



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

**Kinship 2026 Knowledge
Exchange: Building the
kinship care system that
families need: Where are
we now and what's next
for policy and practice?**

LinkedIn: @kinship-charity





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Welcome from the conference chairs

Dr Beverley Barnett-Jones, Trustee of Kinship and Nurture
Futures Co-Founder

Tim Fisher, Practice Lead, Kinship



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North East Lincolnshire Kinship Zone

Ann-Marie Matson, Director of Children's Services, North East
Lincolnshire Council

Lisa February, kinship carer



Sister, mother, *other*: **Our Kinship Care story**

A bit about me

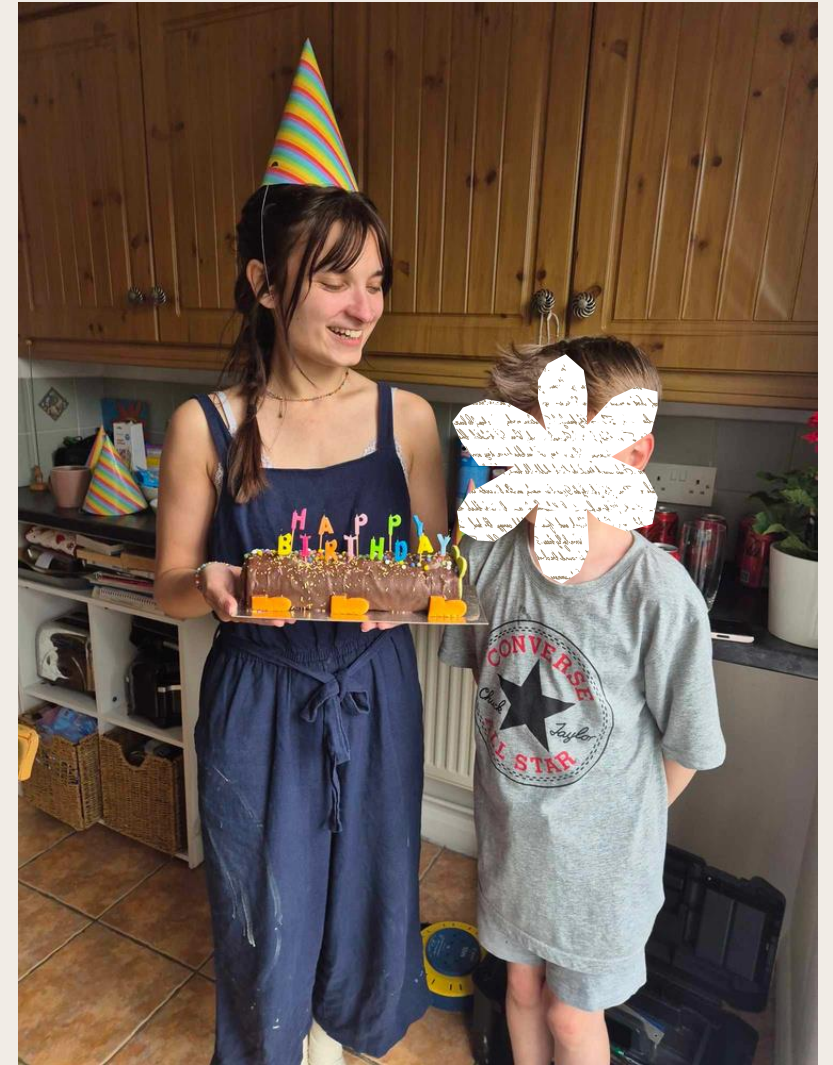


What is Kinship Care?

**Kinship care
is *loss*.**



**Kinship care
is *celebrating
the small things.***



**Kinship care
is *advocacy*.**



**Kinship care
is *exhausting*.**



Kinship care
takes a village.
(...or two)



**Kinship care
has been the
biggest gift of
my life.**



**If it takes a village...
how can we all be
better villagers?**

Kinship Care

Building the kinship care system that families need: where are we now and what's next for policy and practice

