

Autistic mum's baby taken

into care

Jul 7 2007

by Martin Shipton, Western
Mail

THE grandfather of a baby taken into care immediately after he was born is accusing social services of discriminating against his daughter because she has a form of autism.

The baby's 21-year-old mother has Asperger's Syndrome, a condition associated with problems concerning social and communication skills.

The grandfather, who lives in South Wales but cannot be identified for legal reasons, said, "Within hours of the baby being born two weeks ago, social workers arrived at the hospital and served papers on my daughter saying they would be applying for an interim care order. She was beside herself.

"Two weeks before what should have been the happiest day of her life, we as a family attended a case conference where Monmouthshire County Council placed the unborn baby on an 'at risk' register. Their argument was that because she has Asperger's Syndrome, she is at risk of getting post-natal depression, and that there would therefore be the likelihood of her neglecting the baby.

"In my view, all this stress sent my daughter into labour four weeks early.

"At the court case, the odds were obviously stacked against us and the interim care order was granted. My daughter has gone with her baby to a foster carer in a remote part of South Wales, which it takes several hours to get to by public transport from where we live. Both her partner and me are greatly restricted in the times we are allowed to visit."

Next Wednesday a further court hearing is due to take place, by which time the mother and her baby will have been transferred to a family assessment centre in the west of

England.

The grandfather said, “When my daughter asked what arrangements would be made to bring her to the court hearing in Wales, she was told it wasn’t their responsibility to ferry her around.

“My daughter’s mother and I – we are no longer together – have both offered to have her and the baby stay with us, but that has been rejected, even though we have a very good support network in our extended family, including two nurses, a qualified nanny, two nursery nurses and a recently retired policeman.

“In my view, by doing all this to a disabled person, Monmouthshire County Council is breaching the Disability Discrimination Act, the Mental Health Act, the Children’s Act and the Human Rights Act.”

The grandfather said that when his daughter was at school, it had taken years to get the authorities to accept that his daughter had special educational needs.

“Eventually, after a long struggle, she was given a statement of special educational needs in the last term before she left school. She can also be abrasive, but she is very bright. Within three weeks of my teaching her how to play chess, she was beating me. And you wouldn’t find a more caring, affectionate person with kids. Everyone who knows her is flabbergasted that the baby has been taken into care.”

A spokeswoman for Monmouthshire County Council’s social services department said, “In order to retain confidentiality, we cannot comment on specific cases. However, we would say that we judge each case according to the circumstances of the individuals involved and the welfare and best interests of children is our paramount responsibility.”

Understanding is key

Asperger’s Syndrome is named after Hans Asperger (1906-1980), an Austrian psychiatrist and paediatrician. He observed four children in his practice who had difficulty integrating socially. Although their intelligence appeared normal, the children lacked nonverbal communication skills, failed to demonstrate empathy with their peers, and were physically clumsy.

Dr Asperger called the condition “autistic psychopathy” but stated that, “We can show that despite abnormality, human beings can fulfil their social role within the community, especially if they find understanding, love and guidance.”