



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

Making work pay for kinship carers

May 2025

Executive summary

Our new research strengthens the case for paid kinship care leave ahead of the government's review of the parental leave system.

The journey so far

Kinship has been campaigning to secure greater employment support for kinship carers for over a decade. Our [sector-leading surveys of kinship carers](#) have revealed how a lack of paid employment leave is unnecessarily pushing kinship carers into poverty and the benefits system. Our [advice, training and support services](#) continue to help kinship carers navigate the impacts of a system which denies their children a period of stability to settle into their new home after experiencing significant trauma, separation and loss.

Since 2023, our [Kinship Friendly Employer scheme](#) has supported leading employers to deliver paid leave policies for kinship carers in their workforces. Our [#ValueOurLove campaign](#) has also mobilised thousands of kinship carers across the country to push for change, leading to some welcome government action and growing cross-party support for our call for equalised pay and leave between adoptive and kinship families – but the pace of change has been too slow.

A renewed case for kinship care leave

Our new research reveals how poor employment support is pushing kinship carers out of the labour market unnecessarily – and keeping them there. Analysis of more than 1,300 responses to our 2024 annual survey of kinship carers reveals that:

The majority of kinship carers are in work before they take on the role.

3 in 4 kinship carers (74%) were in paid work immediately before they became a kinship carer, and more than two thirds of working kinship carers (67%) were in full time employment (i.e. 31 hours or more per week).

Becoming a kinship carer often results in permanent labour market withdrawal.

Of those who were in paid work, nearly half (45%) stopped working when they took on the care of a relative or friend's child. The vast majority (80%) have not returned to any form of paid work since.

Paid kinship care leave could support many kinship carers to return to employment.

Only 3% of kinship carers were able to take a period of paid employment leave. Around one third (32%) of kinship carers said a similar right to paid leave would have enabled them to return to work as before, and a further 19% said it would have to some extent.

Economic inactivity amongst kinship carers remains high compared to parents.

At the time of our 2024 annual survey, 4 in 10 kinship carers (40%) were in some form of employment. Of those who were economically inactive, nearly 1 in 5 (18%) said this was due to long-term sickness or disability.

Next steps

The current government's focus on boosting employment rights and "making work pay" provides a unique opportunity to finally secure a new right to statutory pay and leave for kinship carers when they step up to care for a relative or friend's child. The government should commit to exploring this within the scope of its forthcoming review of the parental leave system, and work alongside kinship families to design policy solutions which work for families and employers.

The journey so far

Kinship has been campaigning to secure greater employment support for kinship carers for over a decade.

Developing our evidence base

Our pioneering 2012 report [*Giving up the day job?*](#) found that more than 8 in 10 kinship carers who gave up work when they took on the care of a child said they would like to have stayed in work – and we've been pushing for a statutory right to paid leave for kinship carers ever since.

In 2023, after exploring kinship carers' experiences with employment for several years through our annual surveys, we published [*Forced Out: delivering equality for kinship carers in the workplace*](#). This revealed the devastating consequences which a lack of employment support is having for kinship carers and for the state. We found that:

- more than 4 in 10 kinship carers had been pushed out of work permanently and a further 45% had no choice but to reduce their hours after stepping up to care for a relative or friend's child.
- 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.

A lack of paid leave is also splitting up siblings. Our [*Make or Break*](#) report, published in October 2024, revealed that 17% of kinship carers 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 same report also highlighted the scale of kinship carers' reliance on the benefit system to support their incomes; nearly half of working-age kinship carers (46%) were receiving Universal Credit.

Our evidence illustrates that a lack of workplace support is unnecessarily pushing kinship carers into poverty and the benefits system, and denying their children a period of stability to settle into their new home after experiencing significant trauma, separation and loss. Our advice, training and support teams also continue to help kinship carers navigate the impacts of this, including poor health and wellbeing, a loss of identity and relationships, disrupted attachments, and reduced stability for their children.

