

P-05-1161 Routine collection and publication of data of how many babies/children return to their care experienced parents care at the end of a Parent and Child Placement, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 01.07.21

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain the petition further. I'm sure the petition could have had a different heading and would have had further signatures if the wider public understood the reason for it.

I am a foster carer and about four years ago found out that a young woman, who had been in foster care, was pregnant. I knew this young woman would need some support and advice around childcare so took her under my wing. She, unfortunately, experienced two miscarriages before finally having a pregnancy that went full term and the baby was born in August 2020. By this time we had (and still have) a good relationship where the young mum now trusts me (believe me, this is not easy for children/young people who believe they have never had any reason to trust adults).

Prior to the birth of the baby we had organised for mum and baby to come to me straight to my home a couple of weeks but then social services became involved. The mother hadn't done anything wrong. She'd struggled as a teenager so everything was historical other than one 'row' with her boyfriend of 5 years during the pregnancy. I am not condoning the argument and I explained to the mum that, even in the womb, this can impact on a baby and this was taken on board. Unfortunately, social services put this down to 'emotional abuse' and put the baby on the child protection register. I tried to intervene and even took 'mother and baby training' so that mum and baby could come to stay with me in an official capacity. This was refused. This then resulted in Mum being taken from hospital within hours of having a difficult birth, made to walk up two flights of stairs to pack her things – without support, and taken to a foster placement. This mothers anxiety was through the roof and after the difficulties she'd experienced through her life ie. domestic violence in the home, rape, child sexual exploitation to name but a few, this was the last thing she needed.

Social Services told mum that if she didn't complete the 3 month placement then the baby would not be going home with her. The placement was "voluntary" so hadn't gone to court and mum was terrified to allow the case to go to court even though I felt that she would be allowed home. I spoke to the solicitor she'd had on legal aid and, to be frank, she was useless. However, she did tell me that if she'd had a pound for every mother who walked out of a placement she would be

extremely rich. The mother I'm talking about, at the height of her anxiety, feeling that 'social services were going to take her baby anyway' did walk from the placement. Fortunately for her she phoned me absolutely distraught and I was able to persuade her to go back immediately. She completed the placement – although social services drew it out blaming Covid, and she's at home with a very well cared for baby girl who is meeting all her milestones and who has a very strong bond with her mother.

This was the first experience I'd had of a young mum going into a mother and baby placement and the anxiety it caused. I am not adverse to this happening where a baby is truly at risk but feel that there is an extremely high risk of babies being taken into care and put up for adoption unnecessarily because the system is extremely flawed and a mothers reaction to extreme anxiety isn't taken into consideration. It is a false environment that the parents are put into and the result is then false as a parent wouldn't walk away from their own home. Parents feel they are doomed to failure and being spied upon so this situation is setting parents up to fail. People will argue that parents should do what is necessary for their child and this is true but what happens if parents feel the child deserves better and they aren't good enough because of their past experiences. I believe these young parents deserve a chance to have a happy family. Support was available for this mum from a qualified person and was ignored. Mum could have had support in the home but this was also refused.

This example mum had somebody to support her when she was feeling anxious – something many care leavers don't have. If we can find out how many babies successfully go home with their care leaver mothers (or don't) then we can ascertain if this is the best way to help these young people. The more children taken into care, the more children at risk of having mental health issues. Just because a parent is care experienced does not mean that they are incapable of being good parents – many deserve to have a happy family and just need some help with this. With the recent launch of the NEST framework I am hoping that the Senedd will agree that this needs to be addressed and help children now and in the future to stay with the people who love them if it is safe for them to do so.

Kind regards,