A black and white photograph of a middle-aged man with short hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a dark polo shirt and has his sunglasses perched on his head. He is holding a young child, likely a toddler, who is looking off to the side. The child is wearing a light-colored t-shirt and patterned overalls. The background is a dark, textured wall, possibly a brick wall.

Kinship Care
State of the
Nation Survey
2019

Foreword

I want to say a huge thank you to the 1,114 kinship carers who took part in our survey this year. We know you're busy with huge demands on your time, so it means a lot that you spent some of that time sharing your experience of being a kinship carer with us.

From what you've told us, we know that you overwhelmingly feel positive about your role as a kinship carer, and rightly so. But what we also see is a picture of confusion, pressure and worry for the future from the very moment you take on this responsibility. There is a lot of frustration about not getting all the information and support you need to do the best job you can. We do this survey every year to understand the lived experience of kinship carers and we are determined to make sure it shapes all our work and campaigns.

This year, our report focuses on the point at which friends or family became kinship carers. Almost half of kinship carers took on the role in a time of crisis and immediately had to try to find their way around a complicated system with very little information, advice or support. Yet the decisions they make at this time often determine all aspects of the ongoing emotional, practical and financial support they are entitled to receive.

The lack of information, advice and support meant that most kinship carers found they had to make significant sacrifices to care for vulnerable children who could not live with their parents. They were left feeling penalised for stepping in to do the right thing to keep their families together.

The statutory framework around kinship care is the Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Family and Friends Care, and it is referred to throughout this report. This guidance states that:

"...children and young people who are unable to live with their parents should receive the support that they and their carers need to safeguard and promote their welfare whether or not they are looked after (have been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours)."

However, the reality for kinship carers is that access to support continues to be determined by the child's legal status and priorities of the local authority in which kinship carers are raising their family, not the needs of the children.

It is essential that independent information, advice and support are available to all kinship carers as soon as possible, regardless of where they live or their child's legal status. This is why we are campaigning for a Kinship Care Act to ensure that every family raising a child in kinship care is supported to provide the stability and care the child needs.

It's time the government acted and provided kinship carers with the support and recognition they need. We're calling on the government to ensure greater support for all kinship families from the very beginning. Please check the end of this report to find out how you can join us in our campaign.

Dr Lucy Peake
Chief Executive
Grandparents Plus

Key findings

Over 1,100 kinship carers responded to our survey, the results of which highlight the chaos and confusion that are often experienced by new kinship carers at the time they take on the responsibility for children. This is compounded by a lack of support and independent advice which means many kinship carers, under a great deal of pressure, risk being penalised for stepping in to keep their families together.

Key findings include:

- **75%** of carers were asked to look after the children – of these 79% by a social worker, 18% by a parent, 6% by police
- In **83%** of cases, children's services had been involved with the child's family
- **30%** of the children were previously in foster or residential care

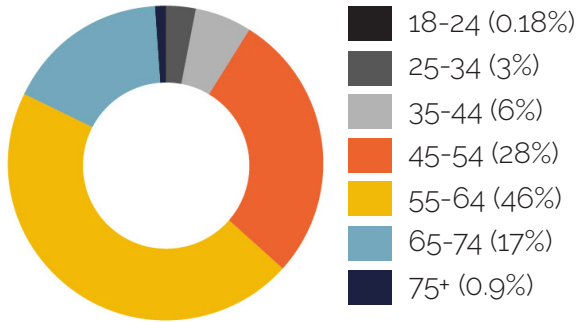
Despite children's services involvement, many kinship carers step in quickly in a climate of crisis and fear, with little time or access to independent information and advice, or support to consider their options. Only later do they realise that support is determined by the child's legal order – it is usually discretionary and it can be means tested, time limited or cut for good.

