

The highs and lows of kinship care: analysis of a comprehensive survey of kinship carers 2019

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Family Rights Group

Family Rights Group is the charity that works with parents in England and Wales whose children are in need, at risk or are in the care system and with members of the wider family who are raising children unable to remain at home. We advise parents, grandparents, other relatives and friends about their rights and options when social workers or courts make decisions about their children's welfare.

We campaign for families to have their voice heard, be treated fairly and get help early to prevent problems escalating. We champion policies and practices that keep children safe within their family and strengthen the family and community support networks of children in the care system.

The charity convenes a kinship carers' panel, runs a freephone specialist legal advice line for families involved in the child welfare system, hosts and moderates an on-line discussion forum for kinship carers and has extensive advice resources for kinship carers on its website. It also conducts research on kinship care, and provides the secretariat, including legal and policy support to the Kinship Care Alliance and to the Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care (in conjunction with Anna Turley MP's office).

Cross-party Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care

The Parliamentary Taskforce is a cross-party group of MPs and peers. It is chaired by Anna Turley MP. Its aim is to raise awareness about children in kinship care, highlight the importance of this option for children who cannot live with their parents and improve support available to kinship carers.

Kinship Care Alliance

The Kinship Care Alliance is made up of organisations which subscribe to a set of shared aims and beliefs about family and friends care. The KCA believe that children and young people are best placed with family and friends where it is in the child's best interests and safe to do so, and that these families should receive support and help to do this.

What is kinship care?

Kinship care (also known as family and friends care) is any circumstance where a child is being raised by a friend or family member other than their parent. Kinship carers are commonly grandparents, but can be brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, or close family friends who have stepped in to take on the care of a child, who is unable to live with their parents due to tragedy or trauma. In the UK, more than 180,000 children are raised by kinship carers.

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Introduction

The highs and lows of kinship care: analysis of a comprehensive survey of kinship carers

This survey was constructed by the charity [Family Rights Group](#) to help develop an in-depth understanding of the current experiences of kinship carers and the children they are raising. The full survey, which consisted of more than 60 questions, was created in order to:

- Get an extensive snap shot of the current situation facing kinship carers and the children they are raising;
- Consider whether the experiences of kinship carers now differ from survey findings from previous years (some of the questions have been asked in previous surveys);
- Explore specific matters in greater depth than have previously been examined, such as:
 - whether kinship children are living with their siblings, and if not, why not; and
 - how kinship carers' access legal advice and what their understanding is from the outset of the legal situation and its consequences.

Alongside learning from published research in the field and from previous surveys that Family Rights Group has conducted, the survey questions were also informed by: calls from kinship carers to Family Rights Group's advice line; matters raised by members of the charity's kinship carers' panel; and by kinship carers and young people who have participated in a series of discussion events hosted on behalf of the [Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care](#).

We are extremely grateful to all the kinship carers who took the time to complete the survey and would like to express our thanks to both the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the John Ellerman Foundation, whose generous grant funding made our research possible.

The report will influence Family Rights Group's services, policy and campaign work. The results will also inform the work of the Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care; be sent to government ministers; and be considered by the [Kinship Care Alliance](#). We hope that it will also influence the kinship care policies, practices and services of local authorities and other public agencies and raise awareness of kinship care amongst the public.

We encourage you to share the report and host events (face-to-face or on-line) with kinship carers, young people and decision-makers to discuss the findings.

Methodology

The survey was designed in partnership with kinship carers, who helped focus the questions on the key concerns affecting their lives. The Survey Monkey on-line platform was used to host the survey in order to make it accessible to as many kinship carers as possible, and for ease of analysis. Respondents could choose to answer all, or some, of the questions. The survey was widely promoted on Family Rights Group's website, newsletter and social media feeds, to members of kinship care Facebook groups, via MPs who are members of the Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care and organisations in the Kinship Care Alliance. The survey was open from April 2019 to June 2019. Excel and Survey Monkey software were used to analyse results.

The report is laid out to enable responses to each (closed) survey question to be easily read. Where open survey questions were asked, the report provides illustrative quotes or quantifies the results. Under each question, it sets out the number and percentage of respondents who answered the question.

The legal status of the child and the consequences of this

The type and level of support that a kinship carer is entitled to largely depends on the legal status of the child. Whether or not a kinship carer has parental responsibility for the child, will also depend upon the child's legal status. Having parental responsibility enables the carer to make key decisions for the child, such as agreement to a medical operation or whether the child can go on a school trip.

Some kinship carers step in and take on the care of a family member's child without the prior involvement of children's services and without the matter being considered by the Family Court. In this scenario, even when a kinship carer has been caring for the child for some time, they do not have parental responsibility for the child. The kinship carer in this situation may apply to the court for a court order that gives them parental responsibility for the child. Without an order or prior involvement of children's services, there is no duty on the local authority to provide the child or kinship carer with any specific support, save for the general duties that all local authorities in England have under section 17 of the Children Act 1989¹ to safeguard and promote the welfare of 'children in need' in their area.

The court orders which most commonly formalise kinship care arrangements are 'lives with' child arrangements orders (previously known as residence orders), and special guardianship orders (it is rare for children placed in kinship care arrangements to be made subject to adoption orders). The making of either of these orders grants parental responsibility to the kinship carer, though a special guardianship order provides the kinship carer with 'enhanced' parental responsibility which in some circumstances can be used to the exclusion of the parents.

¹

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/17> - a child will be 'in need' if s/he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for her/him of services by a local authority, or if s/he is disabled. In Wales, the 'child in need' framework does not apply, and there are separate support provisions set out in the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

Local authorities have the power to pay allowances to kinship carers on the making of an order, but ultimately the decision as to whether and what level of support to provide is means tested and discretionary, although the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 direct local authorities to have regard to how much fostering allowance would have been paid had the child been fostered.

English local authorities are required, as set out in statutory family and friends care guidance², to have a published up to date family and friends care policy. They should also have a designated and named senior manager with responsibility for implementation of the family and friends care policy. Local authorities are also under a general duty to provide special guardianship support services in their locality, but that does not mean that any child under a special guardianship order has a right to a specific service.

If children's services have 'placed' a child with a relative or friend, then that person should be assessed as a family and friends foster carer, and should receive a fostering allowance for the child in their care, which should be set at the same rate as unrelated foster carers. A child can be 'looked after' in the care system as a result of the local authority obtaining a care order (or interim care order or emergency protection order) or through a voluntary arrangement between those with parental responsibility for the child (normally the parents) and the local authority. A 'looked after' child is entitled to certain support services, including leaving care services.

If the child was a 'looked after child' immediately prior to a special guardianship order being made, then they should be assessed for support services including financial assistance (this is likely to result in the kinship carers receiving a means tested special guardianship order allowance for a time limited period) and are eligible to apply for certain support, such as funding for therapeutic help from the post adoption support fund. Children who were in the care system and are now under a child arrangements order are entitled to a more limited amount of support, such as their school being able to apply for Pupil Premium Plus.

To find out more about any of these legal orders or whether or not a child is looked after and the implications for decision making, assessment and support, please read the advice resources on Family Rights Group's website including the advice sheets. If you are a kinship carer (or potential kinship carer) who needs legal advice, you can also contact Family Rights Group's freephone advice line on **0808 801 0366** or register and post on [Family Rights Group's on-line family and friends carers' forum](#).

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/288483/family-and-friends-care.pdf

Summary of key findings

The kinship carers:

- The survey was completed by 845 kinship carers who are raising at least 1252 kinship children.
- 91% of kinship carers who filled in the survey are women, 88% live in England and 92% are aged under 65 years old. The respondents are also overwhelmingly of White British ethnicity. 64% are grandparents raising their grandchildren, 19% are aunts or uncles raising their nieces or nephews. 36% are single carers.
- A third are also raising their own birth children, who are aged under 18.
- A quarter of kinship households also have another adult living there, aside from the carer and their partner. In the overwhelming majority of cases, this is an adult birth child or adult kinship child.
- A quarter of respondents have a limiting long-term illness or disability.

The kinship children:

- 29% of the kinship children are aged under five years old, 33% are aged between 5 and 9 years old, 30% between 10-15 years of age. 6% are aged 16 or 17 years old. 86% are White British and 8% of mixed ethnicity.
- Half of respondents said that one or more of the kinship children they are raising have special needs or disabilities. Four-fifths of these children are described as having emotional and behaviour problems and four in ten having learning disabilities.
- Half the kinship carers report that the children had previously suffered harm, in the main this was emotional abuse and/or neglect.
- At least four in ten kinship carers cite parental mental ill health and/or parental drug misuse as the main reasons as to why the children are unable to live with parents.

- 20% of kinship children of school age have been temporarily excluded from school and 5% permanently excluded.
- A quarter of the kinship children had been placed with an unrelated foster carer (i.e. a foster carer who is neither their family member nor friend of the family) prior to going to live with the kinship carer. Some kinship carers commented that the children could have avoided having to go through multiple placements, including with strangers, if the local authority had engaged earlier in working with the child's family to identify and support the kinship placement where the child is now living.
- 70% of the kinship children have a sibling not living with them.
- Two-thirds of kinship carers responded that their kinship child/ren had been subject to a child protection plan. Half reported that their kinship child/ren had been subject to a child in need plan. Four in ten of the kinship children are or had previously been under a care order. Half of the kinship children in the survey are now subject to a special guardianship order, with the kinship carer their special guardian.

Employment situation of kinship carers:

- Fewer than 20% of kinship carers are in full-time paid work.
- 54% of kinship carers in a job, had to give up work and a further 24% reduced their hours when they took on the kinship child/ren.
- 15% of the partners of kinship carers, who had been in work, had to give up their job and a further 15% had to reduce their hours due to taking on the kinship child/ren.

Legal advice and representation:

The legal status of the child, for example, whether or not they are looked after in the care system, or whether they are subject to a special guardianship order or child arrangements order, affects what practical and financial support they are entitled to. This can have life long implications for both the kinship carer and the kinship child. It also determines whether the kinship carer has parental responsibility for the child/ren and thus can make key decisions for them. The survey results highlight the extent to which kinship carers are either left without legal advice or representation, or end up paying significant amounts towards legal fees from their own pockets.

- Three-quarters of respondents said they felt that they did not have enough information when they took on the care of the kinship child/ren about legal options to make an informed decision.

“Not given any support or advice whatsoever, as a single parent with two children we all suffered and are still suffering from the financial implications and the emotional upheaval.”– kinship carer

- 58% of respondents said there had been legal costs associated with the kinship child/ren. In some cases this was covered all or in part by legal aid or by the local authority, but four in ten said they had no financial help with these legal costs.
- 196 respondents, who had paid out of their own monies for all or part of the legal costs, specified how much they had contributed. It averaged £5446, ranging from just under £100 to over £50,000. 19 kinship carers had paid £10,000 or more.
- Four in ten kinship carers where the child/ren were subject to legal proceedings, were not represented at all.
- 55% feel that the kinship child/ren is now on the most appropriate legal order for them, but 30% feel that they are not. Many kinship carers reported feeling pressured into taking out a special guardianship order or a child arrangements order, despite this resulting in a drop in support.

Financial challenges:

- Around three-quarters of the kinship carers who filled in the survey and are raising children outside the care system, are receiving a financial payment or regular allowance. However, one in five are receiving no such assistance.
- A small but notable number of kinship carers had been adversely affected by the benefit cap, bedroom tax or benefit sanctions, which had a very harsh impact on their daily life.
- One in two kinship carers rated the process of obtaining financial support from the local authority or claiming benefits as very difficult.
- Three in four of kinship carers said becoming a kinship carers has caused them financial hardship. The emotional price paid by the kinship carer and other members of their family can be huge:

“It caused my marriage to break down, so I lost my house and now rent. My 3 boys had to move out before they were financially stable to give the kids their bedrooms.”– kinship carer

- 42% of kinship carers reported not having a holiday in the last year. This compares

- to only 14% of the wider population not having had a holiday in the last year.
- Eight in every ten kinship carers had to make some changes to their accommodation when the kinship child/ren came to live with them. Nearly 90% of them got no help.
- 30% of respondents said their current housing is not suitable, with some kinship carers describing some very difficult situations, such as severe overcrowding or living in temporary accommodation.

