



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

Government support for kinship carers

Westminster Hall debate, 13 November 2024, 4-4.30pm
Tabled by Alistair Strathern MP

Summary

- The government's focus on kinship care is welcome, but it must go much further and faster to ensure all kinship families get the financial, practical and emotional support they need.
- Whilst we welcome the commitment made in the 2024 Autumn Budget to deliver a trial of a kinship allowance in up to 10 local authorities in England, we urge the government not to delay introducing a mandatory, non-means tested financial allowance for kinship carers, as well as a right to paid kinship care leave on a par with adoption leave, and to improve educational and therapeutic support for children in kinship care.
- The situation for kinship families is growing ever more urgent and inaction risks kinship carers being unable to continue caring for their children. This would lead to more children entering an already overstretched care system, with devastating consequences for families and the state.

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 estimate we have suggests there are more than **141,000 children in kinship care in England and Wales – three times the number in unrelated foster care**. 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.

[Learn more about kinship care](#)

Why support kinship families?

Many children in kinship care will have experienced trauma. A kinship carer provides a stable and loving home life where a child can grow and develop in a safe, positive environment. They also get to stay in their existing family network, which helps maintain their sense of identity and family relationships.

It makes sense to invest in kinship care: evidence shows that it delivers good experiences and outcomes for children and families as well as cost savings for the public purse. **Our evidence shows that, for every 1000 children looked after in well-supported kinship care rather than local authority care, the state saves £40 million per year and increases the lifetime earnings of those children by £20 million.**

Kinship families in your constituency

With more children in kinship care than local authority care nationally, we know that kinship carers are at every school gate. It is likely that you heard from our kinship carer campaigners in the run up to the election, have received information directly from us, or have attended one of our awareness-raising parliamentary events. Now is the time to show your support to the kinship carers that live in your constituency. To find out how many kinship children live in your constituency, and other key stats on kinship care locally, please visit our kinship care constituency map.

Visit our [kinship care constituency map](#)

Our #ValueOurLove campaign

Kinship's #ValueOurLove campaign launched in October 2022 and calls on the UK and Welsh governments to equalise support between kinship families and foster and adoptive families. We need to provide urgent support for kinship families across England and Wales today, and take steps to build a kinship care system fit for the kinship families of tomorrow



1. Equal financial allowances

Unlike foster carers, the vast majority of kinship carers are not entitled to a minimum financial allowance to help them cover the costs of raising someone else's child. Current financial support for kinship carers is inadequate and extremely variable, reflecting not the needs of the kinship family but instead a legal and postcode lottery. This is a barrier to permanence; the system currently perversely incentivises kinship carers to become foster carers given this is the only route by which they can access guaranteed financial and other support, even though this often isn't in the best interests of the child or their family.

The impacts of poor financial support are huge. Our 2024 annual survey of more than 1,300 kinship carers found they were **more than twice as likely as other adults to be using food banks. and more than 1 in 8 were concerned about their ability to continue caring for their kinship children in the next year if their situations didn't improve.**

Current status

The government confirmed in the Autumn Budget that it will invest £44 million to support kinship and foster carers in England, including "*triallying a new kinship allowance in up to 10 local authorities to test whether paying an allowance to cover certain costs – like supporting a child to settle into a new home with relatives – can help increase the number of children taken in by family members and friends*".

No further information is yet available on the kinship allowance trial, including which groups of kinship carers are eligible, which local authorities are involved, or how the allowance will be delivered. This follows a commitment made by the previous government in the National Kinship Care Strategy last year to deliver a 4-year financial allowances pathfinder across up to 8 local authorities.

Whilst we are pleased the government has listened to our #ValueOurLove campaign manifesto and maintained the momentum following last year's National Kinship Care Strategy, it must go further and faster to support kinship families. Our evidence shows that legislating to introduce a national, non-means tested financial allowance would support more children to be looked after in well-supported kinship care outside of the care system, bringing enormous benefits to children, families and the public purse.

