



# Submission to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care's call for ideas

December 2021

## Idea 1: Overview of Kinship's vision for the future of kinship care.

### What is the idea?

This is the first of five submissions by Kinship to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care's Call for Ideas. This submission describes Kinship's overarching vision for the future of kinship care. There are two stages to this vision of the development of a robust kinship care system.

The first stage is concerned with urgent changes that are needed to improve the situations for kinship carers who have been neglected by the system for too long. These changes fall into three themes:

- The provision of financial support to all kinship carers.
- The provision of information, advice and support to all kinship carers, their children, and their families.
- The development of public services to make them relevant and accessible for kinship carers and the children they care for.

These themes will be addressed individually in submissions two, three, and four.

The second stage makes recommendations to develop a robust system that will support kinship carers into the future. This recommendation has been consolidated into a single theme which includes several sub themes:

- The need for a national kinship care strategy and investment.
  - Ensuring the rights of kinship carers and their children are enshrined in law.
  - The acknowledgment of kinship care as specific form of family in its own right and as a specific area of practice.

- The development of a skilled children's social care workforce specialising in kinship care.
- Greater awareness of kinship care

This theme will be addressed in submission five.

Kinship will be publishing a policy report early in 2022 bringing together these ideas into a vision for the future of kinship care.

### **What will the impact be?**

The research evidence is very clear that when kinship care is well supported, skilled and confident kinship carers are able to offer the best possible care to children who have usually suffered loss, abuse and/or neglect during their childhoods. This improves the outcomes for children and increases family stability.

Well-supported kinship care can also offer the following benefits to kinship carers, their children, and their families; children's social care; and society more generally:

- Well-supported kinship care will mean more children are successfully raised in kinship families reducing the numbers of children going into care and increasing the numbers of children leaving care to live with kinship carers.
- Children in well-supported kinship care will have improved outcomes in all developmental outcomes including educational attainment, mental and physical health, and reduced instances of risk-taking and antisocial behaviour. This will reduce the reliance on public services throughout their lifetimes.

Kinship carers will see a reduction in the stress and pressure they face which will have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing.

## **Idea 2: The provision of financial support for all kinship carers.**

### **What is the idea?**

Financial stress and poverty are one of the main challenges faced by kinship carers and it severely impacts on their ability to provide the best quality care to the children they look after.

Kinship is recommending the following policies for all kinship carers, regardless of the legal status of the children:

- A universally available financial allowance which is not means tested or reviewed. This allowance must be the equivalent to the national minimum fostering allowance.

As part of this call kinship carers need fair employment rights to include:

- Kinship care leave on par with adoption leave for when a child first moves in with them.

### **What will the impact be?**

Research has demonstrated there are several significant benefits to kinship carers feeling financially secure and financially supported by the state:

- Feeling financially secure allows kinship carers to focus more on meeting the needs of their children rather than worrying about feeding them or keeping them warm. This will reduce the number of family break downs and improve the outcomes for children.

- When kinship foster carers feel confident they will receive financial support they are more likely to apply for an SGO which will result in fewer children in the care system.
- Removing means testing and financial review processes removes a layer of expensive bureaucracy and frees up social workers' time.

When kinship carers feel financially supported it encourages them to trust their local authorities and engage in support at an earlier point, reducing the need for intensive crisis interventions.

### **Idea 3: The provision of tailored information, advice and support to all kinship carers, their children, and their families.**

#### **What is the idea?**

A duty on local authorities to ensure the kinship carers, their children and their families receive:

- Independent advice and information.
- Support tailored to the specific needs of each family.

The information, advice and support should include:

- Independent advice and information, including legal advice, to be available when required.
- Peer support available to all kinship carers.
- The provision of preparation workshops designed specifically for kinship carers.
- Early help and preventative support offered through combinations of universal services and the third sector. This will increase engagement of hard-to-reach communities.
- Specialist crisis intervention support available when required.
- Support plans should be developed when necessary. Plans should be developed in partnership with carers and reviewed in a timeframe that works for the kinship carers and the children.
- Specialist support to manage ongoing family relationships, including support around contact and family history where required.
- Therapeutic support for kinship carers and the children.
- Specialist support for carers offering permanence to children where parents are requesting the children are returned to their care.
- Specialist support for children transitioning to adulthood, especially in relation to accessing further and higher education.

This information, advice and support must be accessible to all kinship carers regardless of the legal status of the children or where they live. Support should be voluntary for kinship carers to engage in unless there are child protection concerns.