Practical and emotional support:

- Almost two thirds (64%) of kinship carers rated the help they'd received from children's services as poor or very poor. Only 15% rated it as good or excellent.
- More than one in three (37%) kinship carers said they'd received no help of any kind from children's services.
- Where there had been help from children's services, contact with the children's social worker featured highest. Only one in ten kinship carers had received support from children's services on managing contact with the child's parents or other relatives, despite this often being a major source of concern for kinship carers.
- Kinship carers reported that family and friends are their main source of help and advice. 36% of kinship carers identified the child's school as a source of help or advice, although some pointed out that from their experience it was easier to get help from the child's primary rather than secondary school. Support groups (on-line and local groups) came in for praise from kinship carers. A number particularly highlighted the advice they had received from Family Rights Group.
- 93% of kinship carers said some additional support would have made/would make a difference, only 7% said no additional support was needed. Half of kinship carers reported that emotional support for them would have had or would have a positive impact and more than four in ten identified that help with the child's behaviour/emotional difficulties, counselling or therapeutic support would make a difference. More than one in three kinship carers reported that respite care, life story work for the child, managing family contact, and training courses would have or would make a difference.

To summarise, a considerable number of kinship carers reported that they feel their life is a battle trying to care for, and get the right help, for their kinship child/ren - who may have special needs, disabilities or are suffering the impact of past trauma. The kinship carers have often had to make significant financial and personal sacrifices to take on the child/ren, and whilst the child/ren is doing well in their care, this can be at the expense of kinship carers' own health, finances and even relationships. However, they feel this is rarely recognised by children services, public agencies or government. They love their kinship child/ren and they put their needs first, and in doing so they save the state significant amounts of monies, but the public agencies that should be there to help, too often make life more stressful.

The recommendations at the end of the report set out what steps government and children's services could take, in order to enable more children to be supported to live safely and thrive within their family and friends network.

The kinship carers

This section sets out the demographics of the respondents

Q1 Gender of kinship carer

767 (91%) of respondents are female
67 (8%) of respondents are male
9 (1%) of respondents preferred not to say.

Total respondents: 843

Q2 Where kinship carer lives in the UK

740 (88%) live in England
39 (4%) live in Wales
58 (7%) live in Scotland
6 (1%) live in Northern Ireland).

Total respondents: 843

Q3 If kinship carer lives in England, which region do they live in?

English region	Respondents	% of respondents	% of population of England living in those regions ³
East of England	58	8%	11%
East Midlands	68	9%	9%
London	41	6%	16%
North East	106	15%	5%
North West	99	14%	13%
South East	117	16%	16%
South West	86	12%	10%
West Midlands	70	10%	10.5%
Yorkshire and Humber	78	11%	10%

The table sets out the number and proportion of respondents living in each of the English regions. The third column reflects the percentage of the population of England living in each region. There was a disproportionately low response to the survey from London and high response from the North East.

Total respondents: 723

Analysis by Wijedasa⁴ of 2011 census data has previously found that London and the North East have the highest proportion of children in kinship care compared to the rest of England.

³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/294681/population-england-united-kingdom-uk-regional>

⁴ Wijedasa D (2015) The prevalence and characteristics of children growing up with relatives in England. University of Bristol

Q4 Age of kinship carer

Age	Respondents	% of respondents
15-17 years old	1	0%
18-24 years old	2	0%
25-34 years old	54	7%
35-44 years old	119	14%
45-54 years old	313	38%
55-64 years old	268	33%
65-74 years old	61	7%
75 years or older	5	1%
Prefer not to say	1	0%

Total respondents: 824

Age of kinship carer completing the survey

21% are under 44 years of age
71% are 45 – 64 years of age
Only 8% are 65 years old or over.

Q5 Ethnicity of kinship carer

Ethnicity	Respondents	% of respondents
White/White British	766	94%
Black/Black British	15	2%
Asian/Asian British	4	0%
Mixed	18	2%
Prefer not to say	11	1%
Other ethnic group	5	1%

Total respondents: 816

The respondents are disproportionately White/White British, compared to the general population (87% of the UK population in 2017 was White/White British) .

Responses to question 21 indicate that the kinship children that respondents are raising are more ethnically diverse.

Q6 Does kinship carer have a limiting long term illness or disability?

Illness or disability	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	200	24%
No	572	70%
Prefer not to say	48	6%

Total respondents: 820

A quarter of kinship carers who responded said they have a limiting long-term illness or disability.

Q7 How many kinship children under the age of 18 years are you raising as a kinship carer? This does not include respondents' birth children

Number of kinship children being raised by carer	Respondents	% of respondents
1	489	60%
2	238	29%
3	63	8%
4	17	2%
5	2	0%
6	1	0%
More than 6	2	0%
0*	5	1%

In total 817 kinship carer households who responded are raising at least 1252 kinship children aged under 18 years old.

Where the respondent stated 0, this is because the kinship 'child' or children' they are raising had is now 18 years old or above.

Total respondents: 817

Q8 Relationship to the kinship children you are caring for?

Relationship to kinship children	Respondents	% of respondents
Grandmother	485	59%
Aunt	140	17%
Grandfather	37	5%
Great Aunt	41	5%
Friend	27	3%
Uncle	12	2%
Sister	11	1%
Cousin	11	1%
Great Uncle	7	1%
Brother	1	0%
Other	51	6%

64% of those who answered are grandparents. This compares with the analysis by Wijedasa⁵ of the 2011 census which found that 51% of kinship carers related to the child (it didn't include non-relative kinship carers, such as a family friend) were grandparents and 23% were siblings.

Total respondents: 823

Analysis of the survey respondents who answered 'other' is interesting in that it includes: a sister in law to the eldest; aunt in law to the youngest child; a step parent; a second cousin; great grandparents; the sibling of the carer's niece and nephew; the carer's step brother's child; and a carer's granddaughter's half-sister. It also includes family friends, including a neighbour and a friend of the child's grandmother. In some cases relatives and friends went far to keep siblings together.

⁵ Wijedasa (2015) ibid

Q9 Kinship carers also raising at least one birth child aged under 18

Birth child/ren under 18	Respondents	% of respondents
1	156	56%
2	90	32%
3	29	10%
4	3	1%
5	1	0%
6	2	1%
More than 6	0	0%

Total respondents: 281

A third of kinship carers responding to the survey have birth children under 18 who they are also raising. These 281 kinship carers are raising 452 birth children aged under 18 years old alongside the kinship child/children.

Q10 Do you have a wife or husband/partner living with you?

Wife or husband/partner living with kinship carer	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	524	64%
No	295	36%

Total respondents: 819

A third of kinship care respondents are single.

Q11 Are there other adults in household?

Other adults in household	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	207	25%
No	615	75%

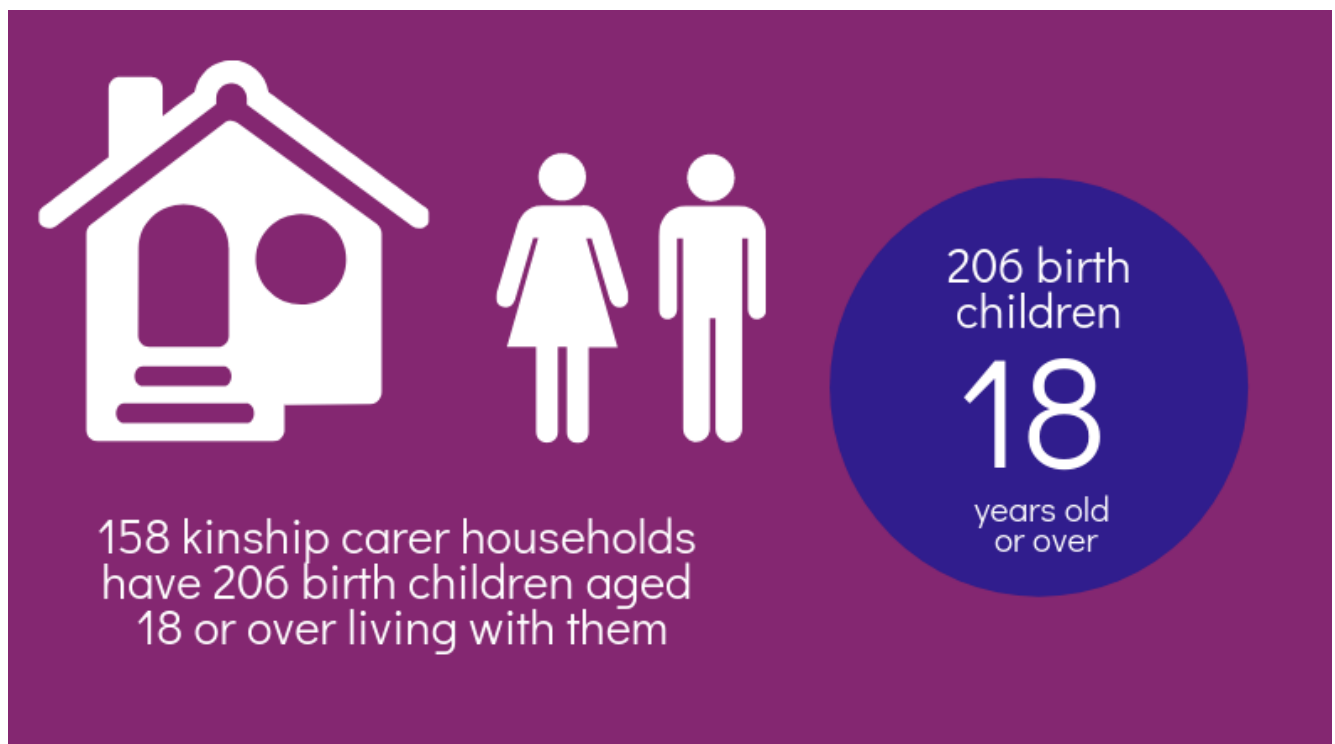
Total respondents: 822

A quarter of kinship care households also have another adult living with them who is not the carer's partner.

Q12 Kinship carers were asked more detail about the other adults in the household (excluding a husband/wife or partner)

190 of the 207 kinship carers who had answered yes to Q11 answered this question by describing their relationship to these other adults in more depth:

- 158 kinship carer households have 206 birth children aged 18 or over living with them;
- 15 kinship carer households have 21 kinship 'children' aged 18 or over living with them;
- 37 kinship carer households have 41 other adults living there (who are not the carer's partner/wife/husband).



Employment and kinship care

Q13 Employment status of kinship carer

Employment status of kinship carer	Respondents	% of respondents
Full time paid work	151	19%
Part time paid work	162	20%
Retired	85	11%
Unemployed	32	4%
Not working due to ill health	92	11%
Not working due to caring responsibilities	276	34%
Studying	9	1%

Total respondents: 807

Fewer than 20% of kinship carers are in full-time paid work and 50% are neither in paid work nor retired.

Q14 Employment status of carer's partner (where applicable)

Employment status of carer's partner	Respondents	% of respondents
Full time paid work	290	56%
Part time paid work	51	10%
Retired	75	14%
Unemployed	10	2%
Not working due to ill health	37	7%
Not working due to caring responsibilities	59	11%
Studying	1	0%

Total respondents: 523

44% of carers' husbands, wives or partners are not in full-time work.

Q15 Did you have to give up work or change your hours to care for the kinship child/children?

Kinship carer's work
status/change of
working hours

Respondents

% of
respondents

Yes, gave up work	356	44%
Yes, reduced hours	159	20%
Yes, increased hours	5	1%
Yes, made other changes to my working pattern	79	10%
No, didn't change work pattern	60	7%
Not applicable/not working at the time	148	18%

44% of kinship carers had to give up their job and a further 20% had to reduce their hours due to taking on the kinship child/children. If you exclude those who were not working at the time they took on the children, this figure increases to 54% having to give up work and a further 24% reducing their hours.

Total respondents: 807

Q16 Has caring for a kinship child resulted in your partner having to give up work or changing their hours?

Kinship carer's
partner's work
status/change of
working hours

Respondents

% of
respondents

Yes, gave up work	71	13%
Yes, reduced hours	70	13%
Yes, increased hours	26	5%
Yes, made other changes to my working pattern	89	16%
No, didn't change work pattern	204	38%
Not applicable/not working at the time	83	15%

13% of the husbands, wives or partners of kinship carers had to give up their job and a further 13% had to reduce their hours due to taking on the kinship child/children. An additional 21% had to make some other adjustment to their working pattern. If you exclude those who were not working at the time the children came to live with them, this figure increases to 15% having to give up work and a further 15% reducing their hours.