The kinship allowance trial must not delay progress towards a wider rollout of allowances. We want to see the government legislate to deliver a financial allowance for kinship carers which at least matches the guaranteed financial allowance provided to all foster carers.

Read our [Out of Order paper on financial support for kinship carers](#)

2. Equal paid leave from work

Our *Forced Out report* revealed that **more than 8 in 10 kinship carers had given up work permanently or reduced their hours** after taking on their caring role. The lack of paid leave for kinship carers is unnecessarily pushing them out of work and into poverty, and robbing them of protected time where they can focus on settling in a child to their new home.

We want to see the government introduce a statutory right to paid kinship care leave at least on a par with adoption leave and pay. As a minimum step, the government should commit to including kinship care leave within the terms of reference for the forthcoming review of parental leave.

[Read our recent briefing on employment rights for kinship carers](#)

3. Equal therapeutic and educational support for children

Children growing up in kinship care have typically experienced trauma, separation and loss. But unlike their counterparts in the care system, most don't have access to vital help at school or with their mental health. Our *Forgotten report*, published earlier this year, revealed that **nearly half of kinship children in England were reported to have a special educational need or disability (SEND)**, but that far fewer children than would be expected given this prevalence were receiving support through the SEND system, including through an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

The government should ensure that all children in kinship care get the education and mental health support they need by extending key entitlements, including Pupil Premium Plus, and improving access to therapeutic, emotional and SEND support.

[Read our *Forgotten* report on kinship children's education and mental health](#)

4. Equal access to training and support

Unlike foster care or adoption, kinship care often happens in a crisis and so most kinship carers don't get the preparatory training and ongoing advice and support they need. In our *2024 annual survey of kinship carers*, around **one third rated the information provided by their local authority about kinship care as very poor**. We want to see all kinship carers offered independent expert advice and the ongoing training and support they feel they need to best support the children in their care.

We were delighted that the previous government recognised the need for this and began to invest in training and peer support programmes for kinship carers across England. As the leading national charity for kinship carers, we are proud to be [delivering these programmes](#), offering a wide range of support groups and in-person and online workshops and roadshows right across the country.

It is vital that this government continues to invest in these services, which are providing a lifeline to many kinship carers – including those with informal arrangements – who are otherwise isolated and struggling without the information and support they need.

[Learn more about the #ValueOurLove campaign](#)

During the debate

This important debate provides an opportunity for MPs to highlight why the government needs to go further and faster to support kinship families. We are grateful for those able to push the minister on commitments to kinship families by sharing our evidence and #ValueOurLove campaign calls.

- More than 1 in 8 kinship carers were concerned they might have to stop caring for their kinship children due to lack of support (*Make or Break*).
- The cost-of-living crisis is plunging kinship families into poverty. Kinship carers were more than twice as likely to be using food banks than other UK adults and said they were four times more likely to have had a direct debit, standing order or bill they weren't able to pay in the last month (*Make or Break*).
- More than 8 in 10 kinship carers said they had to leave work permanently or reduce their hours after becoming a kinship carer. 28% were forced to claim benefits due to a change in their employment status (*Forced Out*).
- Nearly half of children in kinship care in England are reported to have a special educational need or disability, including 31% with diagnosed or suspected social, emotional and mental health needs; this is a similar prevalence to children in local authority care (*Forgotten*).
- It makes sense to invest in kinship care. For every 1000 children raised in kinship families rather than local authority care, the state saves £40 million and increases the lifetime earnings of those children by £20 million (*Kinship Care: The Opportunity*).

Further information

Please visit our [kinship care policy tracker](#) to stay updated on the current status of each kinship care policy area, our verdict and what we think should happen next. You can also read our collection of [recent policy reports and briefings](#) for further information and recommendations.

Please download our [information pack for MPs](#) for everything you need to know about how to support kinship families in your constituency and in Parliament. You can also visit our [kinship care constituency map](#) to learn more about the kinship families in your constituency.

[Learn about our policy and influencing work](#)

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

[Discover our support for kinship families in your constituency](#)

Contact

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