



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

Handle With Care

Annual survey of kinship carers 2025

October 2025



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Executive summary

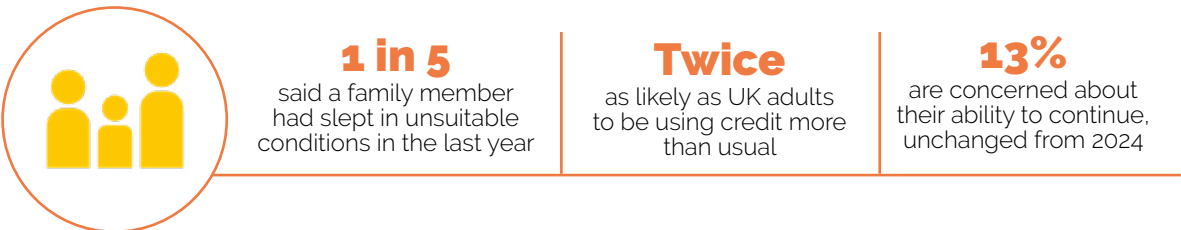
Introduction

Handle With Care, published ahead of Kinship Care Week 2025, shares key findings from Kinship's 2025 annual survey of more than 1,900 kinship carers to provide an updated 'state of the nation' overview of kinship families. It offers new insight into how kinship carers and their children are managing this year and how particular experiences with finances, support and health are changing, set in the context of ongoing kinship care policy and practice reform.

Kinship families in 2025

Financial hardship remains a core part of many families' lives, experiences of sleeping in unsuitable conditions are common, and poor support presents a significant continued risk to children's stability.

A substantial proportion of kinship families continue to experience significant challenges, risking children's experiences and outcomes. The high cost of living is threatening kinship families' long term financial health above and beyond other UK adults. Incidences of family members sleeping on sofas, chairs and floors so that kinship children have somewhere to sleep are far too common. Worryingly, the percentage of kinship carers concerned about their ability to continue, most often as a result of challenges managing children's social, emotional and mental health needs, remains unchanged.



However, there are some signs of improving kinship family experiences and local authority support, albeit from a very low base.

Kinship carers' health and experiences of loneliness are improving, but continue to remain stubbornly lower than for other UK adults and especially those of a similar age profile. Ratings of local authority support, information and trust are also improving following investment in specialist training and support services for kinship carers.



Policy context in 2025

Kinship Allowance Pilot

Our additional new evidence of kinship foster carers' expectations of movement to other kinship arrangements and the role of improved financial support suggests the UK Government's Kinship Allowance Pilot – which will test the delivery of guaranteed financial allowances in up to 10 local authorities in England – should be accelerated to deliver improved experiences and outcomes for children, families and the public purse.


38%

of kinship foster carers expect to move to other arrangements, down from 49% in 2023

Half

of kinship foster carers say they would move to other arrangements if an equitable financial allowance was guaranteed

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

Awareness amongst kinship carers of the new kinship local offer requirement and extended remit of virtual school heads (VSH) – both strengthened within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, currently going through Parliament – must be improved to ensure kinship families get the information and advice they are eligible for.

Although some reported positive experiences of family group decision making (FGDM), kinship carers overwhelmingly spoke of being poorly supported to participate and take forward resultant plans, leading to negative outcomes. Increased use of FGDM, without accompanying reforms to improve support for family networks and kinship families as recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, risks exacerbating current dysfunctionality within our kinship care system and encouraging greater use of less well-supported kinship care arrangements.


26%

had participated in family group decision making (FGDM)

1 in 8

had seen their local authority's kinship local offer

22%

had received advice or support from the virtual school

Recommendations

Please see page 37 for a detailed set of recommendations.

Improving support for kinship families

The UK and Welsh Governments should equalise financial support between kinship carers and foster carers. The UK Government's Kinship Allowance Pilot should be accelerated and new guidance published to reduce unacceptable levels of variation and poor practice in the delivery of financial support. In the interim, local authorities should emulate leading practice and provide non-means tested allowances. The UK Government's parental leave and pay review should recommend a new right to statutory paid employment leave for kinship carers.

Local authorities should proceed at pace to deliver their kinship local offers and improve the information and signposting provided to all kinship carers. Governments and local authorities should invest in the delivery of tailored and accessible training and support services for kinship carers, including peer support, paying particular attention to support around children's social, emotional and mental health needs and circumstances which increase the risk of family instability.

Building a new kinship care system

It is crucial that the UK Government gets the sequencing of reform right and works at pace to improve the financial, practical and emotional support available to kinship families – including the further rollout of Family Network Support Packages – in order to generate the right legislative, funding and practice framework in the context of the incoming new duty to offer family group decision making (FGDM). Future guidance and research on FGDM should consider the views and experiences of kinship families.

Future policy development should explore how local authorities can actively support progression to more permanent kinship care arrangements without necessitating entry into local authority care to secure long-term eligibility for support.

Results at a glance

Kinship families in 2025

- ➔ 20% of kinship carers said their family was 'mostly doing well', up from 16% in 2024 and 13% in 2023, 21% said they were 'facing severe challenges' or 'at crisis point', down from 23% in 2024 and 26% in 2023.

Health and loneliness

- ➔ 9% of kinship carers said their health was generally bad or very bad, down from 12% in 2024 and 13% in 2023. 53% said their health was generally good or very good, up from 49% in 2024 and 46% in 2023.
- ➔ 15% of kinship carers said they felt lonely often or always, down from 19% in 2023. 18% said they never felt lonely, up from 9% in 2023. 36% of kinship carers were caring for their kinship children on their own.

Local authority support, information and trust

- ➔ Of those who had received local authority support, 20% rated this as excellent or good, unchanged from 2024 but up from 12% in 2023. 38% rated this as poor or very poor, up slightly from 37% in 2024 but down from 44% in 2023.
- ➔ 40% of kinship carers said they had a named contact or worker in their local authority who they could go to for support as a kinship carer.
- ➔ 16% of kinship carers rated their local authority's information about kinship care as excellent or good, up from 15% in 2024 and 9% in 2023. 46% rated this as poor or very poor, down from 47% in 2024 and 55% in 2023.
- ➔ 21% of kinship carers said they completely or moderately trusted their local authority, up from 18% in 2024 and 14% in 2023. 42% of kinship carers said they didn't trust their local authority at all, down from 44% in 2024 and 49% in 2023.

Finances and cost of living

- ➔ 40% of kinship carers said they were 'living comfortably' or 'doing all right', up from 30% in 2023. 24% said they were 'finding it quite difficult' or 'finding it very difficult', down from 32% in 2023.
- ➔ As a result of the cost of living, 44% of kinship carers said they were using their savings (down from 48% in 2024) and 28% were using credit more than usual such as credit cards, loans or overdrafts (unchanged from 2024).
- ➔ In addition, 11% were skipping meals, 11% were not replacing essential broken goods such as boilers or washing machines, 21% were not putting the heating on, 17% were avoiding the dentist or other healthcare treatment, and 7% were using food banks (down from 8% in 2024).
- ➔ 18% of kinship carers said they had a direct debit, standing order or bill they couldn't afford to pay in the last month, up from 17% in 2024.

Home

- ➔ 18% of kinship carers said someone in their family had to sleep in unsuitable conditions in the last 12 months so that a child they care for had somewhere to sleep, including sleeping on a sofa, chair or on the floor (8%), sharing a bed (6%), or giving up their own bed (6%) or bedroom (9%).

Family stability

- ➔ 13% of kinship carers said they were concerned about their ability to continue in the next year if their situations didn't improve, unchanged from 2024 and up from 12% in 2023..
- ➔ The most common reasons for this were difficulties managing children's social, emotional and mental health needs (71%), a lack of support from others to help provide care (47%), concerns about their age and/or health and wellbeing (47%), financial worries (46%), and challenges with family relationships and contact (43%).
- ➔ 18% of kinship carers said they had at some point been unable to take on the care of another kinship child. Of this group, 84% said this was a brother or sister to a kinship child they already cared for.
- ➔ The most common reasons for this were housing challenges and/or a lack of space at home (53%), difficulties managing children's social, emotional and mental health needs (50%), challenges with family relationships and contact (47%), concerns about their age and/or health and wellbeing (46%), and financial worries (40%).

Policy context in 2025

Kinship Allowance Pilot

- ➔ 44% of kinship foster carers said they did not expect to move to a different arrangement, up from 38% in 2023. 38% said they did expect to move to a different arrangement, down from 49% in 2023.
- ➔ 50% of kinship foster carers said they would move to a special guardianship or child arrangements order if they were guaranteed a financial allowance by the local authority at least equivalent to the allowance they receive as a kinship foster carer. A further 22% said they didn't know.

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

- ➔ 13% of kinship carers said they had seen their local authority's kinship local offer. A further 11% said they didn't know.
- ➔ 15% of kinship carers said they had ever been invited by their local authority to give feedback or help shape the support available to kinship carers in their area.
- ➔ 22% kinship carers said they or a kinship child they care for had ever received advice or support from their local authority virtual school.
- ➔ 26% of kinship carers said they had participated in some form of family group decision making (FGDM), and 90% of this group specified a Family Group Conference (FGC). A further 10% kinship carers said they didn't know.

Foreword



Handle With Care Care reflects the voices of nearly 2,000 kinship carers raising more than 2,700 children across England and Wales – the highest ever number of responses to our annual survey. We're immensely grateful to all those who shared their views and experiences with us this year, and recognise the commitment and contribution they make every day to their children, to each other, and within our communities.

There are some limited signs of improving experiences and local authority support in 2025 which we welcome and celebrate. However, this is climbing slowly from a very low base and there remains a significant cohort of kinship families at breaking point. Financial hardship continues

to feature as a core part of too many kinship carers' lives, many are sleeping in unsuitable conditions to give their kinship children a good night's sleep, and an absence of support is posing an ever-increasing risk to family stability and children's outcomes.

It's clear that, despite nearly 3 and a half years having passed since the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#) in England made its final recommendations to the UK Government, subsequent efforts to “*unlock the potential of family networks*” and deliver much-needed support for kinship families have been woefully inadequate.

In Wales too, progress to equalise support between kinship families and foster and adoptive families is moving too slowly. With Senedd elections on the near horizon, we must and will continue our efforts to ensure the needs, strengths and experiences of all kinship families feature in the ongoing work of the Welsh Government and those representing communities across Wales.