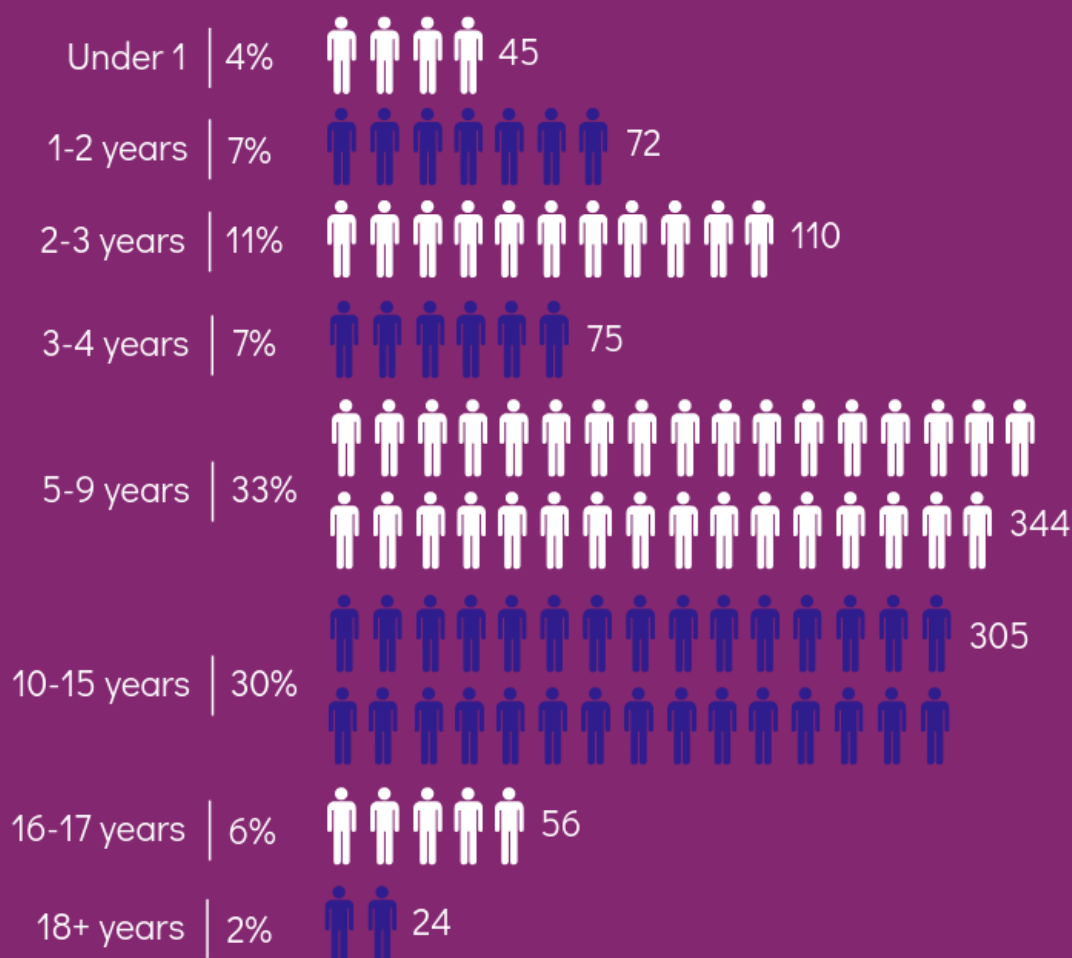
Total respondents: 543

The kinship children

Q17 Ages of kinship care children

This infographic represents the percentage of kinship children in each age category. **797 kinship carers answered this question.** They were raising 1031 kin children, including 24 aged 18 or over.

29% of the kinship children were aged under five years old, 33% were aged between 5 and 9 years old, 30% between 10-15 years of age. 6% were aged 16 or 17 years old.



Q18 Has one of more of your kinship child/children previously suffered harm?

Has kinship child/ren previously suffered harm	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	396	50%
No	241	30%
Don't know	118	15%
Other (please specify)	36	5%

Total respondents: 791

Our child welfare and family justice system categorises harm to a child as emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse and/or neglect.

Half of kinship carers said the kinship children had previously suffered harm. This is likely to be a considerable underestimate given many kinship carers were confused by the terminology or felt they didn't have sufficient information about the child's earlier childhood before they had come to live with them:

- 15% of kinship carers answered that they didn't know; if their kinship child/ren had previously suffered harm; and
- the 'other' answers provided by 36 kinship carers responding to the survey indicate that they were unsure whether or not neglect or emotional abuse should be categorised as suffering harm or whether harm solely meant physical or sexual abuse. For example 13 who filled in 'other' described the children as having suffered neglect, 11 described the child as having suffered emotional abuse and also parental domestic violence and drugs misuse.

“Neglect and emotional abuse – I suppose that is harm but i was unsure about a straight ‘yes’.”
–kinship carer

“Neglect, but not physical abuse.”
– kinship carer

Q19 The kinship carer was asked, if the kinship child/children had previously suffered harm, to describe the abuse experienced (carers could tick more than one answer)

The percentage figures in the table below reflects the proportion of respondents who ticked each option. Because carers could tick more than one option, the total percentages adds up to more than 100%.

Abuse experienced by kinship child/ren	Respondents	% of respondents
Physical abuse	148	34%
Sexual abuse	34	8%
Neglect	330	76%
Emotional abuse	261	60%

Neglect and emotional abuse were the main categories of abuse that children had experienced.

Total respondents: 434

Q20 Main reasons the kinship child/children unable to live with their parents (carers could tick more than one reason)

The percentage figures in the table below reflects the proportion of respondents who ticked each option. Because carers could tick more than one option, the total percentages add up to more than 100%.

Reasons children unable to live with their parents	Respondents	% of respondents
Parental drug misuse	363	46%
Parental mental ill health	316	40%
Parental alcohol misuse	255	32%
Parent could not cope	266	33%
Domestic abuse	192	24%
Parental abandonment or parent relinquished child	93	12%
Parental illness or disability	67	8%
One or both parents have died	63	8%
Very young parent	61	8%
Parental imprisonment	41	5%
Breakdown in relationship between parent and child	37	5%
Parents' separation	35	4%
Parent/partner is a sex offender	23	3%
Child or adolescent behavioural difficulties	19	2%
Child is beyond parental control	8	1%
Other (specified):		
Parental neglect	32	4%
Parental physical harm	21	3%
Parental emotional abuse	7	1%
Sexual abuse	5	1%
Child with complex disabilities or terminal illness	2	0%
Other (not specified)	25	3%
Don't wish to answer	33	4%

At least four in ten kinship carers cited parental mental ill health and/or parental drug misuse as the main reasons as to why the children were unable to live with parents. Other reasons included parental death or illness, parental substance misuse, imprisonment and domestic abuse, or parents not being able to cope, in some cases because of their very young age.

Total respondents: 795

Q21 Race and ethnicity of kinship children

The children being raised by kinship carers who filled in the survey were more ethnically diverse than the kinship carers themselves, with 8% of the children being of dual heritage. This is particularly significant given the struggle (see Question 60) that many kinship carers have getting support to enable the child to develop their sense of identity, including life story work and help with managing contact with parents or other relatives.

Wijedasa⁶ analysis of the 2011 data found that almost a third (32%) of children in England growing up in kinship care were non-white.

Race and ethnicity of kinship children	Kinship children of respondents	% of kinship children
White/White British	703	86%
Black/Black British	13	2%
Asian/Asian British	11	1%
Mixed	67	8%
Prefer not to say	12	1%
Other ethnic group (provide details)	14	2%

Total respondents 786 (raising 820 kinship children)

Q22 Do any of the kinship children have special needs or disabilities?

Do any of the kinship children have special needs or disabilities	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	392	50%
No	386	50%

Half of kinship carers responded that at least one or more of the kinship children they are raising have special needs or disabilities.

Total respondents: 778

⁶Wijedasa (2015) ibid

Q23 If the kinship child or children have special needs or disabilities, the carer was asked to specify the type of disability (carers could tick more than one answer)

The percentage figures in the table below reflects the proportion of respondents who ticked the reason. Because carers could tick more than one option, the total percentages add up to more than 100%.

Types of special needs or disabilities of kinship children

Respondents

% of respondents

Other conditions specified:

Physical disability	52	13%
Learning disability	168	43%
Chronic health condition	33	8%
Special educational needs	201	51%
Emotional and behavioural difficulties	335	85%
Other (please specify)	79	20%

ADHD	14
Attachment disorder	14
Autism	23
FASD	11
Congenital heart disease	3
PTSD	2
Genetic disorder	4
Developmental delay	4

Total respondents: 393

85% of respondents raising a kinship child with special needs or disabilities, stated the child has emotional and behavioural problems and more than four in ten said the child has learning disabilities. Many of the children had multiple conditions:

“Nonverbal child with low functioning autism. Physical disabilities and poor mobility. Continuing health problems. Violent and challenging behaviours daily. No understanding of risk.” – kinship carer

Kinship carers expressed feeling exhausted singlehandedly supporting children with high needs:

"Not slept all night for nearly 10 years as (child has) high anxiety" – kinship carer

Q24 Have your kinship child/ren ever been temporary excluded from school?

Kinship child/ren temporarily excluded from school

	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	123	16%
No	652	83%
Not sure	7	1%

Total respondents: 782

Respondents who answered raising a child aged 5 or over

Yes	122	20%
No	471	79%
Not sure	7	1%

Total respondents: 600

20% of kinship children of school age have been temporary excluded, according to survey respondents.

It is worth noting that Department for Education public data shows that the rate of fixed term exclusions in 2017/18 for all children at state-funded primary, secondary and special schools was 5%.⁷

Q25 Have your kinship child/ren ever been permanently excluded from school?

Kinship child/ren permanently excluded from school

	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	29	4%
No	745	95%
Not sure	6	1%

Total respondents: 780

Respondents who answered raising a child aged 5 or over

Yes	28	5%
No	564	94%
Not sure	6	1%

Total respondents: 598

5% of kinship children of school aged has been permanently excluded from school, according to survey respondents.

Department for Education⁸ public data shows that the rate of permanent exclusions in 2017/18 for all children at state-funded primary, secondary and special schools was 0.1%.

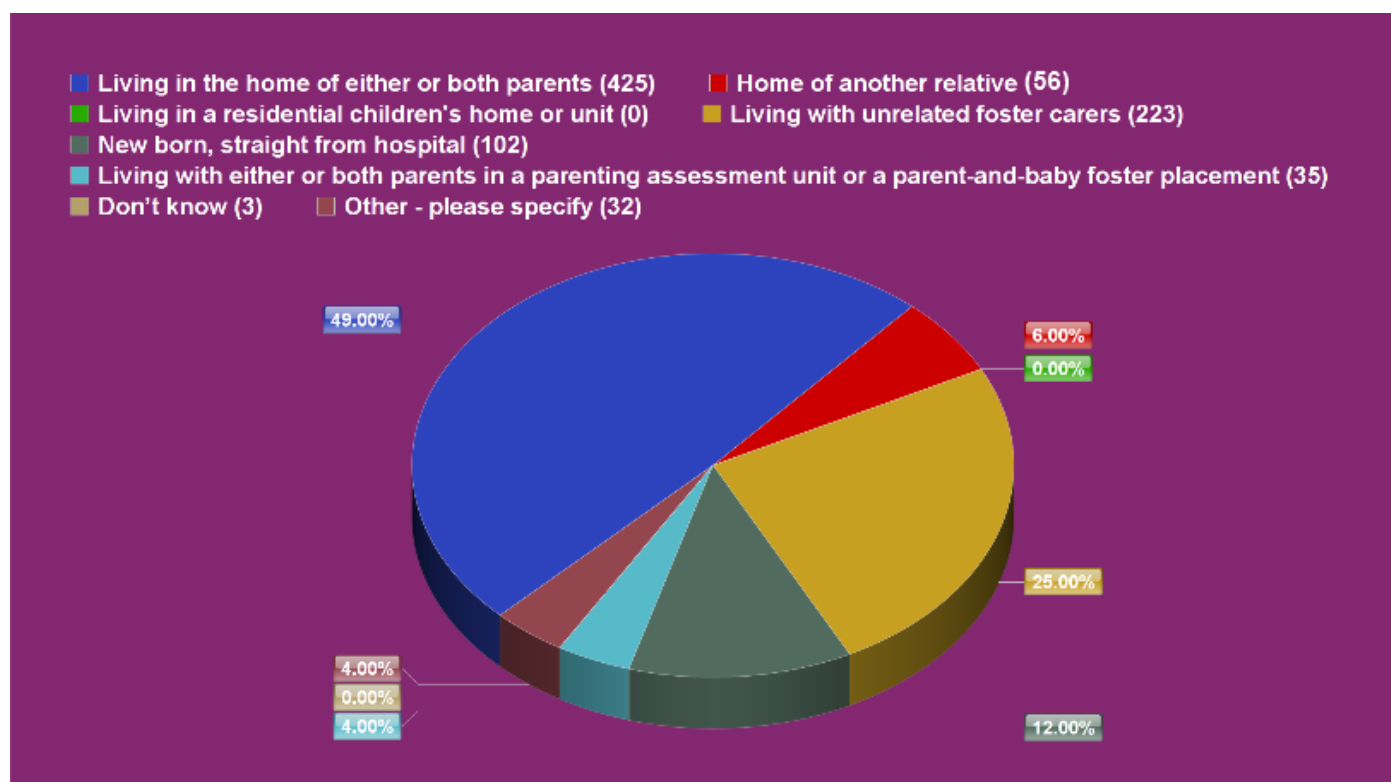
⁷ Department for Education 2017 to 2018 (July 2019) [Permanent and Fixed period exclusions in England](#)

⁸ Department for Education 2017 to 2018 (July 2019) [ibid](#)

More details about the kinship children including where they previously lived

Q26 Where did the child live prior to coming to the kinship carer?

