

**Nominee:**

Kevin Skinner  
Goodman Ray  
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Solicitor, 3 years PQE in children law

**Proposer:**

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**Introduction:**

I nominate Kevin for this award because of his ability to show outstanding technical legal expertise, client care, skilful case management, beyond that of his peers and of his level of qualification. These qualities have led to a substantial number of referrals being made directly to him from well-respected firms. Kevin provides excellent client service receiving positive feedback from his clients at the end of cases and he is known for "going the extra mile" for all his clients. Kevin has expertise in all areas of children and family law. He has been involved in a remarkable number of high profile and reported cases, and at two years qualified he was described in Legal 500 2012 as being "exemplary". He continues to demonstrate exceptional commitment to his clients within the ever tightening constraints of publicly-funded work. When Kevin is instructed on a case, he shows 100% commitment to achieving the best outcome for his client and will do everything in his power to achieve it. He is a member of the Human Rights Lawyers Association, Young Legal Aid Lawyers, Association of Lawyers for Children and Resolution. He undertakes charitable work on a frequent basis and is regularly asked to comment in the media.

**Ability to support clients:**

Kevin has excellent client care skills, he is extremely good at establishing a rapport with his clients quickly and they soon become at ease with him. This allows him to discuss often very painful and sensitive subjects with them, whilst being able to give them objective advice and still maintaining their confidence in his ability to represent them to the highest standard. He keeps in close contact with the clients throughout the case often outside work hours.

When he initially trained and qualified, he worked with a number of victims of domestic violence. He quickly became a favoured solicitor for The NIA Project because of the support he offered their clients throughout the process. Tina Wathern, formerly a domestic violence advocate for The NIA Project had this to say:

*"I have known Kevin for a number of years in a professional capacity. Whilst working for The NIA Project I referred clients to Kevin representation. These clients were referred to NIA after domestic violence incidents from a number of referral agencies including the Metropolitan police. We worked with women who were fleeing domestic abuse, in particular high risk cases. These women were usually in an extremely vulnerable state. Kevin continually demonstrated an amazing amount of patience and empathy with these women and always took time to develop a trusting relationship with them. This approach enabled otherwise disenfranchised women to feel that they had a voice and were being heard for the first time."*

More recently, Kevin has formed close ties with Haringey MENCAP and represents a number of their clients within care proceedings. Recently that included the mother in the twice reported case of ***Re J (a child) (Learning disabled parent) (No 2) [2013]*** and ***Re J (a child) (Learning disabled parent) (No***

1) [2012], both appearing on Family Law Week. Debbie Floyd of Haringey Mencap had this to say about Kevin:

*"Kevin showed great professionalism and patience and always remained calm, even when the same questions were asked more than once, due to AP [the client] having a learning disability. Kevin was always quick in responding to my emails and messages, and answered all questions I needed answers for. I found Kevin easy and comfortable to talk to in a professional manner, and I know AP has felt the same way."*

Rachel Langsdale QC of 7 Bedford Row, who represented AP during the trial, had the following to add:

*"It is no surprise that as a newcomer in the field Kevin Skinner has hit the ground running. He has excellent communication skills and is a bright lawyer. His client care is exemplary. He establishes professional, meaningful relationships with clients from the start, offering sensible and child-centred advice. In one case in which I worked with Kevin, a placement order was successfully defeated at the eleventh hour. This was largely as a consequence of the client's willingness in the early stages to accept Kevin's sound advice. He works hard to secure resources within the community to help and support vulnerable clients. His skills are well suited to modernisation. Kevin is able to think out of the box and to be pro-active on behalf of his clients."*

#### **Researched points of law and developing new ideas:**

Kevin is excellent at researching, interpreting and applying the law; as evidenced by the fact that he is regularly published in legal journals and interviewed by LexisNexis;

- *The Hague Convention and the article 13 defence*, LexisNexis, June 2013
- *Court's examination of the right of biological, but not legal, parents*, LexisNexis, February 2013
- *Comment on Re K (Children) [2012] EWCA Civ 1549*, LexisNexis, December 2012
- *Rickets and the use of experts in the family court system*, LexisNexis, November 2012
- *Confidentiality in the family courts*, LexisNexis, December 2011
- *Adoption, public policy and integrity: Re PW*, Jordan Family Law, May 2012, volume 42, page 577
- *Confidentiality in Children Cases after Doncaster MBC V Haigh*, Jordan Family Law, December 2011, volume 41, page 1348
- *Parenting; Getting it right*, Out in The City, July 2011
- *The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007: Two Years*, Jordan Family Law, January 2011, volume 41, page 76

Kevin is willing to push boundaries and use the law to his client's advantage and challenge the normal practice. As a trainee solicitor he was instructed on a domestic violence case where his client believed the children were at risk of being abducted. Despite PSOs and Non-Molestation Orders being in place, the mother (a victim of forced marriage) and the children disappeared. Kevin made an application to the High Court for protective orders for the children and the mother; including warding the children. During the initial application, Sir Christopher Sumner commented that *"the instructing solicitors showed proper concern for their client and the children. I commend them for taking the appropriate steps that not all firms would have the insight to have taken"*.