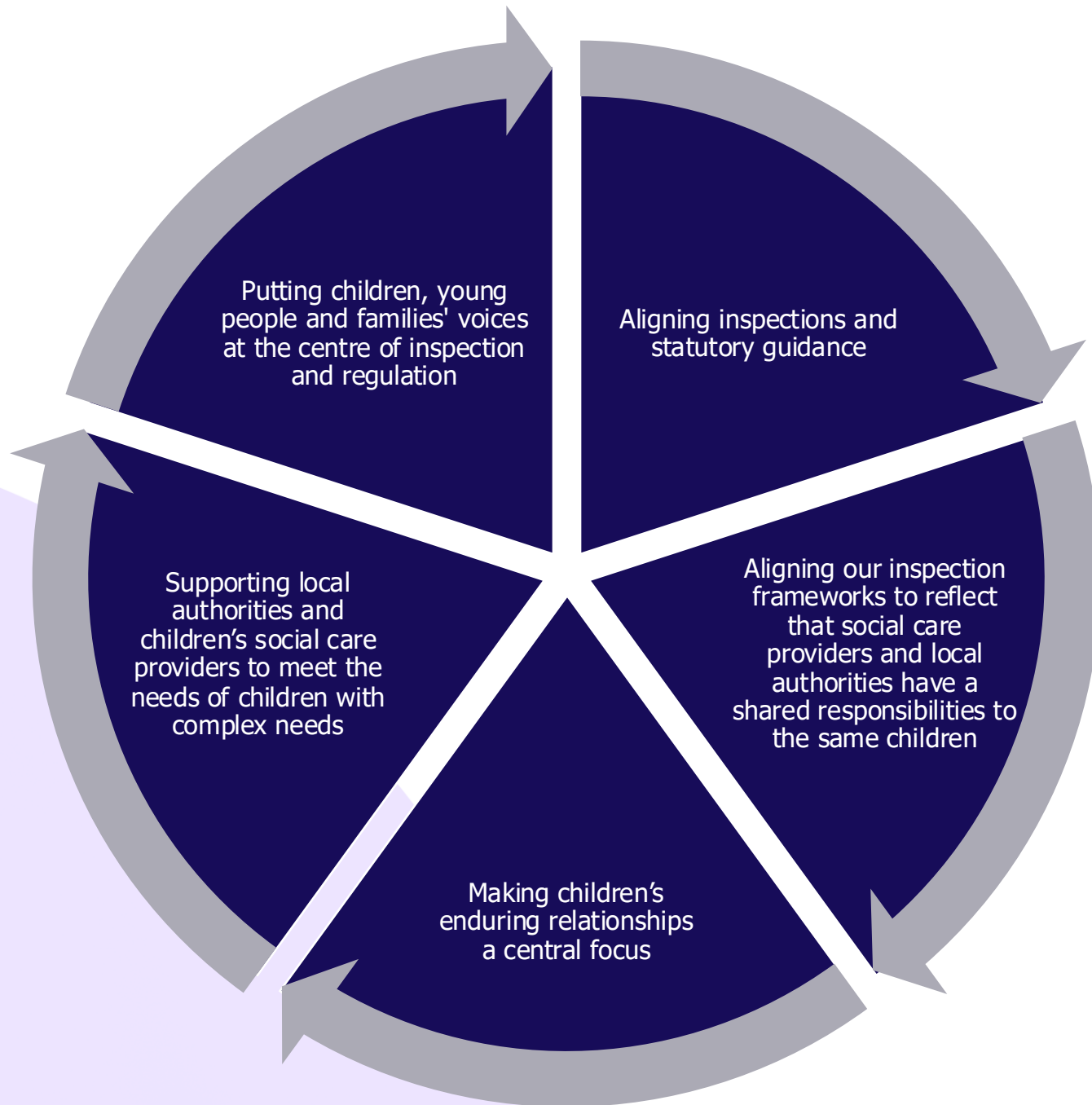
Yvette Stanley

National Director, Regulation and Social Care

July 2026

A personal journey





Our ambition - frameworks that are part of an agile, unified system of inspection and regulation

- We have just launched our **consultation proposals to reform both frameworks**, following the Department launching their Working Together consultation.

ILACS evaluation areas

New evaluation areas to better align with the Children's Social Care National Framework:

- family help (separated)
- child protection
- family networks (new)
- children in care
- care leavers
- impact of leaders

Golden threads – how the local authority:

- helps children create enduring relationships
- engages with children and families
- collaborates with other relevant agencies

Law Commission and observations

- Legal gaps and issues
- Assessment and support gaps
- Entitlements for children
- Clarity, transparency, equity, funding
- The inspection and accountability system which underpins.



