



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

Kinship

**Submission to the Women and Equalities
Committee 'Equality at work: paternity and
shared parental leave' call for evidence**

February 2025

Introduction

Kinship carers are family or friends who step up, often during an unexpected crisis, to care for a child when their parents aren't able to. This may be because the parent has died, is unwell, has gone to prison, is experiencing problems with drugs and alcohol, or are neglectful or abusive. Kinship carers are usually grandparents, aunts or uncles, brothers or sisters, a stepparent, stepbrother or stepsister, or someone who isn't related but knows the child well. Whatever their relationship to the child, in that moment a commitment is made. To bring love and hope to a child who has experienced trauma, no matter what.

It is estimated there are more than 141,000 children living in kinship care in England and Wales – three times the number in unrelated foster care.¹

Some kinship carers will have a legal order securing the family arrangement which provides them with parental responsibility, such as a special guardianship order or child arrangements order made following care proceedings or secured privately through the family court. Others will be kinship foster carers where the child is 'looked after' and has been placed with them by the local authority. However, the majority of kinship families are likely to have only informal arrangements in place made privately within the family.²

The written evidence submission below focuses on our evidence about the inequalities faced by kinship carers at work owing to the lack of any rights to paid employment leave, and the gendered dynamics associated with kinship caring responsibilities and statutory workplace support. This aligns with the Committee's examination of gender inequalities in the context of the system of statutory pay and leave for those with parental responsibilities.

¹ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) [Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/childpopulationandchildren/articles/kinship-care-in-england-and-wales-census-2021) Released 26 September 2023, ONS website, article. For more information on the Census figures and what they can and can't tell us, visit:

<https://kinship.org.uk/news/new-census-2021-analysis-of-kinship-households-published/>

² More information on the different types of kinship care can be found on our website at: <https://kinship.org.uk/what-is-kinship-care/>

Summary

- Kinship carers do not have any specific rights to paid employment leave when they step up to care for a relative or friend's child, often in an emergency. As a result, more than 8 in 10 kinship carers tell us they are forced to leave work permanently or reduce their hours after taking on their role. Gendered dynamics in kinship care and existing inequalities in employment compound each other to exacerbate economic penalties for older women in particular.
- A lack of workplace rights and support is pushing kinship families into poverty and the benefits system, and exacerbating labour market challenges in health, social care and education. The result of their forced withdrawal from employment often leads significant financial hardship for kinship families, poor health and wellbeing for kinship carers, and reduced stability for children.
- We want to see the introduction of a statutory right to paid kinship care leave, at least on a par with adoption leave and pay. At minimum, the government should ensure an exploration of this forms a part of the forthcoming review of the parental leave system.
- In the meantime, our Kinship Friendly Employers scheme is working with pioneering employers including Tesco, John Lewis and B&Q who have introduced their own paid leave policies for kinship carers. But employers of all types and sizes tell us they can only go so far and need the government to introduce statutory entitlements too.

1. Background

- 1.1. Currently, kinship carers do not have any specific entitlements at work. Depending on the type of kinship arrangement they have and whether or not this confers parental responsibility, they may be able to utilise other limited entitlements available to support parents and those with caring responsibilities, such as unpaid parental leave, Time Off for Dependents, or flexible working.³
- 1.2. When they take on the care of a child, adoptive parents quite rightly have an entitlement to adoption pay and leave, similar to maternity leave. No equivalent right is available to kinship carers who step up to care for a relative or friend's child, often in an emergency and with no other financial or practical support
- 1.3. There are no current government plans to introduce paid employment leave for kinship carers. The government's Employment Rights Bill does not include provisions for kinship care leave; an amendment to this effect tabled by Steve Darling MP, Sarah Gibson MP and Munira Wilson MP was withdrawn in committee stage.
- 1.4. Several independent reviews and committees have encouraged governments to introduce paid kinship care leave. In May 2022, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care recommended that paid leave on a par with adoption leave should be introduced for special guardians and kinship carers with a child arrangements order where the child would otherwise be in care.⁴ A similar recommendation was also made by the House of Lords Children and Families Act 2014 Committee⁵, and the previous Chair of the Education Committee argued in May 2024 that *"the case for additional financial support for kinship carers, as well as 'kinship leave' on par with Adoption Leave must be reviewed"*⁶.
- 1.5. In response to the recommendation made by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, the previous government's *Stable Homes, Built on Love* strategy published in February 2023 committed to *"explore additional workplace entitlements"* for kinship carers and provide an update in the National Kinship Care Strategy.⁷ However, no further commitments were made in the National Kinship Care Strategy when published in December 2023. Instead, the Department for Education published information for employers which sets out best practice for supporting kinship carers at work, including how to adapt internal HR policies and improve cultures of support.⁸