#### **Helped with training:**

Kevin is a regular speaker and lecturer within the United Kingdom; he has recently given training to the NSPCC, The NIA Project and IMECE. He is on the Amnesty International speakers and has spoken at the Amnesty International student conference. He has recently been invited to speak at the ALC Conference in Jersey in October 2013, providing a case law update on same-sex parenting.

### **Developed new ideas and initiatives:**

In 2012, he was involved in *LB of Islington v Al Alas and Wray [2012] EWHC 865 (Fam)* and represented the mother in *A London Borough v M (a child; rickets) [2012]*. In both those cases, the Judge found that the parents had not caused the injuries to their children and that the cause was severe vitamin D deficiency and rickets. Both judgments called for more research to be done into the area.

Kate Branigan QC of 4 Paper Buildings, who represented the mother in *Re M*, had the following say:

"Kevin is passionate about his work as a family lawyer. He builds strong and empathetic relationships with his clients whilst remaining consistently professional and has a gift for gearing his approach to the particular client. He is utterly conscientious in his preparation for trials, ensuring that his clients feel supported and informed at every stage and that Counsel are thoroughly and fully briefed when instructed. He expects the high professional standards he sets for himself to be mirrored in the efforts of Counsel when instructed and puts much thought into the choice of Counsel, ensuring a good match for each individual client.

I feel extremely privileged to have worked with Kevin and, in particular, received the highest level of support and encouragement in a complex and extremely challenging case involving rickets and Vitamin D deficiency. It felt like we had a 'team' from the first moment I was instructed and throughout this long case, which involved us all in hours of additional work outside of court, Kevin was available at all times and requests for information and work to be done were dealt with efficiently and thoroughly. His client care skills are of the highest order and on every level it was and is an absolute joy to work with Kevin."

### **Represented parties in a particularly noteworthy case:**

- *Re J (a child) (Learning disabled parent) (No 2) [2013]*
- *Re G (A Minor); Re Z (A Minor) [2013] EWHC 134 (Fam)*
- *Re J (a child) (Learning disabled parent) (No 1) [2012]*
- *A London Borough v M (a child; rickets) [2012]*
- *LB of Islington v Al Alas and Wray [2012] EWHC 865 (Fam)*, with Ann Thompson
- *Re PW (Adoption) [2011] EWHC 3793 (FAM)*

*Re PW (Adoption) [2011] EWHC 3793 (FAM)* and *Re G (A Minor); Re Z (A Minor) [2013] EWHC 134 (Fam)* were undertaken on a pro bono basis, the clients falling in the difficult position of not being able to afford private representation, but not being eligible for legal aid and in desperate need of their cases being put properly to the court.

### **Contribution to good practice, facilitating children's voices or the development of the field of child law:**

In 2013, Kevin represented the mothers in the ground-breaking decision of *Re G (A Minor); Re Z (A Minor) [2013] EWHC 134 (Fam)*. This case was the first time that a non legal parent had applied for residence, parental-responsibility and contact with his biological children post the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, leave having been given to pursue those applications by the lower courts. Kevin advanced an argument that leave should never have been given for the donor to pursue his applications and that the court should vary or revoke leave having been given. The order giving leave to apply for orders was set-aside, that part of the judgment providing the definitive authority within the Family Division for setting aside / varying orders once drawn.

At the subsequent hearing about leave to make those applications, Kevin ran an argument that the donor could not and should not be recognised as a parent for the children and that the court need

bear in mind the wider implications of giving leave for donors to apply for orders when they were not a legal parent. That argument was successful in part, in that the Judge refused permission to apply for residence and / or parental responsibility, protecting the de facto family unit, but did allow the donor's application for contact.

**In support:**

In support of this nomination, Dorothea Gartland of 4 Paper Buildings had this to say:

*"I think Kevin Skinner is an excellent lawyer: he is focused on obtaining the best result for his clients; he has the intellectual rigour to challenge complacent ways of thinking; he is committed to excellence in the law relating to children; he works with all types of clients, those in receipt of public funding and those who are able to fund their own litigation.*

*Some of the most interesting cases which have led to developments in the law in relation to children in the last two years have involved Kevin and I am sure he will continue to be involved in developing the law in the years to come."*

John Tughan of 4 Paper Buildings had this to add:

*"Kevin Skinner applies an excellent analytical legal brain to the most complex of cases and does so in an approachable and client-friendly way. In a recent complex case involving a five week long fact-finding hearing in the High Court he correctly analysed the evidence and advised a learning-disabled client as to his position and the evidence. As a direct result of Kevin's advice the outcome for the children in the case was altered to the advantage of them and their family. In my view he is a worthy nominee, and winner, for this award."*