

Kinship carer networks and targeted support planning

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Kinship Knowledge Exchange
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University
of Exeter

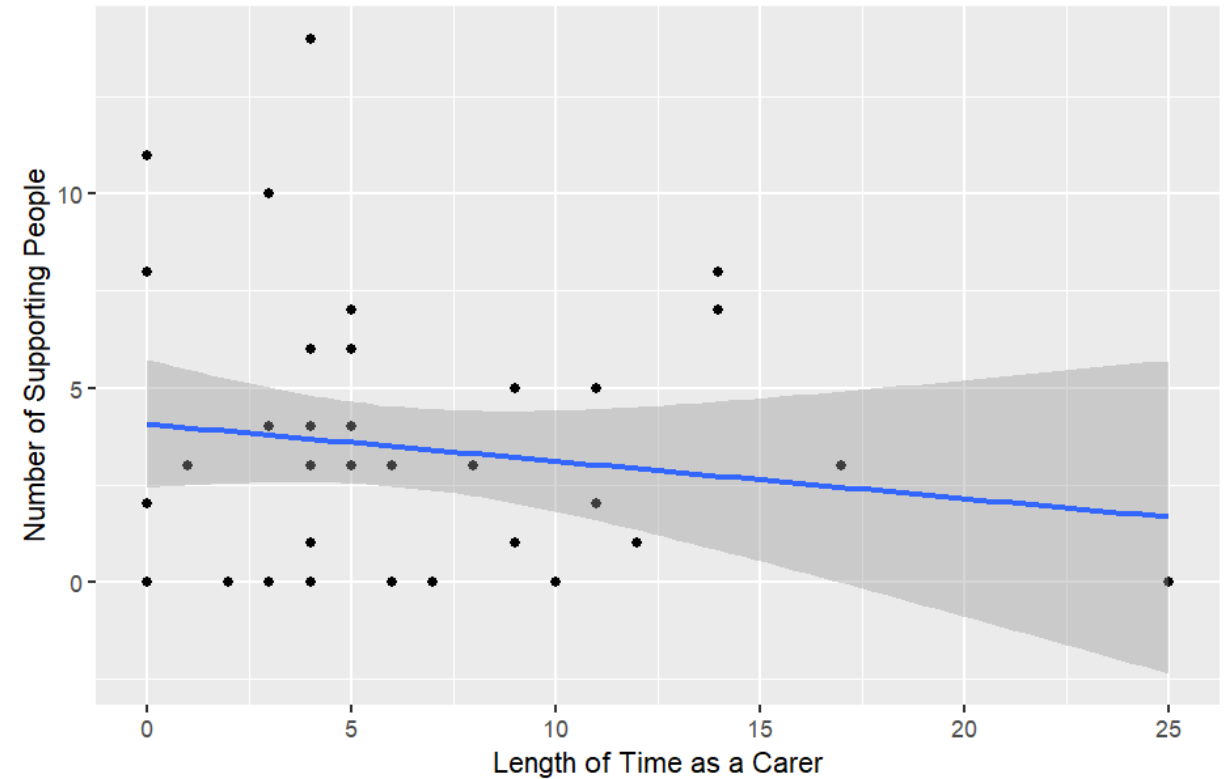
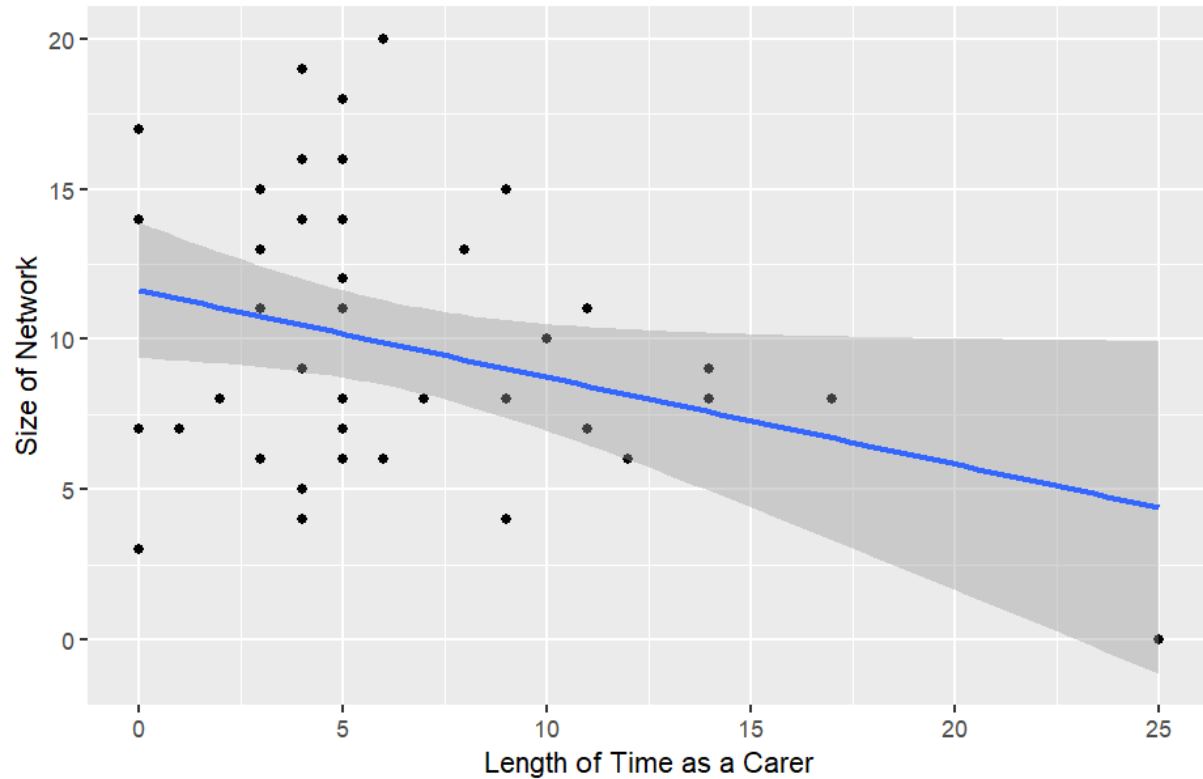