2. The case for kinship care leave

- 2.1. Kinship has led the campaign for a right to paid employment leave for kinship carers for more than a decade. In 2023, our *Forced Out* report revealed the devastating consequences which a lack of employment support is having for kinship families and for the state.
 - More than 4 in 10 kinship carers (41%) told us they had to leave work permanently and a further 45% were forced to reduce their working hours after they became a kinship carer

³ Kinship (2023) [Forced Out: delivering equality for kinship carers in the workplace](#)

⁴ MacAlister, J (2022) [Independent Review of Children's Social Care: Final report](#)

⁵ House of Lords Children and Families Act 2014 Committee (2023) [Children and Families Act 2014: A failure of implementation](#)

⁶ Education Committee (2024) [Correspondence to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children, Families and Wellbeing on the Committee's inquiry into Children's social care](#) [Published 24 May 2024]

⁷ Department for Education (2023) [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Children's social care implementation strategy and consultation](#)

⁸ Department for Education (2023) [Kinship carers in the workplace: guidance for employers](#)

- More than one-third of kinship carers experienced an income drop of more than 50% after they stepped up to take on the care of a child.
 - 28% of kinship carers had to claim benefits due to changes in their employment status after they took on their caring role.
 - More than half of kinship carers said a right to paid leave on a par with adoption leave and pay would have prevented them from leaving work or changing their employment status.
- 2.2. The result of this forced and unnecessary withdrawal from employment is often significant financial hardship and poverty for kinship families, poor health and wellbeing for kinship carers, and reduced stability for children. It is vital for children entering kinship care to have a period of protected time with their new caregivers to settle in after immense trauma, separation and loss.
- 2.3. A lack of paid leave is also splitting up siblings: in our most recent 2024 annual survey of kinship carers, 17% of kinship carers said they had been unable to take on the care of a brother or sister to a kinship child already in their care, and more than half of this group said that a lack of paid employment leave and/or workplace support contributed to this – the most commonly chosen contributing factor.⁹
- 2.4. There are also significant consequences for the state. An absence of support pushes many kinship carers into the benefits system: our *Make or Break* report found that nearly half of working-age kinship carers (46%) were receiving Universal Credit.¹⁰ Prior to taking on the care of a child, even when acknowledging the overrepresentation of women within the kinship carer population, kinship carers are also overrepresented in the health, education and social care sectors. As such, their withdrawal from the labour market is likely to be exacerbating significant workforce challenges in our schools, hospitals and communities.

Gendered inequalities

- 2.5. It is likely that kinship carers are more likely to be women. The vast majority of kinship carers who responded to our 2024 annual survey were women (87%), although the proportion of male respondents has increased in recent years. Including the partners or spouses of survey respondents where applicable, 62% of kinship carers within the kinship households represented in our 2024 annual survey were women.¹¹
- 2.6. This continues to suggest that, in households where a mixed gender couple are acting as kinship 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.
- 2.7. Although a lack of good employment support can impact on all kinship carers regardless of age or gender, this is likely to exacerbate some of the existing challenges faced by older women in particular. The lifetime financial losses associated with both the cumulative impact of the gender pay gap and previous time spent out of the labour market (and without pension contributions) if raising their own children will likely intensify financial challenges when they become a kinship carer, and ageist attitudes will make it more difficult for them to re-enter the workforce at an older age. Women's increasing retirement age means more kinship carers in the future will be of working age, but the circumstances

⁹ Kinship (2024) [Make or Break: Annual survey of kinship carers 2024](#)

¹⁰ Kinship (2024) [Make or Break: Annual survey of kinship carers 2024](#)

¹¹ Kinship (2024) [Make or Break: Annual survey of kinship carers 2024](#)

of taking on a kinship caring role means they're significantly less able to remain in the labour market.

Kinship Friendly Employers

- 2.8. Our Kinship Friendly Employers scheme¹² provides a free framework and toolkit to help any employer – from any sector and of any size – to introduce policies which retain their staff and support kinship carers in their workforce to maintain their income, job security and career prospects whilst stepping up to take on caring responsibilities for children they love.
- 2.9. To date, we've worked with leading employers such as Tesco, John Lewis, cardfactory, B&Q, Lloyds Banking Group, Correla and many others who have introduced their own paid leave policies for kinship carers. However, employers of all sizes tell us that the lack of statutory underpinning for kinship carers in the workplace means they often cannot go as far as they would like to.

3. Case studies

3.1. Rachel¹³

Rachel, aged 56 and from South London, took care of her nephew as a baby in 2017 when his parents were no longer able to care for him. At the time, she had a managerial job and had been working for her employer for more than six years.

"Our HR department said they'd never come across a situation like mine before and they hadn't heard of kinship care. They said any support would need to be discretionary and I would need to speak to my line manager, who was really intrusive and asked lots of personal questions about my nephew's mum and dad. I remember a look of disgust on his face when I told him why he had come into my care. There was no understanding or empathy, instead I felt judged and stigmatised just for being a family member.

