



Sarah Blackmore MCIArB

Joint Head of Chambers

CALLED: 1993

SBlackmore@spirebarristers.co.uk

Summary

Sarah has developed her practice in children cases over the last 18 years, initially at a specialist family law set in London and since 2008 on the North Eastern Circuit at what is now Spire Barristers. She appears on behalf of local authorities, parents, extended family members and Children's Guardians and often represents parents suffering from mental illness, those with severe learning difficulties as well as 'child parents' in serious, complex cases (both public and private law), involving serious non-accidental injury and sexual abuse, often including both issues in the same case, as well as cases involving neglect, mental health issues, learning difficulties/disabilities, domestic violence, 'implacable hostility' and 'parental alienation'.

She appears at all levels of the Family Court, (including the High Court) as well as appearing as necessary in the Court of Appeal.

From this work in the Family Court she has a developing interest in Mental Health and Court of Protection – Health and Welfare matters.

She provides representation pro bono through her membership of the Bar Pro Bono unit. In 2021 Sarah's contribution to pro bono was acknowledged by being awarded The John Collins Pro Bono Excellence Award at the annual Advocate Pro Bono Awards.

Sarah is qualified as an Arbitrator in Children matters and is also trained as a Family Mediator, specialising in Children issues. Deputy District Judge on the North-Eastern Circuit within the Civil and Family Courts

Areas of Practice

PUBLIC LAW CHILDREN

Sarah is an expert in dealing with care proceedings involving the most serious of issues – in particular, serious non-accidental injury, sexual abuse, neglect, mental health issues and learning difficulties/disabilities.

Notable cases:

Re U [2016] – Care proceedings involving a very serious and rare C2 (hangman) fracture of the vertebrae in a 2-year old boy, which was the 7th fracture sustained over a 9-month period. No other concerns about the family, with two older sisters who were receiving excellent parenting. The hospital and Local Authority were convinced that these were non-accidental injuries.

Representing the mother, (led by Darren Howe QC) who speaks very little English, to assist her understanding of the medical evidence. Analysis of that medical evidence undertaken to ensure the right questions of instructed experts were asked to enable full challenge to be made to the Local Authority's assertion that the injuries must be NAI.

Despite the seemingly obvious conclusion that the most likely explanation for the fractures was NAI, with the right questions being asked of the right experts it was ultimately discovered that the child suffered from a very rare form of osteogenesis imperfecta. The family were immediately re-united.

Re W [2017] – Care Proceedings in respect of serious allegations of sustained, inter-generational sexual abuse made by the now adult daughters of the parents. Both parents alleged to have been abusers, with the mother also failing to protect. The father committed suicide in the weeks before the matter was due to be heard as a fact-finding hearing.

Representing the subject children (half-siblings of the adult witnesses). Serious findings against the mother sought by the Local Authority. Analysis of the adult daughter's evidence required.

The Mother vehemently denied the serious allegations against her, which resulted in the very vulnerable young women giving evidence. Skilled cross-examination of them was required to enable the court to have the best possible evidence to determine the findings sought.

ARBITRATION AND MEDIATION

Sarah is a specialist in all aspects relating to arrangements for children following separation and can act as an Arbitrator in Children matters.

She deals with matters relating to a couple's financial arrangements following separation together with a co-mediator.

PRIVATE LAW CHILDREN

Sarah has extensive experience in dealing with the whole gamut of cases within the private law field. In particular cases involving domestic violence, sexual abuse and non-accidental injury as well as those matters which involve 'implacable hostility' and 'parental alienation'

She also has experience of and is interested in cases of child abduction (both international and within the UK) and applications by a transgender parent to re-establish relationships between them and their child(ren).

Appointments and Memberships

- Deputy District Judge within the Civil and Family Courts.
- The John Collins Pro Bono Excellence Award 2021 - Advocate Pro Bono Awards
- Member of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators Barrister Member of The Bar Standards Board Independent Decision-making Body
- Joint Head of Chambers
- Member of the Family Law Bar Association
- Director of Pupil Training for Chambers and approved Pupil Supervisor Advocacy Trainer (accredited by the NEC and Advocacy Training Council)
- Jointly (together with Liz Shaw) awarded Barrister of the Year at the Yorkshire Lawyer Awards 2011 in recognition of them conducting a fact-finding hearing pro bono on behalf of

grandparents 'accused' of causing serious non-accidental injury to their granddaughter, by shaking her.

- North Eastern Circuit
- Bar Pro Bono Unit
- Lawyers for Children

Legal Directories

Legal 500 2023 - 'A formidable advocate with a wealth of knowledge and experience in the field of public law proceedings. She is sensitive to the needs of the most vulnerable clients.'

Legal 500 2022 - 'Sarah combines a first rate and instinctive knowledge for the most complex and demanding legal matters with an ability to communicate this easily and naturally with both lay and professional clients.'

Legal 500 2021 - 'Ms Blackmore is a very strong advocate with an in-depth knowledge of public law and Children's Act matters. She is clearly passionate about her work and offers an extremely high level of service. What stands out in respect of Ms Blackmore is the extra lengths she will go to and additional support she provides. Her experience shines through and is shown in the guidance and practical advice.'

Legal 500 2020 - 'A strong children law practitioner'.

Publications

In addition to her success in court, Sarah is also the co-author of 'Family Justice Reformed – Developments since the Children's & Families Act 2014 (previously known as Reforming Family Justice) published by Lexis Nexis – Jordan Publishing Ltd (Family Law)

<http://www.jordanpublishing.co.uk/practice-areas/family/publications/family-justice-reformed#.WUurXjOZPeQ>

Education

Nottingham Trent University LLB (Hons) 1992