



For family or friends who  
step up to raise a child.

# Make or Break

Annual survey of kinship carers 2024

October 2024



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# Executive summary

## Introduction

*Make or Break*, published during Kinship Care Week 2024, shares key findings from Kinship's 2024 annual survey of more than 1,300 kinship carers to provide an updated 'state of the nation' overview of kinship families. It offers new insight into the lives of kinship carers, the financial circumstances of kinship households and local authority information and support, and highlights the stark realities facing kinship families in 2024.

## Key findings

### The lives of kinship carers

Kinship carers are more likely than other adults to be disabled, to report having poor health, to feel lonely and anxious, and to be providing unpaid care alongside their kinship caring responsibilities.



**4 in 10**

kinship carers were disabled

**1 in 8**

kinship carers said their health was bad or very bad

**36%**

of kinship carers were also unpaid carers

### Finances

Kinship families in 2024 are continuing to face significant hardship, and their greater reliance on welfare support leaves them vulnerable to financial insecurity.



**Four times**

more likely to have had a direct debit, standing order or bill they weren't able to pay in the last month

**8%**

of kinship carers were using food banks because of increases in the cost of living

**46%**

of working-age kinship carers were receiving Universal Credit

## Local authority support

There are some positive signals that local authority support and information is improving, but kinship carers still tell us this is far from good enough.



**8pp**  
more likely to say local authority support was excellent or good than in 2023

**A third**  
of kinship carers rated their local authority's information as very poor

**44%**  
of kinship carers did not trust their local authority at all

## Family stability

Too many kinship families remain at breaking point, and continued inaction risks significant consequences for children and for the state.



**More than 1 in 8**  
kinship carers were concerned they might have to stop caring for their kinship children

**17%**  
of kinship carers had been unable to take on the care of a brother or sister to a kinship child in their care

## Recommendations

Please see page 38 for a detailed set of recommendations.

### Equalising financial support

The UK and Welsh Governments should equalise financial allowances between foster carers and kinship carers, ensuring kinship families across England and Wales receive a non-means tested allowance at least equivalent to the national minimum fostering allowance.

In the interim, local authorities should emulate leading practice in the provision of allowances and ensure financial issues are never the reason for a kinship arrangement ceasing or changing to a different type when in the child's best interests.

The UK Government should also introduce a statutory right to kinship care leave and pay, at least on a par with that given to adoptive parents.

### Improving support for kinship families

All local authorities should ensure they provide up-to-date, accessible and visible information about the support available to kinship families of all types, including signposting to support from Kinship. Forthcoming kinship care statutory guidance for England should reaffirm the requirement for local authorities to publish a specific family and friends care (kinship) policy and a clear, joined-up local offer of support,

All kinship carers should be offered free and independent advice, including legal advice facilitated by extended eligibility for legal aid, from the moment they are considering becoming kinship carers and throughout their journey.

Local authorities should ensure the provision of tailored and accessible local training and support services, including peer support, for all kinship carers, and signpost to Kinship's new national offer of training and support in England.

## **Building a new kinship care system**

Future policy development should build on testing of family network support packages and family group decision making in England to improve early support for kinship families. The Law Commission's project should explore the potential for bespoke kinship care pathways.

Local authorities should establish specialist kinship teams with the breadth of skills necessary to deliver high-quality social work support where these do not exist already.

The UK Government must not delay significant additional investment in kinship care and children's social care at the next fiscal opportunities – particularly within the forthcoming Autumn Statement and as part of the next Spending Review.

# Foreword



Two years on from the launch of Kinship's [#ValueOurLove](#) campaign, much has changed. More than ever, politicians and the public know what kinship care is and back our calls to improve support for kinship families.

Through the hard work of kinship carers pushing for change locally and nationally, we now have a first-ever [National Kinship Care Strategy for England](#) and significant momentum behind our campaign to equalise support between kinship families and foster and adoptive families.

But our political leaders need to keep pace – and act fast. It really is make-or-break time.

As *Make or Break* shows, many kinship families continue to be pushed to their limits, and the stark realities of caring for a relative or friend's child are clear to see. Whilst we can point to some welcome progress, national policy isn't moving far or fast enough to deliver the urgent financial, practical and emotional support which kinship carers and their children need.

We find ourselves at a pivotal moment where the new UK Government has an enormous opportunity to change the futures for thousands of kinship children and break down the barriers which prevent them from healing and thriving into adulthood.

This will only happen if they are serious about a mission-driven approach which avoids the 'sticking plaster' policies which have come before. The Government must seize the moment to [maintain the momentum and deliver urgent support](#) by choosing to invest in kinship care as part of the forthcoming Spending Review, and then consider the essential ingredients to building a kinship care system that's fit for the future.

In Wales too, a new First Minister and Cabinet offer the chance for the Welsh Government to put children, including those raised in kinship care, at the heart of policymaking. As a nation with a history of pioneering and progressive reform, kinship families cannot be left behind as progress is made across the border.

Initial signs are promising. We were delighted to welcome the new Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP, to [meet with an incredible group of ten kinship carers](#) we support on only her second day in post. The new UK Government has also [outlined plans to introduce a Children's Wellbeing Bill](#) to begin fulfilling its legislative ambitions for children's social care.

It was two years ago that Bridget Phillipson MP, then Shadow Secretary of State for Education, spoke at our [#ValueOurLove campaign launch](#) and promised that "Labour will not forget kinship carers. We will not forget the children you care for. We will not forget the difference you make. We will always remember the love you give".

It's time to make good on this promise, not break it.

We stand ready to help – and to hold to account – to ensure that the more than 141,000 children in kinship care across England and Wales and those caring for them get the recognition and support they have long deserved.

**Dr Lucy Peake**  
**Chief Executive**  
**October 2024**

# Introduction

## About kinship care

Kinship care is when a child lives full-time or most of the time with a relative or family friend, usually because their parents are not able to care for them. The best estimates suggest there are more than 141,000 children in kinship care in England and Wales<sup>1</sup> – three times the number in unrelated foster care<sup>2</sup>.

Grandparents are most commonly kinship carers, but they can also be older siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins and family friends. Kinship care can take many forms, and the rights, responsibilities and support available to kinship families depends largely on the type of arrangement they have.

## About *Make Or Break*

*Make or Break*, published during Kinship Care Week 2024, shares key findings from Kinship's 2024 annual survey of kinship carers to provide an updated 'state of the nation' overview of kinship families. It offers new insight into the lives of kinship carers, the financial circumstances of kinship households and local authority information and support, and highlights the stark realities facing kinship families in 2024.

It follows a series of reports and papers based on the findings from Kinship's 2023 annual survey which made a compelling case for policy and practice change, including *Breaking Point*, *Forgotten* and *Out of Order*.

Case studies included in the report come from kinship carers supported by Kinship and/or who are involved in contributing their views and expertise to our policy and campaigns activity, including those who completed our 2024 annual survey. All are shared with full permission, but some names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals and their families: these are marked with an asterisk.

## About our 2024 annual survey

Kinship has conducted a sector-leading annual survey of kinship carers since 2016. These are the largest of their kind, and the findings help us to develop an understanding of what life has been like for kinship carers over the previous year and learn more about the issues they and their families face so that we can deliver support services attuned to their needs and campaign for the policy and practice changes they want to see.

Our 2024 annual survey was developed using Form Assembly and open to responses from 6 August to 1 September 2024. It was promoted widely via Kinship's community of kinship carers, social media channels, partner organisations, and our networks of professionals and researchers.

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1 Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021 [Published 26 September 2023]  
2 Department for Education (2023) Children looked after in England including adoptions [Published 16 November 2023]



We're extremely grateful to the more than 1,300 kinship carers across England and Wales who kindly gave up their time to share their views and experiences with us through our annual survey this year. Thanks to Dr Alexandra Turner for delivering analysis of this year's survey responses.

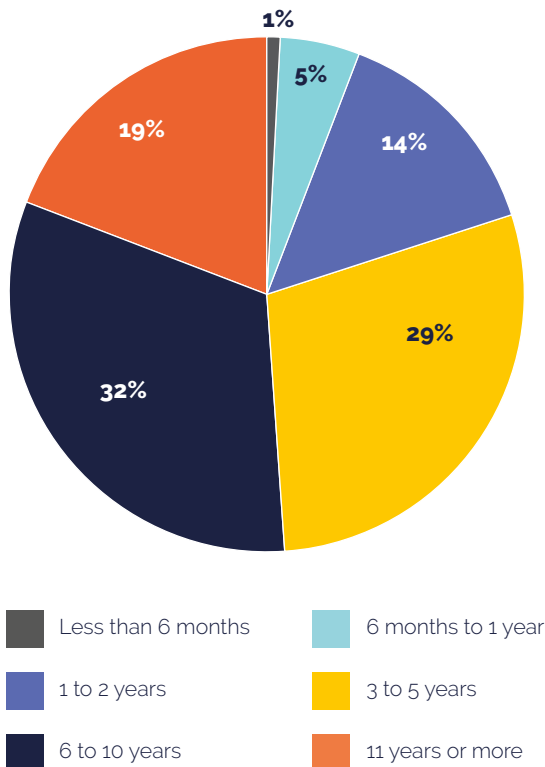
# Our 2024 annual survey cohort

1,342 kinship carers kindly gave up their valuable time to complete our 2024 annual survey. Together, they were caring for at least 1,954 kinship children; around two thirds (65%) of kinship carers were caring for one kinship child and around a quarter (26%) for two.