- **53%** were given no notice and took on the children in a crisis situation
- In **70%** of cases, kinship carers understood that the children would be taken into care if they did not step in
- **50%** felt under pressure when making this decision
- **84%** said they hadn't got the advice and information they needed when the child moved in
- **95%** said they hadn't had any form of training to help prepare them for their kinship care role
- **90%** said they hadn't been told by their local authority where to access peer support

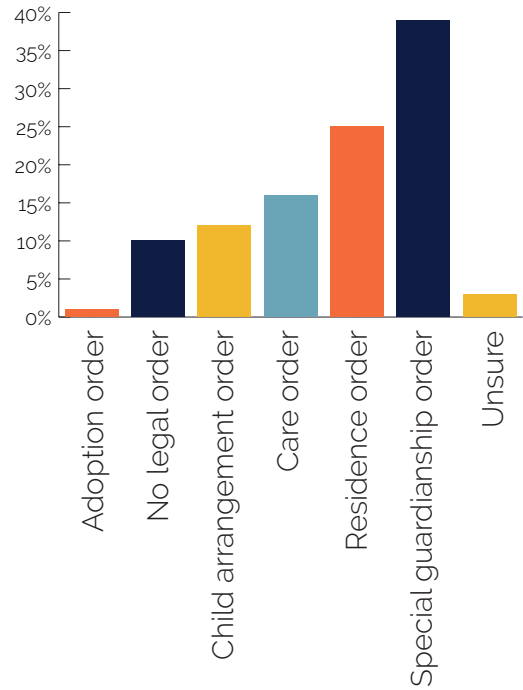
Family and friends become kinship carers for many reasons, the most commonly cited were substance misuse by birth parents, neglect, domestic violence, and mental health issues.

About the carers

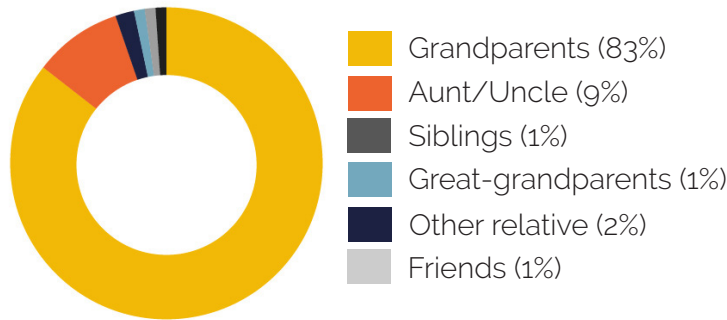
Age of respondents



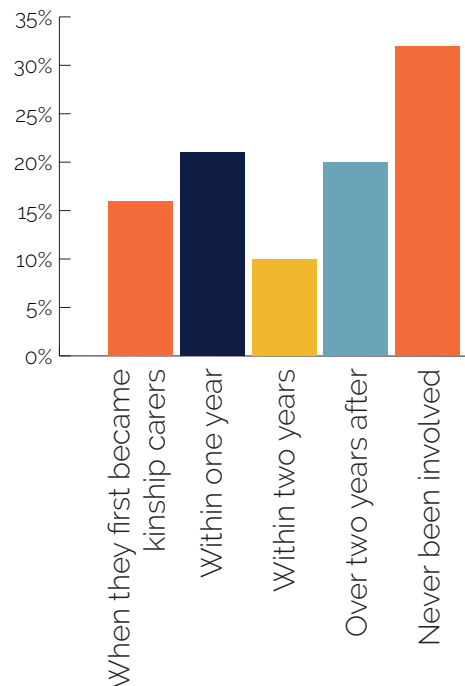
Type of legal order



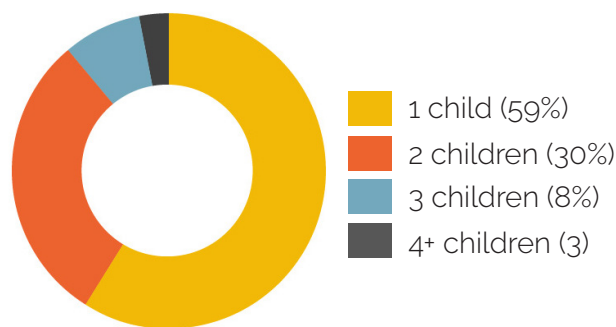
Relationship to child



When they got involved with Grandparents Plus



Number of kinship children



85% have other children and grandchildren

Why and how

There are multiple and complex reasons why parents are not able to look after their children. Kinship carers have described the complex and often multiple factors at play when they took on the role.

