



Support for Single Kinship Carer Families

Briefing for debate tabled by Amy Callaghan MP on 14 March 2023

Summary

- Single kinship carers are often overlooked and locked out of accessing support earmarked for lone parents, despite facing complex challenges.
- Many single kinship carers struggle to access the same entitlements to childcare due to the legal status of their child(ren).
- Due to complex family dynamics, kinship carers often have a depleted family network to rely on, providing less options for childcare making employment difficult to maintain.
- Unemployment in kinship families is higher than in lone parent families, this is partly due to a lack of statutory employment leave, forcing kinship carers out of work to help their child(ren) adjust to new living arrangements.
- Lone kinship carers are prone to loneliness and isolation.

Over one third of kinship families are single parent families

Limited support is available for lone parents, yet many kinship families are overlooked and locked out of accessing support earmarked for lone parents due to the informal nature of many kinship arrangements and a lack of understanding by services and practitioners. 2021 census data tells us that 15.4% of families in the UK are lone parent familiesⁱ, however the prevalence of lone parent households amongst kinship families is far higher than that of the general population; **35% of carers surveyed by Kinship in 2022 were single, raising their kinship child(ren) alone**ⁱⁱ.

Kinship carers are more likely to experience poverty

When a kinship carer takes on the role, they become completely financially responsible for their children. Kinship carers are predominantly older women, often living in insecure housing and areas of high deprivation, with lower incomes. Many will have retired or had plans to retire soon but find their financial planning to be insufficient in light of the unexpected costs of raising a child. 7 in 10 kinship carers surveyed had been forced to spend their savings or pension pots to care for their child(ren).

Our 2022 Financial Allowances survey found that kinship carers are facing financial destitution: 44% told us they couldn't afford all their household bills, 26% food for their families, and 35% clothes for their childrenⁱⁱⁱ. Last year, 89% of kinship carers told us that they worried about their financial situation^{iv}. **Unlike foster carers, kinship carers do not have a right to a financial allowance from the local authority** to help them cover the costs of raising a child. One-third of the 1500+ carers who responded to our survey told us they were worried their financial situations might eventually prevent them from being able to care for their children; this would come at a significant cost to children, their families, and to the state. Kinship's [#ValueOurLove](#) campaign has put significant pressure on the Government to equalise financial allowances between kinship carers and foster carers which would significantly help to alleviate the numbers of kinship families experiencing poverty.

Additional issues with employment

Compounding kinship carers' precarious financial situations is the lack of paid leave from employment. Unlike adoptive parents, kinship carers do not have a right to leave when a child first comes to live with them; this period is crucial to help a child settle and to provide the stability they need.

Nearly half (45%)^v of kinship carers are forced to give up work and many more (62%)^{vi} reduce their hours, further risking their financial security. Kinship's [#ValueOurLove](#) campaign calls for statutory kinship care leave on a par with adoption leave. This will ensure kinship carers do not have to leave employment if they don't need or want to and supports a choice based on the needs of the child, reducing risk of financial insecurity.

The national single parent employment rate is high at 65.5%^{vii}. The kinship carer employment rate is significantly lower at 39%^{viii} despite close to 4 in 5 being of working age.

Childcare

Single parent kinship carers are disproportionately impacted by rising childcare costs due to high levels of financial insecurity. In addition to affordability, kinship carers can struggle to find childcare that offers the right setting and approach for children who have often experienced significant trauma and adversity and need additional support as a result. **Many kinship carers find that they are unfairly locked out of existing childcare support schemes** such as 15 hours free childcare for 2-year-olds, particularly if there isn't a legal order securing the kinship care arrangement and when the child wasn't previously in local authority care.

Increasingly grandparents are the 'backbone' for many family's childcare needs, providing a stable, reliable, flexible, and affordable childcare solution. One study has found that up to 85% of grandparents offer some kind of support with childcare^{ix}. Many kinship families do not have that option, as kinship carers are most commonly grandparents. Additionally, kinship carers often face alienation from extended family networks as the shift in relationship dynamics can make managing family ties very difficult, sometimes even causing spousal relationship breakdowns, leaving even less family to support with childcare.

