



Steven Howard

Year of Call: 2009

Solicitor: 2008

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Family

Children – Public law

Steven represents clients at all stages of care proceedings. He regularly acts for parents, local authorities, guardians, extended family members (such as grandparents), intervenors, and the Official Solicitor.

Steven has a particular interest in NAI cases, and has appeared in cases involving brain and skull injury, rib fractures, limb fractures, and extensive bruising. Steven has also been led in cases involving child deaths

A growing area in which Steven has experience is that of cross-jurisdictional care cases. He has advised in cases involving family members abroad, and cases where the children are foreign nationals living in this jurisdiction.

Steven is experienced in representing parties in care cases involving:

- Jurisdictional issues
- Non accidental injury / death of a child
- Expert / medico-legal issues
- Chronic neglect, drug and alcohol addiction (including cases in the FDAC / PSCM)
- Domestic violence and sexual abuse / offending
- Serious mental health problems
- Adoption / Special Guardianship / Wardship
- Parents or children with special needs / cognitive impairment and capacity issues
- Revocation of placement orders / discharge of care orders

Reported cases:

Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole Council v O and others, [2023] EWFC 117

Led by Kate Branigan KC, acted for a father accused of causing 16 rib fractures to a baby, and placing the baby in an unsafe sleeping position before the child's death. Father and mother found to be in the pool of perpetrators for the fractures, and findings were made against the father in respect of the unsafe sleeping position.

Re J (children) (reopening findings of fact) [2023] EWCA Civ 465, [2023] 1 WLR 3348

Led by Claire Wills-Goldingham KC acted for a respondent local authority in an appeal concerning the correct legal test to apply when re-opening findings in children's proceedings. Appeal dismissed.

Re S (A Child) (Interim Care Order: Residential Assessment) (Note) [2015] 1 WLR 925, sub nom Re S (Parenting Assessment) [2014] 2 FLR 575

Acted for the guardian before the President of the Family Division in a matter which set out the circumstances in which the 26 week time limit in care proceedings may be extended.

Recent cases:

Oxfordshire County Council v JN & Anor [2022] EWHC 2794 (Fam)

As leading junior acted for a local authority in an application for a declaration of age with a novel methodology that did not rely on a Merton assessment but instead relied on MRI imaging. Declaration made and methodology accepted.

Re H [2021] (unreported)

Acted for a local authority in a case involving a child born of incest. The grandmother's proposal to care for the child against the mother's wishes was rejected, and a care and placement order was granted.

Re DA [2021] (unreported)

Led by Vanessa Meachin QC, acted for a father accused of having caused extensive bruising and multiple fractures to one of his children. The mother was found to have caused the injuries that the court found proved, and the child was rehabilitated to the father's care. A programme of work was agreed by the court to see whether the mother could progress sufficiently to re-join the family in due course.

Re B [2021] (unreported)

Acted for a local authority in a case where the mother and her partner had been assessed in private law proceedings to have alienated the children against their father. The children were removed under interim care orders for further assessment of the family, and a plan for rehabilitation to the father's care approved by the court.

Re B [2021] (unreported)

Acted for a local authority in a finding of fact hearing where it was found that the father who suffered from a number of mental health difficulties caused bruising to his child's thighs and groin.

Re H [2020] (unreported)

Acted for a guardian in a case concerning neglect, domestic abuse, substance misuse, and physical injury to one of a sibling group. The mother and grandmother were found to have lied about an incident they said caused the ear injury. The court found the injury to be caused by the parents. At the final hearing, the placement order for 2 of the children was dismissed as a preliminary issue due to the local authority not having a valid ADM decision, and care orders were made for those children. Care and placement orders were granted for the younger children.

Re L [2020] (unreported)

Acted for a guardian at a fact finding hearing at which the father was found to have fractured the arm and caused bruising to the buttocks of his child. Findings were made about parental substance misuse, and the mother's failure to protect the child.

Re R [2020] (unreported)

Acted for a father accused of breaking his child's leg at a finding of fact hearing. The mother was found to have fractured the leg, and no findings were made against the father.