For 47%, parental drug or alcohol misuse was a factor. Other reasons that were identified include:

- neglect (30%)
- domestic violence (15%)
- mental illness (15%)
- the parent was unable to cope (14%)
- abuse (8%)
- death of a parent (5%)
- abandonment (5%)
- parental disability or illness (4%)
- the parent was very young (3%)
- the parent was in prison (2%)
- difficulties between the parent and child (2%).

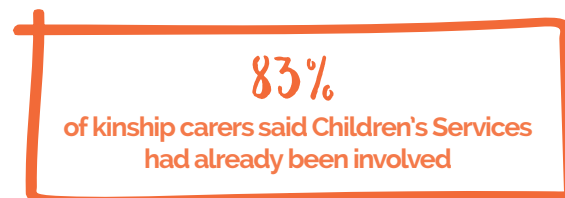
In 83% of cases, children's services had been involved with the child's family and 30% of the children had previously been in foster or residential care

75% of respondents were asked to look after the child or children (other kinship carers were already looking after the child or children; some proactively took on the responsibility themselves). Of these:

- 79% were contacted by a social worker
- 18% by a parent
- 6% by the police
- 4% by a family member
- a small number were contacted by the school, by a friend or neighbour or by the child themselves.

This initial request matters because whether or not a child has been looked after by the local authority has significant implications for the financial and practical support kinship carers and the child or children are entitled to.

Many kinship carers felt that local authorities often do not fulfil their duties because of how the placement was started.



Family and friends care policy

Despite variations in support, every local authority that is responsible for children's services should have a policy which says how it will promote and support the needs of children living with kinship carers. It might be known as the family and friends care policy or the kinship care policy. This policy should be published and easily available and should identify an overall senior manager responsible for the needs and care of the children.

They should be responsive to the identified needs of the children and carers and ensure that the policy is publicised so that anyone considering becoming a kinship carer knows how to contact the local authority to access support and information. Despite this:

- **63%** of respondents didn't know what the family and friends care policy is
- **91%** either don't know how to contact the local authority lead responsible (46%) or know who that is (45%)
- **17%** said the social worker explained the friends and family policy to them
- **20%** told us the policy wasn't clearly explained
- **95%** had no preparation classes or meetings

Crisis and pressure

When people foster or adopt, they are rightly supported to prepare and adjust to a child joining their family. In comparison, there is very little preparation and support for kinship carers who often step in to care for children in challenging circumstances.

Crisis

53% of kinship carers take on the children in a crisis situation with no notice at all.

When asked about the challenges that most concerned them when they first became kinship carers, 63% of kinship carers told us it was the children's well-being, 59% had financial concerns, 47% were worried about the impact on their family, 23% were worried about their own well-being and 21% were worried about housing.

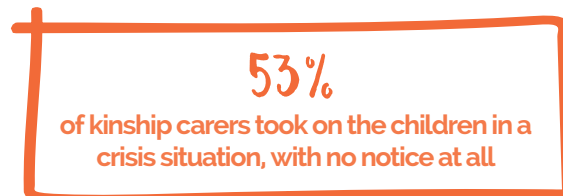
Pressure

50% felt under pressure when making the decision to take on the care of the children. The pressure for most kinship carers was due to their concern about who would care for the children if they were not able to.

When asked what they were told would happen to the children if they did not take them in at that point, 70% understood that the children would be taken into care or adopted. Many were told their family would be separated which meant they felt forced into making a quick decision.

This pressure could be made worse when the kinship carers were not being given advice about their rights, and the children's rights, and if they were not properly supported to take part in the local authorities' processes.

Many described pressure from social workers pushing a specific legal order, others described navigating around a complex system with no or contradictory advice.