The percentage figures are the proportion of kinship children who had lived in the following placements prior to coming to the kinship carer.



Total respondents: 754 (876 children)

A quarter of the kinship children had been placed with an unrelated foster carer (i.e. a foster carer who is neither their family member nor friend of the family) prior to going to live with the kinship carer. Comments in the survey from some kinship carers indicate that some of the children could have avoided having to go through multiple placements, including with strangers, if the local authority had engaged earlier in working with the child's family to identify and support the kinship placement where the child was now living.

Q27 Do the kinship child/ren living with you have any siblings⁹ not living with you?

Kinship child/ren's
siblings not living
with kinship carer

	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	220	28%
No	546	71%
Don't know	10	1%

Seven in ten of the kinship children have a sibling or half sibling who they are not living with.

Total respondents: 776

Q28 If kinship child has siblings not living with them, where do the siblings live?

Kinship child/ren's
siblings living
arrangements

	Respondents	% of respondents
With the birth parent(s)	256	36%
With unrelated foster carers	87	12%
With other relatives	142	20%
They are adopted	106	15%
In a residential children's home or unit	20	3%
They are adults	73	10%
Other (specified)	32	4%

The percentage figures are based upon the proportion of children, who are siblings to the kinship child, living in different placements.

Total respondents: 542 (answering in respect of 716 children)

When examining where the siblings live of the 70% of kinship children who have a sibling not living with them – more than a third of those siblings are living with at least one of their parents, and one in five are living with another relative. 12% are in an unrelated foster care placement system and 15% have been adopted.

Where siblings or half-siblings are living with another parent, in some cases this is because at least one of their parent(s) are in a better place in terms of being able to raise the child (e.g. they have a new partner who isn't violent) or because it is a half sibling, who is living with a parent, who is not a cause for concern. In some other cases however, kinship carers expressed their worries about siblings' welfare in the care of their parents.

⁹ Note throughout the survey and report, the term siblings also includes half siblings

Q29 If the kinship carer's sibling(s) is not living with you, did you put yourself forward to raise their siblings?

Did kinship carer put themselves forward to raise siblings

	Respondents	% of respondents
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Yes	174	32%
No	284	52%
Not applicable	88	16%

Total respondents: 546

Three in every ten kinship carers, who are raising a kinship child who has a sibling living elsewhere, put themselves forward to raise the sibling (or half-sibling).

Q30 If you put yourself forward to care for one or more of the kinship child's siblings, what happened that resulted in them not currently being in your care?

Why kinship child's siblings are not being raised by kinship carer

	Respondents	% of respondents
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A negative local authority assessment	34	27%
A court judgment	12	10%
Parental hostility	18	14%
The placement broke down	3	2%
Realised wouldn't be able to cope in part due to lack of support	5	4%
Lived with kinship carer but now an adult	6	5%
Kinship carer accepted situation was too risky	2	1%
Child/ren is living with parent(s)	18	14%
Child/ren is living with another relative	7	6%
Child/ren was adopted/already in an unrelated foster placement	7	6%
Assessments/court case ongoing	5	4%
Other (please specify)	9	7%

Total respondents: 126

A number of kinship carers described how they had received a negative assessment to care for the sibling or withdrew from the process due to lack of support:

“I was told originally that the child in my care didn't have a bond with (their) younger siblings. Then they feared as I had a child and was taking on my nephew, I wouldn't cope if I took on both of his siblings. They were young enough to be adopted.” – aunt raising her nephew

**“As my children were both under 5 at the time and the two siblings were both under 5 I was not allowed to be kinship carer for those two :-(“
– kinship carer**

Some respondents described how they realised they could not put themselves through the process again, or, in one case, that tragically that the sibling had died.

**“We decided we couldn't do it again due to the emotional distress for us, for the grandchild we had and financial reasons.”
– grandparent carer**

“The baby was born within the court procedure for the four children we have .. and they said we could not cope with a baby. He is in foster to adopt.” – kinship carer

Legal and social care interventions

Q31 Has your kinship child/children ever been subject to any of the following? (respondents could tick all that are relevant)

The percentage figures in the table below reflects the proportion of respondents who ticked each reason. Because carers could tick more than one option, the total percentages add up to more than 100%.

Legal and social care interventions	Respondents	% of respondents
A children's hearing (Scotland)	38	5%
A child protection plan	490	67%
A child in need plan	377	51%
A pre proceedings meeting	171	23%
A family group conference	245	33%
A Supervision Order	161	22%
A Care Order	329	45%
A voluntary arrangement (also known as voluntary accommodation or a section 20 agreement)	186	25%
Don't know	46	6%
None of the above	48	7%
Other (please specify)	38	5%

Total respondents: 735

Two-thirds of kinship carers responded that their kinship child/ren had been subject to a child protection plan. Half reported that their kinship child/ren had been subject to a child in need plan.

Four in ten of the kinship children are or had previously been under a care order.

Q32 Is the kinship child or children looked after by the local authority?

Is the kinship child/ren looked after by the LA	Respondents	% of respondents
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Yes, the child is currently under an interim or full care order	125	21%
Yes, the child is currently voluntarily accommodated under s20	13	2%
No	408	67%
Not sure	52	9%
Other (please specify)	6	1%

Total respondents: 604

A child is looked after by the local authority i.e. in the care system, if they are under a care order (including interim care order) or as a result of a voluntary arrangement between those with parental responsibility (normally the parents) and the local authority.

Looked after children are entitled to local authority support and their carers must be assessed and paid as foster carers.

52 respondents did not know whether or not the child is looked after. Responses by kinship carers to questions 30, 31 and 32 indicate that many kinship carers are confused as to the child's current or previous legal status.

In addition, a number of kinship carers said that the child's status was disputed, they believe the child should be treated as looked after under a voluntary arrangement whilst the local authority denies placing the child and claims it to be a private arrangement. Some of these carers provided evidence in the survey to support their position. In some cases the kinship carer stated that they are raising two or more kinship children who are under different legal orders, this has implications in terms of the children being entitled to different levels of support regardless of having similar needs.

Q33 What legal order, if any, do you have for the child/ren?¹⁰

The figures in the table are the number of kinship children subject to different legal orders. The percentage figure reflects the proportion of kinship children under the different legal orders.

Legal orders	Kinship children raised by respondents	% of kinship children
None, the child is under no legal order (note: this could be because it is private arrangement or because the child is looked after under a voluntarily arrangement)	61	8%
None, but the local authority has an interim or full care order	112	15%
I have a Special Guardianship Order for the child	401	52%
I have a Child Arrangements Order for the child	66	9%
I have a Residence Order for the child	104	13%
Not sure	21	3%

Total respondents: 696 raising 765 kinship children

Half (52%) of the kinship children in the survey are subject to a special guardianship order.

¹⁰ Note: some of the figures differ between questions 32 and 33 because question 32 gives figures for the number of kinship carers, whereas question 33 provides figures on the number of kinship children (some kinship carers are raising more than 1 kinship child). Also some respondents chose to answer question 32 but not 33 and visa versa.

Legal advice and representation

Q34 Have there been any legal costs incurred in relation to the kinship child/ren?

Legal costs in relation to the kinship child/ren

	Respondents	% of respondents
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Yes	422	58%
No	305	42%

Total respondents: 727

Q35 If yes, what were the legal costs for?

The percentage figures in the table below reflects the proportion of respondents who ticked each reason. Because carers could tick more than one option, the total percentages adds up to more than 100%.

What the legal costs were for

	Respondents	% of respondents
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Legal advice	277	67%
Legal representation pre proceedings	182	44%
Legal representation in court proceedings	271	65%
Costs of bringing proceedings	127	31%

Total respondents: 414

Q36 Have you had any help with these legal costs?

Help with legal costs	Respondents	% of respondents
No	168	41%
Yes - I qualified for public funding (legal aid) for part of the legal costs	43	10%
Yes - I qualified for public funding (legal aid) for all of the legal costs	48	12%
Yes - I received some help from the local authority for the legal costs	56	14%
Yes - The local authority covered all the legal costs	94	23%
Other type of help	2	0%

Total respondents: 411

Where legal costs were incurred, 41% of kinship carers had no financial help with these costs.

Where the local authorities provided support, a number of kinship carers stated that the local authority had only paid for one hour of legal advice or that they had to be extremely persistent to get the local authority to pay.

“Social care agreed to fund part of my legal expenses but didn't and as it was them who said I should go to court or they would remove the baby, I feel I shouldn't of incurred costs which I am still paying back 4 years later.” – kinship carer

Q37 How much have you contributed/paid towards legal costs?

196 kinship carers who had paid out of their own monies for all or part of the legal costs specified how much they had contributed. It averaged £5446, ranging from just under £100 to over £50,000. 19 kinship carers had paid £10,000 or more.

Q38 If child/ren were the subject of legal proceedings were you represented by a solicitor?

Representation by solicitor	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes, throughout	268	45%
Yes, some of the time	92	15%
No, but had access to legal advice	74	12%
No	164	28%

The figures in the table excludes those kinship carers who responded that question wasn't applicable to them.

Total respondents: 598

Four in ten kinship carers where the children were subject to legal proceedings, were not represented at all. They are therefore unlikely to have seen relevant assessments provided setting out the child's past trauma and health and emotional conditions, and support needs. Lack of representation is likely to have significantly impeded their ability to influence decisions about contact arrangements and the support plan, including financial, emotional and practical support.

A majority (55%) of the kinship carers, raising children who were subject to legal proceedings were not represented throughout legal proceedings.

Q39 If you had access to legal advice, please state who you got legal advice from?

Who gave legal advice	Respondents	% of respondents
A high street solicitor	233	47%
A solicitor recommended to you	197	40%
Family Rights Group	20	4%
A barrister	14	3%
A member of my family	3	1%
Another voluntary organisation	11	2%
Other (please specify)	14	3%

14 respondents gave other answers including peer kinship Facebook groups.

Total respondents: 492

Q40 When you took on the care of the kinship child/children, do you feel you knew enough about the legal options and their implications in terms of support to make an informed decision?

Total respondents: 716



159 respondents elaborated on their answers. The following are indicative:

“We were told nothing! It was six hour court session and a ‘here you are, there’s the baby at the end of it!’ In the beginning there was not enough information to what we were entitled to and exactly what a special guardian is.”

– kinship carer

“When we took on the child I had to find everything out myself, like what we were entitled to. Social services tried to tell us it was a private arrangement at the beginning for the first four months of the child living with us. I had to find out what we were entitled to myself using the internet and fight to become kinship (foster) carers. When being offered a special guardianship order I also had to highlight we were entitled to 2 years foster payments as we had been kinship foster carers. Social services were not forthcoming at all with information or financial support.”

– kinship carer

“The local authority paid for one hour legal advice but refused to give us the special guardianship order support plan, therefore there was little advice the solicitor could offer us personally.”

– kinship carer

“It happened very quickly from the children being placed with us following concerns about their mother being able to cope and parent them properly to us being advised to take legal advice. Social services would not consider any other options, such as (us) fostering (the child) and were reluctant to discuss this as an option. We felt railroaded into special guardianship as this was the easiest and cheapest option for them. Also it wasn't until the court case that we were made aware that all financial support would stop once the youngest started school. We have had to move house as we did not have room in our small cottage and now have a bigger mortgage until I am 67 years old. My husband has cashed in part of his pension as we were struggling financially. My car broke down and was not able to be repaired. The pension went to cover this. We have never had any offer of respite care which I think a foster carer might get.”