Re H [2020] (unreported)

Acted for a mother found to have caused her child to make untrue allegations of sexual abuse. The child was rehabilitated into the father's care.

Re S [2020] (unreported)

Acted for a local authority in a case where the mother accepted she could not care for the children, and the father was alleged to have accessed a large amount of child pornography and sexually abused his children. The father suffered from serious mental health problems which impeded his ability to engage in the proceedings. Care orders were granted.

Re B [2020] (unreported)

Acted for a father with mental health difficulties alleged to have neglected and assaulted his child. After psychological assessment of the father and child, the father accepted he could not meet the child's needs in the child's timescales and a care order was granted.

Re K [2020] (unreported)

Acted for a mother with a learning disability, whose partner also had learning difficulties, with a large number of children. A variety of care orders and placement orders were granted.

Re W [2020] (unreported)

Acted for a local authority in a fact finding hearing in a case involving a mother and her boyfriend accused of creating and distributing illicit images of one of her children. Findings were made against the mother and her boyfriend. The children stayed in their father's care.

Dorset Council v M & Others [2019] EWFC B63

Acted for a father in a fact finding hearing where it was alleged he had fractured the skull of his 12 day old baby. No findings were made and the child returned to his care after the local authority application was dismissed.

AB (Contested Adoption) [2019] EWFC B68

Acted for prospective adopters in a contested adoption which was opposed by the birth parents who had managed to make significant changes in their lives. The birth parents were successfully parenting another of their children as a result of those changes. The adoption orders were granted.

Re W [2019] (unreported)

Acted for children in a fact finding hearing where it was alleged by one of the children that an adult family member with profound learning difficulties had sexually abused them. The child and learning disabled adult gave oral evidence during the hearing.

Re K [2019] (unreported)

As leading junior acted for a mother at a fact finding hearing in which it was alleged she had sexually abused her young daughter causing anal scarring. The father was found to have caused the child's injuries.

Re D [2019] (unreported)

Led by Vanessa Meachin QC, acted for a mother accused of having murdered one of her children who died of catastrophic head injuries. Her former boyfriend was found to have caused the death, and some of the children were rehabilitated to the mother's care.

Re T [2019] (unreported)

Acted for a father in a fact finding hearing where it was found that he had shaken his baby. The child was rehabilitated to the joint care of the father and the mother.

Re D [2019] (unreported)

Acted in care proceedings for a mother who had been subject to domestic abuse and controlling behaviour from the father.

The father was found to be dishonest, and to have manipulated the children against the mother. The children were reunited with the mother. As a result of the father's significantly harmful behaviour his parental responsibility was removed.

Re M [2018] (unreported)

Acted for a prospective adopter accused of causing extensive bruising to one of the children placed with her for adoption. Findings were made against her husband, and the children were eventually adopted by the prospective adopter.

A Local Authority v G (Parent with Learning Disability) [2017] EWFC B94 (18 December 2017)

Acted for the local authority in care proceedings involving chronic neglect of children, a learning disabled, partially deaf mother, and her non-impaired husband. SGO and 12 month supervision order made in respect of eldest child, and care and placement orders in respect of the other 2 children.

Bournemouth Borough Council v A Mother & Ors [2017] EWFC 18

Led by Paul Storey QC, acted for a father in a fact finding hearing where it was found he had murdered one of his children and caused physical harm to his other children. The surviving children were rehabilitated to the mother's care.

Children - Private law

Steven Howard represents clients at all stages of private law children disputes. He regularly represents parents and rule 16.4 guardians in disputes about the living arrangements for children, disputes about contact arrangements, and disputes about the exercise of parental responsibility.

Steven is experienced in representing parties in cases involving:

- Entrenched / intractable disputes
- Parental alienation
- Split hearings / finding of fact hearings
- Domestic violence and abuse including serious sexual abuse / offending
- Mental health problems and substance abuse issues impacting on child arrangements
- Removal from the jurisdiction
- Wardship
- Abduction and international issues

Reported cases:

Re L (Costs of Children Proceedings) [2014] EWCA Civ 1437, [2015] 1 FCR 477

Acted for the father on an appeal brought by the mother in respect of the trust funds and a costs order. The mother's appeal was allowed.

