

## Background

Ben and his brother were living with grandparents as their mother was a heroin & crack user, who initially lived with the boys and her parents, and then left, resulting in care proceedings to decide the best place for the children to live. There was considerable disagreement as to whether the grandparents were the best carers for them long term. The court required further assessments take place and during this time Ben was found in the garden pond. Subsequently the grandparents were granted a Special Guardianship Order to care for the boys.

## Incident

In September 2015, Ben was found at the bottom of an 8ft deep garden pond at his grandparents house. The family thought he had been missing for 15 minutes. Despite a very poor initial prognosis of life and the belief that he would have suffered significant brain damage if he survived, he made a miraculous recovery.

## What Worked Well?

- The family placement social worker identified the pond as a risk and twice advised the grandparents to cover it
- The Children's Hospital has robust safeguarding systems in place, and communication was good between the social worker and the ward.
- The Social Worker and Health Visitor both discussed risks with the Grandparents (for example the dangers of co-sleeping)

# Learning Brief Ben Age 18 months

## Findings

- Is the opportunity for collaborative working between the local authority legal team and children's social care used to the best effect and to agree the most effective tactical approach to take the case through court proceedings and how best to present the evidence to achieve the desired outcomes?
- The priority given to a child's pre-existing relationships in placement decision making easily leads to assumptions in those connected carers assessments where children are already living that health and safety standards are guidance rather than requirements. This increases the likelihood that any risks, such as an uncovered pond, will not be addressed.
- It is appropriate that family and friends assessments are conducted by the Family Placement Team but not all practitioners in the Family Placement Team in South Gloucestershire have been provided with the skills and support required, meaning these complex assessments for court are likely to be of variable quality.
- The expertise of health staff at a regional children's hospital supports relevant communication and collaboration in a crisis situation, enabling an effective multi-agency response.

## Concerns

- The Social Worker and Health Visitor did not know about the pond. When it was identified, requests to cover it were seen as a request not a requirement.
- The family placement team social worker had never undertaken this type of assessment before and for a variety of reasons did not have the usual level of management oversight.
- The safety plan relied on continued support to the grandparents from Social Care and this was an unrealistic aspiration when compared to previous lack of co-operation with the Local Authority
- Requesting immediate removal of the children at court had various negative consequences. Legal advice prior to court suggested that the threshold to remove them had not been met and the planning leading up to court did not effectively explore all possible outcomes of the decision

How do things look today?  
(June 2017)

- ✓ Ofsted, The Family Justice Board, Social Care & Legal Services all report positive collaboration between Social Workers and the Legal Team.
- ✓ HHJ Wildblood has given feedback through the Ofsted Inspection and subsequently that he is highly satisfied with the quality of work presented in court from South Gloucestershire.
- ✓ There is a 2 Day Court Skills Training in place. This case is referenced in training
- ✓ The legal team provide training re. Connected Carer Assessments. The entire Family Placement Team has been trained since this incident.
- ✓ Although Ben was not placed, but lived with his grandparents under a private arrangement, a Health & Safety form must be completed in order for a child to be placed.
- ✓ CHIP are creating a targeted campaign around pond safety



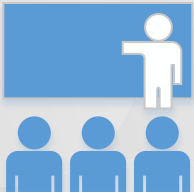


*The Case  
Review*

This review was conducted using the SCIE (Social Care Institute for Excellence) Learning Together Systems Model.

This approach endeavours to understand professional practice in context, identifying the factors in the system that influence the nature and quality of work with families, and make it more or less likely that the quality of the practice will be good or poor. Solutions then focus on redesigning the system to make it easier for professionals to safeguard children well and harder to safeguard children poorly.

The full review can be found on the South Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board website [here](#)



## **Court Skills Training**

This training can be found on the Learning & Development Website [here](#)

The Child Injury Prevention Information (CHIP) can be found [here](#)