“Social services put a lot of pressure on the whole family. They kept telling us if I didn't agree they would take all the children and place them all into care and the baby would be put up for adoption. It was the most difficult time in all our life's causing an almighty rift in our family”

“I was told that I would be being assessed to become a kinship foster carer. I did not realise I had other options I could look into like special guardianship”

“Social Services pushed us down the route of a residence order, as they said their budget was used up for special guardianship”

Advice and support

84%
of kinship carers didn't get the advice and information they needed when the child moved in and 72% still don't get what they need now

Kinship carers need access to specialist and independent advice and emotional and financial support to help them adapt to their new situation. However, they often struggle to access this support and may be less aware of local services for children and young people, especially if they do not have children themselves or it has been some time since they brought up their children.

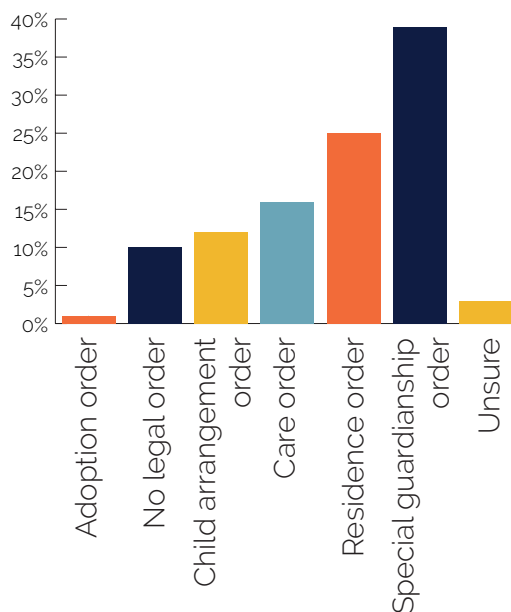
Kinship carers also have differing levels of involvement from local authorities, depending on how the children came to live with them, the child/ children's needs and the legal order they have.

Advice and information

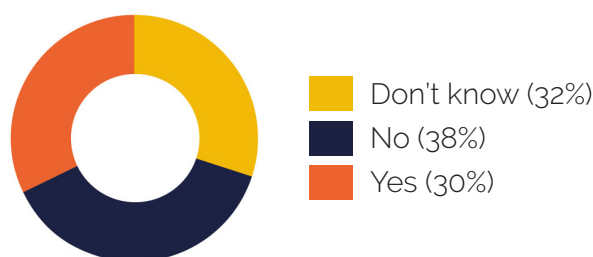
The legal order a child has dictates the support they and their carer receive. Independent advice would help them to fully understand the implications of each order and the impact this might have on any ongoing financial, practical and therapeutic support they would be entitled to. Yet many kinship carers felt unsupported and ill-informed when making any decision about the care order they had.

- 34% had not heard of any orders when making longer term care arrangements
- 46% had heard of the Special Guardianship Order
- Only 10% felt well informed about their options
- 29% received legal advice paid for by the local authority
- 19% paid for legal advice themselves
- 11% received advice from other sources including legal aid, themselves (own research), and friends
- 8% received advice from Grandparents Plus

Type of legal order



Would they change the legal order?