Recent cases:

Re C [2021] (unreported)

Acted for a mother in 2 linked cases where the father and his partner were alleged to have been seriously domestically violent to the mother, to have assaulted the children, and to have caused the mother and children psychological harm. The case involved issues of how a non-subject competent child should give evidence.

Re K [2021] (unreported)

Acted for a father opposing an appeal from a decision of the lay justices to move his children to live with him. Appeal allowed.

Re N [2019]

Acted for a father absolved of serious sexual and physical abuse in previous proceedings who had been rejected by one of his children.

Re H [2019]

Acted for a father against whom the mother made a series of allegations of sexual abuse during a series of proceedings. No findings were made against the father, and contact was ordered.

Injunction Team

A frequent feature of Steven's cases is domestic violence, often associated with other issues such as substance abuse or mental health problems.

Steven is experienced in advising in respect of non-molestation orders and occupation orders, and has appeared for applicants and respondents throughout these applications, from ex-parte application to final hearing. He has also appeared in applications to enforce those orders.

Recommendations

Steven Howard is a children law barrister recognised for his advocacy skills and ability to deal with vulnerable clients. Howard represents parents and guardians in complex cases involving the death of a child, sexual abuse and non-accidental injuries. He is also experienced in handling contested adoption cases.

Strengths: "He is a very clear, concise and accurate advocate with an excellent client manner."

"He is a tenacious advocate who is exceptional on his feet, with an ability to deal with very complex and sensitive cases."

"Steven is a specialist in children matters."

Chambers UK 2024/Family/Children/Western Bar

Strengths: "Steven's attention to detail is second to none."

"He is strong, analytical, a good performer and can think on his feet."

"Steven is very on the ball."

Chambers UK 2023/Family/Children/Western Bar

Strengths: "He excels in the most complex of cases, delivering first-class cross-examination whilst providing accessible advice to clients from a variety of backgrounds."

Chambers UK 2022/Family/Children/Western Bar

Strengths: "He is extremely committed to his work and is meticulous when it comes to detail and applying the law. He always makes time to discuss issues." "His knowledge and ability are unquestionable, his commitment to the client tireless and the feedback comprehensive and succinct."

Chambers UK 2021/Family/Children/Western Bar

'Steven is exceptional. He is very thorough, has attention to detail that is unmatched and is highly respected by the judiciary. He deals with highly complex cases with great care and attention and his advocacy skills are of the highest standard.'

Legal 500 2024/Family: Children and Domestic Violence/Leading Juniors/Western Circuit - Tier 1

Steven Howard 'is a dedicated advocate with a specialism in non-accidental injuries in care proceedings, where his advocacy is akin to that of a silk'.

'Steven grasps every detail and nuance of a matter at an astonishing rate. His legal and technical knowledge is encyclopedic and he has a strategic mind. On his feet, he is a commanding presence. He is measured, controlled, and razor sharp in cross examination. He is superb at putting clients at ease.'

Legal 500 2023/Child Law (Public and Private)/Leading Juniors/Western Circuit - Tier 1

'Steven is always impeccably prepared and is always on top of the case. He has a good way of identifying the points that will make a difference in the case, then pursuing them with an unassuming but persistent manner which makes a real difference to the outcome. A silk of the future.'

Legal 500 2022/Child Law (Public and Private)/Leading Juniors/Western Circuit

'Steven is incredibly hard working, thorough and forensic in his approach to cases. He represents clients with passion and dedication. He is persuasive and tenacious, and does not back down, but manages to do so in a pleasant and courteous manner. He goes above and beyond.'

Legal 500 2021/Child Law (Public and Private)/Leading Juniors/Western Circuit

'Specialises in care proceedings.'

Legal 500 2020/Family

'A meticulous advocate with the human touch.'

Legal 500 2018/19/Family

Academic qualifications

- BSc (Hons) Dunelm
- CPE
- LPC

Professional qualifications & appointments

- Recorder (family)

Professional bodies

- Family Law Bar Association
- Western Circuit