The current UK Government has taken some steps to improve support for kinship families in England, including through the refreshed Kinship Allowance Pilot and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. But our new evidence shows these remain insufficient at best, and could exacerbate some of the most damaging aspects of our dysfunctional kinship care system at worst.

Ultimately, the grand vision for kinship care articulated in the Review has not been realised – and kinship families up and down the country know it.

With the lead architect of the Review – Josh MacAlister – now at the helm of children's social care policy in government as Minister for Children and Families, now is the time to see plans accelerated and efforts renewed to ensure the reality matches the rhetoric.

At our parliamentary reception last year, the Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson MP, said: *"I'll fight every day for children in kinship care and kinship carers. I'll be a voice for you. You will not be forgotten by this government... I know how long you've been waiting, and I know it's frustrating. You are valued critical friends to this government. I want you to push us."* These words really meant something to those we support and campaign alongside, and the thousands of kinship carers who have joined together to support our [#ValueOurLove campaign](#) are now looking to the government to deliver on this promise.

There's a crucial opportunity to finally deliver the *"radical reset"* of children's social care promised by the Review. This new *"phase 2"* of government with its *"focus on delivery, delivery, delivery"* must recognise where reforms to support family networks and kinship families aren't progressing fast enough, and where they might even create further risks to the experiences and outcomes of children and those caring for them. This is a situation which needs handling with care.

Dr Lucy Peake
Chief Executive

October 2025

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 Wales¹ – three times the number in mainstream foster care^{2,3}.

Kinship carers are most commonly grandparents, 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 *Handle With Care*

Handle With Care, published ahead of Kinship Care Week 2025, shares key findings from Kinship's 2025 annual survey of more than 1,900 kinship carers to provide an updated 'state of the nation' overview of kinship families. It offers new insight into how kinship carers and their children are managing this year and how particular experiences with finances, support and health are changing, set in the context of ongoing kinship care policy and practice reform.

About our 2025 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 2025 annual survey was developed using Form Assembly and open to responses from 8 July to 5 August 2025. It was promoted widely via Kinship's Community of kinship carers, social media channels, partner organisations, and our networks of professionals and researchers. We're extremely grateful to the more than 1,900 kinship carers across England and Wales who shared their views and experiences with us this year; 2025 marks the largest ever response to a Kinship annual survey

¹ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) [Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021](#) [Published 26 September 2023]

² Department for Education (2024) [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#) [Published 14 November 2024]

³ Welsh Government (2024) [Children looked after by local authorities in foster placements, at 31 March](#)

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Sam Turner, Associate Director of Policy and Public Affairs. Thanks to Ozioma Paul, Data Analyst, and Anam Raja, Research Manager, for leading on analysis of this year's survey results, and to the wider Kinship team who supported kinship carers to respond.

We are grateful for the support Kinship receives from players of People's Postcode Lottery. Their long-term, flexible funding is especially valuable. It enables us to deliver this annual survey and, together with support from our other core funders, underpins much of the work we do with, and for, kinship families.



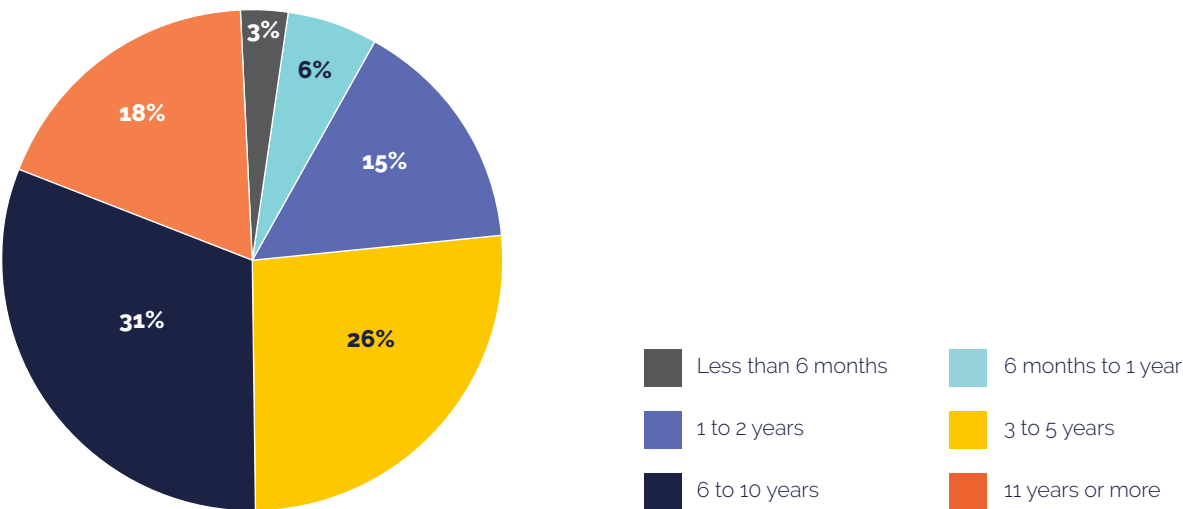
Our 2025 annual survey cohort

1,929 kinship carers kindly gave up their valuable time to complete our 2025 annual survey. Together, they were caring for at least 2,789 kinship children. Around two-thirds (65%) of kinship carers were caring for 1 kinship child and around a quarter (26%) for 2.



Respondents had most commonly been a kinship carer for between 6 and 10 years (31%). Around three-quarters (76%) of our cohort had been a kinship carer for at least 3 years, with nearly 1 in 5 (18%) having done so for 11 years or more. We are pleased to see growing representation from those who have only recently become kinship carers given the particular challenges associated with this often difficult transitional period and the value of hearing from those at different points in their kinship journeys; 9% of respondents to our 2025 annual survey had been a kinship carer for only up to 1 year compared to 6% in last year's survey cohort.

How long have you been a kinship carer?



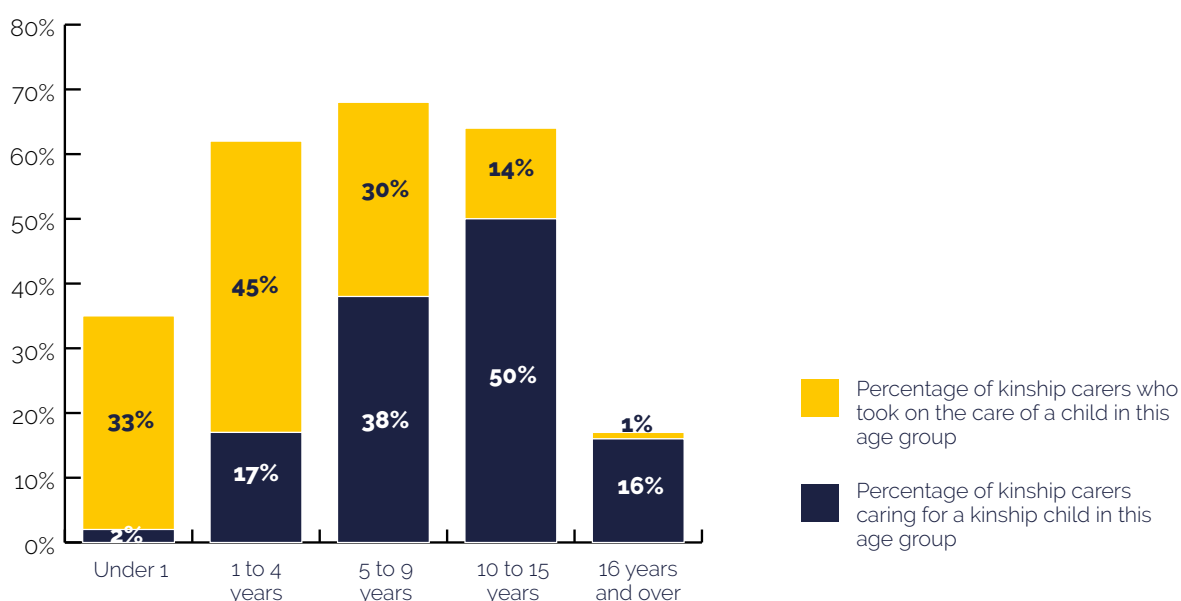
Nearly three-quarters (73%) of kinship carers said they expected their kinship arrangement was going to be long-term or permanent when they took on the care of their kinship child or children, reflecting the significant lifelong commitments being made by kinship carers, often with very little information, notice or preparation. This is one of the key characteristics of kinship care which sets it apart from foster care or adoption. Only 15% said this wasn't expected and a further 11% said they didn't know at the time.

Age

As in recent years, the median age of kinship carers who completed our 2025 annual survey was 55-59 and nearly half (48%) of respondents were aged 60 or over, reflecting the continued 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 similar age profile is also seen in the partners and spouses of survey respondents (where applicable).

Although the percentage of responding kinship carers aged under 40 remains broadly similar to the last 2 years, it's welcome to see that we are continuing to engage a greater number of younger kinship carers. Over the last year, we have continued to enhance our focus on reaching and supporting more younger, non-grandparent kinship carers to ensure their needs and experiences are considered and reflected in our work.

Half (50%) of kinship carers were caring for at least 1 kinship child aged 10 to 15 years old, and nearly 4 in 10 (38%) were caring for at least 1 kinship child aged 5 to 9 years old, broadly aligning with previous annual survey cohorts. Although not directly comparable, the age profile of the kinship children represented in our survey may be more concentrated within those middle age categories than those either under 1 or 16 and over when compared to that identified by ONS analysis of Census 2021 data on kinship households.⁴ It is likely a younger cohort on average compared to all children looked after in local authority care (where 27% are aged 16 and over)⁵, and more reflective of the age profile of those in kinship foster care specifically⁶.



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

5 Department for Education (2024) [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#) [Published 14 November 2024]

6 Department for Education (2024) [Children in Care and Foster Care: Written question](#) Parliament: written question, UIN 15020. Answered on 27 November 2024.