Respondents had most commonly been a kinship carer for 6 to 10 years but our survey cohort reflects a wide range of relatively new kinship carers and those who have been raising the children of relatives and friends for several years, offering substantial insight into the unique needs, strengths and experiences of kinship families across England and Wales.

## How long have you been a kinship carer?



Time as a kinship carer	Percentage of kinship carers
Less than 6 months	1%
6 months to 1 year	5%
1 to 2 years	14%
3 to 5 years	29%
6 to 10 years	32%
11 years or more	19%

## Age

As with last year's survey, the median age of kinship carers who completed our 2024 annual survey was 55-59 and nearly half (48%) of respondents were aged 60 or over. This likely reflects the high proportion of grandparent kinship carers amongst our survey respondents and what we understand to be the makeup of the wider kinship carer cohort. A very similar age profile is also seen in the partners and spouses of survey respondents (where applicable).

However, it is welcome to see an increasing number of younger kinship carers engaging with our annual survey. Despite a lower overall number of respondents this year, the number of kinship carers aged under 40 who responded to our 2024 annual survey was 58% higher than in 2023. This may reflect additional targeted activity over the last year designed to develop support and community spaces for younger, non-grandparent kinship carers, including our [Aunt and Uncle Kinship Carers' Group](#).

It was most common for kinship carer respondents to be caring for at least one kinship child aged 10 to 15 years old (46%), followed by at least one kinship child aged 5 to 9 years old (39%). Nearly 1 in 5 kinship carers (18%) were caring for multiple kinship children in different age groups.

Age group	Percentage of kinship carers caring for at least one kinship child in this age group
Under 1	1%
1 to 4 years	18%
5 to 9 years	39%
10 to 15 years	46%
16 years and over	17%

This aligns broadly with the age profile of kinship children represented in last year's survey cohort and with what we understand to be the age profile of children in kinship care as identified by ONS analysis of Census 2021 data, where 4 in 10 children living in kinship care were teenagers.<sup>3</sup> This is overall a younger cohort of children than those looked after in local authority care where 38% are aged 10 to 15 years and 26% are aged 16 and over.<sup>4</sup>

## Gender

Although the vast majority kinship carers responding to our annual survey continue to be women (87%), the proportion of male kinship carers is increasing; men represented 12% of this year's respondents, up from 7% in 2021.<sup>5</sup> Again, this may reflect additional efforts through our programmes, peer support and communications activity to reach more male kinship carers, including our [Men's Kinship Carers' Group](#).

Including the partners or spouses of survey respondents (if applicable), 62% of kinship carers within the kinship households represented in our 2024 annual survey were female. This continues to suggest that, in households where a mixed gender couple are acting as kinship

3 Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021 [Published 26 September 2023]

4 Department for Education (2023) Children looked after in England including adoptions [Published 16 November 2023]

5 Kinship (2021) Kinship care: State of the Nation Survey 2021

carers, women are more likely to act as the 'lead' in engaging with the systems and services which impact on their family's life, including in accessing advice, support and community spaces through Kinship.

Gender	Percentage of kinship carers	Percentage of kinship carers' partners or spouses	Kinship carers and their partners or spouses
Female	87%	17%	62%
Male	12%	83%	38%
Non-binary	<1%	0%	<1%
Prefer not to say	<1%	<1%	<1%

Kinship care is similarly impacted by the gendered socioeconomic and cultural forces which dictate the characteristics of those with caring responsibilities across society. As explored later in this report and in our *Forced Out* report, the lack of employment support for kinship carers in particular is likely to be exacerbating the economic penalty facing the – predominantly – older women who become kinship carers.

## Ethnicity

94% of survey respondents were White, and the vast majority (96%) of this group identified as White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British. Only 3% of kinship carers responding to our survey were Black, Black British, Caribbean or African, 1% had a Mixed or multiple ethnic groups background, and fewer than 1% were Asian or Asian British.

This is a broadly similar ethnicity profile to those of previous Kinship annual survey respondents since 2021, and the small number of respondents from some Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds will significantly limit the ability of our survey findings and insights to reflect the full diversity of kinship families' views and experiences.

However, as in 2023, the ethnicity profile of the kinship children represented in our 2024 annual survey cohort has several key differences to that of their kinship carers. Although not directly comparable to last year (where we asked about the ethnicity of each individual kinship child in their care), 10% of kinship carers said they were caring a child with a Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups background and 86% were caring for a child with a White ethnic background, although the percentage of those caring for a child from an Asian or Asian British or Black, Black British, Caribbean or African ethnic backgrounds were similar to the percentage of kinship carers with that ethnicity. Only 2% of kinship carers were caring for multiple children with different ethnicities.

Ethnic group	Percentage of kinship carers	Percentage of kinship carers caring for at least one child from this ethnic group <sup>6</sup>
Asian or Asian British	1%	1%
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	3%	3%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	1%	10%
White	94%	86%
Other ethnic group	1%	1%

<sup>6</sup> Percentages may not add to 100 as respondents were able to select multiple categories if they were caring for more multiple kinship children with different ethnicities.

Evidence on the ethnic profile of children in kinship care suggests our survey cohort likely underrepresents those from some Black and ethnic minority backgrounds, although may overrepresent those within the Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups category. ONS analysis of Census 2021 suggests that 75% of children in kinship care are White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British, and that around 9% are Black, Black British, Caribbean or African and 4% are Asian or Asian British. However, prevalence is markedly different within aggregated ethnic group categories, especially when compared to children in parental households.

We also know that children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds are underrepresented in formalised kinship arrangements (i.e. kinship foster care and kinship special guardianship).<sup>7</sup> This likely contributes to the ethnicity profile of our survey respondents given the relative proportions of those caring for children under formalised arrangements to those with informal arrangements; the type of kinship arrangements within our 2024 annual survey cohort is explored further in the following section.

We want to ensure our information, advice and support reaches kinship families who we have struggled to engage with previously, and so we can develop the trust and relationships with kinship carers that enable them to feel comfortable sharing their experiences and views with us as part of our annual survey.

There isn't a lot of research about the experiences of people from Black and Asian families who are raising someone else's child, which means that organisations don't know enough about what support and services would be helpful for kinship carers and children from these communities. As such, we have partnered with the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford to deliver a research project – [Raising someone else's child: the experiences of Black and Asian kinship carers in England](#) – to explore this further.

We have also developed our [Diverse Families Group](#) to support kinship carers to talk about the importance of racial identity, culture and heritage, and worked with [Families in Harmony](#) to deliver a six-part workshop series on Exploring Cultural Identity in Blended Ethnic Families, creating a safe online space for kinship carers to discuss their experiences and gain guidance and peer support on raising children of a different race from their own or blended with their own.

## Relationships

More than 7 in 10 kinship carers (73%) said they were a grandparent to at least one kinship child in their care, consistent with previous annual surveys and who we understand as the most likely members of a child's family network to take on a kinship caring role. In the ONS analysis of Census 2021 data, more than one half of children in kinship care lived with at least one grandparent.<sup>8</sup> Around 3% of kinship carers who responded to our survey were caring for multiple children who had different relationships to them (i.e. one grandchild and one step grandchild).

Relationship to child	Percentage of kinship carers <sup>9</sup>
Grandparent	73%
Aunt or uncle	13%
Step grandparent	5%
Friend	2%
Great grandparent	2%
Cousin	1%
Sibling	<1%
Other relative	1%
Other	4%
Prefer not to say	<1%

<sup>7</sup> What Works for Children's Social Care (2022) Understanding formal kinship care arrangements in England: Analysis of administrative data

<sup>8</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021 [Published 26 September 2023]

<sup>9</sup> Percentages may not add to 100 as respondents were able to select multiple categories if they were caring for more multiple kinship children with different relationships to them.

## Location

At least one kinship carer in 95% of all local authorities who deliver children's services in England and Wales completed our 2024 annual survey. Compared to the proportion of kinship households in each region as identified by ONS analysis of Census 2021, our survey cohort may overrepresent kinship households from the South East and North East of England and underrepresent kinship households from London and the West Midlands.



Prevalence of kinship care can vary considerably across the country and is closely associated with patterns of poverty and deprivation: six of the ten local authorities with the highest proportions of kinship households in England are in the North East.<sup>10</sup>

Around 7 in 10 (71%) of kinship carers were living in the same local authority that their kinship child(ren) lived in before coming into their care, similar to previous years. Last year, more than half (57%) of kinship carers told us they had experienced challenges accessing support for their kinship family as a result of living in a different local authority to the one their child was living in and supported by previously.<sup>11</sup>

## Type of kinship arrangement

The majority of respondents (69%) were special guardians to at least one kinship child. 16% were caring for at least one child as a kinship foster carer, 1 in 10 of kinship carers (10%) had a child arrangements or residence order, and 6% were caring for at least one child in an informal arrangement.