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Break



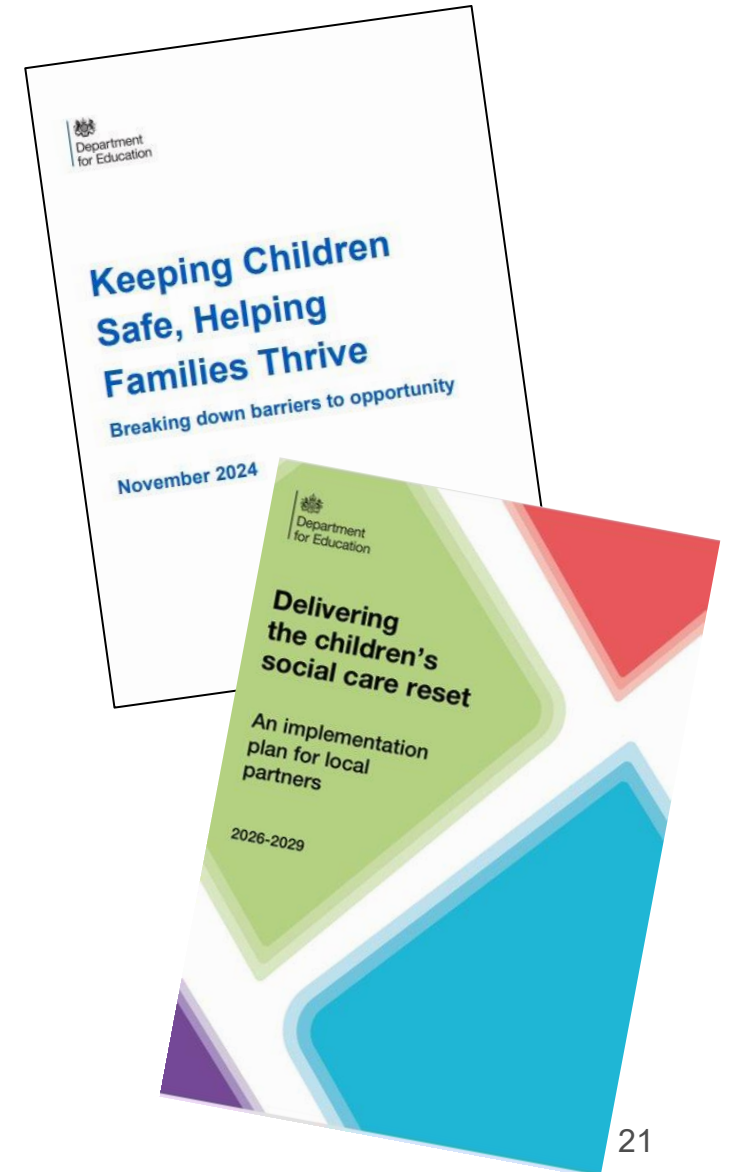
Department
for Education

Kinship in government: progress and prospects

July 2026

The government is implementing generational reform to children's social care to rebalance the system away from crisis response towards earlier intervention

- In November 2024, we published **Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive** which set out a vision for a transformed system.
- In May 2026, we published **Delivering the Children's Social Care Reset: an implementation plan for local partners**.
- The plan provides a framework for whole-system reform of children's social care in England and sets out our vision to:
 - Keep children within their families wherever safe and possible
 - Build long-term, loving relationships for children
 - Shift the system from crisis response to early intervention
- Success will look like:
 - Fewer children in care due to **earlier support**
 - More children living with **family or kinship carers**
 - Improved safety and **reduced harm**
 - More stable placements and **lasting relationships**
 - Stronger workforce and **better outcomes**



Kinship care is central to our vision for children's social care by enabling children to stay within their family networks wherever safe and possible

We have three main objectives, to which each of our current activities are aligned:



1. Enable more families to stay together by supporting family networks and family led solutions

Activities:

- Mandating local authorities to offer **family group decision making** to families at pre-proceedings, where that is in the child's best interests, through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026.
- Funding the **Law Commission to undertake a comprehensive review of the legal framework surrounding kinship care**
- Kinship Zone LAs are delivering **Family Network Support Packages** and focussing the design of their services around **empowering and supporting more family networks**.



2. Where children cannot remain safely at home, we remove barriers to enable more children to live in stable and loving kinship arrangements

Activities:

- Launched the **Kinship Allowance Pilot** in 7 local authority areas, known as **Kinship Zones**. The pilot will test whether providing eligible kinship carers with an allowance equivalent to the Fostering National Minimum Allowance improves stability and outcomes for children.
- We introduced **kinship leave in DfE** on a par with adoption leave. The government has also launched a **review of the parental leave system**, which will consider whether the support available meets the needs of working families, such as kinship carers.