Although kinship carers can take on the care of children at any age, we know they are more likely to take on the care of younger children. Only 1% of respondents to this year's survey took on the care of a child at age 16 or 17, but more than 1 in 6 (16%) of them were currently caring for a child of this age. This reflects what we know about the age profile of those who leave care to special guardianship too, where those aged 1 to 4 remain the largest group at 36%.⁷

The different ages at which children enter kinship care – and how this impacts on kinship carers' experiences and circumstances – will be a crucial consideration for the government's parental leave review in understanding the right approach to a potential future right to employment leave for kinship carers⁸ and how this might be similar or different from other groups including new parents and adopters. Earlier this year, our influencing helped to secure the inclusion of kinship carers within the scope of the government's review, and we look forward to continuing our participatory policy development and campaigning on this alongside kinship carers, [Kinship Friendly Employers](#) and other stakeholders to help secure a new right to statutory leave and pay.⁹

Gender

The gender split across our survey cohort remains identical to last year, with women representing the vast majority (87%). However, the higher response rate this year means our 2025 annual survey represents the views and perspectives of more than 220 male kinship carers, a 38% increase on last year. Alongside younger kinship carers, we've continued our efforts this year to diversify the breadth of our activity to better reach and support more male kinship carers, including through our [Men's Kinship Carers Group](#).

As in previous years, including the partners or spouses of survey respondents (if applicable) gives a much more balanced picture of kinship caring responsibilities and gender; 65% of kinship carers within the households represented in our 2025 annual survey were female. However, this continues to suggest that women are more likely to act as the 'lead' kinship carer, including through involvement with Kinship as peer support group leaders or members, volunteers, campaigners and as members of the Kinship Community, reflecting wider gendered societal patterns in caring responsibilities.

| Gender | Percentage of kinship carers | Percentage of kinship carers' partners or spouses | Kinship carers and their partners or spouses |
|-------------------|------------------------------|---|--|
| Female | 88% | 17% | 65% |
| Male | 12% | 83% | 35% |
| Non-binary | <1% | <1% | <1% |
| Prefer not to say | <1% | <1% | <1% |

⁷ Coram (2025) [Adoption and Special Guardianship Quarterly Data Collection: Headline Measures: Q4 2025/25](#) [Published July 2025]

⁸ For more on the case for a right to paid employment leave for kinship carers, read our [Making work pay for kinship carers](#) paper published in May 2025.

⁹ Kinship (2025) [Kinship celebrates inclusion of kinship carers within government's parental leave review](#) [Published 1 July 2025]

Ethnicity

93% of survey respondents were White, and the vast majority of this group identified as White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British. 4% of kinship carers responding to our survey were Black, Black British, Caribbean or African, 2% had a Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups background, and 1% were Asian or Asian British.

This does not reflect what we understand the likely ethnicity profile of the wider kinship family population to be and significantly overrepresents kinship carers from White backgrounds. Despite this, it is promising that the number and proportion of kinship carers from Black, Asian and Mixed or Multiple ethnic backgrounds responding to our annual surveys is growing. This year, responses from these groups represented a 2 percentage point increase from the proportion in our 2024 annual survey.

Put another way, we heard from more than double the number of Black and Asian kinship carers this year as we did last year, although additional progress is essential to ensure our survey findings and insights better reflect the full diversity of kinship families' views and experiences. Earlier this year, we published our [Raised by Relatives](#) research report which explored the experiences of kinship carers from Black and Asian communities to better inform Kinship and the wider sector about how such kinship families can be better supported in the future.¹⁰

| Ethnic group | Percentage of kinship carers | Percentage of kinship carers caring for at least one child from this ethnic group |
|--|------------------------------|---|
| Asian or Asian British | 1% | 2% |
| Black, Black British, Caribbean or African | 4% | 3% |
| Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups | 2% | 10% |
| White | 92% | 83% |
| Other ethnic group | <1% | 1% |

As we have identified in previous surveys, the ethnicity profile of those kinship children cared for by our kinship carer respondents is more diverse. For example, although only 2% of kinship carers were from a Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups background themselves, 10% said they were caring for a child with a Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups background. However, ONS analysis of Census 2021 data 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, although prevalence is markedly different within aggregated ethnic group categories and especially when compared to children in parental households.¹¹

The identified underrepresentation of children from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds in formalised kinship arrangements (i.e. kinship foster care and special guardianship) very likely contributes to the skewed ethnicity profile of our annual survey cohort given the relative underrepresentation of those with informal arrangements.¹²

10 Tah, P. and Selwyn, J (2025) [Raised by Relatives: the experiences of Black and Asian kinship carers in England](#). Kinship and the Rees Centre, University of Oxford.

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

12 What Works for Children's Social Care (2022) [Understanding formal kinship care arrangements in England: Analysis of administrative data](#)

Relationships

This year marked the very first Kinship annual survey where the percentage of responding kinship carers who were grandparents to a child in their care dropped below 70%, reflecting growing diversity in the type of kinship carers we're hearing from and mirroring the increasing number and proportion of younger kinship carers too. 69% of respondents in 2025 were grandparents, falling from 86% in our very first 'state of the nation' survey in 2016.



The largest year-to-year proportional growth came from those who were aunts and uncles; we heard from 86% more kinship carers who were aunts and uncles this year compared to last year. This likely brings our survey cohort closer to the makeup of kinship household relationships as identified in the ONS' analysis of Census 2021 data, which found that over half of children in kinship care lived with one or more grandparents.¹³

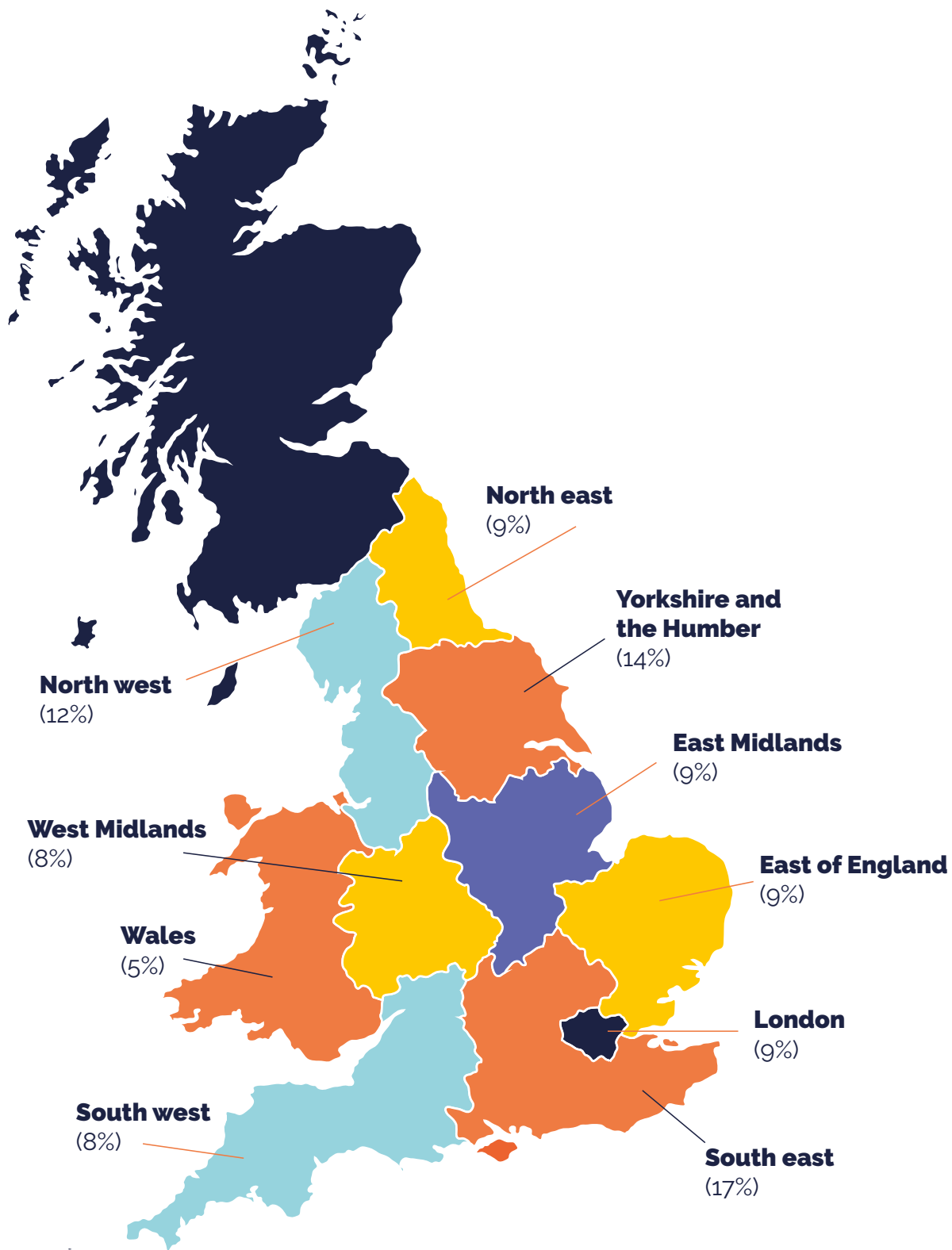
Location

We received responses from at least 1 kinship carer living in all but 2 local authorities which deliver children's services in England and Wales. Compared to the proportion of kinship households in each region, our survey cohort may overrepresent kinship households from the South East and North East and underrepresent kinship households from London, the West Midlands and Wales.

Prevalence of kinship care varies considerably across the country: 6 of the ten local authorities with the highest proportions of kinship households in England are in the North East.¹⁴ Nearly a third (31%) of kinship carers in our survey cohort were living in a different local authority area to the one their kinship child or children had lived in before coming to live with them.

¹³ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) [Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021](#) [Published 26 September 2023]

¹⁴ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) [Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021](#) [Published 26 September 2023]

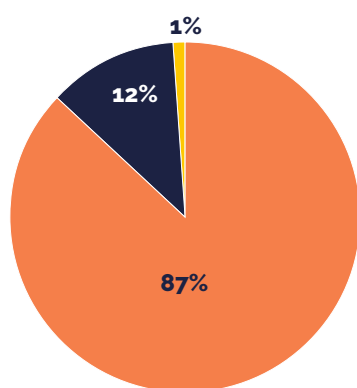


Type of kinship arrangement

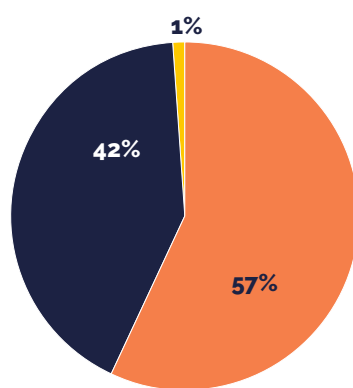
Comparable to recent years, around 7 in 10 (69%) of kinship carers in this year's survey cohort were special guardians to at least 1 kinship child in their care. Of this group, the vast majority (87%) had a special guardianship order (SGO) which was made following care proceedings involving local authority children's services. Comparably, 1 in 10 (10%) kinship carers had a child arrangements order (CAO) (or residence order), but of this group, a considerably higher percentage had secured this in private law proceedings (42%) compared to those with an SGO (12%).