Making progress

Responding to these challenges, we established our [*Kinship Friendly Employer scheme*](#) in June 2023. This provides a free framework and toolkit to help employers – from any sector and of any size – to introduce policies which support kinship carers in their workforces. To date, the scheme has supported leading employers including Tesco, cardfactory, John Lewis Partnership, Lloyds Banking Group and B&Q to deliver their own paid leave policies and meaningfully enhance the support they offer to their kinship carer employees.

In addition, Kinship's [*#ValueOurLove campaign*](#) has, since launching in October 2022, called on the government to deliver a new right to paid leave for kinship carers at least on a par with that available to adoptive parents.

Following the publication of our *Forced Out* report, we hosted a parliamentary drop-in event in July 2023 for MPs and Peers to learn more about our research and policy asks, and to meet with kinship carers who have themselves been forced out of work. They included Ginna, a kinship carer and grandmother from Thirsk, who met with her MP and then minister responsible for employment rights, Kevin Hollinrake MP. Thousands of kinship carers also signed an open letter from Ginna to Minister Hollinrake and shared their own experiences, urging him to support a new right to kinship care leave.

Our campaigning led to the government publishing new guidance for employers on supporting kinship carers in the workplace in December 2023 alongside the first ever National Kinship Care Strategy. And in January 2025, we were proud to celebrate the Department for Education becoming the very first government department to achieve 'gold standard' from our Kinship Friendly Employer scheme.

Unfulfilled promises

However, despite the welcome progress made, kinship carers are still waiting for the government to deliver what they need and deserve – a right to statutory leave and pay when they step up to care for a child.

The previous government's *Stable Homes, Built on Love* strategy, published in February 2023, committed to *"explore additional workplace entitlements"* for kinship carers following the Independent Review of Children's Social Care's recommendation 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. But this didn't lead to the introduction of any further entitlements.

Despite slow progress, there is now growing cross-party support backing our call for equalised leave entitlements between kinship carers and adoptive parents, as MPs and Peers across the political spectrum recognise that this makes sense for children and families, for employers, and for the state. The three main political parties at the time all included commitments to improved support for kinship carers in their 2024 General Election manifestos, and the Liberal Democrats pledged to make *"all parental pay and leave day-one rights, including for adoptive parents and kinship carers"*.

In addition, the House of Lords Children and Families Act 2014 post-legislative scrutiny committee recommended that paid leave entitlements should be extended to special guardians, and the previous Education Committee acknowledged following its unfinished children's social care inquiry that *"the case for additional financial support for kinship carers, as well as 'kinship leave' on par with Adoption Leave must be reviewed"*.

An opportunity for change

Which brings us to now. The current government was elected with a strong mandate for delivering employment reform, and this has formed a key part of their policy and legislative agenda. Labour set out prior to the election a Plan to Make Work Pay and deliver *"a new deal for working people"*, and their manifesto for the 2024 General Election committed to implementing this in full and introducing legislation within 100 days of taking office.

Subsequently, the government's Employment Rights Bill, introduced into Parliament in October 2024, marks the first phase of the government's delivery of this commitment. Whilst many of the Bill's provisions – such as enhanced rights to flexible working – could help to improve workplace experiences for kinship carers, it does not include a right to paid employment leave for kinship carers.

The Bill is currently being scrutinised by Peers in the House of Lords at committee stage. We've worked with parliamentarians to deliver and support amendments to the Bill, tabled by Steve Darling MP and Lord Palmer of Childs Hill in the Commons and Lords respectively, which would introduce kinship care leave. During the Bill's committee stage debate in the Commons, although the amendment was withdrawn, the responding minister noted that the government was *"committed to ensuring that all employed parents and carers receive the best possible support to balance their work and family lives"* and acknowledged that *"the existing system of leave for parents and carers needs improvement"*.