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Context

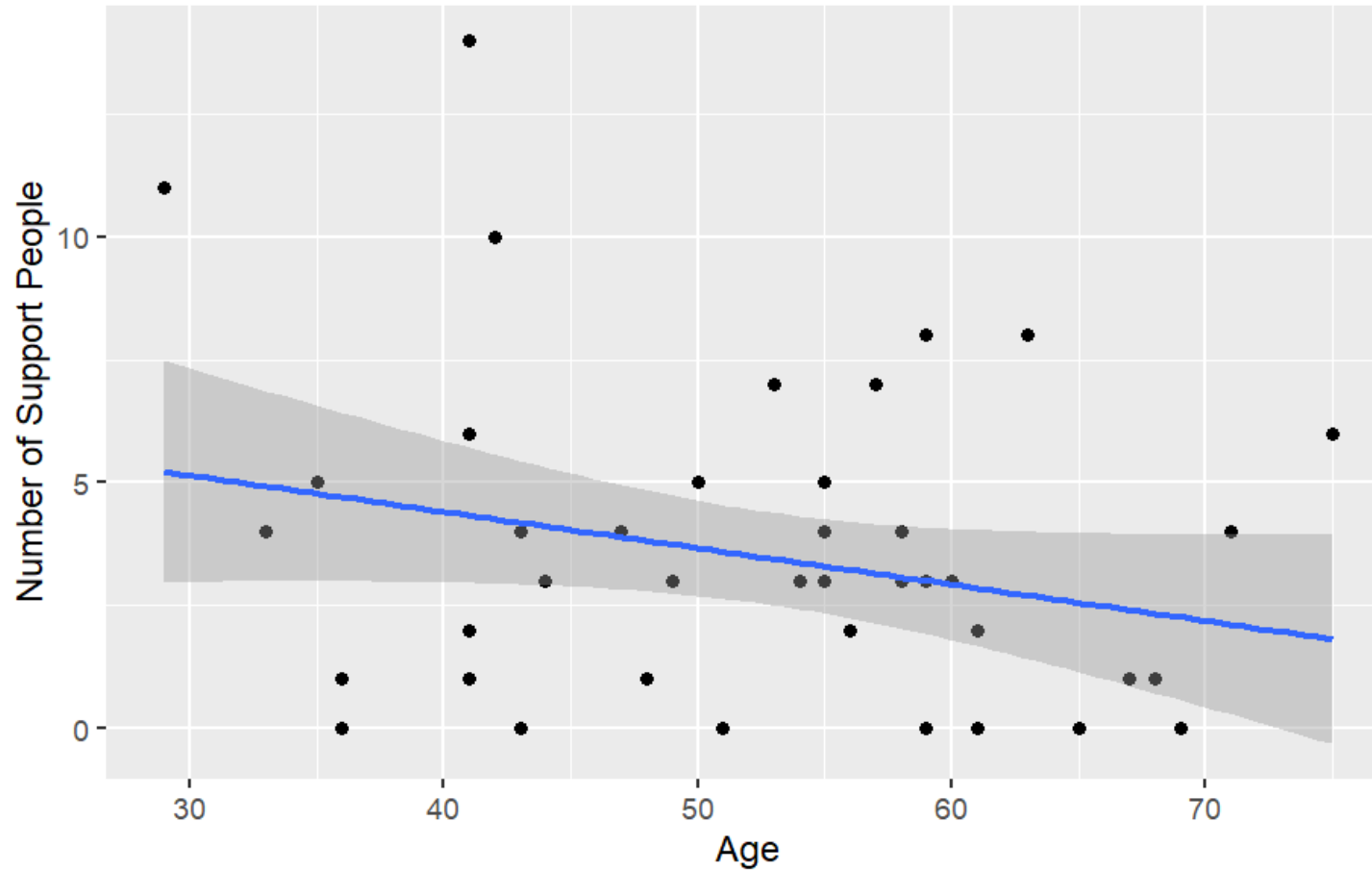
- Many kinship carers do not receive the support they need
- Support often comes from informal networks e.g. family and friends, community groups
- We need to know more about these networks and how they differ across carers based on factors such as legal status, age, ethnicity, age and needs of child
- We need to understand how carer support needs change over time as family circumstances evolve
- This can help identify what is working well, and where critical gaps lie to inform better support planning