This reflects what we know about the typical use of each legal order and how circumstances lead to some kinship carers securing parental responsibility through a legal order made in private family law proceedings.¹⁵ Together with colleagues at Lancaster University, University of Bristol and Families in Harmony, we are [supporting further research](#) to better understand the circumstances, needs and experiences of children and families involved in non-parent cases within private family law.

Kinship carers with an SGO



Kinship carers with a CAO



Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) of respondents were kinship foster carers. Most were caring for a child or children placed with them under a full care order (s31) (63%), but 13% were caring for a child placed under an interim care order (s38) and 9% under a voluntary arrangement (s20 in England or s76 in Wales). 9% said they didn't know.

7% of kinship carers had an informal arrangement. Of this group, more than 4 in 10 (44%) said they had found out they were a 'kinship carer' through their own research, 15% said as a result of seeing Kinship or kinship care mentioned in the media (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers), a further 15% said through their local authority, and around 1 in 5 (19%) specified a different source, most commonly friends and family or a local organisation supporting kinship carers.

When asked to what extent they would have been better able to seek support if they had known earlier they were a kinship carer, more than half (55%) of informal kinship carers said 'a lot', 14% 'a little' and only 9% 'not at all'. A further 19% said they didn't know. More than a third (35%) of kinship carers with informal arrangements said they didn't expect their arrangement to be long-term or permanent compared to 15% of the entire survey cohort. These figures reflect the importance of improving awareness and understanding about all types of kinship family, and ensuring they receive timely information, advice and guidance about their options and the long-term implications for eligibility for support.

¹⁵ Cusworth, L. et al (2023) [Uncovering private family law: Exploring applications that involve non-parents \('the other 10%'\)](#). Nuffield Family Justice Observatory.

Kinship families in 2025

Financial hardship remains a core part of many families' lives, experiences of sleeping in unsuitable conditions are common, and poor support presents a significant continued risk to children's stability. However, there are some signs of improving kinship family experiences and local authority support, albeit from a very low base.

For nearly a decade, our sector-leading surveys of kinship carers have highlighted the specific challenges they face, illustrating how the difficulties associated with taking on the care of a relative or friend's child are often compounded by having few entitlements to appropriate financial, practical or emotional support.

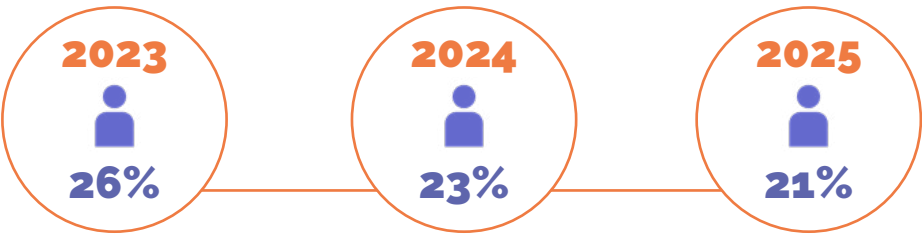
This year's survey has continued to identify a substantial proportion of kinship families who are experiencing significant challenges, posing risks to children's stability and outcomes. Too many kinship families in the last year have been forced to sleep in unsuitable conditions. Financial insecurity remains common and kinship carers are making major everyday sacrifices as a result of a high cost of living. Most worryingly, the percentage of those who say they are concerned about their ability to continue caring for their kinship children remains at similarly alarming levels to last year at 13%.

Kinship is proud to be the largest provider of advice and support services to kinship carers and to have pioneered evidence-led programmes and services which deliver timely advice, training and support to all types of kinship family. With the support of our 12,500-strong community of kinship carers, valued local authority and sector partners and funding from the Department for Education, we have established more than 150 peer support groups across England in the last 3 years and delivered more than 6,100 training experiences since January 2024 to help equip kinship carers with knowledge and skills to support them in their role.

As such, we are also pleased to see in this year's results some continued signs of improving kinship family experiences overall, reflecting the growing recognition of and support for kinship families we have helped to secure through our work to change lives and change the system.

1 in 5 kinship carers (20%) said their family was 'mostly doing well' this year, up from 13% in 2023. In addition, those who said they were 'facing severe challenges' or 'at crisis point' has decreased from over a quarter (26%) in 2023 to 21% in 2025. Measures of health, loneliness and local authority support, information and trust are also moving in the right direction, albeit slowly and from a low base.

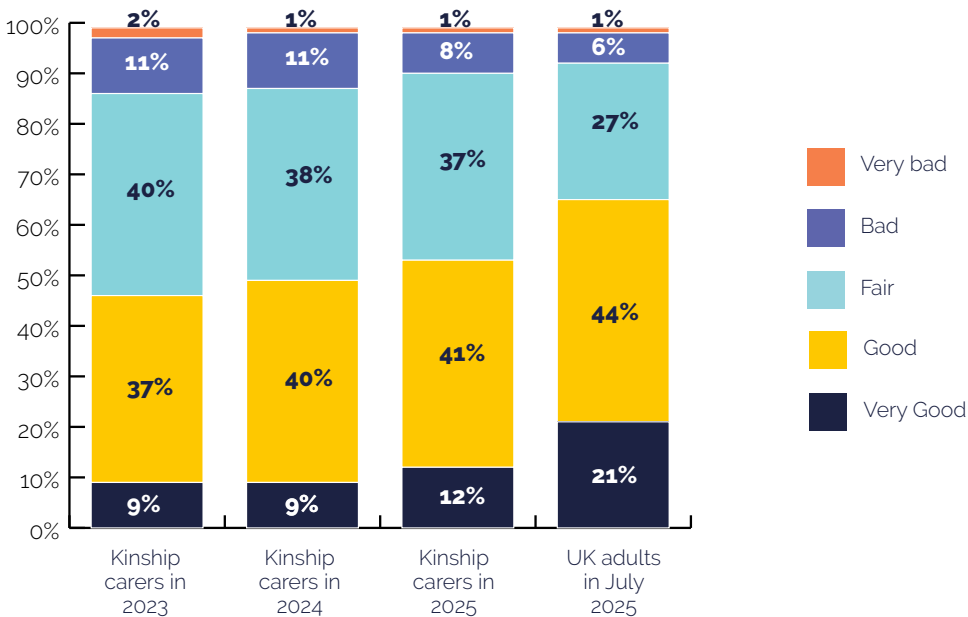
Percentage of kinship carers who said they were 'facing severe challenges' or 'at crisis point'



Health and loneliness

The percentage of kinship carers who said their health is generally bad or very bad has decreased year-on-year from 13% in 2023 to fewer than 1 in 10 (9%) in 2025. Similarly, the percentage who said their health is generally good or very good has increased from 46% in 2023 to over half of respondents (53%) in 2025.

How is your health in general?



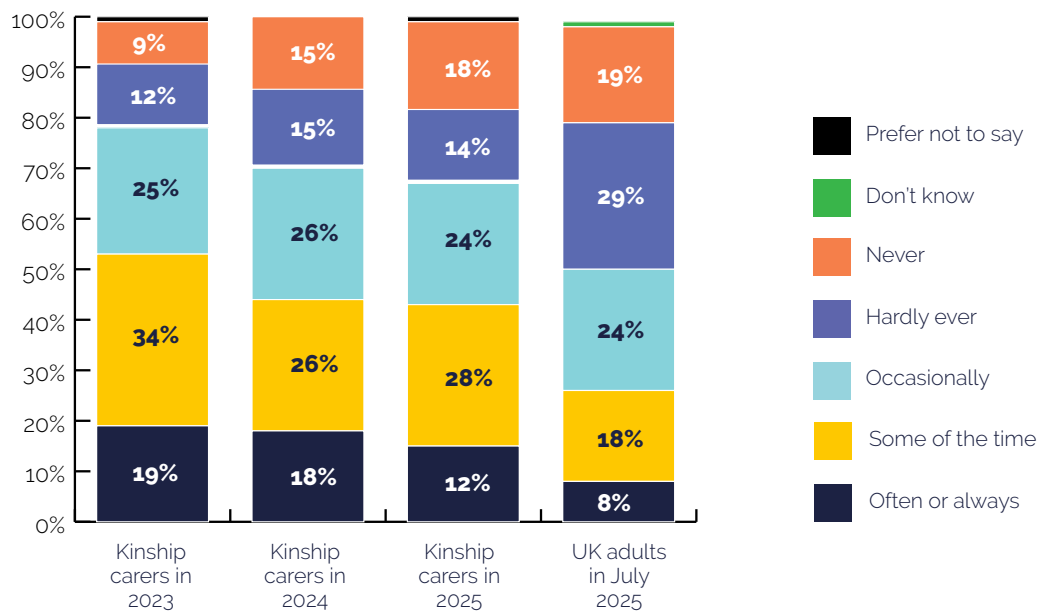
Although the gap has closed, kinship carers still rate their general health as considerably worse than the general population where, at the time of our survey, only 7% said their health was generally bad or very bad and 65% said their health was generally good or very good. As a likely more appropriate comparison given the relationship between age and health, for those in the general population aged 50 to 69 (more than two-thirds of our survey respondents fall into this age group), this was 8% and 63% respectively.¹⁶

Similar to previous years, more than a third (36%) of kinship carers were caring for their kinship children on their own, with the remainder most commonly caring with the support of a partner or spouse. In comparison, only 13% of children who left care via adoption

last year went to single adopters¹⁷ and a 2024 survey of foster carers found that only 26% were fostering on their own¹⁸. Previous Kinship annual surveys have identified that lone caring is a potential risk factor for kinship family instability, with a lack of support at home understandably contributing to concerns about being able to continue. This is why we continue to consider this group specifically in our work, including through a [Caring for kinship children your own](#) online peer support group.