– A grandparent raising her adopted daughter's children

“Not given any support or advice whatsoever, as a single parent with two children (7 and 9 at the time) we all suffered and are still suffering from the financial implications and the emotional upheaval.”

– kinship carer

A few kinship carers did mention getting excellent legal advice:

“FRG gave me a lot of help and advice and a lot of reassurance.”

– kinship carer

“I had a good understanding of the processes before starting working with the authorities and got an excellent solicitor.”

– kinship carer

Q41 Are you satisfied with the current legal status of the kinship children?

Satisfaction of current legal status of the kinship child/ren	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	392	55%
No	218	30%
Not sure	110	15%

Total respondents: 720

Some respondents gave a further explanation for their answer. These varied but illustrative comments were:

“I am happy we have parental responsibility through the special guardianship order, however we get no support with things like contact so in some ways being a foster carer would be better.”
– kinship carer

“If the children were still a looked after children, they would get a lot more support however under a special guardianship order I do not have to put up with social services’ involvement.”
– kinship carer

“(The order) is not secure .. it can be appealed and revoked. It is very stressful.” – kinship carer

“Had I have known then what I know now, I would have stayed fostering them.”
– kinship carer

“I have no financial security , I can't plan for the future , I have no support unless I fight for it, no respite, court orders for sibling contact have been breached. I've tried all avenues to get this sorted and no court or social worker can help.” – kinship carer

“The adoptees have not stuck to the letter box (contact) and left two siblings out of his life.”
– kinship carer

Financial support

Q42 As a kinship carer, are you receiving any financial payments or a regular allowance from your local authority?

The responses exclude kinship foster carers who are raising children who are looked after in the care system, given that the local authority **must** assess these kinship carer as foster carer and pay them a regular allowance.

Financial support from the LA % of Respondents respondents

Yes, Special Guardianship Allowance	327	54%
Yes, Residence or Child Arrangements Order Allowance	109	18%
Yes, regular child in need (also known as section 17) payments	32	5%
No, but I have received one or irregular child in need payments	7	1%
No	124	21%
Unsure	5	1%

Around three-quarters of kinship carers in the survey, who are raising children outside the care system, are receiving a financial payment or regular allowance. However, one in five are receiving no such assistance.

Total respondents: 604

Q43 If you receive or have received a regular financial allowance from your local authority, has the amount reduced during the last two years?

Has your financial allowance from your LA been reduced during the last 2 years % of Respondents respondents

Not applicable, we have not received a regular allowance in the last two years	135	22%
Not applicable, we have only recently started receiving an allowance	63	10%
No, the allowance has increased	87	14%
No, the allowance has stayed the same	194	31%
Yes, the allowance has been reduced due to a change in local authority policy/cuts	44	7%
Yes, the allowance has been reduced but it is due to a change in our circumstances (e.g. the child is now 18 years old)	12	2%
Yes, we were told from the outset that the allowance would be time limited	26	4%
Yes, the allowance has been reduced but we do not understand why	34	5%
Yes for other reasons	33	5%

87 kinship carers said the allowance had increased, **94** said it had stayed the same and **149** kinship carers said the allowance had been reduced or cut entirely.

Total respondents: 628

“It has stayed about the same but we are afraid to change our circumstances in case it stops! Yearly assessments go in but the council will not let you know their thresholds so I’m unsure whether to go back to working full time – would children lose out on any allowance and would I cope with caring for two very young and often challenging children?”

– kinship carer

Of the 149 kinship carers who said the allowance had been reduced or cut:

- 30% said it was a result of a change in local authority policy or cuts.

“The local authority changed the way it took various income and expenditure to make it ‘fairer’ – mostly by removing items of allowable expenditure, so the allowance went down.”

– kinship carer

“When the local policy changed and allowance cut, I lost £80.72 per week and this has had a massive impact.”

– kinship carer

- 8% said it had been changed as a result of a change in the child’s own circumstances (e.g. the child turning 18 years old).
- 17% said they were told from the outset the allowance would be time limited.

“It was stopped...after two years. My husband of 72 years old still has to work as it is the only income.”

– kinship carer

“We were awarded a time limited special guardianship allowance, we were told it was transitional until we became accustomed to the cost of a young child. We received payments for two years but as I’m 59, I can’t find work, nor afford childcare. I can’t save for retirement.”

– kinship carer

“The special guardianship order ceased after two years of the special guardianship order being awarded. Our little one has significant special needs. This has not been taken into consideration. Our income has therefore recently reduced by £500 per month, just as little one’s needs are increasing. We were told that two years is enough to ‘secure alternative income’ i.e. find a job. We are nearing retirement age, have health issues and little one has high needs. It is simply not possible for my wife to work. I work full-time in a demanding job and support my wife with the care of little one at home. I have a heart condition. It is not realistic to expect me to take a second job to ‘make up’ the loss of income.”

– kinship carer

- 23% said they didn't understand why it had been reduced.

“It randomly went from £121 a week to £17 total! We were not informed this would happen and they had lost the financial assessment our previous amount was based on.” – kinship carer

- 22% gave other reasons for the reduction.

“I was means tested out of the special guardianship order allowance when I was working more hours in a well paid job. Since having to give that up due to widowhood and now single parent a kinship child with additional needs, I tried to reapply but was told they are no longer the placing local authority's responsibility, as we live in a different area.” – kinship carer

“I received an amount for a while but have been told that is going to stop next month. The children are going to be removed from being ‘children in need’ – this is because I care for them. As a result I have pretty much been told that social services are not going to be involved anymore and I am left on my own.” – kinship carer

Q44 If your kinship child/children's legal status has changed since they have been living with you, did this affect the financial support you received from children's services?

Did change in kinship
child/ren's legal status
affect financial support
from children's services

	Respondents	% of respondents
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Yes	116	22%
No	284	54%
Not sure	123	24%

Total respondents: 523

Some kinship carers described how the change in the child's legal status from being looked after to being under a special guardianship order, had resulted a reduction in financial and other practice support. Commonly, the special guardianship order allowance was time limited and means tested and excluded birthday and other special payments. In some cases the carer ceased receiving any financial help on the making of the special guardianship order.

“I was approved as a kinship foster carer and received a fostering allowance but ..in court I was granted a special guardian allowance (which was 50% of the fostering allowance). The judge told them because they had forced me into a position where I had to leave my job, they were to pay my mortgage arrears. But they said they could not afford to...consequently I had no alternative but to sell my house.” – kinship carer

“When our little one was a looked after child (for 18 months), we received a basic fostering allowance. The local authority said this could only be a temporary arrangement as little one was ‘adoptable’ and would be taken for adoption if we did not apply for special guardianship. A special guardianship order resulted in two years of 'fostering allowance equivalent', then zero.” – kinship carer

**“As soon as special guardianship order was granted, no more respite or help with advice from the support team.”
– kinship carer**

“I received a fostering allowance when my grandson was in local authority care... but I have not received any allowance since the SGO was granted.”– kinship carer

Some kinship carers described how the child had been subject to a child arrangements order or residence order, but was now subject to a special guardianship order, and this had prompted them receiving some financial help, albeit discretionary.

“I am now receiving special guardianship order allowance for eldest whereas on the residence order I didn’t receive anything for 10 year.”– kinship carer

Some kinship carers described the struggle they had faced in order to have the child recognised as a looked after child, despite the local authority having placed the child with them.

“When the children first came to live with me the local authority refused to assess me as foster carer despite placing the children with me. I got no allowance until a (solicitor’s firm) helped me challenge this decision within court proceedings. We won our case and I received £16,000 back payments and was awarded the full allowance. The local authority had tried to get me to accept an award of 60% of the entitlement which I refused due to having appropriate legal advice. Family Rights Group also provided me with template letters to help me challenge the original decision making.” – kinship carer

The experiences of kinship carers were variable, and was not uniformly negative.

“The special guardianship allowance is very close to the one we received for fostering but it does not include an additional payment for birthdays, Christmas and holidays. However, we do receive child benefit ...we are quite happy with what we receive.” – kinship carer

Q45 Do you receive any of the following benefits or tax credits?

Respondents could tick more than one answer, hence the percentage total is greater than 100%

Benefits	Respondents	% of respondents
Child benefit	511	84%
Child tax credit	332	54%
Council tax benefit	187	31%
Housing benefit	178	29%
Disability Living Allowance for the child you are raising	135	22%
Carer's allowance	127	21%
Working tax credit	103	17%
Disability Living Allowance/Personal Independent Payment (PIP)	84	14%
Income support	67	11%
Universal Credit	46	8%
Employment and Support Allowance	50	8%
Pension credit	15	2%
Bereavement/widow's benefit	14	2%
Guardian's allowance (NOT local authority special guardianship allowance)	13	2%
Other (please specify)	39	6%

This demonstrates the importance of child benefit and child tax credit, as well as disability living allowance, particularly for the child, to many kinship care households.

Total respondents: 611

Q46 Have you been affected by the benefit cap?

Have you been affected by the benefit cap

	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	42	6%
No	473	72%
Not sure	144	22%

Some kinship carers who had been affected by the benefit cap, described the impact:

Total respondents: 659

"I had a joint tax credit claim with my partner. We received an extra £70 a week in tax credits when my grandson came to live with us. My partner left and I had to claim universal credit. I'm now losing £263 a month due to the cap. I fail to see how they can ask you to take children on knowing they'll live in poverty. In 11 months my grandson has lived with his mum, his dad, his foster carer and me. I want to give him stability not put him in childcare so I can avoid the benefit cap. This will also prevent me from taking on any more children." – grandparent carer

"I am worse off now that I have the child ...we've been thrown into poverty"

– kinship carer

Q47 Have you been affected by the bedroom tax?

Affected by bedroom tax	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	45	7%
No	593	89%
Not sure	28	4%

Total respondents: 666

Some kinship carers who are affected by the bedroom tax (officially known as the under-occupancy charge), described the impact. A number explained how at least one of the children had special needs which meant that they needed their own room (rather than share with another child in the household) but they were still penalised:

“(As a result) both children share a room. I understand this is normal with their ages and cannot change until older is ten but with little boy’s behavioural problems, oldest getting no rest and he destroys all her things.” – kinship carer

“We struggle to pay the rent but need the additional bedroom as the children have extra needs and cannot share.” – kinship carer

**“I have a three bedroom house, son in one room and classed as non-dependent, he is autistic. Council says both children can share one room but room is not big enough so one shares with me and the baby in the small room. Have to pay bedroom tax each month.”
– kinship carer**

In some cases, the impact of the bedroom tax, was to force the kinship carer to have to move home or even become homeless:

**“We were in a specially adapted bungalow for disabilities had to leave as I couldn't afford the bedroom tax on two rooms”
– kinship carer**

**“We were living in a 3 bed but were made homeless because I couldn't go to work to pay the rent. We are now in temporary accommodation.”
– kinship carer**

“Myself and my then 19 year old daughter had downsized to a two bed property, we had moved back into a three bed to accommodate grandson, when daughter finished college, I had to pay bedroom tax, so grandson and myself moved back to a two bed so we could afford to live. My daughter had to become homeless before getting her own place to live.” – grandparent carer

Some kinship carers described being caught between different professionals and agencies giving contradictory messages.

**“All the children have their own room. As I only claim DLA for one of the two children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, the council states that I have to pay bedroom tax, irrespective of the fact that a letter from our paediatrician states both boys with ASD need their own bedroom.”
– kinship carer**

**“We moved to a three bedroom house after the social worker said we needed a room for Kelly and one for Billy. When we told the council, they said it didn't matter, we still had to pay.”
– kinship carer**

“I was told (by the social worker) I had to move house as he had to have a room of his own and could not share with any of my children. Had to give up my council house and take a private one but benefits section said that because of ages of my youngest and kinship child, they had to share and not have rooms of their own.”

– kinship carer

“I had less money every month because I was paying the bedroom tax because I rented a three bedroom house. I am now in a two-bedroom flat, so I no longer pay the bedroom tax but I do not have a spare room for my grandson. The local authority said if my grandson comes to live with me then he can share with his sister, however, the local authority where my grandson lives says he needs his own room. ”

– kinship carer

“Lost my house in 2013 due to bedroom tax, after living there for over 27 years.” – kinship carer

Q48 Have you been affected by two child tax credit limit?