#### **What will the impact be?**

Kinship carers are currently suffering from the legacy of a lack of investment in kinship care. Carers do not receive the necessary advice, information, and support they need, which adds huge stress onto families. The provision of advice, information and support will:

- Increase confidence among kinship carers. This will result in better care for children enabling them to cope better with the impact of their early life experiences and leading to better outcomes for them.

- Reduction in child and carer distress including a reduction in child on care violence and risk taking behaviour in children.
- Increase the likelihood that families will engage more with early help support and prevent families falling into crisis. This will minimise the distress experienced by kinship families and reduce the need for expensive intensive crisis interventions.
- Increase stability and prevent families breaking down and children having to go into local authority care.
- Increase resilience in carers and children and reduce the need for lifelong involvement with public services.

Increase trust between kinship carers and their local authorities which will encourage families to seek support at an earlier stage.

## **Idea 4: The development of public services to make them relevant and accessible for kinship carers and the children they care for.**

### **What is the idea?**

Kinship carers and their children come into contact with a range of public services. These services commonly do not have specific policies for working with kinship care families. Kinship is calling for public services to develop kinship care aware policies and working practices:

- All public services must have a policy detailing how their service is able to meet the specific needs of kinship care families.
- The development of specialist education support including:
  - Priority for school admissions.
  - All children in kinship care to be entitled to pupil premium plus.
  - Extend the remit of the virtual school to include all children in kinship care.
  - Support for young people in kinship care accessing further/higher education.
  - All children in kinship care to be entitled to free childcare hours.
- The development of health support including:
  - The right to an annual health assessment for the child if requested by the carer.
  - Priority access to CAMHS (on a par with children in care)
  - The development of specialist kinship care CAMHS teams.
- The development of housing support including:
  - Kinship carers to be considered as a priority need group in terms of housing.
  - The cost of adaptations to kinship carers homes which allow them to look after a child should be covered by the state.

### **What will the impact be?**

Not only do children and kinship carers access universal public services but the children's experiences of trauma also mean they often need to access more specialist services. Public services commonly lack awareness and understanding of kinship families. This results in carers often having to fight to access service which they are entitled to, or they are offered services/support designed for other groups (foster carers or adopters). The development of kinship competent public services will raise awareness of kinship care and the specific needs of kinship families within the public

sector, and make public services more accessible and better able to meet the needs of kinship carers and their children.

#### Education:

- Help provide a nurturing and supportive education environment.
- Increase educational attainment.
- Increase attendance.
- Allow teachers to manage positively children's distress and reduce child exclusions.
- Support children to make and maintain friendships.

#### Health:

- Increase the early identification of health issues in children.
- Increase the treatment of health issues.
- Increase the provision of mental health support.
- Prevent the development of mental health and personality issues.

#### Housing:

- Reduce overcrowding.
- Ensure kinship families are securely housed.
- Reduce the need for people to lose their family homes.
- Enable siblings to be kept together.

### **Idea 5: The need for a national kinship care strategy and investment.**

#### **What is the idea?**

There must be a clear strategy to help develop an understanding of kinship care and level up the way kinship families are identified, assessed and supported. This should include:

- Ensuring that national and local data is collected on all aspects of kinship care.
- Ensuring the rights of kinship carers are enshrined in law, this is to include the right to a fair assessment (including the right to appeal a negative assessment) and the right to support.
- Kinship care to receive recognition in its own right and not to be combined with adoption or foster care. Kinship care is a fundamentally different family type to any other and must be treated as such.
- Invest in the voluntary sector to provide independent services to kinship families.
- The development of a kinship specialism in children's social care.
- There should be specialist kinship care CPD modules available to social workers and awareness of kinship care is taught on all qualifying programmes for professionals likely to work with kinship carers and their children.
- A strategic plan to raise awareness of kinship care and tackle stigma associated with it amongst relevant professionals and more broadly across society.

#### **What will the impact be?**

A national kinship care strategy has the potential to revolutionise the way vulnerable children are supported to remain within their families rather than being placed in the care system.

The collection of robust data will allow national and local services to be designed efficiently and effectively based on the knowledge of the numbers of kinship care families and their needs.

An increase in legal rights for kinship carers and their families will increase security and stability within families.

Locating kinship care and a specialist practice area will ensure kinship care families receive the highest quality support which will promote stability and improve outcomes.

Raising awareness of kinship care will deepen the understanding of what kinship care is. This will mean that more people understand they are kinship carers and seek help. It will mean more professionals are able to identify kinship carers and signpost them to help. An accessible and supportive system for kinship carers will encourage more carers to engage with service and encourage more carers to support the development of kinship care aware policy making and services.