A similar pattern of gradual improvement emerged this year for loneliness as with ratings of health. The percentage of kinship carers who said they feel lonely often or always has decreased year-on-year from nearly 1 in 5 (19%) in 2023 to 15% in 2025, and the percentage who said they never feel lonely has doubled from 9% in 2023 to 18% in 2025.

How often do you feel lonely?



Again, however, kinship carers are still considerably more likely than those in the general population to experience some loneliness, particularly when looking at the comparator age group of those aged 50 to 69. Only 8% and 5% of the general population and those aged 50 to 69 respectively said they felt lonely often or always, and 19% and 25% respectively said they never felt lonely.¹⁹

16 Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2025) [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: personal well-being and loneliness – 2 to 27 July 2025](#) [Published 15 August 2025]

17 Department for Education (2024) [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#) [Published 14 November 2024]

18 The Fostering Network (2024) [State of the Nations' Foster Care: Full Report 2024](#)

19 Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2025) [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: personal well-being and loneliness – 2 to 27 July 2025](#) [Published 15 August 2025]

Local authority support, information and trust

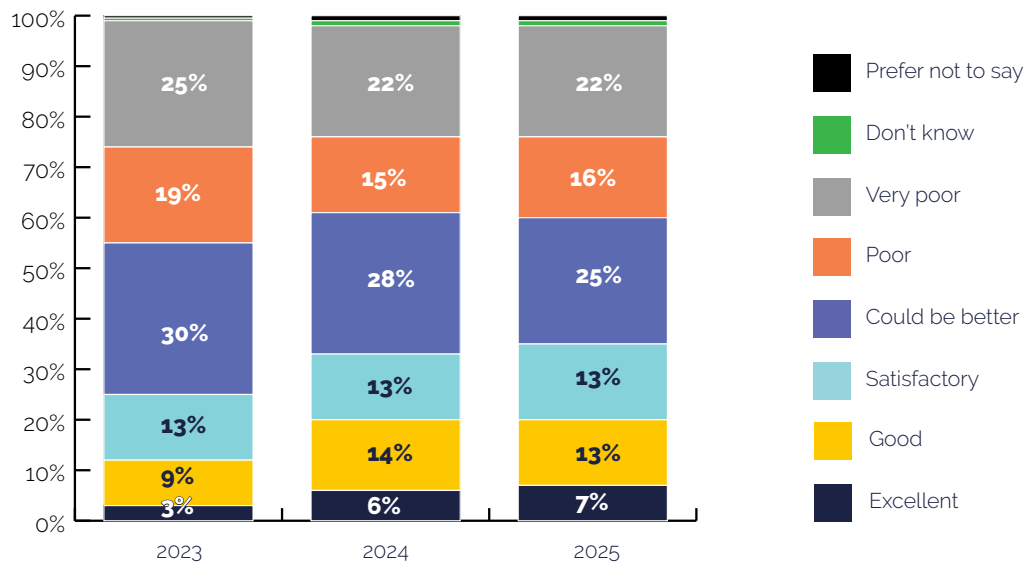
As identified in our [kinship care policy tracker](#), an increasing number of local authorities are taking steps to respond to a changing policy and practice landscape for kinship care. In England, the Department for Education's children's social care reform agenda aims to "support children to live with kinship carers or in fostering families, rather than in residential care"²⁰, and the Welsh Government is undertaking a consultation on proposals which consider the specific needs and circumstances of kinship foster carers and special guardians²¹.

Some local authorities 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. These programmes help local authorities to build improved support for and relationships with their kinship carers. As with [Kinship Navigator programmes](#) operating in the US, they also provide kinship carers with specialist help to learn about, navigate to and access the support they might need, as recommended within the Kinship Care Practice Guide published by Foundations.²²

Results from our 2025 annual survey offer some evidence that improvements identified last year in ratings of local authority support, information and trust have continued, albeit from a very low base. We know from the continued demand for our advice and support services that, despite welcome progress being made in many areas, too many kinship families continue to have poor experiences engaging with their local authority.

Of those who had received local authority support, the percentage rating that support as either excellent or good remained the same as last year (20%) and the percentage rating the support as poor or very poor is also very similar (38% in 2025, up from 37% in 2024). Ratings in 2023 however were much worse, with only 12% of kinship carers rating the support as excellent or good and 44% as poor or very poor.

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



20 Department for Education (2024) [Keeping children safe, helping families thrive](#) [Published 18 November 2024]

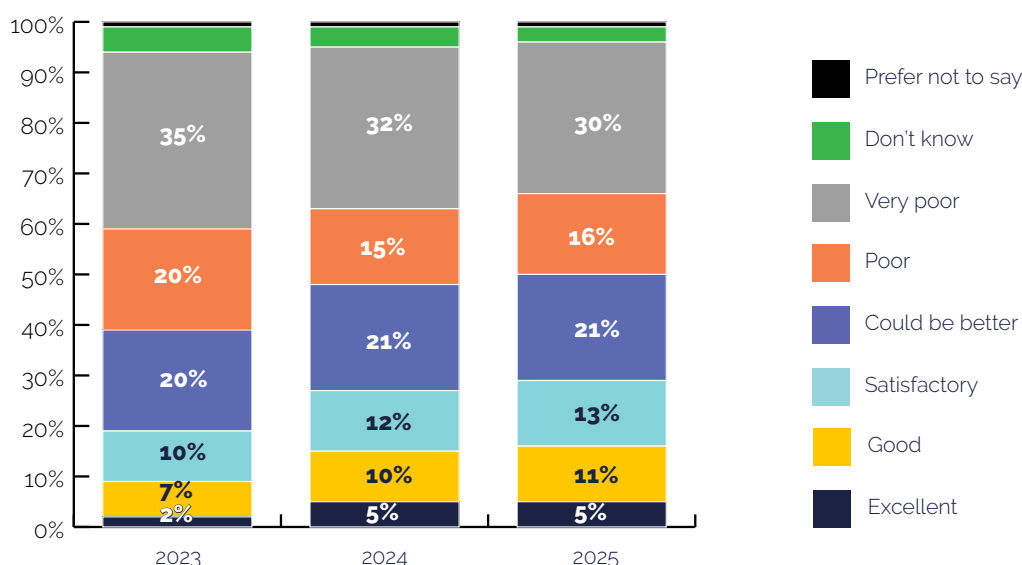
21 Welsh Government (2025) [Consultation Document: Improving support for vulnerable children and their families across Wales – Improving adoption, fostering and kinship services](#) [Published 4 August 2025]

22 Foundations (2024) [Kinship Care Practice Guide](#)

This year, 2 in 5 (40%) kinship carers told us they had a named contact or worker in their local authority who they could go to for support as a kinship carer. In a 2023 survey, 88% of local authorities said they had a designated kinship care team or worker, most commonly sitting in a fostering or placement and permanency service²³, and our research has identified some of the key characteristics of specialist social work practice in kinship care²⁴.

16% of kinship carers this year rated their local authority's information about kinship care as excellent or good (up from 15% in 2024 and 9% in 2023), and just under half (46%) rated this as poor or very poor (compared to 47% in 2024 and 55% in 2023). As discussed in the next section of the report, a refreshed requirement on local authorities to deliver a kinship local offer may be contributing to a greater recognition of the importance of high quality information.

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



Greater year-on-year change can be seen in levels of trust. More than 1 in 5 kinship carers (21%) this year said they completely or moderately trusted their local authority, up from 18% in 2024 and 14% in 2023. 42% of kinship carers said they didn't trust their local authority at all in 2025, down from 44% in 2024 and nearly half of kinship carers (49%) in 2023.

As such, although there are some signals that kinship carers' experiences of authority support, information and trust are improving, these ratings are still far too low and are much lower than for foster carers²⁵ and adopters²⁶ rating the support they have received from their local authority and/or relevant agencies. Given the continued policy and practice focus on improving support for kinship carers and their children, we would expect to see further improvements in the coming years, although the legacy of the lack of trust associated with poor interactions with children's services will continue to have a lasting impact within the kinship carer community.

23 Foundations (2023) [Understanding the variation in support for kinship carers: A survey of local authorities in England](#)

24 Hunt, J (2021) [Practising in kinship care: The perspectives of specialist social workers](#)

25 The Fostering Network (2024) [State of the Nations' Foster Care: Full Report 2024](#)

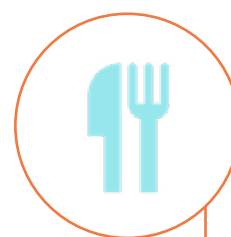
26 Adoption UK (2025) [The Adoption Barometer: A stocktake of adoption in England](#)

Finances and cost of living

There are some signs that acute financial pressures associated with the recent period of peak inflation and spiralling costs of basic goods may be easing slightly amongst kinship families in England and Wales. The percentage of kinship carers who say they are either 'living comfortably' or 'doing all right' has increased from 3 in 10 (30%) in 2023 to 4 in 10 (40%) this year. Similarly, the percentage who say they are 'finding it quite difficult' or 'finding it very difficult' has decreased from just under a third (32%) in 2023 to just under a quarter (24%) in 2025.

However, our evidence shows that many kinship carers are continuing to make significant sacrifices in their daily lives to cope with a sustained high cost of living, some of which are likely to have significant longer-term consequences for families' financial and wider wellbeing.

To cope with the cost of living, more than 1 in 10 kinship carers told us they were skipping meals (11%) and not replacing essential broken goods such as boilers or washing machines (11%), and more than 1 in 5 were not putting the heating on (21%). More than 4 in 10 (44%) were using their savings – including drawing down pensions early – to ensure they could provide for their children, compared to 30% of the general population. Most worryingly, 1 in 7 (17%) say they were avoiding the dentist or other healthcare treatment, and 7% were using food banks.



7%
of kinship carers were
using food banks
because of increases
in the cost of living



Twice as likely

to be using credit more than
usual, such as credit cards,
loans or overdrafts

Kinship carers (28%) were also nearly twice as likely as the general population (15%) to be using credit more than usual such as credit cards, loans or overdrafts in order to provide for their children. And 1 in 5 (18%) kinship carers had a direct debit, standing order or bill they couldn't afford to pay in the last month, 3 times that of the general population responding at the same time as our survey.²⁷ Both of these figures remain unchanged from or are even slightly higher than last year; this is an unsustainable situation for the financial health of kinship families.