Affected by 2 child tax credit limit	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	11	2%
No	595	89%
Not sure	59	9%

Total respondents: 665

Following a successful campaign, led by Family Rights Group in conjunction with the Children's Society, members of the House of Lords and organisations in the Kinship Care Alliance, the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 exempts kinship children from the restriction of child tax credit to two children in the household. Unfortunately, the way the regulations were drafted, led to kinship carers not being able to claim child tax credit for their own baby, if they were already raising two children. This was challenged by Child Poverty Action Group, with support from Family Rights Group, in the High Court, which found the policy to be 'unlawful'. The regulations have now been amended, and kinship children should be exempt from the two child credit limit, regardless of whether or not the carer had his/her own birth children before or after the kinship child/ren came to live with them. Some kinship carers will however still be adversely affected by the two child restriction, if they have three or more of their own birth children aged under 18 years old, living with them.

Q49 Have you ever had your benefits sanctioned?

Benefits sanctioned	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	26	4%
No	611	92%
Not sure	25	4%

Total respondents: 662

Whilst only 4% of respondents said that they had been benefit sanctioned, those who had described the extreme impact including the severe knock on consequences.

“My employment and support allowance has been stopped as they are saying if I can look after 2 children then I can go to work. I have crohn's, colitis, diverticular disease, polyarthritis, high blood pressure so high that they couldn't get a physical examination at my medical on set cataract diabetes. We literally have no money coming in at the minute and also because the ESA has been stopped the housing benefit has stopped and so has the council tax reduction so I'm trying to sort that out too. Very, very stressed which is affecting my health conditions and making them worse. I take around 20 tablets a day which when they run out I will not be able to get a repeat prescription as my benefit is being appealed, so I don't know what will happen when I have no medication” – kinship carer

**“We were relying on food banks and quite often having to decide whether to put money on gas or electric.”
– kinship carer**

“I had my ESA benefit stopped for nearly 10 months. I was advised to appeal the decision and won my case. So during the 10 months period, I fell behind on my bills and got into more debt. Social workers were aware of my struggles and kept saying that they could not help me. It was fully reinstated after my appeal hearing.”– kinship carer

“I was made redundant shortly before my nephew was removed (from his mother). Originally we were not accepted (by the local authority) to take on my nephew but then they decided they were happy for it to go through. I was looking to return to work during this time. I was sanctioned as I explained we were taking him on and that would mean I had to stop looking as he needed to settle in and I needed to go to meetings. Contact was all over the place. This caused many issues until that Xmas. It was horrible to go through” – aunt carer

**“I was sanctioned because I was late for Jobcentre appointment. Another time I was sanctioned because I was ill and could not attend the appointment despite having contacted them. It has meant on occasions having to go to the food banks, which is ridiculous and embarrassing and then it means juggling your bills. All this does is create enormous amounts of stress and you’ve already been through enough so has the child. It creates anxiety, depression, stress.”
– kinship carer**

Q50 Do you think you were given enough information about benefits, finances and sources of financial support when you became a kinship carer?

Information about benefits, finances and sources of financial support

	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	52	8%
No	582	85%
Not sure	36	5%
Other (please provide details)	13	2%

Total respondents: 683

85% said they didn't have enough information about benefits, finances and financial support when they became a kinship carer. Lack of access to tailored advice, may explain why 22% respondents (Q46) were not sure whether they had been affected by the benefit cap.

Q51 How would you rate the process of obtaining financial support from the local authority or claiming benefits? (1 is very easy and 5 is very difficult)

Rating the process of obtaining financial support

	Respondents	% of respondents
1	51	7%
2	26	4%
3	109	16%
4	93	14%
5	399	59%

Total respondents: 678

Over half of kinship carers rated the process of obtaining financial support as very difficult.

Q52 Has becoming a kinship carer caused you financial hardship?

Financial hardship	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	503	74%
No	110	16%
Not sure	68	10%

Total respondents: 681

Three quarters of kinship carers said becoming a kinship carer has caused them financial hardship. The following quotes indicate some of the struggles that kinship carers face.

Some described the impact of not having equivalent paid maternity or adoption leave:

“If they had allowed me to continue in my employment rather than give me the option of she gets adopted or I leave my job and care for her then if I was working I would not have to receive any state benefit.” – kinship carer

**“No maternity leave – not even a day’s parental leave. I have to take unpaid leave to attend training.”
– kinship carer**

“No rights to defer a higher paid job I had secured before taking on little one so I had to give up this job in CAMHS psychiatry!! If I’d been allowed to defer the post like any natural or adoptive parent I would have been able to continue to progress career wise. – kinship carer

Some described the gruelling process of becoming a kinship carer and the impact of benefit reforms:

“My life since my grandson was born has been nothing short of awful. I've had to watch his mother, my daughter, fail miserably at being a parent and watch our relationship further crumble. The kinship foster care and special guardian assessments were nothing short of gruelling. When I finally saw light at the end of the tunnel I was slapped with a 6 month supervision order and although the local authority seem so keen to be a part of my life still I have felt little to no support from them even refusing in court to offer anything more than two years financial support. Not one person mentioned that I would be benefit capped and my own children would have to share their financial support with my grandson. I did not get pregnant outside of the two child rule. I did not ask for my grandson to live with me and he did not ask to live here either. Circumstances beyond our control brought us here and now it seems we are being punished for it. I would desperately like my life and my grandson's to return to some sort of normality where the local authority are no longer a part of our lives and hand on heart believe benefit caps for families the same as ours are nothing short of criminal.” – grandmother carer

Some kinship carers felt that they had been misled about the financial support (or lack of it) that they would receive or had been just left to cope, despite asking for help:

**“We were led to believe that we would receive financial help because we were looking after four children by social services but this help has never materialised.”
– kinship carer**

“Social worker would often tell me that they could not help me, even when I told them that I was unable to pay my mortgage or utility bills. When they were fully aware that my son was still claiming child tax credit and child benefit, they did not approach him to make changes. When the children (came to me) two social workers came to do a home visit. They asked if I needed anything. When I said that their beds were broken and I had no money to replace them, she looked under the mattress at the broken slats and turned to me and said, ' you can fix that yourself '. I've never had any kind of financial assessment from day one. By the way, my grandchildren sleep in my double bed and I sleep on the sofa. I'm 63 and suffer with arthritis...and life goes on.”– grandparent carer

Kinship carers described the additional financial and emotional struggles of raising children who have special needs, emotional and behaviour difficulties and/or disabilities:

“I had a good job and was well paid , I had to retire early and take money from my pension to adapt my home and manage. My life is being a rock for my kids, and being there for the opening of a front door if that’s what it takes to build their security, fighting for appropriate support in schools and the right diagnosis for their SEN and ASD...When your children have anxiety friendship and communication difficulties, it is a daily battle. Adding battling the authorities who should be supporting you not hindering you to do your best for these kids is shocking and cruel.” – kinship carer

“The child needs a lot of additional equipment due to their disabilities and it’s impossible to get any help from the local authority.” – kinship carer

Some kinship carers described the daily struggle and longer term financial toll of becoming a kinship carer:

**“Taking on two more children would always cause financial difficulties just with day to day living. We have also funded an extension with our mortgage which was the cheapest option to be able to house our two nephews“
– kinship carer**

“I used to earn £50k per annum. I have chronic cancer. I couldn’t work and look after a baby. The local authority didn’t want me to work. I now live on minimum universal credit. It’s hard and debts just mount.”– kinship carer

**“Having to give up my job and taking early retirement caused a very diminished income causing long term financial sacrifice. Without kinship care I could have worked a further ten years and paid ten further years of pension contributions resulting in far greater pension benefits both from my teaching pension and my state pension and my later years would therefore be far more comfortably provided for, I may even have been able to pay off my mortgage with better cash flow as was received through my professional salary. My long term expectation is now extreme financial hardship, I would say through bad advice and guidance in every step of the kinship journey. Had I been advised and supported in a more appropriate way I could have managed both my job and the child which ultimately would benefit the local authority who would save on special guardianship allowance! It is not an intelligently devised and designed system.”
– kinship carer**

“I can’t work, I can’t put money aside for my pension, my husband works away from home, he will have to continue to do so until we retire.”– kinship carer

“It caused my marriage to break down, so I lost my house and now rent. My 3 boys had to move out before they were financially stable to give the kids their bedrooms.”– kinship carer

“We are finding it difficult to purchase clothes, books, food and furniture i.e. bed. Our priority is our mortgage which seems to go up every quarter along with day to day living. travel passes for all 3 children and credit for phones and vehicle expenses. I have had to take out a credit card which is putting me into more debt. The girls are missing out on school travel trips.” – kinship carer

**“The decision to become a kinship carer has cost me £180,000.00 plus in terms of pension benefits etc. I would do it again, my grandson is worth every penny. He has promised to pay me back when he grows up, my rewards will be a happy, productive young man able to embrace his role in our community.”
– kinship carer**

Q53 Have you and your family taken or booked a holiday in the last 12 months?

Holiday	Respondents	% of respondents
No	283	42%
Yes, paid for by ourselves/our family	364	53%
Yes, paid for by a charity/organisation or other	17	2.5%
Yes, paid for by other (please state)	17	2.5%

Total respondents: 681

More than 4 in 10 kinship care households hadn't had a holiday in the last year. This compares to only 14% of the wider population not having had a holiday between September 2017-August 2018.¹¹

Those who answered 'yes, paid by other', included those who'd been helped by a friend and a tiny number who received funding from their local authority for a holiday.

¹¹ ABTA (2018) Holiday Habits Report accessible [here](#).

Housing

Q54 Did you have to make any changes to your accommodation when your kinship child/children came to live with you?

Changes to accommodation	Respondents	% of respondents
No	140	21%
Yes, decorated/refurbished	308	45%
Yes, extended the house/loft conversion	67	10%
Yes, moved to a bigger home	141	21%
Yes, other (please state)	25	3%

Total respondents: 681

Eight in every ten kinship carers had to make some changes to their accommodation when the kinship child/ren came to live with them.

Q55 If you had to make any changes to your accommodation, did you get any help from the local authority, housing association or any other agency?

Help from the LA re. changes to accommodation	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	75	14%
No	467	86%

86% of kinship carers who incurred costs or had to make changes to their accommodation got no help.

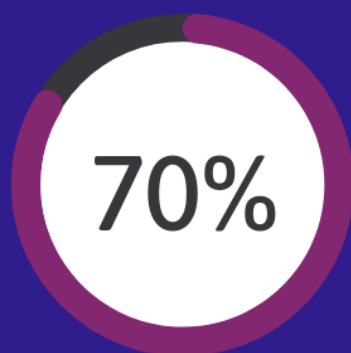
Total respondents: 542

The help that a minority of kinship carers received varied. In some cases it involved monies for furniture and minor adaptations. In a small minority of cases, the local authority had put a bond down on a new home, helped secure a bigger home from the housing association or a local authority tenancy move, or funded an extension to the carer's house.

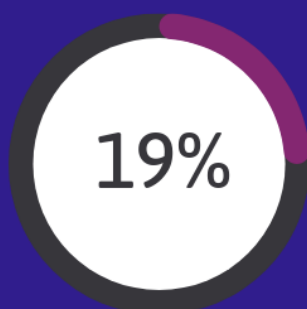


Q56 Is your current housing suitable for your household?

Total respondents 676

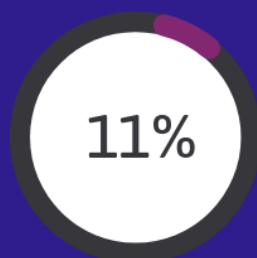


YES (470)



NO (131)

IT IS OVERCROWDED



NO (75)

IT NEEDS REFURBISHMENT



30%

of respondents said their housing is not suitable

Some kinship carers described some very difficult situations:

**“We have been homeless without access to washing facilities for pretty much all the children’s lives. The local authority refusing to pay for a property which would meet the children’s needs
– kinship carer**

“It desperately needed refurbishment this flat. When we moved in they told me it was temporary accommodation then changed their mind and told me it was permanent. It has mould so I have to leave the windows open and the heating has to be on a steady 18 degrees to prevent the mould which cost me a lot more in heating” – kinship carer

**“I have a disabled adult son at home who sleeps on the sofa as there isn’t a bedroom for him. He recently became epileptic...he has suffered several serious injuries.”
– kinship carer**

**“We have nine of us living in a three bedroom house”
– kinship carer**

Practical and emotional support

Q57 On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor and 5 is excellent, how would you rate the help that you've received from children's services?