Networks contract and reconfigure over time



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Carer age can impact support



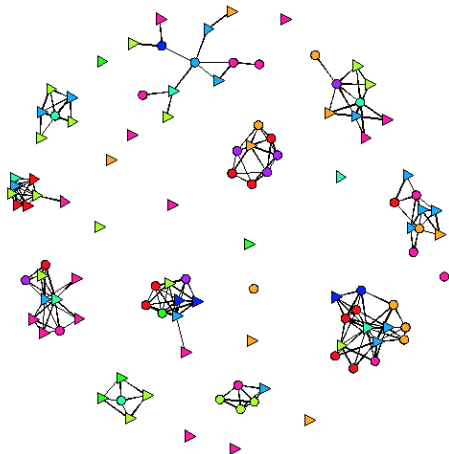
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Quality of relationships is important

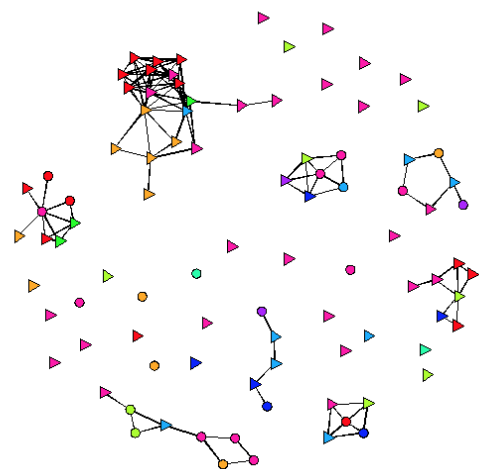
- Meaningful support is often carried by a very small number of people - or by peers and community groups filling gaps.