That's why the government has also promised to deliver a review of the parental leave system. The Labour Party manifesto promised this within a first year in government, and the government's Next Steps to Make Work Pay paper, published alongside the Employment Rights Bill, confirmed it would do so and *"listen to workers and employers on how to deliver change"*. Recent debate in Parliament suggests the review may begin in June, but this is yet to be confirmed.

As such, we think the forthcoming parental leave review provides the best opportunity to secure a commitment from the government to introduce a new right to statutory pay and leave for kinship carers. Ahead of the review commencing, we're calling on the government to confirm that the review's scope will include employment leave for kinship carers and that they will work alongside kinship families to make an assessment of the value of introducing paid employment leave for this cohort.

A renewed case for kinship care leave

New research reveals how poor employment support is pushing kinship carers out of the labour market unnecessarily – and keeping them there.

To generate further supporting evidence to inform our [#ValueOurLove campaign](#) call for equalised pay and leave between kinship carers and adoptive parents, we asked a series of questions in our 2024 annual survey which reflect those included within the Census 2021. Our new analysis deepens our understanding of kinship carers' labour market participation by comparing our survey data from more than 1,300 kinship carers with the wider public and other groups.¹

For additional evidence and extended discussion of the impact of a lack of employment support on kinship carers, including additional case studies and contributions from kinship carers, please read our [Forced Out](#) report.

Before becoming a kinship carer

3 in 4 kinship carers (74%) were in paid work immediately before they became a kinship carer.

Even considering the typical age profile of kinship carers compared to other groups caring for children (the median age of respondents to our 2024 annual survey was 55 to 59 and nearly half were aged 60 or over), most are economically active prior to taking on the role.

The vast majority (85%) were an employee during this period and the remaining 15% were self-employed. Currently, unlike the Maternity Allowance available to self-employed mothers, only employed adopters are entitled to any pay and leave. We support a right to paid leave for both adoptive parents and kinship carers which includes those who are self-employed too, and hope to see the government's review address this gap in the law.

Consistent with our previous research, kinship carers responding to our 2024 annual survey were disproportionately likely to be working in key sectors including healthcare, education and social care prior to taking on the care of a child, even when considering the overrepresentation of female respondents to our survey and within these sectors. A lack of employment support for kinship carers is therefore likely to be exacerbating significant workforce pressures within our hospitals, schools and communities.

Sector	Percentage of kinship carers in employment immediately prior to becoming a kinship carer
Healthcare	19%
Teacher training and education	17%
Retail	10%
Public services and administration	9%
Social care	7%

¹ For more information on our 2024 annual survey cohort, including demographics, please see our [Make or Break](#) report.

More than two thirds of working kinship carers (67%) were in full time employment (i.e. 31 hours or more per week) prior to taking on the care of their kinship children.

This is similar to the percentage of those in employment who were working full time hours at the time of Census 2021 (70%).² The comparable intensity in the average number of hours worked by kinship carers at this point confirms that a significant amount of labour market activity and productivity in key sectors is likely either lost or displaced, given what we now know about how becoming a kinship carer impacts on labour market participation.

Samantha

Kinship carer and mother-of-2, Samantha, 41, from Doncaster, is raising her 3 year old great nephew who came to her when he was just 7 months old. She had to give up her full-time teaching assistant job so she could look after her great nephew when she wasn't offered paid leave from work.

Samantha said: "My great nephew was in foster care while I was being assessed to be a kinship foster carer. I was the only family member who had been successfully assessed so it was a case of either I took him, or he was adopted.

I asked the school for time off and asked about flexible working but they didn't offer me anything and so it put me in a difficult situation. As a single mum, I didn't know how I was supposed to look after my baby nephew and take him to all the family contact sessions if I couldn't get time off work.

I had colleagues who were taking adoption and maternity leave but there was nothing in place for kinship carers like me who step up to look after a child. It was a hard decision to make but I had no choice other than to quit my job which I loved.

Being at home all the time with my great nephew has been very difficult. I've had problems with my mental health and was struggling with his behaviours as he was screaming all day long every day. My own children also struggled with having to share their mum with a baby.