Home

Kinship households are more likely than parental households to be overcrowded and deprived in terms of housing.²⁸ We regularly support kinship carers who are struggling without the space at home they really need, and who are concerned about the impact which poor sleep might be having on their health and the wellbeing and development of others in their household.

Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) respondents told us that, in the last 12 months, someone in their family had been forced to sleep in unsuitable conditions so that a child they care for had somewhere

²⁷ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2025) [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: household finances: 2 to 27 July 2025](#). [Published 15 August 2025]

²⁸ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) [Kinship care in England and Wales: Census 2021](#) [Published 26 September 2023]



Nearly 1 in 5

said someone in their kinship family had slept in unsuitable conditions so a child had somewhere to sleep

to sleep. This includes having had to sleep on a sofa, chair or on the floor (8%), share a bed (6%), or give up their own bed (6%) or bedroom (9%).

These experiences were more common amongst those kinship carers who were looking after 2 or more children (26%), living in rented accommodation (27%), and who said they were facing severe challenges or at crisis point (31%). We plan to explore kinship carers' experiences with housing further, including analysing additional findings from our 2024 and 2025 annual surveys.

Family stability

Worryingly, the percentage of kinship carers who were concerned about their ability to continue caring for their kinship children in the next year if their situations didn't improve remains unchanged from last year at 13%. Despite some of the welcome signs of progress outlined earlier, there is still a significant minority of kinship families who continue to be at breaking point, risking stability and permanence for children.



13%

of kinship carers are concerned about their ability to continue in the next year if their situation doesn't improve

Very similarly to last year, by far the most common reason for this – selected by more than 7 in 10 (71%) kinship carers – was difficulties managing their children's social, emotional and mental health needs. It is therefore particularly problematic that the UK Government this year chose to reduce the amount of funding for therapeutic support available to each eligible kinship family in England through the adoption and special guardianship support fund (ASGSF). We will share further insights from our 2025 annual survey soon around kinship families' experience with mental health support and the ASGSF to help inform the UK Government's "public engagement process" on reform of the ASGSF due to begin in the new year.²⁹

Other common reasons selected by kinship carers for their concern included a lack of support from others to help provide care (47%), concerns about their age and/or health and wellbeing (47%), financial worries (46%), and challenges with family relationships and contact (43%). Compared to our 2024 survey, kinship carers were about 5 percentage points more likely this year to note housing challenges and/or a lack of space at home and concerns about their age and/or health and wellbeing. 9 in 10 (90%) of respondents selected more than one reason, illustrating a common experience of multiple challenges which take a cumulative toll on kinship carers' lives.

29 Daby, J. (2025) [Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund](#) Parliament: written ministerial statement, HCWSg08 | Published 4 September 2024]

Poor support also continues to be a factor in limiting the opportunity for kinship children to live alongside siblings and other relatives or friends. Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) kinship carers told us they had at some point been unable to take on the care of another kinship child, the vast majority (84%) being a brother or sister to a kinship child they already cared for.

The most common reason given for this was housing challenges and/or a lack of space at home (53%), but half (50%) of respondents also noted challenges managing social, emotional and mental health needs. 47% highlighted challenges with family relationships and contact, 46% concerns about their age and/or health and wellbeing, and 40% financial worries.

Policy context in 2025

There are several opportunities for governmental activity to deliver further and faster reform. Current action in England fails to meet the ambition for kinship care set out by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, and some activity could even exacerbate the dysfunctionality within our current system.

Across both England and Wales, government action to reform children's social care and kinship care is moving too slowly. Whilst there are positive steps to celebrate, and an ever-increasing recognition of the vital role which kinship families play in our communities, the rhetoric has often failed to match the reality, leaving kinship carers and their children continuing to fight for the financial, practical and emotional support they deserve.

In England, the publication of the final report of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in May 2022 marked a pivotal moment for kinship care. It proposed a series of bold recommendations to “*unlock the potential of family networks*” and catalysed government interest in kinship care reform.³⁰ However, more than 3 years later, the ‘pick and mix’ approach adopted by successive governments to the plan set out in the Review has resulted in stunted progress and risks introducing unintended consequences into the system which may have negative implications for some kinship families.

Below, we focus on two specific pieces of reform activity of relevance to kinship families in England – the Kinship Allowance Pilot (KAP) and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill – and draw on insights from our 2025 annual survey to explore where we're at now and to understand how things may change in the future.

However, it is important to note there is other relevant policy change and activity taking place across both England and Wales, including but not limited to the [parental leave and pay review](#), [Law Commission review](#) into the legal framework for kinship care, [changes to the adoption and special guardianship support fund \(ASGSF\)](#) in England, and the [Welsh Government's proposals](#) on changes to kinship foster carer assessment and reviews and use of special guardianship support plan templates.

Kinship Allowance Pilot

Kinship has long campaigned both nationally and locally for improved financial support for kinship families outside of the care system. Our [#ValueOurLove campaign](#) continues to push the UK and Welsh Governments to deliver equalised allowances between kinship carers and foster carers. Evidence suggests this investment makes economic sense; for every 100 children looked after in well-supported kinship care than local authority care, the state saves £4 million and increases the lifetime earnings of those children by £2 million.³¹ Kinship carers

³⁰ The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022) [The independent review of children's social care – Final report](#)

³¹ Nicol Economics for Grandparents Plus (2020) [Kinship Care: The Opportunity](#)

in England contribute £4.3 billion to the economy each year by caring for children, many of whom would otherwise be in the care system.³²

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care recommended in 2022 that financial allowances be extended to all special guardians and kinship carers with child arrangements orders where the child would otherwise be in care, and argued that doing so would deliver savings for the public purse after only 3 years.³³ Despite the then government's recognition that improved financial support *"often makes good financial sense for local authorities, kinship carers and, ultimately, for children and their outcomes"*, they subsequently only committed to a small pathfinder to test the delivery of allowances for special guardians caring for previously looked after children.³⁴

In June 2025, the UK Government [launched expressions of interest](#) for a renewed Kinship Allowance Pilot (KAP) in up to 10 local authorities in England. We were pleased to see our expertise and campaigning reflected in the Pilot's revised aims and eligibility, including its expanded focus to include wider groups of kinship families including those who secured – or are on their way to securing – an order granting parental responsibility in private law proceedings.

The KAP aims to test whether paying a non-means tested financial allowance equivalent to the national minimum fostering allowance to some kinship carers with or pursuing a legal order contributes to *"minimising the risk of placement breakdown where the leading cause is financial difficulties"*, *"understanding whether an improved financial offer... enables kinship families to consider placements outside the care system"*, and acts to *"alleviate care placement pressures on local authorities"*.³⁵

Our previous research has identified that more children are looked after and staying longer in kinship foster care than ever before, whilst movement to other kinship arrangements from local authority care has stalled. Between 2019 and 2023, the number of children in kinship foster care in England increased by 24% and children with a final placement in kinship foster care were staying on average 4.3 months longer in that placement before leaving care, whilst over the same time period the number of children leaving care each year to an SGO or CAO remained almost completely stable.³⁶

The hierarchy of financial and other support across different kinship arrangement types and journeys inhibits movement to the right type of arrangement for each family, at great additional cost to the state. Kinship carers tell us they want arrangements which deliver permanence and stability, but the lack of guaranteed financial support within arrangements such as special guardianship is a significant factor in decision making about the right option for their kinship family.

Additional evidence from our 2025 annual survey suggests that the KAP should proceed at pace, and consideration should be given to accelerating this in order to end the perverse incentive for children to remain looked after in kinship foster care when this isn't in their best interests – and to deliver well-supported kinship care arrangements which reduce

32 Petrillo, M., Zhang, J., Driscoll, B., & Hughes, N. (2025) [Valuing Kinship Care in England](#) Kinship and the Centre for Care DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.34452.00648

33 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022) [The independent review of children's social care – Final report](#)

34 Department for Education (2023) [Stable Homes, Built on Love: strategy and consultation](#)

35 Department for Education (2025) [Kinship Allowance Pilot: Expression of Interest \(EOI\) supporting guidance for local authorities](#) [Published 17 June 2025]

36 Kinship (2024) [Out of Order: the case for boosting financial support for kinship arrangements outside the care system](#)

unnecessary financial and resource demands on children's social care services. This would align with statutory guidance on kinship care, updated in October 2024, which says that the support provided by local authorities within the kinship local offer should ensure that *"children do not... remain looked after longer than is needed".*³⁷

The percentage of kinship foster carers who said they did not plan to move to a different arrangement has increased from 38% in 2023 to 44% in 2025. Similarly, the percentage who said they did expect to move to a different arrangement – the vast majority to special guardianship – has decreased from nearly half (49%) in 2023 to 38% this year. This suggests that some of the trends identified in our [Out of Order](#) paper last year (i.e. where kinship foster carers are trying to remain in this arrangement, often despite local authority pressure, in order to ensure adequate support for their family) may be becoming increasingly commonplace.³⁸



It is right for some kinship children to remain in kinship foster care. Of those kinship foster carers who told us they didn't expect to change arrangement, some spoke of the ongoing need for more intensive local authority support for things such as contact and family relationships, the risk of legal challenge from parents and the security afforded by the local authority's joint parental responsibility, or children's ongoing needs or support arrangements which demanded they remain in the care of the local authority. Some expected their arrangement to be temporary and that the child would return to live with their parents.

However, reflecting our previous research, many kinship foster carers spoke of their concerns about the lack of guaranteed financial support associated with any change. Whilst any move out of local authority care and any support for the making of a legal order which grants parental responsibility in the family court is based on appropriate care and permanency planning for the child by the local authority, it is clear that the wishes and behaviours of kinship carers also play a significant role in movement between different kinship arrangements, and they will understandably act in ways which protect their and their children's access to vital financial, practical and emotional support.

Of all the kinship foster carers who responded to this year's survey, half (50%) said that they would move to a special guardianship or child arrangements order if they were guaranteed a financial allowance by the local authority at least equivalent to the allowance they receive as a kinship foster carer. A further 22% said they didn't know.