Type of kinship arrangement	Percentage of kinship carers caring for at least one child under this type of arrangement
I have a special guardianship order	69%
I am a kinship (family and friends) foster carer	16%
I have a child arrangements or residence order	10%
A have an informal arrangement	6%
Other <sup>12</sup>	2%
Prefer not to say	<1%
Don't know	<1%

The vast majority (97%) were caring for children under one type of kinship arrangement, but 3% of kinship households represented in our 2024 annual survey cohort included multiple children cared for under different kinship arrangements.

For those who were kinship foster carers, more than 6 in 10 were caring for at least one child placed with them under a full care order (s31), 15% under an interim care order (s38), 9% under a voluntary arrangement (s20 in England or s76 in Wales) and 2% under an emergency protection order.

However, as many as 14% of kinship foster carers said they didn't know under which order their kinship child(ren) was placed with them, illustrating the often poor information shared with kinship carers about the nature of their arrangement and what this means for their kinship care journeys.

<sup>10</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021 | Published 26 September 2023|

<sup>11</sup> Kinship (2023) Breaking Point: kinship carers in crisis

<sup>12</sup> This includes private foster carers, those with an adoption order and others, testamentary guardians and some respondents who erroneously selected 'Other' but didn't include enough additional information to clearly determine the type of arrangement(s) they had.

For responding special guardians, the vast majority (91%) were caring for at least one child under a special guardianship order made following care proceedings involving local authority children's services, and 11% for at least one child where the order was made in private law proceedings.

Reflecting what we understand about the differing use of special guardianship and child arrangements orders across the public and private law proceedings routes<sup>13,14</sup>, a greater proportion of kinship carers with child arrangements or residence orders were caring for at least one child where the order was made in private law proceedings (47%), although the majority were still caring for at least one child where the order was made following care proceedings involving local authority children's services (64%).

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13 Cusworth, L. et al (2023) *Uncovering private family law: Exploring applications that involve non-parents ('the other 10%')*. Nuffield Family Justice Observatory.

14 Kinship (2024) *Out of Order: the case for boosting financial support for kinship arrangements outside the care system*



# The lives of kinship carers

**Kinship carers are more likely than other adults to be disabled, to report having poor health, to feel lonely and anxious, and to be providing unpaid care alongside their kinship caring responsibilities.**

Kinship's sector-leading annual surveys have, since 2016, brought to light the huge challenges facing kinship carers and the impact which taking on the care of a relative or friend's child can have on their physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Given what we know about the age profile of kinship carers and the prevalence of multiple dimensions of deprivation within kinship households, the demands of parenting children who commonly have social, emotional and behavioural or other special educational or additional learning needs can exacerbate existing physical or mental health challenges for their kinship carers.

In this year's survey, we again prioritised asking questions which would allow us to compare self-reported health and wellbeing measures to the general population and build a year-on-year understanding of how things might be changing (or not) for kinship carers.

## Disability

In our 2022 annual survey, over half (54%) of kinship carers told us they had a long-term health condition or disability and nearly a quarter (23%) said they needed but hadn't received professional support for this.<sup>15</sup> Other research has identified that kinship carers are far more likely to have a disability or chronic health condition than unrelated foster carers.<sup>16</sup>

In this year's annual survey, we adopted the harmonised standard for measuring disability as used in Census 2021 and elsewhere, allowing us to understand how prevalence of disability within our survey cohort compares to other groups.

More than half (52%) of kinship carers said they had a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more, and of this group, 18% said that a condition or illness reduced their ability to carry out day-to-day activities a lot and 59% said it reduced this a little. As such, 4 in 10 kinship carers (40%) in our 2024 annual survey cohort were disabled; this is more than double the proportion of disabled people across England and Wales (17.8%).<sup>17</sup>



**4 in 10**  
kinship carers  
were disabled

<sup>15</sup> Kinship (2022) The Cost of Loving: annual survey of kinship carers 2022

<sup>16</sup> Farmer, E. and Moyers, S. (2008) Kinship care: Fostering Effective Family and Friends Care

<sup>17</sup> Office for National Statistics (2023) Disability, England and Wales: Census 2021 (Published 19 January 2023)

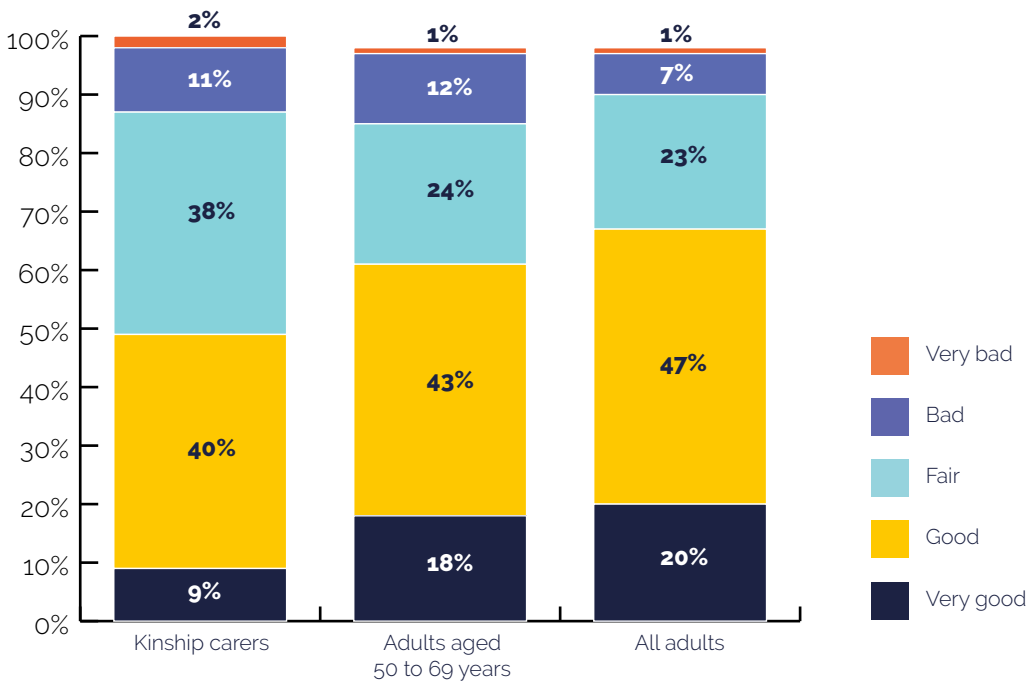
Even when considering the age profile of our survey cohort, levels of disability are higher than would be expected; for adults aged 55 to 59 years old in England (the median age of kinship carers who responded to our survey), 23% of women and 19% of men were disabled. This aligns with what we understand from ONS analysis of Census 2021 which found that, of all kinship households in England and Wales, nearly half (46.8%) were deprived in the health and disability dimension compared with a quarter (25.4%) of parental households.<sup>18</sup>

## Health

Around 1 in 8 (12%) of kinship carers told us their health was bad or very bad in general, similar to last year (13%).<sup>19</sup> This remains a considerably higher percentage than for all adults (8%), although is comparable to the self-reported health of those aged 50 to 69 years old (13%)<sup>20</sup>; around two thirds of our survey respondents were in this age group.

Kinship carers were much less likely – even when considering our survey cohort's age profile – to say their health was very good; 9% of kinship carers told us their health was very good compared to 20% of all adults or 18% of those aged 50 to 69 years old only.

### How is your health in general?



	Kinship carers – Aug/Sep 2024	Adults aged 50 to 69 years old – July 2024	All adults – July 2024
Very bad	2%	1%	1%
Bad	11%	12%	7%
Fair	38%	24%	23%
Good	40%	43%	47%
Very good	9%	18%	20%

18 Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021 [Published 26 September 2023]

19 Kinship (2023) Breaking Point: kinship carers in crisis

20 Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2024) Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: personal well-being and loneliness – 5 to 28 July 2024 [Published 16 August 2024]

## Fiona

**Fiona, 65, from Dorset, became a kinship carer when her grandson for four-and-a-half months old..**

*"My grandson was taken into foster care at birth and I was told that unless I applied for a Special Guardianship Order to look after him, he would stay in the care system.*

*I felt pressured and pushed into taking out a guardianship order because I didn't have a clue what my options were. I took social services at their word that this was the best for me and my grandson."*

Fiona had to give up her well-paid and satisfying career to care for her grandson who is now aged six. These days she survives on benefits and relies on food banks and school vouchers to get by.

*"My finances have gone down the pan. Becoming a kinship carer has had a huge impact on my life. Apart from contact with family members I am completely isolated. There's just one friend that I see once a month, so I do feel lonely.*

*Money wise I can't afford to do much. We struggle and I juggle credit cards. I try to keep household bills as low as possible. When it's cold I'll sit here with a rug on me while he's at school and eat child sized meals. It's miserable.*

*I can't afford to buy new clothes, so I buy from charity shops. I use food banks over Christmas and the school has organised a weekly food voucher which helps."*

Fiona says that her grandson is also struggling with behavioural issues and believes that if she had been a foster carer he would have received the assessments and therapeutic support he needs much faster.