84%
of kinship carers hadn't been told about independent advice

68%
of kinship carers hadn't been told about legal advice

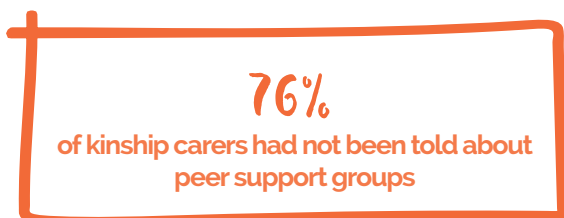
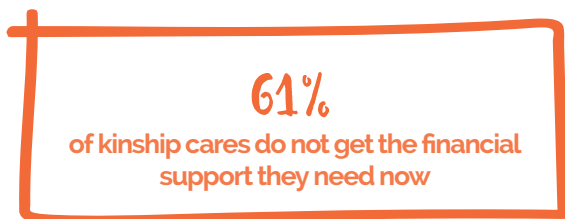
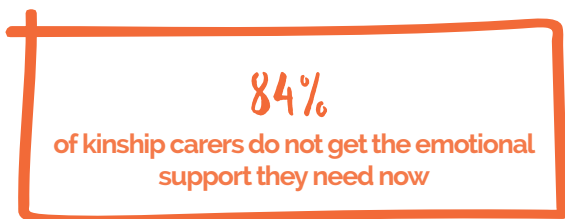
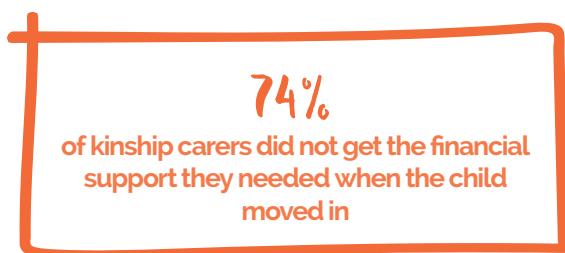
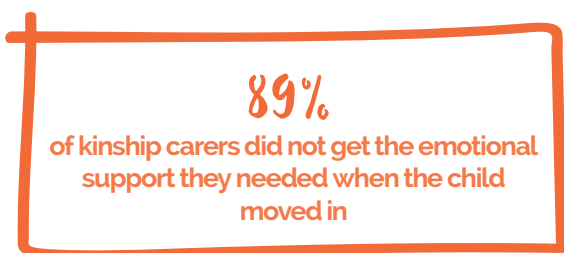
Advice and support

Emotional support

Children raised in kinship care are likely to have had similar experiences of trauma or neglect, but support continues to be determined by the child's legal status and priorities of the local authority in which kinship carers are raising their family, not the needs of the children.

Financial support

There is no national minimum financial allowance for kinship carers. Many kinship carers reported struggling to make ends meet, and high levels of uncertainty about the financial support they may be entitled to, how much they could receive and how long it would be available to them for.



"I think it would be good to have more group support, one to one meetings with other carers"

"Provide more help and support, especially financially, for informal kinship carers. Most people have to give up their jobs and the local authority don't want to know if they have not placed the child with the carer"

"Local kinship groups. It is now nine years since the [special guardianship order] and I've only just become involved with them... and they found me, I had no inkling!"

"There is a lack of financial support to purchase equipment, especially when taking on babies"

"If we get ill through stress or lack of respite what happens to the child?"

Grandparents Plus

Grandparents Plus is the national kinship care charity. We are here for all kinship carers, through our networks, services and programmes.

Kinship Care Network

Our free network keeps kinship carers connected and up-to-date on the world of kinship care.

Advice Service

Our advice service provides free and independent advice on welfare benefits, financial support, employment, housing and education amongst other topics.

0300 123 7015
advice@grandparentsplus.org.uk

Someone Like Me

Our Someone Like Me service provides telephone peer support for kinship carers and offers the chance for them to talk to someone who has been in a similar position.

Local Support Groups

There is a network of friendly local support groups for kinship carers across the country, and these are a great place to meet people who understand what you may be going through.

Professionals Network

Our network of over 500 professionals who all have an interest in kinship care.

Kinship Ready

One-day preparation workshops, designed specifically to support special guardians when they first begin their journey, they can be commissioned by the local authority.

Kinship Connected

Our Kinship Connected programme, available for commission by local authorities, offers tailored support to kinship carers.

Kinship Active

A pilot programme in Teesside for kinship families that encourages physical activity and better health and well-being.

“I wish I had gone into this process with more knowledge and understanding of the whole process as the stress has massively impacted on my marriage and my other children/ grandchildren”

What is needed

1: A Kinship Care Act

Kinship care must be recognised in law. Current inequality in the support available to kinship carers can impact everything from the financial and practical support they can expect to receive, to school choice and access to funding for specific therapies for children who have suffered trauma.

It is a legal requirement to place children with family first where possible, and the vast majority of children who can't be raised by their parents are looked after by kinship carers.