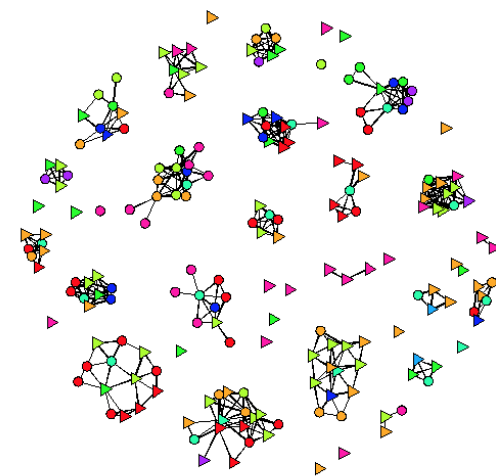
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- OtherAuthority
- Child
- Family
- Partner
- KinshipChild
- Parent
- Sibling
- Other
- ▲ No Support
- Support



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Family relationships can both sustain and strain care

- The same family networks that can make kinship care possible can also carry conflict, stress and risk for carers
- Carers often manage parent contact alone
- Emotional toll on children and carers
 - Adjustments for SEND and older children needed
- Wish for mediation and joined-up support for carers and parents

Building support around complex needs

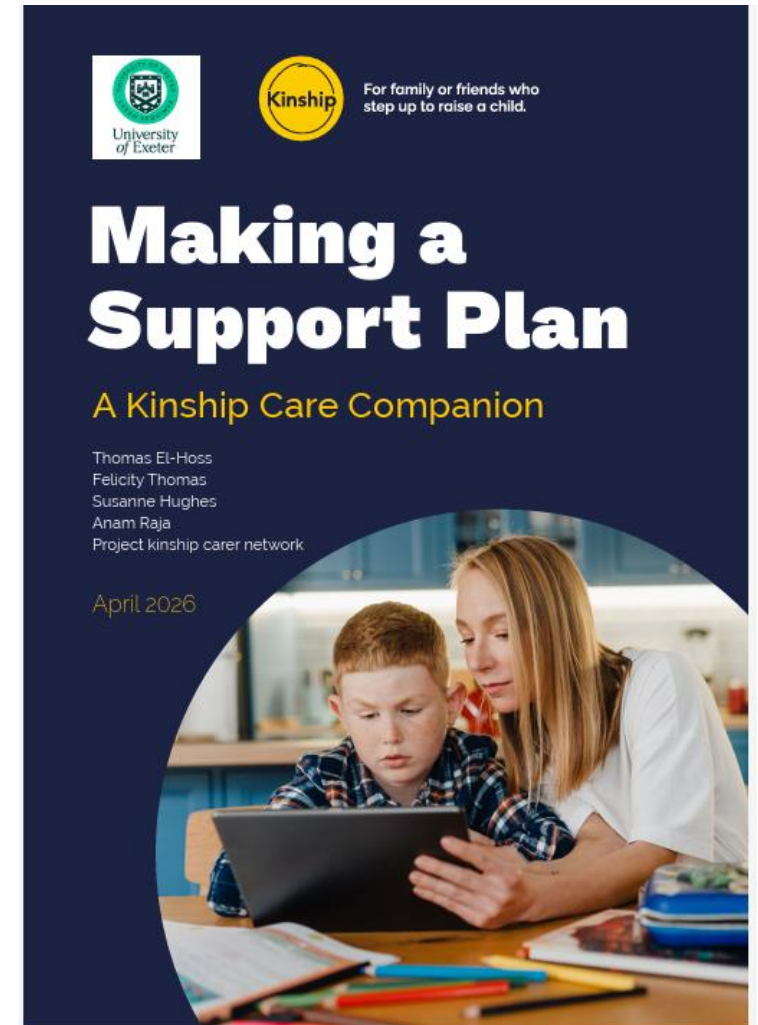
- Children's needs change over time, particularly during adolescence and key transition points
- Gaps in information, support, diagnosis and respite can lead to crisis points
- Informal networks are not always able to provide the more specialised support carers need
- Continuity with professionals can help carers build trust and access support

