

## **EASTENDERS' FOWLER FAMILY RAISES AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF GUARDIANSHIPS**

An on-going Eastenders story-line is highlighting what happens to children who lose their parents and have no guardianship plans in place something the Institute of Professional Willwriters (**08456 442042**) says all parents should consider, if they want their children to fare better than those of leading soap characters.

In the popular soap, young mother Sonia Jackson put her daughter, Chloe, up for adoption after she and Martin Fowler became teenage parents. Five years later, the parents of the child who had been renamed Rebecca were killed in a car crash. Adopted grandmother, Margaret, has raised her since, but is unable to cope and has formed a friendship with Sonia and Martin, who subsequently married. She has now asked them to become legal guardians of Rebecca and have this written into her will, should anything happen to her before the child reaches 18. .

When it becomes known that Sonia is involved in a lesbian relationship, Rebecca's grandmother decides she does not want to go ahead with the guardianship, stating that "someone will look after Rebecca."

This is a possible fate for a child who loses its parents and this is why the Institute of Professional Willwriters (IPW) is urging parents to make guardianship provisions in their will. More than one guardian can be listed, working as a security for the child, if one or more of the guardians are unable to fulfill the duty.

Paul Sharpe, Chairman of the IPW, says: "Unfortunately, if a child becomes an orphan, and there have been no guardianship arrangements made in the parent's will, the law states that the court will decide where the child or children should live.

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"As is the case in the Eastenders plot, some children in this situation risk the court sending them to live with foster parents. These are people whom their own parents will have never met, which can be very unsettling for the child."

In the event of their death, parents who have appointed guardians in their will, can be sure that their wishes will be met. Provisions of how parents wish their child to be raised can be discussed with the chosen guardian or guardians, providing the parent with the peace of mind that their child's future will not be dictated by a stranger with no idea of how they wanted their child raised.

The choice of guardian needs careful consideration. It is not a simple procedure and many facts need to be considered before the guardianship is written in to a will. As is shown in Eastenders, grandparents are not always the wisest choice, as they may be too old to cope with the responsibility, especially if they suffer from age-related illness. In fact, grandparents do not have any parental rights, unless they have been granted this or have been appointed as a guardian.

As is the case with another Eastenders<sup>1</sup> character, Phil Mitchell, fathers do not always have parental responsibility for their child if its mother dies. His son, Ben lost his mother and step-father in a car crash and has since gone to live with his brother, Ian Beale. Although the situation relating to Ben is cloudy, it seems that his mother Kathy Beale did not specify that Ben should go to live with his natural father, Phil, in her will.

Some key financial questions also need to be asked when appointing a guardian. How will the welfare of my children be paid for? How is money looked after for them? How can I make financial provision for the guardian? At what age do I want my children to inherit?

Guardianships can be discussed with a fully trained member of The Institute of Professional Willwriters, who deal with such issues on a daily basis. In a profession that is not regulated, the IPW is the only self-regulating body that campaigns for higher standards of will writing. Members have to pass professional exams and undergo a series of development programmes as part of the Institute's high standards.

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By seeking the correct advice from a member of the IPW, any parent can ensure that their child or children have the future that they envisage for them as far as possible and stop them suffering similar consequences to the Fowlers<sup>1</sup> daughter.

For more information about the Institute of Professional Willwriters visit [www.ipw.org.uk](http://www.ipw.org.uk) or call 08456 442042.

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**Press calls: Jane Hunt/David Aaron, Catapult PR, 01253 595558**

#### **Notes to Editors/Producers**

Interviews with IPW Chairman, Paul Sharpe, or local IPW members can be arranged on request. Please contact Catapult PR to arrange.