*"I've been fighting to get him to see health professionals for the last two years. In the end I said 'this arrangement is going to break down unless he is assessed by experts'. Now he's finally starting to see the right professionals and I hope we're working towards a diagnosis and getting him the support he desperately needs.*

*It should not take me to reach breaking point for them to do something. I believe that if I were a foster carer we would have had the support we needed. Along the way I've had breakdowns through the stress of it all.*

*I really believe kinship carers should receive the same financial, practical and emotional and therapeutic support as foster carers, as we love our kinship children and are keeping them with family and out of the care system."*

Fiona said before she became a kinship carer she would enjoy walks out with her dog and meet friends for lunch. But due to her grandson's behavioural issues it's hard to go out anywhere. One place she manages to visit is Kinship's monthly local peer support group coffee mornings.

*"I don't feel so alone when I'm there. It's great because you can sit and chat about problems or issues you're going through and we sympathise and help each other. Often, we'll exchange useful information and ideas. I enjoy it and it's good to be with people who understand you and don't judge."*

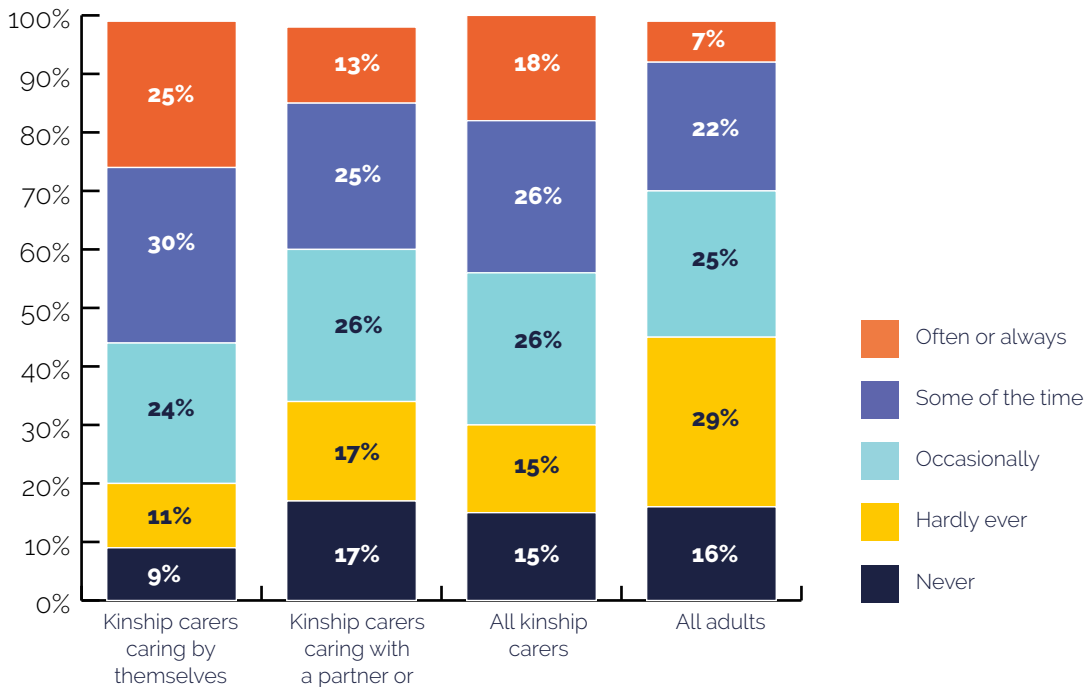
## Wellbeing

Nearly 4 in 10 kinship carers (37%) were caring for their kinship children on their own, with the remainder most commonly caring with the support of a partner or spouse. This suggests that lone caring amongst kinship carers is higher than for other groups raising children; in a 2021 survey of foster carers, 75% were fostering with their partner or another adult<sup>21</sup>, and during the year ending 31 March 2023, only 13% of children were adopted by single adopters.<sup>22</sup> Caring for a child without support is likely to intensify many of the challenges facing kinship families.

Similarly to last year, nearly 1 in 5 kinship carers (18%) said they felt lonely often or always. This is considerably higher than for all adults (7%), and even more so when considering the age profile of our survey respondents (only 6% of adults aged 50 to 69 years old said they felt lonely often or always).<sup>23</sup>

Feelings of loneliness were more common amongst those kinship carers who were caring for children on their own; lone kinship carers were almost twice as likely to say they felt lonely often or always compared to those caring for kinship children with the support of a partner or spouse (25% to 13% respectively). This is why we established a [Caring for Kinship Children on Your Own](#) online peer support group so that lone carers could meet others going through similar things.

### How often do you feel lonely?



21 The Fostering Network (2021) State of the Nation's Foster Care: 2021 report

22 Department for Education (2023) Children looked after in England including adoptions [Published 16 November 2023]

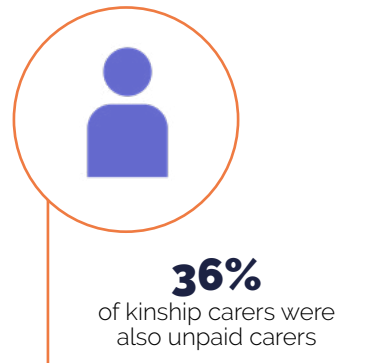
23 Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2024) Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: personal well-being and loneliness: 5 to 28 July [Published 16 August 2024]

	Kinship carers caring by themselves – Aug/Sep 2024	Kinship carers caring with a partner or spouse – Aug/Sep 2024	All kinship carers – Aug/Sep 2024	All adults – July 2024
Never	9%	17%	15%	16%
Hardly ever	11%	17%	15%	29%
Occasionally	24%	26%	26%	25%
Some of the time	30%	25%	26%	22%
Often or always	25%	13%	18%	7%

This year’s annual survey also reveals that levels of anxiety amongst kinship carers are likely to be higher than in the general population. We adopted one of the [ONS4 measures of personal wellbeing](#) and found that kinship carers were around 6pp more likely to report high levels of anxiety when compared to all adults, rising to 10pp when only considering adults aged 50 to 69. Our advice and information for kinship carers on [recognising and responding to anxiety](#) explores what anxiety is and how kinship carers might recognise it in themselves and the children in their care.

## Other caring responsibilities

Alongside their kinship caring responsibilities, 13% of kinship carers were also providing care for biological or step children. Our survey cohort were caring for at least an additional 332 biological, step or adopted children in their households; this suggests that, across England and Wales, efforts to improve financial, practical and emotional support for kinship families are likely to also benefit nearly 24,000 other children being raised by kinship carers. Last year, three quarters (75%) of kinship carers who were caring for their own biological or step children said they worried about the impact that becoming a kinship carer has had on them.<sup>24</sup>



In addition, more than a third of kinship carers (36%) told us that, in addition to their kinship caring responsibilities, they were providing care for a friend or family member who, due to illness, disability, mental health problems or an addiction, could not cope without their support.<sup>25</sup> This is four times the prevalence of unpaid carers identified by Census 2021 across England and Wales (9%)<sup>26</sup>, although other research suggests this could be higher. This is also reflected in the 14% of respondents who said they received Carer’s Allowance (see ‘Finances’).

Given that challenges around mental health and addiction are common reasons for why children might enter kinship care (40% of kinship carers responding to our 2022 annual survey said substance misuse was a reason for why their kinship children were unable to

<sup>24</sup> Kinship (2023) *Breaking Point: kinship carers in crisis*

<sup>25</sup> This wording is suggested by the Carers Trust to identify unpaid carers and differs slightly from that used in Census 2021 which was “Do you look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems related to old age?”. In our 2023 annual survey, we asked if respondents had other caring responsibilities for other adult family members; 28% of respondents said ‘yes’, suggesting the adoption of the new wording in our 2024 annual survey helped to reveal a greater prevalence of unpaid care than previously understood.

<sup>26</sup> Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) *Unpaid care, England and Wales: Census 2021* [Published 19 January 2023]

live with their parents, and 25% said parent disability, illness or mental health)<sup>27</sup>, it is arguably unsurprising to see such high levels of unpaid care amongst our survey cohort given the likelihood they are also providing care for their kinship children's parents.

This will likely bring substantial additional challenges for kinship carers who often describe complex feelings of love and loyalty as well as anger or frustration directed towards the relative or friend whose children they care for, depending on the circumstances which led to the child entering kinship care.

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<sup>27</sup> Kinship (2022) The Cost of Loving: annual survey of kinship carers 2022

# Finances

**Kinship families in 2024 are continuing to face significant hardship, and their greater reliance on welfare support leaves them vulnerable to financial insecurity.**

We know from our advice and support work and other research with kinship families that experiences of poverty and kinship care are inextricably linked.

Evidence suggests that kinship carers more likely to have lower incomes than any other group raising children<sup>28</sup>, and analysis of Census 2021 shows that kinship households are more likely to include people who are economically inactive and to be deprived across all measures: employment, education, health and disability, and housing<sup>29</sup>.