50%
of kinship foster carers said they would move to a kinship arrangement outside the care system if equitable financial support was guaranteed

37 Department for Education (2024) [Kinship care: statutory guidance for local authorities](#)

38 Kinship (2024) [Out of Order: the case for boosting financial support for kinship arrangements outside the care system](#)

Comments shared by kinship carers illustrated the importance of guaranteed financial support in their decision making and in alleviating their concerns about providing the best possible care and environment for their kinship children, and spoke of their worries associated with any move within the current system of typical means testing and review.

"Kinship carers are not paid as mainstream foster carers or as therapeutic foster carers (which we are). I would expect to be paid equally in this respect and then, if that financial allowance was in place we would consider moving to one of the other arrangements when we had all the information about those."

Aunt and kinship foster carer

"The financial aspect has always been my main worry about moving to an SGO. I am 61, when I retire my pension will not cover living costs of bringing up two young boys. I am guaranteed payment for first two years and then I will have the stress of annual means testing, but my grandchildren will be able to have a more 'normal' life without so many intrusive restrictions. It will give me more time to dedicate to them and more energy to spend on them rather than wasting my energy battling with social services."

Grandparent and kinship foster carer

"We would be more than happy to take an SGO if the financial support was the same or better than we currently receive as this would mean we could guarantee to continue to provide the same financial support to our child."

Grandparent and kinship foster carer

"Our work and income has been severely affected because of the LA training etc. We would need the same provision to continue under SGO etc to be able to afford to pay debts incurred by this."

Aunt and kinship foster carer

"The allowance from fostering makes the difference from being absolutely broke to just about keeping my head above water. Without the financial help, he wouldn't be able to attend clubs, have a holiday and access play therapy etc."

Grandparent and kinship foster carer

"My local authority has withheld finances from me on a number of occasions which has left me financially vulnerable... I have only just got back on top of my finances and out of debt after beginning to care for my nephew. I absolutely would love to move to an SGO but I have heard far too many stories about people losing finances as a result of the move and so it isn't a financially viable move."

Aunt and kinship foster carer

"We will only have funding for 2 years once the SGO is granted. After that we are means tested and as we will both be on pensions by then, with some savings we will not receive any financial support. We will be expected to fully fund the lives of our 2 grandchildren, using up our savings etc and will be in our late 60's and early 70's. Foster carers are fully funded and not means tested. How is this fair?"

Grandparent and kinship foster carer

"If the children don't go back to mum, we would highly consider doing SGO for same or better payment to what we receive. To take away the fear of my grandchildren being removed from family by getting social services out of their lives, is worth it. If we don't get this payment until they're 18 we are quite prepared to carry on as we are doing."

Grandparent and kinship foster carer

"Our plan has always been to proceed to SGO. However, the financial element is a concern. We have been told by other carers who have been through SGO, that when or if we go SGO, to employ a solicitor and get a watertight agreement. As otherwise, current and future financial support will be significantly reduced."

Aunt and kinship foster carer

This suggests there is strong potential for the government's Kinship Allowance Pilot to ultimately evidence what it aims to do – i.e. enable kinship carers to have the confidence in the support offer available to them to feel comfortable pursuing an arrangement outside of the care system – ultimately delivering better outcomes for children and families as well as significant savings for the public purse. The Department for Education should give urgent consideration to whether the timeline for the Pilot and future rollout should be accelerated and a guarantee of equalised financial support extended.

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

The UK Government's Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill is, at the time of publication, progressing through Parliament. Its provisions include some of relevance to kinship care and support for wider family networks, including:

- a new legal duty on local authorities to publish a kinship local offer which sets out the support available to kinship carers in the local area, strengthening the requirement included in updated kinship care statutory guidance published in October 2024.
- the placing on a statutory footing of the September 2024 extension of the virtual school head (VSH) role to championing and supporting a wider group of kinship children.
- a duty on local authorities to offer a family group decision making (FGDM) when a child is at risk of entering local authority care.³⁹

We asked several questions in our 2025 annual survey to better understand how these new provisions, once enacted after the Bill receives Royal Assent, might impact on kinship families and to establish baselines we can use to help us track the impact of the new duties in the future.

Kinship local offer requirement

Around 1 in 8 (13%) kinship carers told us they had seen their local authority's kinship local offer, and a further 11% said they didn't know. The question clarified that the kinship local offer "outlines the support services available to kinship carers and the children they care for in your local area, and replaces what used to be known most commonly as a 'family and friends care policy'".



13%

of kinship carers said they had seen their local authority's kinship local offer

³⁹ For more information on kinship care and the relevant provisions within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, please read our blog post: kinship.org.uk/our-work-and-impact/news/kinship-care-and-the-childrens-wellbeing-and-schools-bill.

This echoes kinship carers' poor, albeit improving, ratings of local authority information as outlined earlier, and illustrates that much more needs to be done to ensure kinship carers of all types understand and are signposted to support. However, this finding isn't necessarily unexpected given local authorities will be continuing to respond to the kinship local offer requirement included in statutory guidance last year and given the strengthened legal duty – with a specific commencement date – has not yet been introduced. We would expect to see significantly improved awareness of the kinship local offer in the coming years.

Although the percentage who have seen their kinship local offer is low, this year's results do suggest that the new requirement, alongside increasing awareness and reform within kinship care and improving local authority information more broadly, might be making a difference. In 2023, when asked if they had seen their local authority's family and friends care policy (which have now been replaced by the kinship local offer requirement but performed a very similar function), only 7% of kinship carers said they had and a further 29% said they didn't know this existed.⁴⁰

Statutory guidance also makes it clear that *"local authorities should consult children, kinship carers and parents as appropriate, in drawing up their kinship local offers, and set out how the kinship local offers have been informed by their views"*.⁴¹ This year, only 15% of kinship carers told us they had ever been invited by their local authority to give feedback or help shape the support available to kinship carers in their area. We are continuing to work with several local authorities to help them co-produce their local offers meaningfully with a diverse group of kinship carers, and expect to see a much higher percentage of kinship carers responding positively to this question in the future.

Extension of virtual school head (VSH) role

Last year, the majority of kinship carers (65%) said they did not understand what support was offered to them by the virtual school, and a further 12% said they didn't know.⁴² Following a commitment made in the National Kinship Care Strategy in December 2023, the virtual school head (VSH) role was extended on a non-statutory basis in September 2024 to include adaption of the strategic role to promote the education of all kinship children and expansion of the provision of advice and information to all kinship carers with a special guardianship or child arrangements order, regardless of whether or not their child was previously looked after.⁴³ The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill effectively 'upgrades' this to become a new statutory duty aligned with those for other groups supported by the VSH.

This year, just over 1 in 5 (22%) kinship carers said they or a kinship child they care for had ever received advice or support from their local authority virtual school. A further 4% said they didn't know and 5% said they didn't think they were eligible. However, of this latter group, we identified based on their wider survey responses that only around 1 in 7 (14%) were actually likely to be ineligible for any kind of direct advice or support, for example because they had an informal arrangement only or their child had very recently turned 18.



22%

of kinship carers said they or a kinship child they care for had ever received advice or support from the virtual school

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

41 Department for Education (2024) [Kinship care: statutory guidance for local authorities](#)

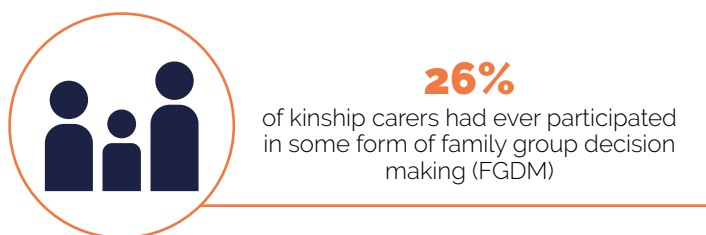
42 Kinship (2024) [Make or Break: Annual survey of kinship carers 2024](#)

43 Department for Education (2025) [Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements: virtual school head role extension](#)

As with last year's findings, this suggests a significant number of kinship families – and particularly those who have only recently become eligible for advice and information on request – are unaware of and could be missing out on helpful support from the virtual school. We hope to see awareness and uptake of virtual school support grow as their new extended remit becomes embedded in practice and kinship local offers communicate revised eligibility clearly.

Duty to offer family group decision making (FGDM)

Just over a quarter (26%) of kinship carers said they had ever participated in some form of family group decision making (FGDM), with around 9 in 10 (89%) specifying a Family Group Conference (FGC). A further 1 in 10 (10%) kinship carers said they didn't know.



Kinship carers shared a range of different circumstances and reasons for why they had participated in FGDM, most commonly as members of a child's wider family network and as potential kinship carers where a child was at risk of entering local authority care but also at other points in a child's involvement with children's services, as well as in circumstances where kinship carers were already formally looking after a child and FGDM was used to come up with a revised plan for contact arrangements with parents.

Across all of those who said they had participated in FGDM, just over half (55%) said this had resulted in a plan for them to become a child's kinship carer. A further 9% said they didn't know. Of those who said it hadn't, in some cases this was because it would never have been the intention of that FGDM process to consider this and in others because they subsequently became kinship carers after the plan produced through FGDM did not materialise, for example. We intend to explore these results further to deepen our understanding about kinship carers' experiences with FGDM and how these differ based on experiences with types of kinship arrangement and engagement with local authority children's services.

When asked about their experiences with the FGDM process and outcomes, and the support provided to them before, during and after, some respondents shared positive experiences of facilitation and wider social work practice which successfully brought those around a child together to come up with solutions, even if the resultant plan didn't ultimately work as planned or they found the process itself to be quite emotionally or practically challenging.

"We had a positive result with the outcome for our Grandson to reside in our care. We had good support during our process."

Grandparent with child arrangements order

"It was helpful as part of the process of us (my wife and I) deciding to apply for an SGO. The social workers seeing us through that whole process were really excellent."

Grandparent and special guardian

"We both found this positive as we were able to express our feelings to other professionals and carers about our experiences and the passion we have for our grandchild!"

Grandparent and kinship foster carer

"I found the family group meetings difficult to some extent as the child we were talking about is my daughters child and my daughter has learning difficulties and has been obstructive all through the process of our grandchild coming into our care. However the social workers we have worked with through this process have been very supportive and continue to support us still."

Grandparent and special guardian

"It was held to help support biological parents try to change their lives for the better so they could raise their child however they did not engage well so it was not helpful in that respect however it was still a positive experience for our journey as a whole."

