

Leeds Kinship Care Service
phone: Kinship Duty 0113 378 3537
email: kinshipdutyteam@leeds.gov.uk

For more information on Kinship Care in Leeds
email: kinshipdutyteam@leeds.gov.uk
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Kinship Care in Leeds



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making Leeds a child friendly city



Kinship Care in Leeds

The information in this leaflet is for people caring for the children of family members or connected people where children and their families are involved with Children's Social Work Services.



Leeds City Council believe that children should live with their birth family wherever possible. If a child cannot live with their birth parents, every effort is made for the child to live with a close relative or friend who has an established relationship with the child.

There are clear benefits for keeping children in their family network. However children who go to live with family members can have had a very difficult start in life and their emotions and behaviour are often greatly affected by these past experiences.

Types of Kinship Care

Note: Parent Responsibility (PR) is the legal right and responsibilities as a parent, the role is to care, protect and maintain the child.

Informal Arrangement: someone who is caring for a child of a relative where there is no legal order supporting the arrangement. This is usually when the birth parent has agreed for a close relative to care for their child/ren.

Child Arrangement Order (previously Residence Order): a court order which gives PR to the holder of the order shared with others with PR, and determines that the child is to live with the person ordered by the court. PR is shared equally and anyone given PR must be consulted when decisions are made about the child, eg regarding education or health issues.

had been a Looked After Child. There is a Special Guardian's support group and specialist SGO Workers can offer support and guidance, including signposting to other services and agencies.

Informal Kinship Carers can contact the Kinship Team or Duty and Advice teams in the city for guidance and advice.

What will be expected of me as a Kinship Foster Carer

- To provide good quality parenting
- To work jointly as part of a team of professionals, including social workers, teachers and health workers. As part of this team you will contribute to the overall plan for the child which is a shared responsibility.
- To work co-operatively with all agencies involved, including being open and honest with professionals
- Ensure the child is available for regular visits from their social worker who will need to see the child alone.
- To engage in all meetings about the child and an annual Foster Carer Review.
- To promote contact with the child's birth family, especially where it is seen as a benefit to the child.

Legal Advice

If you need legal advice you should contact a solicitor who specialises in child care law. Leeds City council has an approved list of children's solicitors.

www.lawsociety.organisation.uk/choosingandusing/findasolicitor.law

Further Information

Leeds City council website: The Kinship Care Guide for England
Grandparents Plus Helpline: 0300 123 7015 or
advice@grandparentsplus.org.uk
Family Rights Group
Family Information Service Leeds

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What happens at the end of an assessment?

All fostering assessments are considered by a Fostering Panel who then make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker who makes the final decision as to whether approval should go ahead or not. If the recommendation is negative the matter can be appealed.

Where the assessment is for Special Guardianship, all assessments are considered by the CSWS and the court.

How are Kinship Carers prepared for the role?

If you become a kinship foster carer, there is an expectation you will attend training to support your role as a carer. For example it is a requirement that you attend Skills to Foster and First Aid training, and complete a Workbook for new foster carers. Lots of other useful training and support is available.

Special Guardians can also access training.

How long do placements last?

When considering whether you can become a carer, you should be aware that this could be until the child is old enough and able to live independently which is until they are 18 years old at least.

How are Kinship Carers supported?

Kinship Foster Carers will have a Supervising Social worker who will visit you regularly, particularly in the early days of children being placed with you. There is a monthly support group for Kinship Foster carers, training and therapeutic support. Kinship foster carers have the same status as other foster carers in the authority.

Special Guardians The level of support, including financial support, depends on any other related orders awarded by the court, the needs of the child and carers and whether the child

Special Guardianship Order: a court order which gives the carer PR to the exclusion of others with PR.

Kinship Foster Carers: Kinship foster carers do not have PR for the child. The local authority shares PR with the birth parent/s when a child is subject to a Care Order made by the court, (Children Act 1989, Sect 31), or if the child is voluntarily accommodated, (Children Act 1989, Sect 20). All foster carers have to sign a Foster Care Agreement when they are approved as a Kinship Foster Carer for Leeds City Council. The agreement specifies the rights and responsibilities of foster carers and also the service they will receive from the Kinship Fostering team.

Kinship Care and the Law

The Children Act 1989 directs that when a child is Looked After and cannot be placed with their birth family, or others with PR, the local authority:

'...shall make arrangements to enable the child to live with a relative, friend or other connected person, unless that would not be reasonably practical or consistent with their welfare'.

Some Kinship Care arrangements are prompted by the involvement of the courts who are directing the local authority to assess family or friends as carers for children where they cannot be looked after by their birth parents. Every decision made will take into account the child's needs, their wishes and feelings.

The Kinship Care service in Leeds

There are two kinship care teams and they are part of Leeds Children's Social Work Services (CSWS). One team focuses on assessing Kinship Carers for children where social workers are involved in planning for the children's future and the other team focusses on helping Kinship Carers to care for the children through advice and practical support. The teams have specialist services for Special Guardians and Private Fostering.

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Do all Kinship Carers need to be assessed?

Informal Kinship carers: if you are a grandparent, adult brother or sister, aunt or uncle and are looking after a child with the agreement of the birth parent CSWS do not have to be informed and no formal assessment is required.

Private Fostering: if your relationship is none of the above you may fall into the category of Private Fostering and as such if you were to care for a child for more than 28 days you need to inform the local authority about the arrangement as soon as possible. You will then be assessed as a Private Foster carer.

Kinship Foster carer: when CSWS are seeking an alternative care arrangement for the child you will be required to be assessed as a Kinship Foster carer to care for a Looked After Child. The assessment process to become a Kinship Foster carer involves gathering information and completing an assessment report about you and your family's parenting and relevant life experiences. This report is presented to a fostering panel of different workers who recommend (or do not recommend) approval as a Kinship Foster carer.

Special Guardians: when CSWS are involved with the child and the plan is Special Guardianship, you are likely to be assessed in the same manner as foster carers. The report will be submitted to court to consider awarding a SGO.

What does the assessment process involve?

You may be approached by a social worker or you might put yourself forward to be considered as a carer of a child known to you

- a) A Viability Report involves a home visit by the child's social worker and a Kinship social worker to discuss your circumstances, reasons for and ability to meet the needs of the child, leading to recommendation for a full assessment or otherwise. This process is the

start of the formal assessment process and serves to establish if the proposed arrangement is in the child's and your family's best interests. In some circumstances an emergency approval may need to be made to enable the child to be placed with you immediately depending on your existing relationship with the child.

- b) Statutory checks will be completed inc DBS (criminal record) checks for all household members over 18 years, and medical checks will be undertaken. References will be taken, along with checks around immigration status. It is very important that applicants are open and honest about their criminal history. Failure to disclose information will be taken seriously and may preclude the assessment proceeding.
- c) A Home and Safety check and discussions regarding pets will be undertaken
- d) Applicants have to be available for a number of 1:1 sessions with their assessing social worker. The sessions cover life history, relationships, relationships with child's birth family, understanding of concerns of the child's situation, knowledge of child development and children's needs, availability and capacity to care for the (child possibly until they are 18 years old) and support networks.

The assessment process can appear to be very intrusive and requires people to think deeply about what is being asked of them. Once an assessment has started it is not uncommon for applicants to change their minds and withdraw their interest.

It should also be noted that the majority of assessments relate to children being cared for until they are at least 18 years old.



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