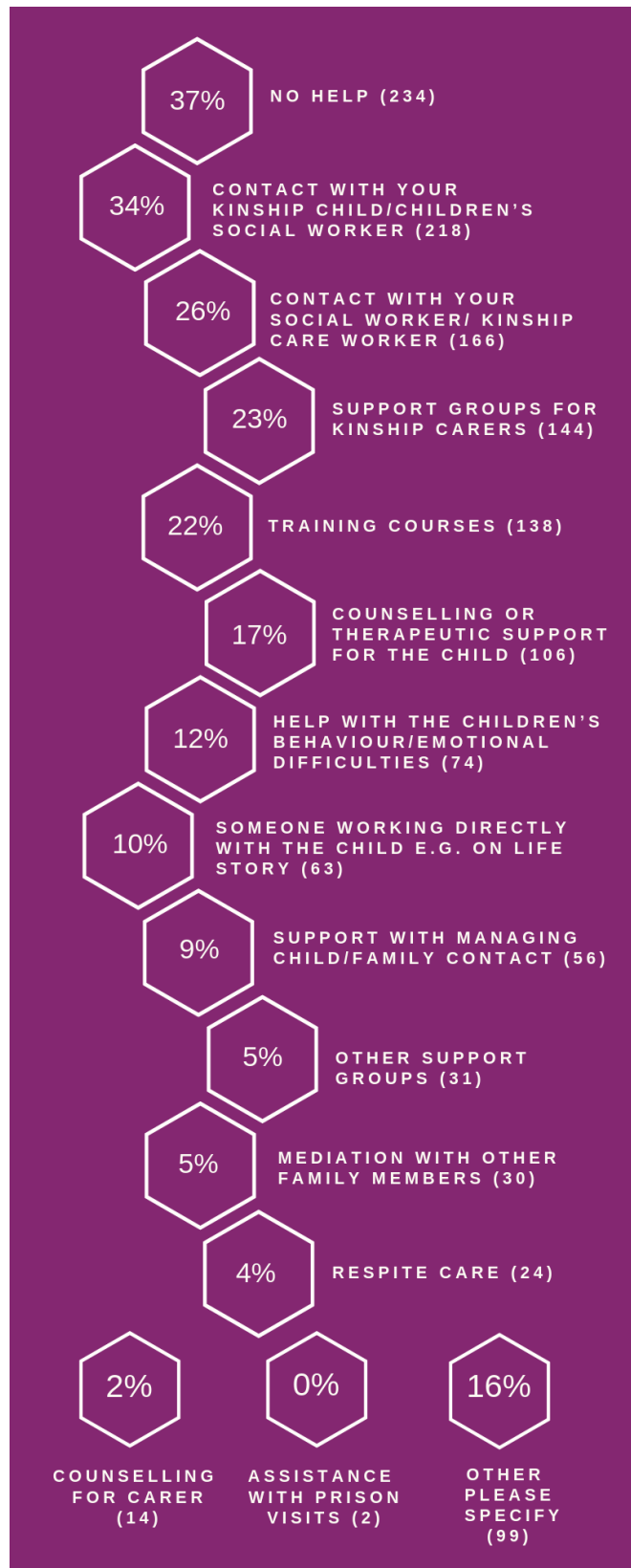
Rating of the help received from children's services	Respondents	% of respondents
1	303	47%
2	107	17%
3	131	21%
4	46	7%
5	51	8%

Total respondents: 638

64% rated the help they'd received from children's services as poor or very poor. Only 15% rated it as good or excellent. This response is very similar to the results of a survey¹² of kinship carers conducted by Family Rights Group in 2015.

¹² Ashley C, Aziz R and Braun D (2015) *Doing the Right Thing: A report on the experiences of kinship carers*

Q58 Since you have been a kinship carer, have you received any help of this kind from children's services? Respondents could tick more than one answer, so percentages total more than 100%



Total respondents: 628

More than one in three (37%) of kinship carers said they'd received no help of any kind from children's services. This compares to 41% who stated this in the 2015 survey conducted by Family Rights Group of kinship carers.

Where there had been help, contact with the children's social worker featured highest. Compared to the 2015 survey there has been a slight increase in the proportion kinship carers stating that they had contact with a kinship care social worker, they'd access to a support group for kinship carers and the kinship child has counselling or therapeutic support, but otherwise, the results are remarkably similar.

Only one in ten kinship carers had received support from children's services on managing contact with the child's parents or other relatives, despite this often being a major source of concern for kinship carers. Fewer than one in twenty had received any respite care. Only two kinship carers said they'd had help with prison visits, despite research on the potential benefits enabling children to be supported to see a parent who is imprisoned (note 41 kinship carers in Question 20 stated they were raising a child because of a parent being in prison).

Q59 Have you received help or advice from any other source, as a kinship carer? Respondents could tick more than one answer so the percentages total more than 100%

Help or advice from another source	Respondents	% of respondents
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Family and friends	236	38%
School	226	36%
On-line support group	187	30%
A local kinship care support group	161	26%
CAMHS	146	23%
Health visitor	138	22%
GP	124	20%
Children's centre/Sure Start	67	11%
Charity or voluntary organisation	61	10%
None	87	14%
Other(please specify)	59	9%

Family and friends were the main source of help and advice. 36% of kinship carers identified the child's school as a source of help or advice, although some pointed out that their experience was that it was easier to get help from the child's primary rather than secondary school.

Total respondents: 623

“Her primary school was excellent with her because but when she moved to secondary school we have had to really battle to get teaching staff to change from their attitude of its ‘because it’s a bigger school’, ‘they all go through this phase’, ‘she’s over sensitive’ and the school’s lack of positive action on bullying etc.” – kinship carer

Support groups (on-line and local groups) came in for praise from kinship carers. A number particularly highlighted the advice they had received from Family Rights Group.

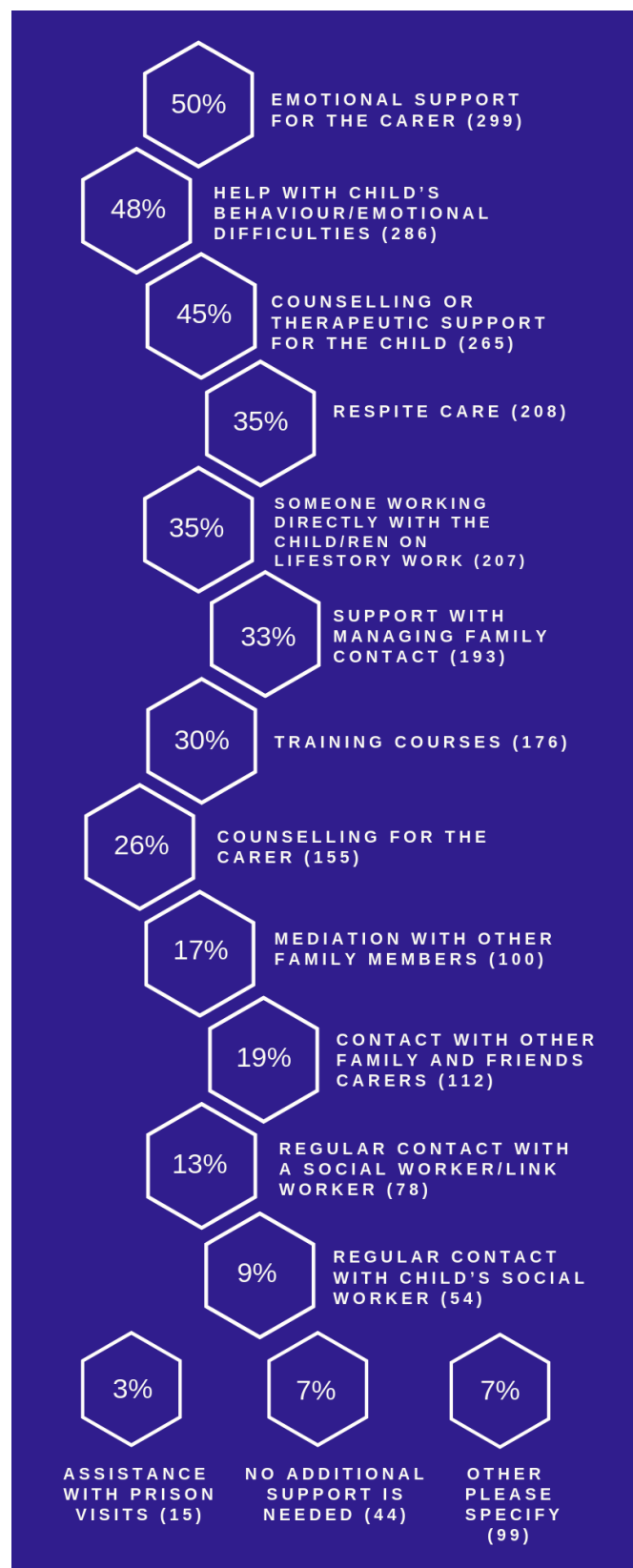
A number of kinship carers raised the difficulty they had faced getting help from Child and Mental Health Services (Camhs).

“The children’s centre has been a Godsend with advice and support readily given.” – kinship carer

“Our GP has been supportive but even with her support we have had to battle to get help whilst having to struggle for approx. 8yrs before she got access to CAMHS. Even then I had to challenge their initial rejection of her needs.”

– kinship carer

Q60 Is there any support that you did not receive but which would have/would make a difference? Respondents could tick more than one answer, so percentages total more than 100%



Total respondents: 593

93% of kinship carers said some additional support would have made/would make a difference, only 7% said no additional support was needed. Very similar (albeit slightly worse) than the 2015 survey which found that 91% said additional support would have made a difference.

Half of kinship carers reported that emotional support for them would have made a difference (43% in the 2015 survey) and more than four in ten identified that help with the child's behaviour/emotional difficulties, counselling or therapeutic support would make a difference. More than one in three kinship carers reported that respite care, life story work for the child, managing family contact, and training courses would have/would make a difference. This is similar to the 2015 survey results.

Follow up comments from kinship carers describe the isolation and financial hardship that many face and their wish that there had been someone there from the beginning.

The following reflect comments made by kinship carers:

“What is a life story? No one ever spoke of this. I heard it mentioned when the children were with the foster carer. Respite care would be fantastic, Training courses would be good but overall it would have been nice to be told the truth so we knew what we were getting into. The social worker told us that there was not real problems with the children’s health or behaviour at all. Turns out the eldest has been diagnosed with RAD, FASS, not 100% certain as the parental history from mother is missing.”
– **kinship carer**

“(I needed) a legal right to the same parental leave as parents going through an adoption and access to therapeutic support for me as a carer would have made me much more able to cope with the huge demands of a hyperactive toddler in those first two years. I had an emotional breakdown and had to go home to my mums with our little one for 3 weeks and take sick leave from work because of the extent of the stress that I had tried to seek help for.” – **kinship carer**

“Continuity of staff (would have made a difference). We have had eight children’s social workers in three years.” – **kinship carer**

Q61 Does the school claim pupil premium plus for the kinship child/at least one of the kinship children that you are raising?

School pupil premium plus claim for kinship child	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes	295	48%
No	140	23%
Not sure	182	29%

Total respondents: 617

One in every two kinship carers report that the school claims pupil premium plus for at least one of the children. Schools can only apply for this funding for children who are looked after, or were previously looked but are now subject to a special guardianship order or child arrangements order or adoption order.

It is significant that nearly a third of kinship carers responded that they were not sure. This maybe because they had not heard about such support. In some, but by no means all cases, this will be because the child they are raising is not or was not previously looked after and therefore the school cannot claim for the child.

Q62 If you are raising a child who was looked after and is now subject to a special guardianship order, have you requested an assessment for therapeutic support from the Adoption Support Fund?

Assessment for therapeutic support from the adoption support fund	Respondents	% of respondents
Yes, and an application was made and was successful	29	5%
Yes, and an application was made but was unsuccessful	14	3%
Yes, but the assessment was negative	0	0%
No	321	57%
Not applicable	198	35%

Total respondents: 562

The Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic support is only available to children who were previously looked after in the care system and are now subject to an adoption order or special guardianship order. The assessment and application to the Adoption Support Fund has to be made by the local authority or the regional adoption agency.

As can be deduced by the Fund's name, it was originally for adopted children only. However, following lobbying from Family Rights Group and other organisations in the Kinship Care Alliance, the remit was extended in 2016 to previously looked after children who are subject to a special guardianship order.

Comments from special guardians indicated that many did not know that the child they were raising might be eligible.

