



Support for kinship carers

Briefing for Westminster Hall debate on Tuesday 18 October at 2.30 – 4pm, led by Munira Wilson MP

Summary

- It makes sense to invest in kinship care. It delivers better outcomes and experiences for children by keeping them within their loving families, as well as being good value for the public purse.
- Our evidence shows that kinship carers are experiencing financial destitution due to the lack of support and the rising cost of living. Unlike foster and adoptive families, children in kinship care and their carers have very few rights to financial, practical or emotional support.
- We want to see the Government respond boldly to the recommendations made by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, and commit to a kinship strategy that equalises support between kinship families and foster and adoptive families.
- Our new **#ValueOurLove** campaign launches on Wednesday 19 October and you are invited to our parliamentary reception taking place 2 – 4pm in Terrace Dining Room A, House of Commons.

What is kinship care?

Kinship care is when a family member or friend steps up to care for a child on an ongoing basis when their parents are unable to. There are **over 162,000 children in England and Wales** being raised by grandparents, aunties, uncles, older siblings and other relatives and friends – more than double the number in foster care.

Kinship care can take many different forms including informal arrangements agreed with the child's parents, a special guardianship order or child arrangements order secured in the family court, or where the child is placed by the local authority as a looked after child with 'family and friends' foster carers.

Why support kinship care?

Kinship care keeps children connected to their family network and important people in their lives. Evidence shows that children raised in kinship care typically have better experiences and outcomes – across education, health and employment – than those raised in unrelated foster or residential care. The familiar relationships present in kinship arrangements help to insulate children from instability, and provide a safe, loving and permanent home where children can heal from trauma and flourish.

It makes sense to invest in kinship care. For every 1000 reduction in the number of children looked after in local authority care, up to £40 million is saved which can be reinvested to better support children and their families.ⁱ Choosing not to invest in kinship care risks the futures of thousands of children and represents poor value for the public purse.

What issues do kinship families face?

Our 2022 Financial Allowances survey found that **kinship carers are facing financial destitution**: 44% told us they couldn't afford all their household bills, 26% food for their families, and 35% clothes for their children.ⁱⁱ Unlike foster carers, kinship carers do not have a right to a financial allowance from the local authority to help them cover the costs of raising a child. One-third of the 1500+ carers who responded to our survey told us

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they were worried their financial situations might eventually prevent them from being able to care for their children; this would come at significant cost to children, their families, and to the state.

Compounding kinship carers' precarious financial situations is the lack of paid leave from employment. Unlike adoptive parents, kinship carers do not have a right to leave when a child first comes to live with them; this period is crucial to help a child settle and to provide the stability they need. **Nearly half of kinship carers are forced to give up work** and many more reduce their hours, further risking their financial security.

"The biggest challenge I faced when I took in my kinship children was financial. I had to take unpaid parental leave and I wasn't entitled to benefits as the children's parents were still claiming them. I had lost my salary and I had no money coming in. We were a family of three that became a family of six..... I even lost out on a promotion as the local authority advised I stayed home to make sure the children were settled."

Aunt and kinship carer supported by Kinship

Kinship care happens in crisis. Unlike adopters or foster carers who receive extensive preparatory support and training, more than half of kinship carers take on the role with very little notice and have to manage a total change in their circumstances, often overnight. 84% of carers told us they didn't receive the advice and information they need when a child moved in, and 92% said they had received no preparatory support at all.ⁱⁱⁱ **Carers are left alone to deal with often challenging behaviour** arising from their children's previous experiences of trauma, separation and loss.

Most children in kinship care don't have access to crucial support for their education or health, despite having very similar needs and experiences to those in local authority care. Unless they were formerly looked after, they don't receive support in school (e.g. through Pupil Premium Plus or help from the Virtual School) and are **locked out of therapeutic and other support** in existing schemes such as the Adoption Support Fund.

Our recommendations

The recommendations made by the recent Independent Review of Children's Social Care in May to "unlock the potential of family networks" marked a pivotal moment for kinship care.^{iv} We want to see the Government respond boldly and positively to the Review and **commit to a first ever kinship care strategy** which includes:

- 1. Financial support for kinship families:** All kinship families should receive the financial support they need, when they need it. This should include a financial allowance that matches the current minimum fostering allowance to help them cover the unexpected costs of caring for a child.
- 2. A right to kinship care leave:** Kinship carers should get paid leave from employment like that given to adopters when a child first moves into their care.
- 3. Access to advice, training and support for kinship carers:** They should have access to information, advice, practical and emotional support from the point they take on a child, including free legal advice, preparation and training, therapeutic and peer support.
- 4. Educational and other support for kinship children:** Children who enter kinship care should receive extra support in school and have access to health and therapeutic support.

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Suggested questions

MPs should use the debate to raise awareness of the disparity in support for kinship families compared to foster and adoptive families, and push the Government to deliver both urgent support for kinship carers and children who are struggling today as well as ambitious children's social care reforms for the kinship families of tomorrow as part of their response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

1. When does the Government plan to respond to the recommendations made by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and will this include commitments to support kinship families?
2. What is the justification behind guaranteeing financial support to unrelated foster carers but denying the same right to a financial allowance for kinship carers who already know and love the child? What assessment has the Government made of introducing a financial allowance for kinship carers on a par with that given to foster carers?
3. What plans does the Government have to ensure that children in kinship care, including those who are not formerly looked after, receive the support they need in education and elsewhere?

#ValueOurLove campaign

On **Wednesday 19 October**, Kinship is launching a new national campaign - **#ValueOurLove** – to push the Government to equalise support between kinship families and foster and adoptive families.

To mark the launch, we are holding a **parliamentary reception on the day of the launch from 2 – 4pm in Terrace Dining Room A, House of Commons**, and would be delighted to welcome you along. You will have the chance to meet kinship carers, join a photocall to pledge your support, and learn more about kinship care in your constituency. Speeches are from 2.30pm with contributions from Kelly Tolhurst MP, Minister for Schools and Childhood, as well as Bridget Phillipson MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Education.

On launch day you will receive an email directing you to our campaign microsite with constituency-level data on kinship care, as well as suggested social media posts and further information on how you can support the campaign.



About Kinship

Kinship is the leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. We offer kinship carers financial, legal, practical and emotional support and understanding from the moment they need it, for as long as they need it. We want every kinship family to be recognised, valued and supported. Visit kinship.org.uk. **For more about Kinship or our policy and campaigns activity, please contact Sam Turner, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, at sam.turner@kinship.org.uk or on 07399154170.**

ⁱ Nicol Economics (2020) [Kinship Care: The Opportunity](#).

ⁱⁱ Kinship (2022) [Financial Allowances survey 2022](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ Grandparents Plus (2019) [State of the Nation 2019 survey report](#). Kinship was formerly known as Grandparents Plus.

^{iv} For our full response to the Review's recommendations and what we think should happen next, please view our [kinship care policy tracker](#).