If I'd had the opportunity to take paid leave from work with the option of working flexibly, that would have been a massive help. I would have had the security of an income and the social interaction that goes with the job because being a kinship carer can be very lonely and isolating.

I didn't get any support from social services. It was all very chaotic, and I felt I was rushed into becoming a special guardian. While I received a financial allowance for the first couple of years that stopped this February and I don't receive any financial support now. I'm just left to rely on Universal Credit.

I thought I was done with nappies and night feeds and had teenage children and a job I enjoyed. Now I'm forced to rely on benefits, Paid leave and flexible working would make a dramatic difference to kinship carers' lives. It's not fair that we are doing the right thing by keeping children within the family but are not receiving any support to help us do that.

My only lifeline is a kinship support group I help run locally where kinship carers can meet up for a cup of tea and a chat and swap advice and recommendations. It's a place where they can be with other people who are in a similar situation and can understand them and show support."

² Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) [Employment in local authorities, England and Wales: Census 2021](#) [Published 13 March 2023]

After becoming a kinship carer

Of those who were in paid work, nearly half (45%) stopped working when they took on the care of a relative or friend's child. The vast majority (80%) have not returned to any form of paid work since.

Of those who did remain in employment after taking on the care of a child, other changes to working intensity or patterns were common. More than one quarter of respondents (27%) said they reduced their working hours, and 13% changed their working pattern or style either instead of – or in addition to – changing the number of hours they worked (e.g. they changed to a new schedule or switched to remote working).

These findings bolster trends identified in previous Kinship surveys, and reflect both the very substantial and widespread changes to labour market participation amongst working kinship carers when they step up to raise a relative or friend's child. Only a small minority of those who were in paid work – fewer than 1 in 8 (13%) – saw no change to their employment status after becoming a kinship carer.

The impact of employment leave on labour market withdrawal

The significant rate of permanent exit from the labour market may be illustrating how a lack of flexible working options suitable for those with kinship caring responsibilities is intensified by the challenges which many older people experience when trying to re-enter the workforce. Kinship carers may continue to struggle to gain employment, even when they want to or feel they need to in order to support their family finances.

Previous research has found that, among mothers who were working full time prior to childbirth, most either stop working or move to part time work after a period of maternity leave; 44% returned to, and remained in full time work 3 years after birth, with this share falling to 31% over 5 years.³ Although not directly comparable, within our survey cohort, 32% of kinship carers who were working full time (i.e. 31 hours or more) said they stopped working and did not return to work and a further 9% stopped working but have since returned to employment in some form.

Parental leave can encourage and support parents to return to work after having a baby, but it can also act to provide financial and wider stability which enables parents to withdraw from the labour market as they deem most appropriate for their own circumstances. Paid employment leave policies can provide significant economic and social benefits to both families and the state often regardless of their impact on future labour market participation, but a lack of statutory pay and leave for kinship carers robs them of the agency to make similar decisions in the best interests of their family and the lasting benefits this brings.

When considering the impact which kinship care leave might have on labour market participation, it is important to recognise the very different starting points for kinship carers who take on the care of a baby or child to other groups raising children, and the impact this has in exacerbating often chronic financial insecurity.

Evidence suggests that kinship carers are more likely to have lower incomes than any other group raising children, and analysis of Census 2021 shows that kinship households are more likely than parental households to be deprived across all measures, including employment and housing.⁴ Last year, we found that kinship carers were more than twice as likely as other adults to

³ Harkness, S. et al (2019) Employment pathways and occupational change after childbirth. Government Equalities Office. [Published 22 October 2019]

⁴ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021 [Published 26 September 2023]

be using food banks and were more than four times as likely to have had a bill they weren't able to pay in the last month.