Central government must invest at all levels to ensure local authorities and the voluntary sector have the resources to support kinship families. There is national guidance - the Statutory Guidance for Family and Friends Care - but it is interpreted and implemented differently in each local authority.

Legislation is needed to ensure that kinship care is recognised in law and there must be immediate investment to ensure local authorities are funded to give kinship carers the support they need.

2: Comprehensive information and advice, specific to the needs of every kinship family as soon as they are asked to look after the child, for as long as they need it

Kinship carers should have access to specialist and independent information and advice. Kinship carers should have access to free, independent legal advice in order to make informed decisions about the care arrangements they make for the child as soon as they are asked to look after the children.

They should also have access to specialist advice to ensure they are able to access allowances and benefits they are entitled to, as well as signposting to peer support groups.

3: Kinship carers should have access to specialist and independent support

Kinship carers should be entitled to request an assessment of their family's support needs from the local authority at any time they feel is necessary. A child placed in kinship care at birth or at a very young age might take many years to show signs of trauma in their behaviour, long after any initial assessment period might have taken place. However, many local authorities have closed the child's case by this time and are reluctant to look again at the child and families' needs.

Tailored and specific training should be made available for kinship carers who feel they might benefit

Support should continue beyond the child's 18th birthday to lessen potential restrictions on the choices facing young people who have grown up in kinship care as they gain their independence or in accessing higher education.

What is needed

Kinship carers should be entitled to financial support. This should be available wherever they live, with a national minimum allowance to cover the costs of bringing up a child in kinship care. There should be greater clarity and consistency about financial support available to kinship carers.

Kinship carers should have access to one to one and peer support. Many kinship carers experience isolation due to the unique pressures of bringing up a child in kinship care. It is essential that they are able to meet others in similar situations.

Peer support from other kinship carers, arranged and supported by local authorities or voluntary agencies must be provided in each local authority to ensure important help at an early stage as well as ongoing support for all kinship carers regardless of the legal order they have for the child they are raising.

Kinship carers should have support in managing contact arrangements. Contact arrangements between the child being brought up in kinship care and their parents, siblings or other family members can be complex and stressful and the responsibility for their facilitation often falls to the kinship carer. This can mean bearing the cost and time of multiple visits, supporting the child through sometimes difficult meetings and ensuring the child's safety and well-being. Local authorities should offer support to kinship carers to manage these arrangements.

Children and young people in all forms of kinship care should be entitled to targeted support, including the extension of Adoption Support Fund and Pupil Premium Plus eligibility to all children living permanently with a kinship carer.

4: Creating an informed and supportive network

Children raised in kinship care should be entitled to the awareness, understanding and support of those around them for as long as they need it, including better support for their transition into independent living.

Awareness and training in kinship care should be offered by local authorities or voluntary organisations to all relevant organisations and service providers - including local authorities, schools, GP surgeries, job centres, voluntary organisations advice services, and community groups. Kinship families require a network of support around them and young people's needs will only be better met if key professionals in a range of agencies, including the voluntary sector, work together to provide an integrated response to the challenges they face.

Kinship carers should be entitled to suitable housing and be given priority by the local authority. Many kinship carers find themselves having to make rapid adjustments to find the space required to raise their kinship family, often waiting many years for the local authority to find appropriate accommodation or, in private housing, meeting the costs themselves. For many, this has meant giving up their own rooms for the children they are raising, using up their savings or taking on greater debt to make the necessary changes. Local authorities must ensure that kinship carers have their, often changing, housing needs met.



Grandparents Plus is the national kinship care charity - supporting relatives and friends who step in to raise children who aren't able to live with their parents.

We strive for a society in which kinship carers and the children they care for are recognised, valued and supported.

Our support services address the significant financial, practical and emotional challenges that kinship carers face.



grandparentsplus.org.uk



020 8981 8001



info@grandparentsplus.org.uk



[@grandparentsplusinfo](https://www.facebook.com/grandparentsplusinfo)



[@GPlusinfo](https://twitter.com/GPlusinfo)