Unlike foster carers and adoptive parents, kinship carers don't make an active choice to take on the care of a child when they feel they are in a stable financial position to do so, but instead step up to provide a safe and loving home often without notice and when they may already be in precarious financial circumstances. The lack of consistent financial and employment support for kinship carers then acts to compound existing pressures on the household.

Our annual and financial allowances surveys have illustrated for several years the intensity of the chronic financial pressures facing kinship carers and the impact this has on the children in their care, despite the sacrifices which their kinship carers make to insulate them as best they can. This year's survey results point to continued hardship for families, although there are some signs that things have improved for some families since last year.

## Cost of living

Last year, our *Breaking Point* report found that the cost of living crisis was plunging kinship families into poverty. This year, demonstrating continued challenges with a high cost of living, kinship carers said they were four times more likely (17%) than all adults (4%) to have had a direct debit, standing order or bill they weren't able to pay in the last month.<sup>30</sup>

When asked what they were doing because of the increases in the cost of living, nearly 3 in 10 kinship carers (28%) said they were using credit more than usual, such as credit cards, loans or overdrafts. This is more than double the proportion of adults aged 50 to 69 years old who said they were doing so (13%) around the same time period.



### Four times

more likely to have had a direct debit, standing order or bill they weren't able to pay in the last month

28 Wijesasa, D (2017) Children growing up in the care of relatives in the UK: Policy Report 18, Nov 2017. University of Bristol.

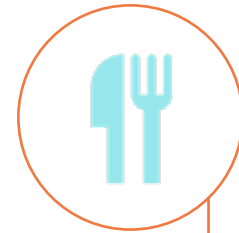
29 Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021 [Published 26 September 2023]

30 Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2024) Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: household finances: 5 to 28 July 2024 [Published 16 August 2024]

Nearly half (48%) of kinship carers said they were using their savings compared to just over a quarter (26%) of all adults. They were also more likely to be using support from charities, and as many as 8% of kinship carers said they were using food banks. This is considerably higher than in the general population, demonstrating the prevalence of food poverty within kinship households; data from the Department for Work and Pensions shows that 3% of working-age adults and 1% of pensioners lived in a household which had used a food bank in the previous 12 months.<sup>31</sup>

Kinship carers were also more likely than all adults and those aged 50 to 69 years old to be shopping around more and cutting back on non-essential journeys in their vehicle, but just as or less likely to be spending less on food shopping and essentials, and to be using less fuel such as gas or electricity in their home,

Despite the above, there are some signs that financial pressures may have alleviated very slightly from last year, although experiences of significant hardship remain common and levels of financial insecurity continue to be considerably higher amongst this cohort than in the general population.



**8%**

of kinship carers were using food banks because of increases in the cost of living

In this year's survey, 7% of kinship carers said their household had run out of food and could not afford to buy more in the past two weeks, a 3pp decrease from our 2023 annual survey, although this is still higher than for all adults (5%) and especially for adults aged 50 to 69 years old (3%).

In addition, 23% of kinship carers said they were finding it quite or very difficult to manage financially these days, a 9pp decrease from last year. A very similar proportion said they were 'just about getting by' (39% compared to 38% last year).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Department for Work and Pensions (2024) Households below average income: for financial years ending 1995 to 2023 [Published 21 March 2024]

<sup>32</sup> Kinship (2023) Breaking Point: kinship carers in crisis



## Rebekah

**Rebekah, 63, from Kent, is raising her two grandchildren following the tragic death of their mother in January 2020.**

*"The children have been severely traumatised after the death of their mum and desperately need specialist support and help. Trying to access the right type of therapy and support has been very difficult and problematic due to long waiting lists and ever dwindling budgets.*

*Although I'm physically fit and healthy for my age, I experience mental health issues and have extremely limited finances. I constantly feel like I'm juggling with all the balls up in the air. There is definitely a lack of support both financial and emotional and therapeutic support for us kinship carers and our children.*

*My grandchildren have brought a lot of joy into my life, but it is very challenging being a kinship carer when they have suffered so much trauma and you can't get the support they need."*

Rebekah, who relies on benefits to get by believes that kinship families should receive financial and therapeutic support to help raise their kinship children, who would otherwise be placed in the care system.

*"The children haven't been offered bereavement counselling. I have tried to access it but the waiting lists are very long. Many kinship children have been through extreme trauma and need therapeutic support to help them navigate life and achieve. It's not fair that kinship children should fall behind because they're not getting the help they need."*

Rebekah was told by the local authority that she was not entitled to financial support as the children hadn't been in care.

*"We have debts now. The kids have never had a holiday. We don't put the heating on for longer than a couple of hours in the winter and we use blankets and dressing gowns to keep warm.*

*There have been occasions when we have gone cold because we have to make a choice between eating and heating. I've used food banks and food vouchers from the school and my mum has helped me out, so we've managed to get by.*

*When things break down, I can't afford to fix or replace them. For example, the oven isn't working, so I'm relying on the hob and a slow cooker to cook our meals.*

*Fortunately I'm resilient and resourceful but it's been a huge challenge. We've been flying by the seat of our pants, with no support or guidance or anything.*

*Kinship carers do the same job as foster carers raising and loving our own flesh and blood. If we didn't step up they would be put in care and the Government would have to pay strangers to look after them.*

*Why can't they allocate that money to kinship carers to help us look after our children. We give them the love and care that only family can. The Government needs to do something because these children are suffering without the right support."*

## Benefits

New evidence gathered in our 2024 annual survey suggests that kinship carers are particularly vulnerable to inflationary pressures and a rising cost of living given their greater reliance on financial support through the welfare system. Only 13% of kinship carers said they didn't receive any benefits at all.

Nearly half (46%) of working-age respondents were in receipt of Universal Credit. Research has demonstrated that most low-income households on Universal Credit are currently going without essentials and that inadequate social security is the main driver of food bank need.<sup>33</sup>



**46%**

of working-age kinship carers were receiving Universal Credit

### Retirement benefits

Around a quarter of kinship carers (23%) who responded to our survey were receiving the State Pension, reflecting what we know about the age profile of respondents (26% were aged 65 or over and the current State Pension age is 66 years old).

Of this group, 16% also received Pension Credit; this provides those over State Pension age with extra money to help pay for day-to-day living costs and will typically include additional money for those looking after kinship children. Although a greater proportion of kinship carer pensioners than all pensioners receive Pension Credit, 16% is still arguably lower than might be expected given what we know about lower household incomes and financial insecurity within kinship households.

With only 63% of those entitled to Pension Credit receiving the benefit<sup>34</sup>, and particularly given the Winter Fuel Payment is now due to be means-tested and delivered to those on Pension Credit, this emphasises the importance of our advice work which supports kinship carers to access all the financial benefits they are entitled to.



**4 in 10**

disabled kinship carers were receiving Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

### Disability and health benefits

Aligning with the findings explored earlier on prevalence of disability, a considerable proportion – 17% – of kinship carer respondents received Personal Independence Payment (PIP), representing more than 2 in 5 (41%) of all of those completing our 2024 annual survey who were disabled.

Reflecting what we know about levels of special educational needs and disability amongst children in kinship care – our *Forgotten* report found that nearly half of children in kinship care in England were reported to have a special educational need or disability<sup>35</sup> – nearly 1 in 5 kinship carers (19%) said they received Disability Living

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024) An Essentials Guarantee: Reforming universal credit to ensure we can all afford the essentials in hard times

<sup>34</sup> Department for Work and Pensions (2023) Income-related benefits: estimates of take-up: financial year ending 2022 [Published 26 October 2023]

<sup>35</sup> Kinship (2024) *Forgotten*: Support for kinship children's education and mental health

Allowance for their kinship children. This helps with the extra costs of looking after a child who is under 16 and has difficulties walking or needs much more looking after than a child of the same age who does not have a disability.

14% of respondents received Carers' Allowance which provides additional financial support for those who provide care for someone at least 35 hours a week, representing nearly 4 in 10 (37%) of all of those who said they were an unpaid carer. This is less than the 61% of unpaid carers who said they received Carer's Allowance in a 2023 survey<sup>36</sup>, but is still a substantial proportion given the already intense demands of caring full-time for a relative or friend's child.

## Family and child benefits

Nearly two thirds of respondents (62%) received Child Benefit, but excluding kinship foster carer respondents who are not eligible to receive this suggests that only 7 in 10 kinship carers (70%) likely eligible to receive Child Benefit were doing so.

We know that some kinship carers can face challenges or complexities in accessing Child Benefit when they take on the care of a child, often due to competing claims with the child's parent or in circumstances where the child may continue or might be expected to remain living with their parent(s) for some of the time, most likely where an informal arrangement or child arrangements order is in place.

