



# Kinship Connected Evaluation

September 2020

This summary gives a very brief overview of the evaluation of Kinship Connected. For a fuller overview please see the executive summary or the full report.

## Introduction

In August 2020 Starks Consulting Ltd and Ecorys, completed an evaluation of Grandparents Plus's Kinship Connected programme.

The Kinship Connected programme was joint funded from April 2018 until March 2020 by local authorities; the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS); Nesta, as part of the Connected Communities Innovation Fund; and several national and local trusts and foundations.

Kinship Connected is a programme of support for kinship carers, most of whom have been granted a special guardian order for their children. Grandparents Plus project workers undertake an assessment of the kinship carers' needs and offer support to help them meet these needs using a strengths-based model of intervention. Furthermore, Kinship Connected also uses a social action model of support to develop peer support groups, which were run by kinship carers supported by Grandparents Plus project workers. During this period, Kinship Connected was delivered in 17 local authorities and supported over 400 kinship carers. Kinship Connected continues to be delivered by Grandparents Plus across the country.



## Key Findings

- **Complex needs of carers:** Before receiving support from Grandparents Plus, most kinship carers were concerned about their children's development or behaviour. Most did not feel supported by their local authorities before accessing Kinship Connected. This lack of advice and support combined with the complexity of caring for the children, many of whom had experienced trauma throughout their childhoods, meant most kinship carers lacked confidence in their role. Kinship carers seeking support from Grandparents Plus were also more likely to be at risk of poor mental health due to the stresses of the role.
- **Value of independent and peer support:** Kinship carers saw a benefit in being supported by Grandparents Plus project workers who were working independently from children's social care. They also reported benefiting from attending peer-to-peer support groups because they believed other kinship carers better understood their experiences.
- **Clear positive impact on carers:** Kinship carers who engaged in Kinship Connected reported improvements in all areas of their kinship carer role. Their confidence increased, they felt less isolated and better supported. The kinship carers saw improvements in both their children's development and behaviour.
- **Improvement in mental wellbeing of carers:** The mental wellbeing of kinship carers who engaged in Kinship Connected support improved to above the level where they were no longer meeting the threshold of being at risk of experiencing long-term psychological stress.
- **Positive impact attributable to the programme:** The methodology of the evaluation meant the improvements experienced by the kinship carers could be attributed to their involvement with the Kinship Connected programme.

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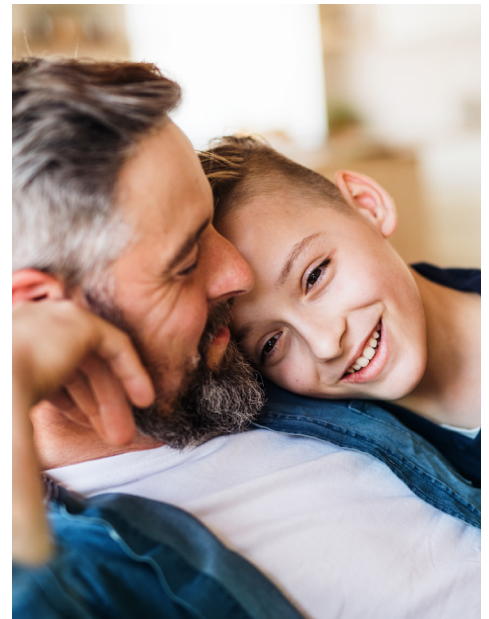
## Key Findings continued

- **Grandparents Plus' unique position**, having developed a large community of kinship carers and having developed positive relationships with local authorities, social care professionals and academics meant they were ideally placed to offer this kind of support.
- **20% ROI for the programme:** A financial cost-benefit analysis of Kinship Connected was carried out and it was identified that every £1 a local authority invested in the programme £1:20 benefits were generated which equated to a 20% rate of return.
- **Kinship carers considered support as 'vital':** The evaluation concluded the support offered by project workers through the Kinship Connected programme and associated peer support groups were seen as being 'vital' by kinship carers who had previously felt neglected and isolated.

## Recommendations

The evaluation made several recommendations to support the development of the Kinship Connected programme. These recommendations were

- **The number of days commissioned by local authorities needs to reflect the size of the kinship community** that local authorities are referring to Kinship Connected. This is to ensure Grandparents Plus support workers have capacity to make an impact with the families they are working with.
- **The way local authorities refer cases to grandparents plus project workers should be straightforward.**
- Local authorities should **raise awareness of the Kinship Connected commissioned support** available among the special guardians in their authorities to ensure higher rates of engagement.
- **Positive working relationships between Grandparent Plus project workers and practitioners** from the referring social work teams should be encouraged. This can be done by having the project workers located in the same building as the social work team or by them attending team meeting either in person or virtually.
- **Target numbers for kinship carers to be supported should be agreed each month** and should consider the capacity of the Grandparents Plus project workers and the complexity of cases they are working on at any given time. This ensures project workers have manageable caseloads evenly spread over the duration of programme and prevents too many cases being referred at the beginning or the end of the commissioned service.
- **Support offered through Kinship Connected should be included as part of any support plans** the special guardians already have in place. This will ensure the impact of the programme is reviewed alongside all other interventions happening with the family.



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## Recommendations continued

- **Local authorities should embed the Kinship Connected programme of support within its wider suite of support** to families with a special guardianship order. This should encourage kinship carers to develop their own support networks over time.
- Going forward, there should be **clarity about the role of Grandparent Plus project workers in ongoing social work interventions**. This is to ensure clarity for project workers, children's social care practitioners and the families and to avoid confusion at meetings and reviews.
- Review the **strategy for a volunteer-led network of peer-to-peer support groups** to encourage the support groups to become as self-sustaining as possible.
- **Boost the number of kinship carers undergoing volunteer training** allowing more to be able to support their peers.
- Continue to **review the quality of the data gathered by Grandparents Plus project workers** and held centrally on Salesforce (Grandparents Plus's recording system). This will allow accurate reporting back to local authorities and support the development of the service.

This summary was authored by Paul McGrath, Policy and Practice Advisor at Grandparents Plus, and is not part of the independent evaluation.



Grandparents Plus is the national charity for kinship carers – relatives and friends who step in to raise children who aren't able to live with their parents.

We strive for a society in which kinship carers and the children they care for are recognised, valued and supported.

Our support services address the significant financial, practical and emotional challenges that kinship carers face.

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