3. Once in place, kinship arrangements are well-supported, and children are given the opportunity to thrive

Activities:

- Published **Kinship Care statutory guidance** for local authorities and a guide on evidence with Foundations. This guidance is due to be updated later this year.
- Mandating local authorities to publish a clear and accessible **kinship local offer**.
- Virtual School Head role to **promote the education of children in kinship care** will become statutory in Sept 2027.
- Funding delivery of over **140 peer support groups** across England and delivering a package of training and support for all kinship carers.
- **Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund** helps kinship families access therapeutic support for children - £55m for 2026-27 and the fund will continue until 2027-28.
- **Improving our data and evidence on the needs of children in kinship care** by adding kinship to the School Census from Autumn 2026.

The National Kinship Care Ambassador advocates for kinship families and supports practice across the whole system:

- Published a report on [improving kinship local offers](#) to support LAs to produce KLOs that are responsive to the needs of kinship families.
- Leading DfE research on children's lived experiences in kinship care, with findings to inform policy and practice.
- Supporting the Kinship Zones pilot, providing guidance, challenge, and sharing learning to help local authorities develop robust, deliverable plans.

Despite significant progress, we know from our engagement with the sector that there are still challenges and opportunities to go further in our support of kinship families



There is variation in practice and support for kinship families across England.

The National Kinship Care Ambassador is developing **national kinship standards, which will form part of revised statutory guidance for local authorities**, helping create a more consistent approach to kinship care.



Support for kinship families often depends on legal status rather than family need.

The **Law Commission's review** will consider whether the legislative framework meets the needs of kinship families. We are **strengthening our evidence base** on the needs and experiences of kinship children and **improving identification** of them.



Kinship often sits with fostering and permanence services, limiting opportunities for earlier intervention and whole family support.

Families First Partnership Programme reforms present an opportunity to **maximise the benefits of earlier, multi-disciplinary support for the whole kinship family** (formal and informal) and promote stability.



Kinship local offers can be centred around what an LA provides rather than the wider partnership.

The NKCA has **published a report on Improving the Kinship Local Offer** including insights on improving partnership working and is delivering learning events on best practice.

What is the priority for local action? What needs to be done centrally?



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Well-supported kinship care: learning from kinship navigator programmes in the USA

Dr Lucy Peake, CEO
July 2026



Kinship Navigators – learning from USA



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Churchill Fellowship – Summer 2025

- Churchill Fellowships are about looking at how other countries are developing solutions to issues we face and bringing that learning back to the UK
- Visited Navigator programmes in 4 states, seeing how it works on the ground in Washington State, Florida, New York and New Jersey
- Attended a national kinship conference featuring Navigator programmes from 18 states and 1 tribal nation
- Learnt from kinship leaders in state agencies, national and local non-profits, policy makers and evaluators

What is a Kinship Navigator programme?



For family or friends who
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- Kinship navigator programmes operate across defined areas. They help kinship carers to navigate complex systems to find the support their families need
- Kinship navigators are kinship experts who offer:
 - 1-1 support and advocacy
 - Access to specialist information and advice
 - Support groups
 - Family activities
- Navigators raise awareness and understanding about kinship care and influence more responsive and more connected services and systems
- Outcomes include improved stability and well-being for children



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Miss Cynthia and **Suzanne**, kinship carers, navigators and *rock stars* of Greater Seattle

Navigator programme developed over 20 years

- **designed with and for all kinship carers** (legal orders and none)
- **1-1 support** delivered by kinship navigators (often kinship carers)
- **Kinship community**
 - Peer support
 - Family activities for kinship carers and children and an annual family camp

Barb, committed non-profit leader

Delivery purposefully through **non-profits**

- **trusted** by kinship carers, able to reach **informal carers** and tailor for **tribal nations**
- **strengths-based approach**
- **long-term commitment to supporting kinship families**
- **key role in influencing local ecosystems** and providing **holistic support** and **effective gateways to other services**



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Ros, statutory service leader. **Amanda** supports delivery organisations to implement the programme and support evaluation

Long-term partnership between state agencies and non-profits

Long-term funding for evaluation (7 years, led by Dr Angelique Day)

Long-term commitment to Kinship Care Oversight Committee - with State **mandated kinship carer representation**

- Brings together statutory and non-profit agencies State-wide.
- Responds to kinship families' needs strategically and operationally.
- Identifies priorities, **connects services** and **unlocks assets** to collectively provide accessible support for kinship families



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King County Bar Association

- Kinship Care Oversight Committee identified need for independent legal advice
- State funds a free and independent legal advice service with clear referral pathways to and from kinship navigators