Loneliness / isolation

Research shows that single parents face a heightened risk of loneliness^x. In a recent survey, over a third of kinship carers said they looked after their children by themselves^{xi}, likely increasing feelings of isolation and loneliness commonly experienced by those who take on a kinship caring role. It's common for carers to find that friendships fall away as they lose the time they once had for social activities and grow disconnected from the experiences of friends who don't understand their new circumstances. Kinship has established a peer support group for single kinship carers to help tackle loneliness and isolation and create a space where the unique challenges they face are understood, and not overlooked as part of a wider group of single parents^{xii}.

Suggested questions:

The key point to be made is that many kinship carers are raising children on their own but are locked out of accessing support that other single parent families are entitled to, despite commonly facing additional practical, financial, and emotional challenges. We urge you to raise awareness of the disparity in support for kinship families, and push the Government to deliver both urgent support for kinship families who are struggling today, as well as ambitious children's social care reforms for the kinship families of tomorrow.

1. What is the Government doing to recognise families headed up by a single kinship carer, and will the Government commit to ensuring they get the support they deserve in the forthcoming kinship care strategy?
2. As part of the forthcoming kinship care strategy, can the Government commit to exploring ways to ensure that single kinship carers are not locked out of accessing childcare allowances due to their child(ren)'s legal status?
3. In line with Kinship's [#ValueOurLove](#) campaign, does the Government plan to introduce statutory kinship care leave on a par with adoption leave to allow a greater number of single kinship carers to stay in work?

#ValueOurLove campaign



The Government recently published its Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy, setting out new commitments to kinship families including a dedicated kinship care strategy by the end of 2023. This marked a pivotal moment for kinship care.

In line with the #ValueOurLove campaign, we want to see the Government set out bold and positive commitments to all kinship families in their strategy by including these four urgent changes to

equalise support between kinship and foster and adoptive families:

- 1. Equalise allowances between foster and kinship families:** All kinship families should receive the financial support they need, when they need it. This should include a financial allowance that matches the current minimum fostering allowance to help them cover the unexpected costs of caring for a child.
- 2. Equalise access to training and support between kinship carers and foster carers:** Kinship carers should have access to information, advice, practical and emotional support from the point they take on a child, including free legal advice, preparation and training, therapeutic and peer support.
- 3. Equalise leave between adoptive and kinship families:** Kinship carers should receive kinship care leave on a par with adoption leave when the child first moves into their care to allow the child to settle in.
- 4. Equalise support between children in kinship care and those in care:** Children in kinship care should have extra support in school and access to health and therapeutic support to help them deal with the impact of abuse, trauma and loss.

To date, the campaign has received the support of **over 12,400 signatories** including a number of parliamentarians across both Houses. Every single MP in England and Wales have been contacted by their constituents about this campaign. You too can lend your support, learn more about the campaign, and **find out more about kinship families in every parliamentary constituency in England and Wales** by visiting:

ValueOurLove.Kinship.org.uk

About Kinship

Kinship is the leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. We offer kinship carers financial, legal, practical, and emotional support and understanding from the moment they need it, for as long as they need it. We want every kinship family to be recognised, valued, and supported. For more information, please visit kinship.org.uk or contact Natalie Grubb-Latouche, Senior Policy and Public Affairs Officer, at natalie.grubb-latouche@kinship.org.uk.

ⁱ Office of National Statistics, [Family and Household Data](#), 2021

ⁱⁱ [Cost of Loving](#), Kinship, 2022

ⁱⁱⁱ [Financial allowances survey](#), Kinship, 2022

^{iv} [Financial allowances survey](#), Kinship, 2022

^v [Cost of Loving](#), Kinship, 2022

^{vi} [Cost of Loving](#), Kinship, 2022

^{vii} Office of National Statistics, [Employment and Labour Data](#), 2022

^{viii} [Cost of Loving](#), Kinship, 2022

^{ix} [Guardian](#), 2022

^x [Gingerbread](#), 2023

^{xi} [Cost of Loving](#), Kinship, 2022

^{xii} [Kinship Compass](#), Kinship, 2023