5% of respondents received Guardian's Allowance which is available to those who are bringing up someone else's child when their parents have died. In our 2022 annual survey, 7% of kinship carers said their kinship children had come into their care as a result of parental death.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Carers Trust (2023) Adult Carer Survey Report 2023: "Unpaid carers are not unsung heroes. We are forgotten, neglected and burnt out"  
<sup>37</sup> Kinship (2022) The Cost of Loving: annual survey of kinship carers 2022

**Sue**

**Former social worker, Sue, 60, from Birmingham, took care of her three granddaughters and one grandson when her daughter was unable to look after them 10 years ago.**

*"The local authority told me I had to sort out all the court work and pay for all the solicitors fees to arrange the care of my granddaughters and get a special guardianship order. I didn't receive any kind of support with that.*

*At first they paid me £17 per week per child. My husband and I were on benefits and my husband had retired. Everything was means tested. The youngest was born with cerebral palsy and her sisters have autism and complex needs, so it's been very challenging.*

*I've asked the local authority time and time again for support and all they've provided is three hours a week respite for the youngest but I've still had to watch the other three so that's not respite. I was told you can put them in foster care if you want respite but we didn't want that. My husband and I just wanted a couple of hours a month to ourselves.*

*My husband passed away due to Covid, so we will never have that chance to have a bit of time together. They changed my benefits after his death which meant I had no money for food or anything for one month. I couldn't even afford to pay for his death certificate. I had to borrow money.*

*The children saw him as their dad, so it's been very traumatic for us all. To be honest it's been one nightmare after another.*

*I complained to my local councillor, the children's commissioner and the Ombudsman to complain about the lack of support. I now receive £82 per child each week but it's means tested every year and that's really stressful.*

*I can't afford to have the heating on this winter, unless it's essential, so we'll just have to wear extra clothes and snuggle up under a big blanket. I went to food banks when my money got stopped six years ago and I have been back to them since. It's a constant worry especially as energy bills have gone up so much but social services aren't interested in helping me. The roof is leaking and it's coming through the bedrooms but I can't afford to fix it.*

*I have to manage contact with the children's father and relatives and they live in London and Kent so that's really expensive too.*

*As a former social worker, I find the lack of support for kinship carers like me deeply shocking, especially when we're saving the Government so much money by preventing children going into the care system. I have no idea how people who don't understand how the system works manage to get by."*

# Local authority support

**There are some positive signals that local authority support and information is improving, but kinship carers still tell us this is far from good enough.**

Many local authorities deliver excellent support to kinship families and have partnered with us to deliver pioneering and evidence-based programmes, including Kinship Connected and Kinship Reach, which provide intensive 1:1 support, peer support and training to communities of kinship carers across England and Wales. However, we know from our advice and support services that, despite increasing focus on investing in kinship care, too many kinship families continue to receive inadequate support from their local authority and that this is based largely on legal order and whether or not the child was previously looked after<sup>38</sup>.

The previous UK Government published the first ever National Kinship Care Strategy for England in December 2023 which committed to extending virtual school support, delivering new statutory guidance on kinship care and appointing a new National Kinship Care Ambassador to drive improvements. This followed earlier commitments made in the national children's social care implementation strategy – *Stable Homes, Built on Love* – which put support for family networks at the heart of a new children's social care national framework and said local authorities should “*feel confident to pursue approaches and ways of working that we know are the right ones*”.

Findings from our 2024 annual survey suggest that national policy efforts and a growing focus on kinship care within local authority children's services may be beginning to have an impact, but experiences of high-quality support and information are still few and far between. As Kinship delivers a new national offer of training and support for kinship carers in England, working in close partnership with local authorities and virtual schools, we will continue to play our part in providing support and building more positive relationships between kinship carers and local authorities. In order to support this, local authorities must develop a clear, well-communicated and accessible local offer of high quality and tailored support for all kinship carers.

## Support and information

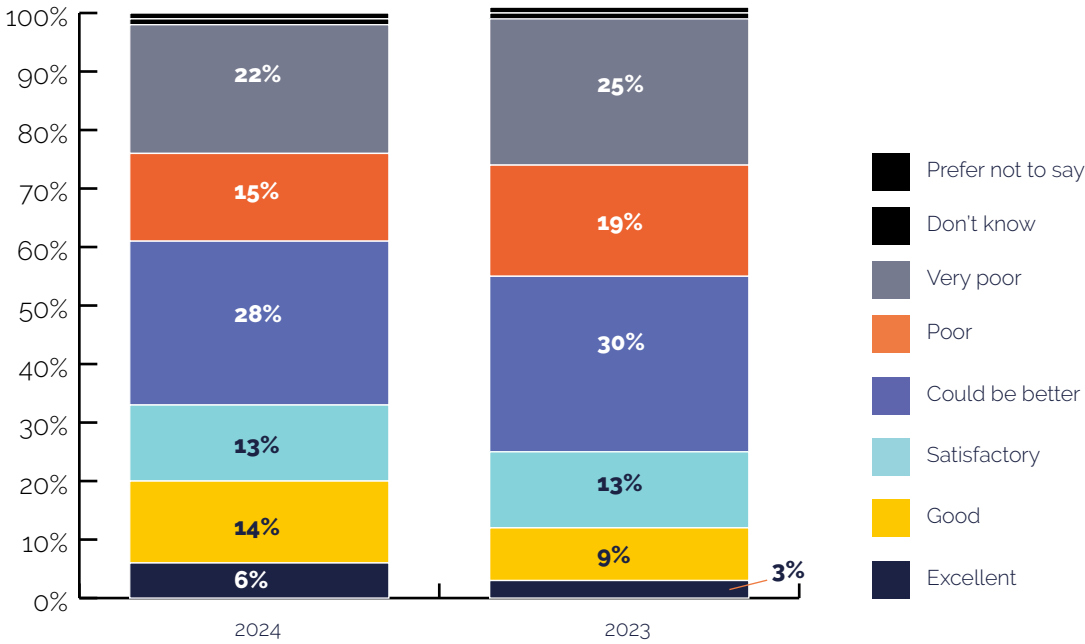
Kinship carers in 2024 were nearly 8pp more likely to say the support they had received from their local authority was excellent or good than in 2023, and 7pp less likely to say it was poor or very poor.

However, despite this positive year-on-year change, this means 37% of kinship carers who had received local authority support still rated it as poor or very poor. In comparison, over half of foster carers (53%) in 2021 rated the support provided by their fostering service in general as being excellent or good and 14% as poor or very poor.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Foundations (2023) Understanding the variation in support for kinship carers: A survey of local authorities in England

<sup>39</sup> The Fostering Network (2021) State of the Nation's Foster Care: 2021 report

**Overall, how would you rate the quality of support your kinship family has received from the local authority?**



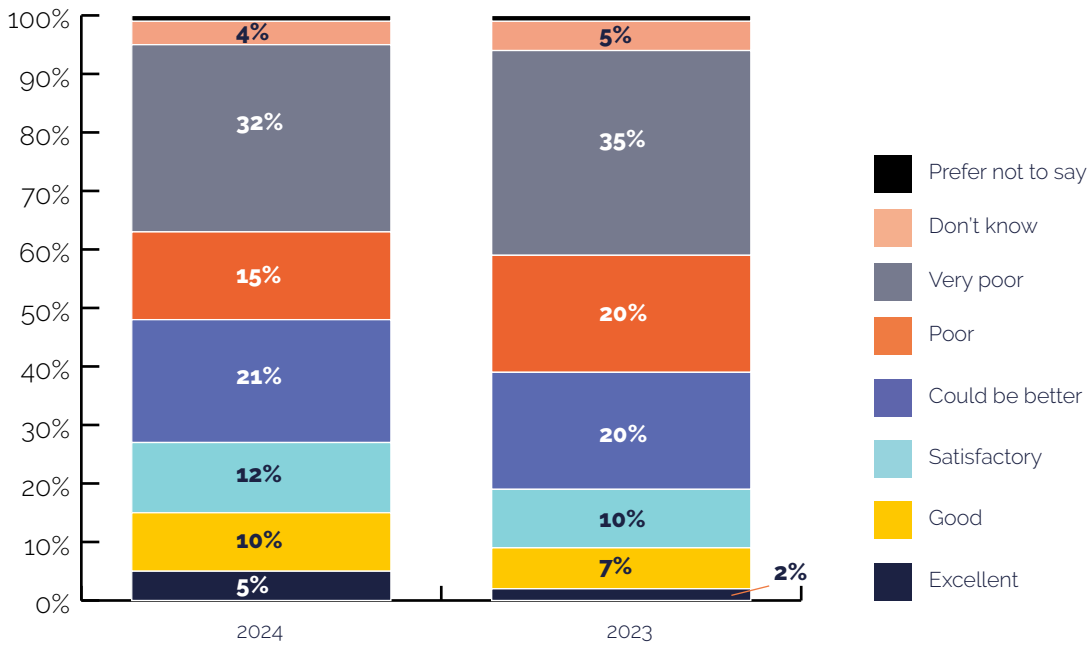
	Kinship carers in 2024	Kinship carers in 2023
Excellent	6%	3%
Good	14%	9%
Satisfactory	13%	13%
Could be better	28%	30%
Poor	15%	19%
Very poor	22%	25%
Don't know	1%	1%
Prefer not to say	1%	1%

Similarly, respondents were also nearly 6pp more likely this year to say that the provision of information from their local authority was excellent or good than last year, and nearly 8pp less likely to say it was poor or very poor. Again, however, this still means that nearly half of kinship carers (47%) rate the information provided by their local authority about kinship care as poor or very poor.