“Didn’t know about it until this question (in the survey)”.
– kinship carer

Some special guardians who knew about it and whose child might be eligible, commented that the process proved problematic:

“Trying to apply but getting no help from social services.”
– kinship carer

“Unable to actually get in contact with anyone who will deal with it and spoken to over 40 people none of whom have been able to help.” – kinship carer

One of the special guardians whose child had managed to get support through the Adoption Support Fund commented:

“A lifesaver. Paid for support from the local authority (combined psychologists & social workers); carer training & support; Theraplay.” – kinship carer

Recommendations

1 Exploring family as the first port of call

There are currently more children in the care system than at any time since 1985. The sector-led Care Crisis Review¹³, facilitated in 2018 by Family Rights Group, examined the stresses and pressures felt by children and families experiencing the child welfare and family justice system, as well as those working in the system. The Review found that there was considerable variation across the country as to how, whether and if wider family and friends are identified, assessed and supported to become kinship carers for a child, who may otherwise live in unrelated foster or residential care or be adopted. The findings from this survey starkly reinforce those of the Care Crisis Review.

Proposals

- A new legal duty on local authorities to ensure that potential placements with kinship carers are always explored and assessed for suitability before a child becomes looked after, unless there is an emergency.
- A Family Group Conference (FGC) is a process led by family members to plan and make decisions for a child who is at risk. FGCs provide a valuable opportunity for the wider family network to support the child to safely remain with their parents or identify themselves as willing to raise the child, if the child cannot remain at home. In some cases, plans made at FGCs may avert the need for care proceedings or the child going into the care system. There should be a legal duty on local authorities to offer family group conferences to all families before a child enters the care system, unless there is an emergency.
- A working group be established, which includes families and practitioners, to draw up a good practice guide for local authority decision making, including during the pre-proceedings process.
- Local authorities must ensure assessments are conducted in a consistent way. Government should incorporate Family Rights Group's initial family and friends care assessment: good practice guide¹⁴ in to statutory guidance, so that local authorities are required to follow consistent, open and fair processes.

¹³ Care Crisis Review (2018) [Care Crisis Review: Options for Change](#)

¹⁴ [Initial Family and Friends Care Assessment: A good practice guide \(2017\)](#)

- Applications to extend care proceedings beyond 26 weeks must be made, if additional time is necessary to ensure that a full and robust assessment of potential kinship carers is completed, where the carer is a potentially realistic option to raise the child.
- The current rights, under Dublin III Regulations, of unaccompanied children in Europe to be united with family in the UK must be upheld after Brexit.

2 Making informed decisions: legal advice and representation

Lack of access to legal advice can have a lifetime of ramifications. As the report demonstrates, kinship carers and potential kinship carers need to know their rights and options from the outset, so that they understand how to best secure the child's future with them and as circumstances change. Family Rights Group's freephone specialist legal advice line is overwhelmed with calls - a third of which are from kinship carers. Funding constraints mean that currently we can only answer 29% of callers. Moreover, the Department for Education grant for our advice line is due to end in March 2020.

Proposals

- We call on the Government as a matter of urgency to adequately fund Family Rights Group's specialist legal advice service for kinship carers post March 2020.
- The Ministry of Justice had pledged to bring forward provisions by Autumn 2019 to extend the scope of legal aid to special guardians in private law cases. The draft regulations have not yet been issued and we strongly press the Government to fulfil their commitment, and ensure that legal aid is available to both applicants and respondents. We would also press for this to be non-means tested, given that many kinship carers are impoverished but own their homes.
- The Government expand the scope of legal aid in the pre-proceedings stage, and where care proceedings have been issued, to family and friends who are considering, or have taken on the care of a child where there is court, local authority or professional evidence that the child cannot live with their parents. This should be non-means tested, enabling kinship carers to have access to free, independent legal advice and representation.
- There are an estimated 5000 children in care & care leavers who must apply for EU settled status by 30 June 2021 (or end of 2020 if we leave the EU without a deal). There are many more children in kinship care who must also apply for settled status, although there is no published data on the numbers of kinship children affected. We call on Government to provide automatic settled status

to children being raised in kinship care under a legal order, and those who are in the care system or are case leavers, whose ability to remain in the UK could be at risk. In the meantime, these children should have access to legal advice and support to apply for settled status. Applications for settled status involve knowledge of complex areas of immigration and nationality law - children can't be expected to pursue such applications alone.

3 Helping kinship carers to remain in work and preventing financial hardship

The report starkly sets out the financial hardships faced by many kinship carers, as a result of them taking on the kinship child/children. We are also mindful that local authorities and public agencies have also faced severe financial pressures as a result of a combination of austerity and rising demand over years, not least in terms of the rise in numbers of children subject to child protection enquiries, and children in the care system. In the current climate, discretionary support for children in kinship care is extremely vulnerable to cuts. This explains why some kinship carers feel that the child needs to be 'looked after' i.e. subject to a care order or voluntary arrangement, albeit with the child living with them, because they feel it's the only way the child is entitled to practical and financial support. The survey also found that many kinship carers felt pressurised by social workers into giving up their work, even though this pushed them into poverty.

Proposals

- The current financial climate presents serious pressures on local authorities. We therefore call on government to address the funding gap within children's services. We support the call by the Local Government Association that the government meet the £3.1 billion funding gap facing children's services by 2025 and urgently review funding arrangements for children with special educational needs and disabilities which faces an estimated funding gap of £1.6 billion by 2021. Local authorities urgently need additional resources to provide the support that kinship carers need.
- A ring-fenced funding stream should be made available by the Government to local authorities to help them work with their partner agencies, young people and families to safely avert children having to enter or remain in the care system, and work effectively with parents and the wider family network. This grant would be awarded on the basis of an approved local plan, which has the support of the local authority's partner agencies, including their local Family Justice Board, and it would set out what steps the authority is taking to avert children having to enter or remain in the care system, including how funding would support kinship placements.

- Introduce a national financial allowance for kinship carers who are raising children who would otherwise be in the care system.

Employment

- The Government should introduce a period of paid employment leave and protection to kinship carers, who are permanently raising a child who the court, local authority or professionals have determined cannot live with their parents, in the same way that adopters are entitled to.

Benefit reforms

- Kinship carer households should be exempt from the benefit cap
- The bedroom tax (i.e. the under-occupation penalty) should not apply to kinship carer and foster carer households, so that children with disrupted lives are not required to share a bedroom with another child in the household.
- No kinship carer, who has to move onto Universal Credit as a result of taking on the care of a kinship child, even as a temporary measure, is financially penalised.
- No kinship carer household should be financially penalised as a result of kinship carers of pension age transferring from child tax credit to pension credit.
- Adequately fund tailored advice and information services for kinship carers, including but not limited to benefits advice.

Adoption Support Fund

- All children being raised by kinship carers for more than 28 days (where there is court, local authority or professional evidence that they cannot live with their parents), should be eligible to apply to receive therapeutic services under the Adoption Support Fund.

4 Improving support services

Many contributors to the Care Crisis Review expressed a strong sense of concern about a culture of blame, shame and fear that has permeated the child welfare and family justice system, affecting those working in it as well as the children and families reliant upon it. It was suggested that this had led to an environment that is increasingly mistrusting and risk averse and prompts individuals to seek refuge in procedural responses. This inhibits partnership working between the state and families, yet partnership working is in the interests of children. These survey results illustrate how many kinship carers experience such an environment, in which they feel done to, cajoled and put upon, despite trying to do their best for the children.

Whilst there is Family and Friends Care Statutory Guidance¹⁵ for Local Authorities and pre-proceedings guidance¹⁶ in England, there are significant disparities in the extent to which authorities comply with these.

Proposals

- The Government should put in place measures so that all children being raised by kinship carers for more than 28 days (where there is court, local authority or professional evidence that they cannot live with their parents) have the same rights to support as those who are adopted, including access to free childcare aged two, priority school admissions, a designated member of school staff to promote their educational achievement and be eligible for Pupil Premium Plus.
- All local authorities should comply with statutory Family and Friends Care Guidance requirements to publish an up-to-date local family and friends care policy which has been informed by the views and experiences of children and kinship carers in their locality. No child should have to enter the care system in order to ensure access to support, and kinship care services, including a specialist kinship care team or specialist kinship care worker, should be in place in every locality, led by a designated named senior manager. Local support groups open to all kinship carers, prospective kinship carers, and the children they are raising should be the norm.
- Kinship carers should have access to ongoing support in relation to contact, comparable to that which is on offer to local authority foster carers. This could include:
 - Free access to contact centres.
 - Social work support and advice in managing difficult decisions relating to changes in contact plans.
 - Government funding of, and local authority signposting to family mediation and therapeutic services.
 - Access to local family group conference services, for example if circumstances change and management of contact arrangements need to be reconsidered.
 - The **Lifelong Links** model of building support networks for children in care could be extended to children in kinship care. Lifelong Links is a new approach, developed by Family Rights Group aimed at building positive lifelong support networks for children in the care system.
- The survey found that 70% of kinship carers had a sibling or half sibling not living with them. In 2017, the then Minister of State for Children and Families acknowledged that there exists an anomaly in the current Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 which address sibling contact where both sibling are looked after but do not refer to contact with siblings who are not looked after.

¹⁵ Statutory Family and Friends Care Guidance

¹⁶ Statutory guidance on court orders and pre-proceedings

The Minister stated that the Government would amend these Regulations so that children who are looked after are better supported to have contact with siblings who are not in the care system, such as a brother or sister living in kinship care under a special guardianship order. Unfortunately, this change to regulations has not yet been implemented. We call on the Government therefore to make these amendments to regulations as matter of urgency.

- All local authorities should offer or commission tailored training courses for all prospective and current kinship carers. They should be easily accessible, reflecting the already heavy demands on carers, for example with on-line options and offered at flexible times.

5 Reimagining the system

The Parliamentary Taskforce for Kinship Care is helping to raise the profile of kinship carers in Parliament, but there remains far less government investment in kinship care, than there is, for example, in adoption. There has never been a Downing Street reception for kinship carers, and there are significantly more civil servants devoted to designing policy and practice in respect of adoption and looked after children, than there are in relation to kinship care. This needs rectifying.

Proposals

- There is greater parity in investment within government between different forms of permanence for children who are at risk of being removed from their parents, including: kinship care, adoption, looked after children and reunification with parents.
- Local authorities and public agencies should be encouraged to hold their own local kinship care taskforce.
- Ofsted should conduct Joint Targeted Area Inspections of kinship care. The Local Government Association should also be encouraged to provide a kinship care peer review and a support network for local authorities.
- Government should collect and publish robust, official data about kinship care arrangements to inform planning of local and national policies and support services for kinship care.
- Local authorities should adopt the Mutual Expectations Charter¹⁷, which sets out what families should be able to expect of child welfare services and what children's services can expect from families.

¹⁷ Mutual Expectations - a charter for parents and local authority children's services, accessible [here](#)

That the Government introduce a Kinship Care Bill that promotes the following principles:

- Support available to kinship carers and children should not depend solely on the child's legal status or how that local authority's processes are organised. Instead, the system should be built around the child, identifying what support is needed so that a child, who is unable to live at home can have a stable, secure, loving home within their wider family.
- There needs to be improved recognition, respect and support for kinship carers and the children they are raising.

A new Kinship Care Bill would:

- Require all local authorities to publish family and friends care policies and have a named designated senior council manager with responsibility for implementing the policy.
- Place a new duty on local authorities to establish and commission specific kinship care support services, including: assistance with managing contact and family relationships; counselling and therapeutic support; help with children's emotional and behavioural needs; life story work; and setting up local support groups and training for kinship carers and prospective kinship carers. In addition to solutions raised above, the Bill would provide:
 - A new duty on local authority to assess the support needs of any child in kinship care (who the local authority, court or professional has determined cannot live with their parents), when requested to do so by a kinship carer.
 - A new duty on local authorities to establish and commission support services for kinship carers in relation to managing contact (see suggested support services above).
 - Regulations 3 of the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 and of the Special Guardianship (Wales) Regulations 2005 provide details of prescribed special guardianship support services. They reference training but only in relation to a child's special needs. These should be amended in England and Wales to expand the scope of kinship carer training provision more generally, to align more closely to that provided to foster carers or prospective adopters.
 - Introduce greater support for parents after children are placed with kinship carers. In the case of adoption, the law makes specific provision for parents to have access to counselling, to help understand what is proposed for their child and come to terms with the placement. Such provisions for parents are not reflected in most kinship care arrangements, but access to such support would have significant benefits not only for the parents, but for kinship carers and most importantly the children placed with them.

Such services must be adequately funded by Government to ensure that local authorities can make such provision and these can be readily accessed by kinship carers.

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