Given that kinship carers are likely to have ongoing financial needs which require additional financial support, their circumstances are more likely than for parents or adopters to necessitate, or at least encourage, maintaining or returning to paid employment. Therefore, we believe the introduction of statutory pay and leave for kinship carers is likely to push disproportionately in the direction of *increasing* the likelihood of greater numbers of kinship carers returning to work compared with what we currently see in the absence of any entitlement, and compared to other groups where paid leave may more commonly facilitate a 'softer' withdrawal from the labour market. This is reflected in the proportion of kinship carers who told us a similar entitlement would have enabled them to return to work as they were before (see below), although we plan to explore this further in our 2025 annual survey and policy development work alongside kinship families.

Mandy and Mark

Kinship carer grandparents Mandy, 62, and Mark, 71, from North West London, were asked by children's services to care for their 2 grandchildren 3 and a half years ago when they were aged 1 and 7.

At the time, Mandy was an administrative worker at a local school and Mark was driving disability buses. Neither were able to take a period of leave to help them settle in and bond with their grandchildren and both were forced to quit their jobs.

Mandy said: *"I loved my admin job at the school. I'd been there 17 years and had no plans to stop working until the grandchildren were literally dropped in our laps. I wasn't offered paid leave from work and I knew I'd have to be at home with them to give them the level of care they needed, so I had no choice but to quit my job which I'd always really enjoyed."*

This all happened at a very difficult time as Mark had just been diagnosed with cancer for the second time in just 2 years and was having to undergo surgery and treatment again.

Mandy said: *"It was all very stressful, the stuff of nightmares really. If I had been offered paid employment leave that would have helped us massively and taken a lot of worry away. Overnight I lost £1,200 a month in earnings even though we had two small children to look after. I felt like I was forced to leave work at 59 and now I feel like I have lost my confidence to go back into the workplace."*

Fortunately, Mark is now in remission, but he says their future is uncertain: *"We're really struggling in this cost-of-living crisis. All our bills are going up but our income has nosedived. We are frightened for the future. We're living hand to mouth and worry that there could come a time where we can't continue to look after the children if our finances were to change or get worse. It would mean we'd have to consider the children going back into care. It's a terrible thought but we are so stretched financially."*

Our support circle isn't great and getting help is difficult, so we feel on our own and isolated. We're still up at night as the little one often has nightmares. We are constantly exhausted and get emotional more than ever before.

Kinship carers should get the same paid leave from work as adoptive parents. We are doing the same role, taking care of our grandchildren to prevent them going into the care system but we are not given the same support and that's not fair."

Access to employment leave

Only 3% of kinship carers were able to take a period of paid employment leave.

A further 8% of respondents said they took a period of unpaid leave.

"I had 3 jobs, 2 care jobs and a job with a healthcare trust. As I was a foster carer then [got] an SGO, I had no rights to leave apart from a few weeks parental leave. Sadly all my jobs were careful to look into options but due to my situation I had no rights to paid leave. I gave up all 3 jobs."

"I had to have unpaid leave whilst we juggled the death of our daughter and sought to care for her son. It was very hard on us financially to have court proceedings and a funeral so close together and be entitled to no financial help at all."

"When grandson first came to me at age 3 he was extremely traumatised, needed lots of medical help/appointments I tried to return to my job in support work but couldn't do shift patterns I did previously and employers weren't willing to make any adjustments to enable me to return, I did cut hours right down but it was made clear that steps were been taken to ensure I left job."

We also asked those respondents who were in work immediately before becoming a kinship carer, if a right to paid employment leave – similar to maternity or adoption pay and leave – had been available to them, would it have enabled them to return to work as they had done before they became a kinship carer.

Around one third (32%) of kinship carers said a similar right to paid leave would have enabled them to return to work as before, and a further 19% said it would have to some extent.

Comments shared by kinship carers explained how a period of paid leave would have supported them not only to be there for their children at a time of immense turbulence, but also to have freedom from concerns about their household finances and their future careers. It would have delivered the stability they needed to make practical arrangements to better support their children, whilst enabling them to stay connected to – and potentially remain in – the careers they had worked hard to pursue and succeed in.