Last year, only 7% of kinship carers said they had seen their local authority's family and friends care policy (which should outline the support available to all types of kinship family) and 3 in 10 said they didn't know this existed.<sup>40</sup>

40 Kinship (2023) Breaking Point: kinship carers in crisis

**Overall, how would you rate the provision of information about kinship care from your local authority?**



	Kinship carers in 2024	Kinship carers in 2023
Excellent	5%	2%
Good	10%	7%
Satisfactory	12%	10%
Could be better	21%	20%
Poor	15%	20%
Very poor	32%	35%
Don't know	4%	5%
Prefer not to say	1%	1%

We know that too few eligible kinship children are accessing support from their local authority virtual school, but when they do, they often find this support very helpful.<sup>41</sup> This year, we asked specifically if kinship carers understood what support was offered to them by the virtual school. Around a quarter (23%) said they did understand, but the majority (65%) said they did not understand and a further 12% said they didn't know.

This low awareness base must be considered in efforts to promote the September 2024 [extension of Virtual School Head \(VSH\) support](#) to a wider group of children in kinship care; this includes the provision of advice and information, on request, to all kinship carers with special guardianship orders and child arrangements orders, regardless of whether their child was previously looked after by the local authority.

Only around 3 in 10 kinship carers (29%) said their local authority had ever signposted them to other places where they could get support, marking no real change since 2022 (where 28% of kinship carers said they had been signposted).

41 Kinship (2024) Forgotten: Support for kinship children's education and mental health



### only 3 in 10

kinship carers had been signposted by their local authority to other places where they could get support

We know that poor quality information can leave kinship carers unaware of the options and support available to them. That's why we developed our [Kinship Compass](#) which helps kinship carers to discover what support is available to them, both locally and nationally, including their own local authority's family and friends care policy and kinship team and virtual school contact details, as well as local peer support groups, workshops, events and other services such as free legal advice clinics and food banks.



**44%**

of kinship carers did not trust their local authority at all

Levels of trust in the local authority amongst kinship carers remains very low; 44% of kinship carers told us they didn't trust their local authority to support them and their kinship family at all. This is however 5pp lower than in our 2023 annual survey, and respondents this year were more than twice as likely to say they trusted their local authority completely (7%), albeit from a very low base (3%).



**Rose\***

**Rose\*, 65, and her husband, from Oxford, stepped up to care for their granddaughter when she was a baby after her parents were unable to look after her.**

Taking on their kinship caring role meant they had to give up their paid roles as foster carers looking after children with complex needs.

*"It was scary times as we didn't receive any financial support from the local authority but still had to pay our mortgage. I don't know how we managed. I had an allotment and was growing some of our food, but it was horrendous. We lived on a very low budget. It's all a bit of a blur."*

*"We were in a position where, when our church that we went to had finished with the foodbank stuff they used to get delivered for their cafe, when they'd finished with that food, we used to take the week-old foodbank food home and use it.*

*We did that for months because we were really pushed, we just did not have income. It's difficult to recover from that, it takes years financially to recover."*

Rose\* and her husband now receive a means tested allowance of £87 per week to raise their granddaughter, which is not enough. They believe kinship carers should receive the same financial and emotional support as foster carers.

Rose\* has had treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder because of the circumstances surrounding taking in her granddaughter and wants to highlight the stress that kinship carers experience.

*"We love our granddaughter dearly. But we went through a period of grieving because we'd just come to a point where we were thinking about retirement and thought we would begin to have an easier life and then we knew it had disappeared, when we stepped up to look after her."*

The couple now spend their time budgeting and researching cost effective ways of living and recycling, like growing their own vegetables and buying second hand and looking for money saving energy schemes.

*"It's so unfair that kinship carers are treated like this. It shouldn't be this hard but we are left to deal with deeply traumatised children without any support, while trying to find ways to make ends meet. That's not right"*

## Financial allowances

Around 7 in 10 of all kinship carers (69%) received a financial allowance from their local authority to help them cover the costs of raising at least one of their kinship children. However, given the overrepresentation of kinship carers with formalised kinship arrangements where the child is or was previously looked after in our survey cohort, this figure is likely to overrepresent the proportion of all kinship carers who receive financial support.

Indeed, we know there is a clear hierarchy in which groups of kinship carers receive a financial allowance and which groups do not. Only 4% of kinship carers with an informal arrangement responding to our 2024 annual survey received an allowance for at least one child in their care. Similar to last year, around three quarters of special guardians where the order was made following care proceedings (76%) received an allowance, and nearly a third of kinship carers with a child arrangements order made following care proceedings (32%).

As explored in our *Out of Order* policy paper, the majority of special guardians and kinship carers with child arrangements orders who receive an allowance have some conditions placed on this, such as means-testing, annual review and/or delivery for a fixed time period, consistent too with what we understand from surveys of local authority practice.<sup>42</sup>

In our 2024 annual survey, two thirds of kinship carers (67%) caring for at least one child under a special guardianship order made following care proceedings in receipt of an allowance had this means-tested, and more than half (57%) said it was subject to annual review. This is unlike the guaranteed minimum financial allowances given to kinship foster carers.

Our evidence suggests that equalising financial support between kinship foster care and kinship arrangements outside the care system could deliver significant benefits for children and families and relieve pressure on overstretched local authority budgets.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Foundations (2023) Understanding the variation in support for kinship carers: A survey of local authorities in England

<sup>43</sup> Kinship (2024) Out of Order: the case for boosting financial support for kinship arrangements outside the care system

# Family stability

**Too many kinship families remain at breaking point, and continued inaction risks significant consequences for children and for the state.**

Kinship care provides children with a stable home life where they can grow and develop in a safe, positive environment and maintain their sense of identity and family relationships. But for some kinship families, a lack of financial, practical and emotional support will act to push them to a risk of breakdown.

The alternative for the vast majority of children would be the local authority care system. For nearly 9 in 10 children (88%) represented in last year's annual survey, respondents said they would have remained or gone into local authority care had they not stepped up to look after them, and kinship carers said they didn't know for a further 7%.<sup>44</sup>

## Risk of breakdown

More than 1 in 8 kinship carers (13%) who responded to our 2024 annual survey said they were concerned they may have to stop caring for their kinship children in the next year if their situation didn't improve, a 1pp increase from last year. A further 9% said they didn't know.



### More than 1 in 8

kinship carers were concerned they might have to stop caring for their kinship children

If this proportion held across the whole cohort of kinship families, it would suggest that as many as 18,000 children across England and Wales are at risk of entering local authority care unless urgent support is provided to kinship families.

Not only would this be hugely disruptive to children's lives and wellbeing it would further compound financial challenges for local authority children's services. Our [economic case for kinship care](#) found that, for every 1000 children raised in kinship families rather than in local authority care, the state saves £40 million and increases the lifetime earnings of those children by £20 million.<sup>45</sup>

The risk of kinship arrangements breaking down wasn't evenly distributed across respondents but mostly concentrated amongst particular groups, including who had received poor (17%) or very poor (23%) local authority support, who reported their health as bad (26%) or very bad (30%), and who said they were finding it quite difficult (21%) or very difficult (24%) to manage financially these days.

<sup>44</sup> Kinship (2023) Breaking Point: kinship carers in crisis

<sup>45</sup> Grandparents Plus (2020) Kinship Care: The Opportunity

The most common reason given for this concern was managing kinship child(ren)'s social, emotional and/or mental health difficulties (72%). Challenges with family relationships and contact (44%), financial worries (43%), and concerns about the kinship carers' own age and/or health and wellbeing (42%) were also common. This echoes the findings from our *Forgotten* report which revealed the significant gaps in support for kinship children with special educational or additional learning needs and their mental health and family relationships, and the impact this had for families struggling to get by.

## Julia

**Julia, 70, and her husband, 70, from West Sussex, are special guardians for their three grandchildren aged 15, 17 and 18.**

Julia and her husband took on the care of their grandchildren 15 years ago when their parents were unable to look after them.

*"I was a manager for a medical practice and on a good salary when we first took care of the children but social services told me I had to give up my job if we wanted to keep the children. It's just one of the many sacrifices you have to make.*

*Since day one we have had an absolute lack of support from the local authority. I certainly wasn't expecting to still be parenting in my 60s and 70s and it's really not easy.*

*I am now on a local authority working group trying to make them understand what kinship carers really need and trying to ensure that they receive the same support as foster carers, which they don't. That ranges from simple practical advice about what a kinship carer is, as 9 times out of 10, kinship carers walk into it blind, to financial and emotional support.*

*Our grandchildren are traumatised and have special needs and behavioural issues but we couldn't and still can't get any proper support. Unfortunately, that has resulted in the eldest of the three having to go into the care system. The guilt with failure and loss is still with us two years on.*

*I'm now really worried about the heating this winter. We've just put ourselves into debt buying a wood burner as we can't afford to have the central heating on. It's just not an option, so we'll just have to wear lots of jumpers.*

*We have bank loans a car loan and credit card debt now. I haven't been to food banks yet but that's more out of pride than need. I buy reduced label food and buy less. We can't afford a bag of crisps for the girls more than once a week*

*We weren't able to have a family day out in the summer holidays. We live on the coast but we couldn't afford to take them for an ice-cream or a drink."*

## Staying with siblings

A lack of support is also continuing to deny children the opportunity to live with their siblings in kinship care; 17% of kinship carers said they had been unable to take on the care of a brother or sister to a kinship child they already care for.