Kinship Navigators – the opportunity



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- Strong **evidence base** to suggest Kinship Navigators improve access to services and benefits, kinship carer knowledge and confidence, social support, ability to meet children's needs and family protective factors
- States are eligible for federal matched funding if they are delivered under certain models – programmes developing as core infrastructure
- Aligns to Foundations' Kinship Care Practice Guide recommendations and principles

Kinship Care Practice Guide (Foundations)



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

- Key Principle 1: **Support for kinship carers should take into account the specific needs and strengths of kinship carers.**
- Key Principle 2: **One-to-one relationships and high quality casework should be at the heart of support for kinship families.**
- Key Principle 3: **Kinship families need to be made aware of the support they are entitled to, and local authorities should actively work to address barriers to accessing support.**
 - Kinship carers reported benefits to receiving **support from non-statutory services**, and support from these services can have a **positive impact** on kinship families.

Kinship navigator programmes in the UK

Kinship Connected is Kinship's flagship Navigator programme – developed with kinship carers and local authorities since 2013.

It is an intensive 1-to-1, community-based support programme designed to improve the wellbeing, resilience, and stability of kinship families.

The intervention is delivered by specialist **Kinship Navigators** who support kinship carers for up to 6 months

Kinship Reach is a remote version of the programme that runs on a similar model with online/telephone support for 3 months



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Building evidence in the UK



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Stephanie, Kirsten, Faye and Yewande, our Navigators

- **Pilot randomised control trial** in 4 local authorities – **Blackpool, Newham, Oxfordshire and Rochdale**, funded by Foundations and evaluated by CEI/Ipsos
- Programme delivery started in June 2026 for 1 year
- Aim to assess if the international evidence base applies in the UK context with different legal framework, statutory system and communities
- Part of our broader commitment to co-design with kinship carers, partnership with local authorities, developing evidence, improving practice and building an ecosystem of support for kinship families

Innovating whole family support



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Y Sort It mentors and a Kinship Navigator

- New partnership with the InTandem established mentoring programme for kinship children and young people in Scotland
- Y Sort It will support children and young people with referral routes to and from Kinship Connected navigators who will support their kinship carers
- Funded by National Lottery UK Fund
- Delivery from Autumn 2026
- We look forward to sharing learning



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Reflections on the morning

Dr Beverley Barnett-Jones, Trustee of Kinship and Nurture
Futures Co-Founder

Tim Fisher, Practice Lead, Kinship



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Lunch



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Kinship Care Week

5 – 11 October 2026



About Kinship Care Week

- Kinship Care Week is a time to shine a light on the vital role of kinship carers and celebrate all kinship families - while highlighting the realities of stepping up to care for a child who has had a difficult start in life.
- Your involvement, even in small ways, can make a big difference, particularly in helping kinship carers in your area feel valued. Local authorities and other professionals and partners have a really important role to play to:
 - to build awareness and understanding among professionals who may support them
 - to signpost support for kinship carers in your area
 - to listen to and amplify the voices of kinship carers and their children



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What you can do

1. Raise awareness & visibility of kinship families

- Add KCW to your comms planner – post about in on social media and include in newsletter to raise awareness of kinship care and signpost available support.
- Encourage local leaders to publicly recognise kinship carers through statements or short videos.
- Promote Kinship support services by displaying posters from the Kinship digital toolkit in public spaces such as libraries and community centres.
- Share stories of kinship carers in your area (with permission).
- Follow and share content from Kinship's social media channels during #KinshipCareWeek



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What you can do

2. Engage and inform staff and partners

- Share Kinship Care Week communications internally.
- Highlight best practice and practical insights in supporting kinship families across your workforce.
- Encourage colleagues, including social workers and frontline staff, to join the Kinship Professionals Network to stay informed and share learning.
- Work with local community organisations and partners to improve awareness and ensure consistent signposting to support - and create links to your kinship local offer.



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What you can do

3. Host an event with kinship carers

- Host a Kinship Care Week tea party or similar local event to bring kinship carers and families together.
- Organise listening sessions where kinship carers can share their experiences directly with decision-makers.
- Involve kinship carers in helping to develop or review your Kinship Local Offer. Kinship can help you to organise this.



Kinship Care Week

5-11 October 2026



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For family or friends who
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Workshops



For family or friends who
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Feedback from workshops



For family or friends who
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Closing remarks

Dr Lucy Peake, CEO, Kinship



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**Kinship 2026 Knowledge Exchange:
*Building the kinship care system that
families need: Where are we now and
what's next for policy and practice?***

LinkedIn: @kinship-charity

*Thank you for
attending*