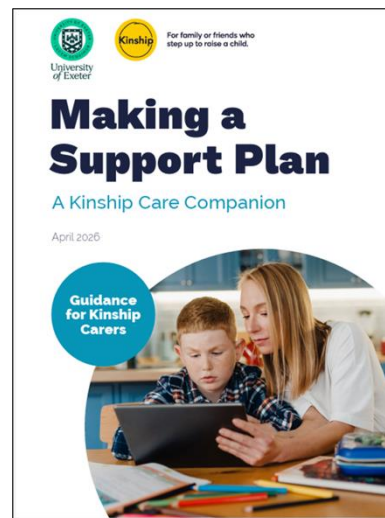
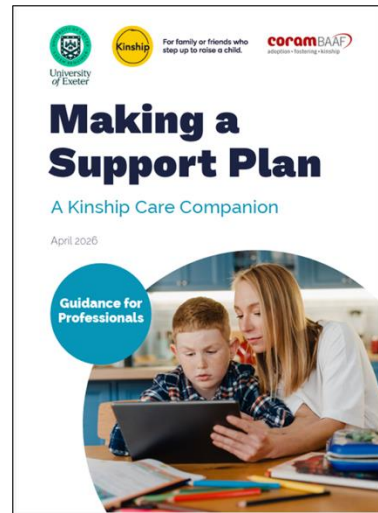
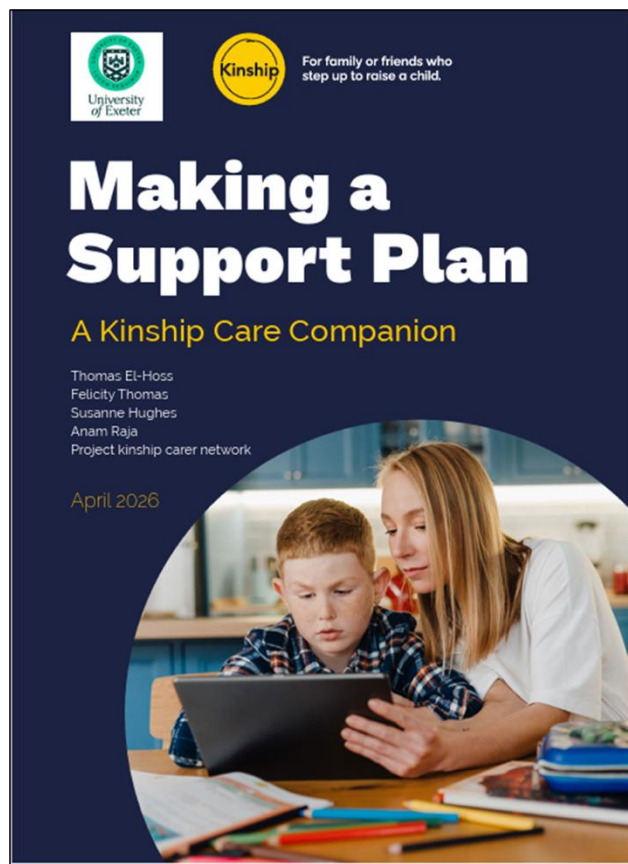
What carers shared about support planning

- Support planning often felt:
 - **Rushed** – plans shared before court with insufficient time to consider/ask questions
 - **Pressured** – carers felt pressure to show strong support in place
 - **Generic** – not tailored enough to individual needs of their family
 - **Unclear** – what specific support was agreed, when, and who
 - **Snapshot** – not forward looking enough and only revisited in crisis points
- Carers **unsure what support they would need** or could ask for – sometimes because information about child not shared
- **Consequence:** damaged trust, children's needs left unmet & building pressures at home – some arrangements breaking down

Targeted support planning

- **Support is more than a list of names** - large networks do not always provide reliable or meaningful support.
- **Support networks are relational and change over time** - work, housing, health, finances and family relationships can strengthen or reduce support.
- **Kinship families need tailored plans** - support needs differ depending on the child's age, identity, legal status, culture, disability and local services.
- **Focusing on the carer, not only the child** - wellbeing, finances, housing, work and social connection all matter.
- **Taking family relationships seriously** – parent contact, conflict, mediation and emotional labour are often central.
- **Support planning should be future-focused and accountable** – clear responsibilities, realistic commitments and *regular reviews* help support remain active over time.
- **Planning should build trust** – Carers need collaborative conversations where they feel safe asking for help.





Please Use and Share the Resources

- They are free to use and available at <https://kinship.org.uk/our-work-and-impact/research/understanding-kinship-carer-networks-to-inform-targeted-support/>
- Some local authorities have already adopted them and we have had positive feedback
- QR code at the back of resources to provide feedback

Questions for discussion

- 1) What are the opportunities to review support plans and re-ignite support planning processes, taking into account potential changing needs, periods of vulnerability and emerging safeguarding concerns?
- 2) Who needs to be involved in ensuring a whole family approach to support planning?
- 3) Where can we use or apply support planning principles other than just with special guardianship families?