"All the changes I made were to adjust to having a baby to look after. I was lucky to have three weeks fostering leave available, but after that I had to secure a home working contract, work overnight sometimes to make up my hours because I had no childcare. If I had the equivalent of adoption leave, I would have had more time to get nursery agreed and secured, and would have been returning to work with a toddler not a newborn."

"Financial pressures were enormous and remain one of the biggest stressors placed on us. Had I been able to take some paid leave to adjust and to bond it would have made the world of difference."

"Couldn't settle the children in around working especially as a single person. Paid mat leave would have allowed me to sort things out and get to know the boys properly, and also given me an idea about what I could manage e.g. going to part time. But I left work as had no choice and have struggled to find something since. The children always come first for me, and although they are worth it and deserve it that has really screwed me over."

"I had to take 7 months sick leave as my nephew was 2 days old when he came to me. Work supported to some extent but they didn't know how to manage my case due [to] a complete lack of guidance. If I could have had maternity leave I wouldn't have had the stress of constantly thinking I would lose my job. My return to work was rocky as it was difficult to return from sick as I felt

ashamed. If it had been maternity leave I wouldn't have had to deal with the guilt that I was letting my team down."

"I work for the NHS so if the kinship leave was available as adoption leave I'm sure I would have gone back into my role as I was. However this wasn't an option, had to use all my leave for the year and take special leave that my manager had to fight for me to have."

"We were given 3 traumatised children aged under 7. None of their biological family had passed assessments to even be able to babysit. It was covid time with no face to face support. A kind of maternity leave would have given me the months needed to sort out schools, medical assessments, contact arrangements with birth parents and balance my own children. The first 9 months were hell during the worst part of covid, they were scared, we were worried, and birth family were not happy we had the children."

"We needed time to settle the child in with our biological children it's a big adjustment for everyone, including the placed child. We struggled working and giving all the children the time required, leave would have made this a much easier transition."

"This would have given time to establish routines and boundaries and help settle the children to feel safe and secure. Instead it puts immense pressure trying to juggle loads of meeting while working."

Understandably, a fairly substantial minority (21%) said they either didn't know if a similar right would have enabled them to do this, or this wasn't applicable to them (e.g. in circumstances where they likely wouldn't have been eligible for an equivalent right to pay and leave).

Only one quarter (26%) said definitively that a similar right to adoptive parents would *not* have allowed them to return to working as they were before. Often, this was due to the complexity of children's ongoing needs which meant a more permanent or long term change would have inevitably been necessary, even if a period of leave may have helped initially. As noted earlier, the introduction of paid leave for kinship carers could deliver additional social and economic benefits for families which are realised even when kinship carers choose not to return to employment.

Other reasons included high costs of childcare creating no financial incentive to work, tacit or explicit direction from children's services or the family court that they would be expected to give up work in order to take on the child's care, and kinship carers' own challenges with their age and health.

"Children suffering from trauma so I had to give up my job as there was no other option."

"Child needed stability and security, judge asked me to give up work to provide this."

"Because of the issues I was unable to work full time, as I was forever being called into school etc."

"Both boys are autistic and one is non verbal so they need lots of looking after."

"It would have helped in the short term but the children's needs based on their trauma and their own neurodiverse needs prevents working unless a higher level of targeted support had been offered."

"To begin with, yes it would have enabled me to have paid time off and returned to work, however over time it's become evident with the children's SEN and lack of support that I am no longer able to work."

Natalie

Natalie, 38, from Doncaster, became a kinship carer to her three-month-old nephew in 2020. She was working at the time for the supermarket Asda, and had just returned from a work trip abroad when she received a life changing call.

She said: "I had literally come back from China just before we went into the first COVID lockdown when I received the call from social services. It was a huge shock. I was asked to look after my nephew otherwise I was told he would be placed into the care system.