Grandparent and special guardian

However, the majority of kinship carers who responded were very negative about their experiences with FGDM, regardless of whether or not this resulted in a plan for them to become kinship carers to a child. Many spoke about their views, offers or concerns shared as members of the wider family network being ignored. Some told us that they had little support or guidance offered to them and felt pressured to make decisions without appropriate time, information or advice, and raised issues with professionalism, judgement and behaviour amongst those involved. .

"Dreadful. There were a large number of professionals present, none of whom we knew, and I think they almost outnumbered the family and friends. It was the first time any of the family and friends, other than the birth parents, had met social workers so there was a lot of misunderstandings and miscommunications. ... We were asked to put forward our names if we wanted to be assessed to have the children. Three couples did, from different sides of the family. There was a nasty fraught session in which people from one side of the family tried to get people from the other side to withdraw their names. There was no support after or even an acknowledgement we experienced it as a negative session. It was probably the worst part of the whole process of being a kinship carer. Writing about it now makes me feel sick...."

Aunt and kinship foster carer

"A very traumatic experience due to different family opinions on where the child should go. I didn't know what the process entailed and had people telling me to do different things. Very stressful."

Aunt and testamentary guardian

"It was awful. It was the first time I had ever met the maternal grandmother. We were left on our own to come up with a plan for our grandson whom neither of us had ever met at that point."

Grandparent and special guardian

"It was initiated by the birth parents regarding contact arrangements. We received some support but felt that it was all geared towards what was best for the birth parents rather than the child."

Great aunt and special guardian

Particularly apparent was the lack of support provided following FGDM to deliver on the agreed plan, again often regardless of the outcome and even following circumstances where it was felt that the FGDM process itself had been delivered fairly effectively. Kinship carers spoke of being abandoned by children's services and promised support never being realised, either for them or for others in the family network, and being expected to pick up the pieces themselves. This was particularly the case for those kinship carers who ultimately went on to secure a legal order in private law proceedings.

"LA was convinced that they could support mum with her alcohol and mental health but this quickly broke down when the child was returned to mum on more than one occasion. Finally mum arrived to pick her up from school drunk and LA told us it was a private family matter."

Grandparent and special guardian (order secured in private proceedings)

"After the family conference there was no further contact with the wider family and the report was useless. It was left to me to fight with family for support which lead to family breakdown."

Aunt and special guardian

"Meetings at the time were very vague. SWs changed every time we meet again so forever covering old ground. Outcomes from each meeting were never met by individual professionals so we had to chase to gain progression. Little advice or guidance given even when asked. Was told if we didn't take the SGO our children would be adopted so used emotionally to do as they said. No support after at all as the order was granted."

Grandparent and special guardian

"There was a lot of emphasis on getting the children into a stable and calm environment and out of chaos and the burden was placed with us. The LA seemed to want to bypass their own involvement and keep it in the family and off their desk."

Aunt and special guardian (order secured in private proceedings)

"It was very positive. [NAME] was a wonderful person who helped set up the FGC and helped with the plan and did her best to put forward our plans to the LA but the local LA were very cruel and misleading and giving us wrong information and did not treat us in a professional manner, offered only little support and this was picked up by the judge in court who reprimanded them on many occasions in court... we will never trust them again it was such a painful and agonising experience that no one should have gone through."

Grandparent and special guardian

"My nephew's mother was dying in hospital and had left her wishes for her end of life care including that we care for him. Her 2 sisters and 2 friends were present and a plan was drawn up that I should tell him his mother was going to die (he didn't know) and they would offer respite care, help with school transport and holiday cover. None of this has ever happened."

Aunt and special guardian (order secured in private proceedings)

These results raise serious questions about the government's continued reference to the new FGDM duty within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill as a positive example of specific reform which supports kinship care and kinship families, including in the Bill's impact assessment⁴⁴ and in recent evidence sessions of the Public Accounts Committee⁴⁵ and Education Committee⁴⁶. Our findings from this year's survey reinforce the concerns we have raised previously about incentivising the use of FGDM to explore kinship care options for children without concurrently developing the appropriate legislative framework, funding and practice to then deliver much-needed support to those kinship families afterwards.

Using FGDM to achieve the government's stated aim of reducing the number of children in local authority care⁴⁷ creates a significant risk that relatives and friends will – either explicitly or tacitly – be encouraged to pursue informal kinship care arrangements or legal orders secured in private proceedings when this may not be in the best interests of the child or their kinship carer(s), particularly given the impact this has on their future eligibility for support.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care in 2022 recommended that FGDM is made mandatory before a case reaches the Public Law Outline (PLO).⁴⁸ But crucially, this was accompanied by complementary recommendations to fund the widespread use of 'Family Network Plans' to deliver the flexible and intensive support required to keep children safe within their family network without the need to become looked after, and to guarantee financial allowances, paid employment leave and extended legal aid for kinship carers with special guardianship or child arrangements orders where the child would otherwise be in care.

The effective and responsible delivery of a new FGDM duty relies on these accompanying reforms, but progress to date on these has been much slower. July saw the publication of an "early findings" evaluation report on the families first for children pathfinder (FFCP), one of two programmes which ended in March 2025 to test the use of Family Network Support Plans (FNSP) – the revised name for Family Network Plans. This found that initial FNSP rollout was slow, "driven by uncertainty amongst frontline staff around how to use it and the restrictions on how to spend the funding", and ongoing plans for future rollout alongside wider Families First Partnership reforms are to be confirmed.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, although the Kinship Allowance Pilot is due to begin in autumn 2025, this is set to run for at least 3 years and the government has confirmed that "options for national rollout [will] be informed by an independent evaluation".⁵⁰

This is far too slow. At minimum, forthcoming guidance to support the implementation of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill must consider the specific experiences and views of kinship families with FGDM, and ensure that increasing use of this practice doesn't reinforce the dysfunctionality within the current system. However, the sequencing of reform is crucial: government must work at pace to improve the financial, practical and emotional support available to all types of kinship family, including the further rollout of family first reforms such as Family Network Support Packages as well as equalised financial allowances for kinship carers.

44 Department for Education (2025) [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: Non-Regulatory Impact Assessment: Children's Social Care Measures](#) [Published 30 January 2025]

45 Public Accounts Committee (2025) [Oral evidence: Improving family court services for children](#), HC 883 [Monday 23 June 2025]

46 Education Committee (2025) [Oral evidence: Children's Social Care](#), HC 430 [Tuesday 18 March 2025]

47 A "reduction in the number of children in care" is the Department for Education's key target within its outcome KPI that "more children stay safely with families" and forms a core part of its activity strategy under mission pillar 4: family security, as outlined in its [annual report for the year ending 31 March 2025](#).

48 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022) [The independent review of children's social care – Final report](#)

49 Department for Education (2025) [Families first for children pathfinder: implementation and process evaluation report](#)

50 Daby, J (2025) [Kinship Care: Finance](#) Parliament: written question, UIN 39489. Answered on 28 March 2025.

Recommendations

Below we make a series of recommendations to governments and local authorities based on the specific findings from our 2025 annual survey of kinship carers; further key recommendations for policymakers can be found in our [reports and briefings](#) and at our [kinship care policy tracker](#).

Improving support for kinship families

Financial support

The UK and Welsh Governments should equalise financial allowances between kinship carers and foster 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 should accelerate plans to test the delivery of allowances through the Kinship Allowance Pilot (KAP) in England and use early learnings to inform how best to legislate for a wider rollout.

In the interim, further guidance and clarification must be issued to local authorities to reduce current unacceptable variation and poor practice in the delivery of financial support for kinship carers. Local authorities should look to emulate the leading practice of those who already deliver a non-means tested financial allowance to kinship carers as soon as possible.

The UK Government's parental leave and pay review should listen to the views and experiences of kinship carers and Kinship Friendly Employers to design and recommend the implementation of a new statutory right to pay and leave for kinship carers in work which recognises their specific needs and considerations.

Information, training and support

Local authorities should proceed at pace to deliver their kinship local offers and improve the information and signposting provided to all kinship carers. These should be meaningfully informed by the views and expertise of kinship families with all types of arrangements, include specific information on the support available from the virtual school, offer clarity on the delivery of financial support, and be promoted extensively to kinship families. They should also include clear signposting to independent advice and support, including Kinship's [specialist advice line](#) and both the [national peer support service](#) and [training and support service](#) for kinship carers in England, delivered by Kinship and funded by the Department for Education. The National Kinship Care Ambassador should support and challenge local authorities to deliver their kinship local offers effectively.

The UK and Welsh Governments and local authorities should invest in the delivery of tailored and accessible training and support services for kinship carers, including peer support, to boost health and wellbeing outcomes and improve ratings of local authority support,

information and trust. Particular attention should be paid to therapeutic and emotional support for children in kinship care and helping kinship carers to understand and manage social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH), as well as kinship carers caring for children alone, those with ongoing health and wellbeing challenges, and those sleeping in unsuitable conditions.

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. 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.

Building a new kinship care system

Getting the sequencing of reform right

The UK Government must work at pace to improve the financial, practical and emotional support available to all types of kinship family, including the further rollout of family first reforms such as Family Network Support Packages, to ensure the system is best placed to adequately support kinship carers and their children in situations where the child does not become looked after. This is particularly crucial in the context of the introduction of a new legal duty to offer family group decision making (FGDM) without the concurrent reforms to family network and kinship carer support proposed by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

At minimum, forthcoming guidance to support the implementation of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill must consider the specific experiences and views of kinship families with FGDM, and additional research should be undertaken to improve the evidence base around the interaction between FGDM and kinship care. Guidance and monitoring should ensure that increasing use of this practice doesn't reinforce the dysfunctionality within the current system and act to push families into arrangements with long-term implications for eligibility for support when not in their best interests.

Long term reform and investment

Future policy development should explore how local authorities can actively support progression – when in children's best interests – to more permanent kinship arrangements without necessitating entry into kinship foster care and without negative implications for support in the future. The Law Commission's review should consider the potential for bespoke kinship care pathways.

Additional governmental investment should be made in kinship care reform at future fiscal opportunities, building on the recent bolstered investment made in children's social care and the UK Government's Families First Partnership programme through the Spending Review.



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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