My HR department said as it wasn't adoption or maternity leave, they had nothing in their policies to support me and that they couldn't set a precedent. I only had 3 weeks to get things ready before my nephew arrived but as I was working full-time, I had no real time to prepare.

Around the same time, I had two colleagues who were becoming parents, one received full maternity leave entitlement and the other received adoption leave. I felt I was being treated completely differently. I felt judged and looked down on as though I was an awful person. This was hurtful, more so with the length of time I had been there; they knew me. Where there was a celebration of the other children [joining a family], mine had to take place in silence.

Every child should have the same start in life but my nephew wasn't allowed to have time with me to settle in, even though I was his 5th placement. I had just 6 weeks off to bond with him but I was busy looking for nurseries and child minders at a time which should have been about his emotional needs. It was horrible and stressful, especially knowing that the days I had before returning to work were fast disappearing. That lack of time together had an impact on my nephew and he has attachment issues now which he's having therapy for. I wished I could have stayed at home with him in the first important months. I believe he would have been more secure.

During that short time off, my line manager contacted me, tried to get me back to work early and wouldn't let me take any more unpaid leave. Work was never the same to me after I took care of my nephew. I used to dread going into work but I had a mortgage to pay. I left that job

¹² For more information on Kinship Friendly Employers, please visit: <https://kinship.org.uk/get-involved/partner-with-kinship/become-a-kinship-friendly-employer/>

¹³ Kinship (2023) [Forced Out: Delivering equality for kinship carers in the workplace](#)

the following year in May 2018. I left because I felt unsupported. Kinship carers are being forced out of their jobs and on to benefits because of the lack of support.

The way I was treated was awful and it still feels raw. I don't want this to happen to other kinship carers. I feel strongly that kinship carers should get the same statutory entitlements such as paid leave as adopters and birth parents do. Why should I be singled out as not being the same, not worthy of the same support? All children should have the same basic rights to help start them off in life.

I 100 per cent think employers should do more to help carers by offering flexible working. In my new job I have flexible working and my boss is amazing. Now I can drop my nephew at school and pick him up and make up the hours by working earlier or later. Having that understanding has made a huge difference.

3.2. **Natalie¹⁴**

Natalie, aged 33, lives in Bradford with her partner. They took on the care of her nephew in 2022 when he was only 10 weeks old, and now care for him under a special guardianship order. Natalie and her partner also have two children of their own.

"It was an emergency situation when I took care of my nephew. I had been working as a teaching assistant and was looking forward to going back to work in September, as I'd been offered a 2-year contract. I explained to the school about my nephew and, although they were very empathetic, they were unable to offer me any paid leave.

Social services said I had to manage contact with my nephew and his parent four times a week and I very much felt that if I couldn't do that he would be taken from me. I was in fight or flight mode. Without paid leave and in a state of high anxiety, I was forced to quit my job and go on benefits.

I could only think one day to the next trying to get through the care proceedings. I think it was four weeks later that I thought 'oh my gosh, I've lost my income'. I didn't realise then it would be a permanent arrangement and had to start going into my savings.

It was an absolute nightmare of a time. Paid parental leave would have made a massive difference to us all because I could have gone back to work after things had settled down. It would have meant a lot less stress for us all. I would have been happier, instead of panicking about the future and my nephew and I would have had time to bond and get to know each other without having to worry about money.

It's massively unfair that kinship carers are not entitled to the same statutory entitlement such as paid leave and flexible working as adopters and birth parents. There's no difference between us. I'm raising a family member's child who would otherwise have gone into the care system.

When I had maternity leave with my children, I had the chance to come up for air and relax during that time with them. But with my nephew, I went from being an independent woman in work to being on benefits and using my savings and having sleepless nights. That's why I want to study to become a social worker so I can help make change happen with the experience I have."

4. **Recommendations**

¹⁴ Kinship (2023) [Forced Out: Delivering equality for kinship carers in the workplace](#)

- 4.1. The government should legislate to introduce a statutory right to paid kinship care leave, at least on a par with adoption leave and pay. This would align with the government's existing action to boost employment rights and ensure those with parental and caring responsibilities are able to remain in and return to work where they want to (e.g. as outlined in the *Get Britain Working White Paper*¹⁵), and contribute to its missions to grow the economy, raise living standards across the country and create opportunities for all.
- 4.2. The government has outlined plans in *Next Steps to Make Work Pay* to deliver a review of the parental and carers leave systems.¹⁶ At minimum, the terms of reference for the review of parental leave must include an assessment of the value of introducing paid leave for kinship carers.

¹⁵ Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury and Department for Education (2024) [Get Britain Working White Paper](#)

¹⁶ Department for Business and Trade (2024) [Next Steps to Make Work Pay](#)

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.

Contact

Sam Turner, Associate Director of Policy and Public Affairs
sam.turner@kinship.org.uk