He was handed over to me like a parcel at my garden gate by social services, on a hot summer's day and came with nothing except some winter clothing and two boxes of blankets, which is hardly appropriate at that time of year.

I didn't have a support network or family nearby, so I turned to social media and put a post on Facebook asking for help and some emergency items. I felt very alone and isolated as there wasn't anyone to support me or even check whether I was doing things the right way.

For two weeks I struggled balancing to feed him through the night every two hours and then go and do a full day's work, without anyone else at home to help me. I was so tired. I had to ask my line manager for help because I wasn't going to give him up and I couldn't quit the job I loved, as amongst other things it also posed the risk of losing my home which I mortgaged alone.

It was such a massive relief when Asda agreed to give me three months discretionary leave because I couldn't have managed without that time off work. I needed time to bond with my nephew, establish some stability and simply rest. Those first few months were critical. There were so many things to sort out. It was all very chaotic, difficult and stressful.

Upon my return to Asda I started a new role so I can work flexibly from home and at head office and I have also since been promoted! I was absolutely delighted when they announced in March this year that paid kinship leave of 26 weeks was being included in a package of family focused benefits for colleagues.

Becoming a kinship carer wasn't something I had ever planned. I had an independent lifestyle, traveling for both work and leisure. My future plans included starting a family of my own. But when I was asked to step up for my nephew, I didn't hesitate.

My nephew is five years old now and doing amazingly well. He's started school which he enjoys, and he has a close relationship with one other sibling who is adopted.

Kinship carers make many sacrifices to keep their kinship children with them and I think it's only right that companies help kinship carers stay in work by offering paid leave and flexible working arrangements. It also helps retain talented staff but importantly, provides stability for vulnerable children.

It's hard work being a kinship carer but totally worth it. If Asda hadn't have given me those three months off work, I would have had to quit my job and then I would have lost my home because I couldn't pay the mortgage, and I wouldn't have been entitled to benefits.

I think it's important for my nephew to see me working and enjoying it. It shows him the value of hard work and to know it is possible to build a positive life, even in difficult circumstances."

Current economic (in)activity

At the time of our 2024 annual survey, 4 in 10 kinship carers (40%) were in some form of employment.

This compares to nearly 6 in 10 (57%) of those aged 16 years and over in England and Wales on Census Day, 21 March 2021.⁵

56% of kinship carers were economically inactive⁶; this is slightly higher than the levels of economic inactivity amongst kinship carers (45%) estimated by ONS analysis of Census 2021 responses from potential kinship carers, and more than 3 times that amongst parents (17%).⁷ Of our group of survey respondents who were economically inactive, nearly half (47%) were retired and 41% said they were looking after home or family.

As another comparison, in April to June 2021, around 3 in 4 mothers (76%) and 9 in 10 fathers (92%) were in work in the UK.⁸ Although there are several factors and characteristics influencing participation in the labour market for kinship carers and parents – including age and gender⁹ – this illustrates a significant employment gap between two groups which both have caring responsibilities for children.

For women – who make up the majority of kinship carers – 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. Women's increasing retirement age and government policies to incentivise greater use of kinship care will lead to greater numbers of working-age kinship carers in the future, but they will be less able to remain in or return to the labour market without adequate support.

Of those kinship carers who were economically inactive, nearly 1 in 5 (18%) said this was due to long-term sickness or disability.

This is twice the rate estimated in previous Census 2021 analysis of potential kinship carers (9%) and considerably higher than for parents (2%).¹⁰ It reflects relevant findings from our *Make or Break* report that 4 in 10 kinship carers were disabled, and that 41% of this group were in receipt of Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

As such, government plans to reform disability benefits – currently under consultation until 30 June 2025 – could have a disproportionately negative impact on kinship carers who are less able than others to find appropriate paid work due to their additional caring responsibilities. The government's Get Britain Working White Paper, published in November 2024, outlines additional plans to drive up economic activity amongst those recorded as not working or looking for work due to ill health.

