995 for an up-to-date timetable of what is available or speak to a member of the SGO Single Point of Access.

Training for Special Guardians

The Calderdale Fostering Team run an excellent training program for Foster Carers that Special Guardians can access, covering a range of specific and relevant topics. The only exclusions to this are where the training is applicable to the Fostering task, and/or meeting the skills level requirements of Foster Carers.

There are also workshops, clinics and webinars accessible to Special Guardians. These change regularly so please refer to Calderdale's most up to date training manual for further information. Kinship, the Charity also offer workshops and webinars on a regular basis which may further meet your training needs.

You can opt in to receive Calderdale's newsletter which includes information relating to training by ensuring your email address is up to date with the SGO Single Point of Access.

Leaving Care/Post-16+ Support

On reaching the age of 16 years (and up to the age of 21 years) children subject to Special Guardianship Orders are entitled to Leaving Care provisions under Section 24(2) of the Children Act 1989; where the following criteria are met:

They were looked after by the Local Authority immediately before the making of a Special Guardianship Order, and; The Special Guardianship Order remains in force when they reach the age of 16 years. These children are qualifying under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and there is a duty upon the Local Authority who last looked after them to provide advice and assistance in relation to employment, education and training. Sometimes this might be through signposting to a more relevant service, but if required there is a duty upon the leaving care service to offer an 'assessment of need' to determine what support can be offered.

All former Calderdale Foster Carers will be entitled to payment equivalent to Staying Put payments, where applicable. Any specific post-16+ support queries including financial support and emotional support for the young person can be queried individually with the Child's Social Worker, or please contact us to discuss further, if there is no allocated worker involved.

Important Contact details:

Calderdale's Single Point of Access for Special Guardianship Support

Email: SGO.support@calderdale.gov.uk

Tel: 01422 266020

When requesting a support call, we will always aim to ensure that you receive a callback from the team within 2 working days or sooner.

Please note, that whilst every effort is made to respond to Special Guardians and those working within Special Guardianship Households as soon as possible, at times we do have a waiting list for support and if this is the case, this will be communicated to you upon receiving a request, or referral for support.

Kinship (priority access for Calderdale Special Guardians)

<https://compass.kinship.org.uk> - The Kinship website offers a range of independent information, advice, workshops and support hubs for kinship carers

Advice line telephone: 0300 123 7015