Press release

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Charity launches first national support service for Special Guardians

The leading family support charity Family Action has launched an exciting new National Special Guardianship Support Service to provide high quality information, guidance and emotional support to special guardians across England. This new service has been developed in direct response to the increase in the number of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) being granted and to help and support the growing number of special guardianship families.

Special guardianship provides an increasingly popular legal route to permanence for children and young people who are unable to live with their birth parents. Since special guardianship was introduced in 2005 the number of Orders made every year has grown rapidly and in 2015/16 3,830 children left care via a Special Guardianship Order. Across England tens of thousands of SGOs have now been made but we are aware that the provision of support to special guardians is often patchy.

The Family Action service is the first national service of its kind and is dedicated to meeting the specific needs of special guardians. It aims to provide a bespoke digital support service seven days a week, 365 days a year that will develop over time as the service grows its expertise. Affordable subscription to the service is available to all local authorities in England and entitles all special guardians and Local Authority professionals to access a raft of specially created resources on a new dedicated website or support from trained professionals via web chat or a Freephone helpline. A number of Local Authorities have already subscribed to this pioneering new service and the charity is now encouraging other Local Authorities to sign up so that their special guardians can benefit from this excellent new service.

David Holmes CBE, Chief Executive of Family Action said:

"We are really excited to launch our new National Special Guardianship Support Service. This innovative and affordable digital service aims to improve outcomes for children and young people who are the subject of Special Guardianship Orders by providing their special guardians with a friendly, accessible and high quality source of trusted information, support and guidance to enable them to fulfil their vital caring roles.

"We recognise that many special guardians have selflessly agreed to care for children in extremely difficult circumstances. They make a commitment to care for those children for the rest of their childhoods and often find themselves supporting children who have had traumatic early experiences and have complex needs. At the same time many special guardians find themselves managing difficult contact arrangements with other members of their own family – it is not surprising that they need access to high quality practical and emotional support."

"We know that support for special guardians can be patchy and we want to help Local Authorities to improve their support services to special guardians in an affordable way. That is why we have created a new high quality support service for special guardians that is available out of hours seven days a week. Such a service would be so expensive to provide at a local

level, but now that we are providing this service nationally local authorities can buy into it at a very affordable rate. Only a national service like this can provide a uniform level of support to special guardians wherever they might live in such an affordable way. We urge local authorities to subscribe to this new service so that together we can make it better and better over time. Together we can create a National Centre of Excellence in the provision of support to special guardians and a virtual community of special guardianship families and all those who work with them. Crucially we can also help to ensure that all special guardians and their children are given the very best chance for their arrangements to succeed."

To find out more, please visit www.specialguardiansupport.org.uk

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