The government should consider how a right to employment leave for kinship carers could support its ambition to ensure those who are able to and want to work can find suitable employment. However, we also urge the government to consider the specific challenges which

⁵ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) Employment in local authorities, England and Wales: Census 2021 [Published 13 March 2023]

⁶ For more information on what is meant by economic inactivity, please visit

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/economicinactivity>.

⁷ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021 [Published 26 September 2023]

⁸ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (202) Families and the labour market, UK: 2021 [Published 22 July 2022]

⁹ For more information on our 2024 annual survey cohort, including demographics, please see our *Make or Break* report. Nearly half (48%) of respondents were aged 60 or over, more than 7 in 10 (73%) were grandparents, and 87% were women.

¹⁰ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021 [Published 26 September 2023]

kinship carers may face given the compounding impacts of their caring responsibilities, time spent out of the labour market, elevated rates of disability and ill-health, and what we know about their typical demographics, on their ability to access and maintain employment.

Next steps

The government should confirm kinship care within the scope of the parental leave review and engage with the sector and kinship families on policy design and implementation.

Developing our understanding

To influence a future review inclusive of kinship care, we plan to include additional questions in our 2025 annual survey of kinship carers to explore further the impact which a right to statutory pay and leave could have for kinship carers, their children, and wider society.

We also plan to continue working alongside kinship carers, our [Kinship Friendly Employers](#), local authority partners, and other charities and groups campaigning for improved family-friendly employment rights, in addition to the Department for Business and Trade, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Education and the government's Future of Work Cabinet Committee, to bring forward further policy and implementation proposals grounded in insight and expertise.

This work will consider some of the specific opportunities and challenges associated with the implementation of statutory pay and leave for kinship carers which may differ from those associated with other groups. This will include recognising that kinship carers can take on the care of children of all ages, although they are still likely to be younger children. 30% of kinship children represented in [our 2023 annual survey cohort](#) went to live with their kinship carers when they were under 1 year and 37% when they were 1 to 4 years, and of those children who left care to special guardianship in 2023-24, we know that 11% were under 1 year and 38% were 1 to 4 years.¹¹

Kinship care arrangements also commonly begin with very little notice, differing from those of new parents or adopters. In 2019, more than half of kinship carers (53%) told us they were given no notice and [took on the children in a crisis situation](#), and only 3 in 10 kinship carers (29%) in 2022 told us they had received any information about being a kinship carer from the local authority [before or shortly after their child moved in](#). Kinship carers are most likely to benefit from paid employment leave at a point when there may be very little certainty about the long term nature of the child's care arrangements or the type of kinship arrangement.

Campaigning for and leading change

This paper, alongside [existing evidence from our research with kinship carers](#), supports our call for an extension of the scope of the government's parental leave review to include an assessment of the value of introducing kinship care leave and to explore how best to implement this in a way which makes sense for families and for employers. We're grateful to other charities and academics who have already echoed our call by [signing a joint letter](#), coordinated by Working Families, calling for a comprehensive review of parental leave, including kinship care.

As further details are released by the government about the parental leave review's timeline and terms of reference, we will continue to engage our [Kinship Community](#), [Campaign Champions](#) and wider network of [#ValueOurLove campaign](#) supporters to share their views and experiences

¹¹ Coram (2024) [Adoption and Special Guardianship Quarterly Data Collection: Headline Measures: Q1 2024/25](#) [Published October 2024]

directly. In the meantime, kinship carers can [share their own experiences of employment with us](#) and [sign up to receive further updates](#) on the campaign.

Having recently joined the [UK Family Friendly Workplaces™ certification programme](#) as an advocacy partner, we're excited to continue building our [Kinship Friendly Employer scheme](#) and support new employers to deliver paid leave and wider workplace support for their kinship carer employees. This includes supporting other governmental departments who are interested in [following the Department for Education's lead](#) and introducing paid kinship care leave for their staff.

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.

kinship.org.uk



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