**17%**

of kinship carers had been unable to take on the care of a brother or sister to a kinship child in their care

We know that sibling relationships for children in kinship care are incredibly important; a fifth of young people in our *Growing Up in Kinship Care* study had lost contact with a sibling or mourned the loss of closeness with a sibling where contact was only occasional, and they had strong and complex feelings of rejection, guilt and concern where relationships weren't present.<sup>46</sup> In last year's annual survey, we found that only around a third of kinship carers (36%) said their kinship children were in contact with one or more siblings they didn't live with.<sup>47</sup>

The most common reason given for being unable to take on the care of sibling was a lack of paid employment leave and/or workplace support (51%). We know from our *Forced Out* report how a lack of statutory and employer support for kinship carers in the workplace is leading to devastating consequences for kinship families, including financial hardship, a loss of identity and relationships, and reduced stability for children.<sup>48</sup>

Challenges managing social, emotional and/or mental health difficulties (49%), housing challenges and/or a lack of space at home (46%) and concerns about the kinship carers' own age and/or health and wellbeing (46%) were also commonly cited as reasons for being unable to care for a sibling, despite kinship carers wanting to keep children connected to their brothers and sisters wherever possible.

<sup>46</sup> Wellard et al (2017) *Growing Up in Kinship Care: Experiences as Adolescents and Outcomes in Young Adulthood*

<sup>47</sup> Kinship (2024) *Forgotten: Support for kinship children's education and mental health*

<sup>48</sup> Kinship (2023) *Forced Out: delivering equality for kinship carers in the workplace*

# Recommendations

## Equalising financial support

### Financial allowances

The UK and Welsh Governments should equalise financial allowances between foster carers and kinship carers, ensuring kinship families across England and Wales receive a non-means tested allowance at least equivalent to the national minimum fostering allowance. The Department for Education and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should jointly support a significant bid to HM Treasury as part of the next Spending Review for additional funding to implement this.

As a minimum interim step, the new UK Government should accelerate the financial allowances pathfinder in England and extend its scope to include a greater number of kinship carers, outlining clear scale points which respond to emerging evidence and moving at pace to ensure the pilot does not paralyse progress towards a more comprehensive rollout of financial allowances.

Meanwhile, local authorities across England and Wales should emulate the leading practice of local authorities who already deliver a non-means tested allowance to kinship carers as soon as possible. They should ensure financial issues are never the reason for an arrangement ceasing or prevent one from starting, nor prevent kinship carers from moving to a kinship arrangement best suited to their family situation.

To support this, the UK Government should commit to updating special guardianship guidance alongside publication of the forthcoming kinship care statutory guidance, and the Welsh Government should amend the Special Guardianship Code of Practice, to reduce current unacceptable variation and poor practice in the delivery of financial support.

### Employment support

The UK Government should introduce a statutory right to kinship care leave and pay, at least on a par with that given to adoptive parents. At minimum, the introduction of kinship care leave should be included within the terms of reference for the forthcoming review of the parental leave system. Employers should ensure their family friendly policies actively include kinship carers and work towards becoming a Kinship Friendly Employer.

## Improving support for kinship families

### Information and advice

All local authorities should ensure they provide up-to-date, accessible and visible information about the support available to kinship families of all types, including signposting to support from Kinship and our new national offer of training and support in England. This should include information on the recent extension of virtual school support as well as

the provision of financial support for kinship carers, offering clarity on any accompanying conditions and their approach to calculating allowances for special guardians and kinship carers with child arrangements orders.

Forthcoming kinship care statutory guidance for England should reaffirm the requirement for local authorities to publish a specific family and friends care (kinship) policy and a clear, joined-up local offer of support. This should recognise the diversity of kinship families and the need for some services to be attuned to specific cohorts (e.g. young kinship carers or those from minoritised communities). The new National Kinship Care Ambassador should support and challenge local authorities to deliver this.

All kinship carers should be offered free and independent advice, including legal advice facilitated by extended eligibility for legal aid, from the moment they are considering becoming kinship carers and throughout their journey. This should include guidance on the different kinship care arrangements and their implications for access to support, and ensure kinship carers receive the welfare benefits they are entitled to given their particular family arrangements.

## Training and support

Local authorities should ensure the provision of tailored and accessible local training and support services, including peer support, for all kinship carers, and signpost to Kinship's new national offer of training and support in England. Professionals and organisations supporting kinship families should pay particular attention to those caring for children on their own without support, those with disabilities, those with other caring responsibilities and those with additional health problems.

The UK and Welsh Governments and local authorities should ensure all kinship families can access appropriate long-term emotional and therapeutic support tailored to their unique needs and experiences, recognising the impact of social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) on family stability.

The UK Government's forthcoming Children's Wellbeing Bill and plans to introduce Young Futures Hubs, and the Welsh Government's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, should consider the mental health and emotional wellbeing needs of kinship families. Future policy development could include developing bespoke therapeutic support modelled on a version of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund designed for kinship families, acknowledging the different approaches they need to adoptive families.

## Building a new kinship care system

### Early support for kinship families

In England, testing of family network support packages and family group decision making through ongoing Pathfinder and pilot activity must enable local authorities to fully deliver flexible and intensive funding tailored to the individual needs of families in order to properly evidence how this early support can make a difference.

Future policy development work should explore how local authorities can then best actively support progression – when in the best interests of the child – to other more permanent

kinship arrangements such as special guardianship without necessitating entry into local authority care and without negative implications for future support. The Law Commission's project should explore the potential for bespoke kinship care pathways.

## Local authority practice

To improve the quality and delivery of support tailored to the needs and strengths of kinship families, and to build understanding and trust, local authorities should establish specialist kinship teams with the breadth of skills necessary to deliver high-quality social work support where these do not exist already<sup>49</sup>. Ofsted and Care Inspectorate Wales should enhance the attention paid to kinship care practice within their inspections and undertake thematic reviews and inspector training to support this work.

## Investment in children's social care

The UK Government must not delay significant additional investment in kinship care and children's social care at the next fiscal opportunities – particularly within the forthcoming Autumn Statement and as part of the next Spending Review. Local authorities cannot be expected to recalibrate services, practice and culture to better prioritise and support kinship families without greater financial and workforce stability.



**For additional and regularly-updated information on kinship care policy in England, including current activity, our verdict and what should happen next, please visit our online [kinship care policy tracker](#).**

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49 For more information, see Hunt, J (2021) Practising in kinship care: the perspectives of specialist social workers



# Conclusion

*Make or Break* provides unique insights into the lives of kinship families in 2024, highlighting the continued challenges they face with an increasing cost of living and a lack of financial, practical and emotional support, and the potentially devastating consequences this might have for children, families and the state.

Our analysis illustrates the precarious position which many kinship carers are in and the fragility of their health and wellbeing in the face of immense caring responsibilities. It highlights how kinship families are uniquely vulnerable to financial hardship, but reveals the insufficient and complex hierarchy of local authority support which continues to be based on a complex legal and postcode lottery rather than the needs of the child.

Although we can see some potential signs of improving practice within local authorities and experiences for kinship carers, it's clear that there is still a long way to go before all kinship families get consistent, high-quality support tailored to their unique needs, experiences and strengths.

Some of these problems don't require complex or costly solutions. Some, such as improvements to the visibility of information for kinship carers, could be actioned tomorrow by local authorities. Kinship's national training and support service in England will empower thousands of kinship carers over the next year to improve their knowledge and access communities of support.

But other solutions will take far longer and will almost certainly require significant additional investment, consideration and policy development, informed by the expertise held by kinship carers. We can and must do both. Policymakers must be comfortable delivering the urgent support that's required today whilst looking ahead to understand what will be needed by the kinship families of tomorrow.

With several significant opportunities for new governments in both England and Wales to invest in kinship care and its transformative potential in the next year, there's no shortage of chances to make a huge difference to the lives of kinship families. The promise made to them after years of being overlooked must not be broken.



For family or friends who  
step up to raise a child.

## ABOUT KINSHIP

We are Kinship. The leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. We're here for kinship carers – friends or family who step up to raise a child when their parents aren't able to.

We are made by and for our community of kinship carers. For too long they have been isolated without the help they need.

Our purpose is to change lives, and change the system.

We support, advise and inform kinship carers. Connecting them so they feel empowered.

Because a child needs the love and warmth of a thriving family.

We develop research, campaigns and policy solutions. Creating positive change across society.

Because for kinship families, love alone is not enough.

And as we see momentum building for change, we keep working with our community and making impact.

Join us. Together, let's commit to change for kinship families.

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