



#ValueOurLove campaign

A manifesto for kinship care

June 2024



For family or friends who
step up to raise a child.

"I believe that because she was family she did everything she could to give me the best opportunities in life. Family sometimes just go above and beyond for other family. The amazing thing that kinship care offers you is that glimmer of hope that you will have a family that can work again."

Poppy, aged 23, raised in kinship care

Introduction

Every child needs love. More than 141,000 children across England and Wales being raised by relatives or family friends know the value of love.

They have often had a really difficult start in life and have experienced trauma and loss that lasts a lifetime. Yet unlike children in foster and adoptive families, most of them and those caring for them receive no support, pushing too many kinship families to breaking point.

But this isn't inevitable. With the right support, kinship families can and do thrive. The loving relationships present within kinship arrangements help to deliver safety and stability for children who can't live with their parents.

The next UK Government has an enormous opportunity to change the future for thousands of children by transforming

support for kinship families and building a new kinship care system. Through the efforts of thousands of kinship carer campaigners, there's more recognition of and support for kinship care than ever before.

However, there's still lots to do to ensure all kinship families get the financial, practical and emotional support they need and deserve. The #ValueOurLove campaign manifesto for kinship care sets out a three step plan for how we can get there.

Kinship's **#ValueOurLove campaign** launched in October 2022 and calls on the UK and Welsh Governments to equalise support between kinship families and foster and adoptive families. To date, thousands of kinship carers have taken action to push for the changes they want to see nationally and in their local communities. Join the campaign at **kinship.org.uk**.



Three steps to #ValueOurLove

Ahead of the General Election on 4 July, we want to see all party leaders commit to doing what is right for kinship carers and their children. **We're calling on the next UK Government to follow our three step plan below.**

1

Maintain the momentum

More than ever, politicians and the public know what kinship care is and back our calls to improve support for kinship families.

We've seen a revolution, driven by the hard work of kinship carers campaigning nationally and in their local communities, which has put kinship care firmly on the map. Alongside pioneering local authorities, we've developed a strong evidence base for why we must invest in kinship care, and we've seen how the cost of living crisis has exacerbated challenges for families to make this all the more urgent.

The first ever National Kinship Care Strategy for England was published in December 2023, marking a significant win for Kinship's #ValueOurLove campaign and for kinship families across the country. It recognised that kinship carers and their children had been overlooked and undervalued for decades,

and set out the Government's vision for what support should look like in the future.

The commitments made in the Strategy fell far short of what was required to meet that vision, but it's vital the next Government does not allow any further delay to the new elements of improved support already in progress – including the financial allowances pathfinder which is testing out how to deliver improved financial support, and new kinship care statutory guidance for local authorities.

The early days of a new Government provide a fantastic opportunity to hit the ground running and prioritise 'quick wins' that will begin to make a difference to the lives of kinship families as soon as possible. The next Government should push further and faster than existing plans in the Strategy – including rolling out the financial allowances pathfinder to a wider group of kinship carers across England – and ensure kinship families aren't forced to wait any longer for promised support.

Deliver urgent support

It makes sense to invest in kinship care: evidence shows that it delivers good experiences and outcomes for children and families as well as cost savings for the public purse.

For every 1000 children looked after in well-supported kinship care rather than local authority care, the state saves £40 million and increases the lifetime earnings of those children by £20 million.

There's a clear case for the next Government to boost support for kinship families as soon as possible and ensure local authorities receive the accompanying funding they need to deliver this well.

Kinship carers cannot wait any longer for more support for the children they are raising – to provide for the essentials that they need and to ensure they are supported to thrive in life. Last year, our *Breaking Point* report found that 12% of kinship carers were concerned they may not be able to continue caring for their kinship children if their situations didn't improve. Failure to act quickly would create devastating consequences for children, families, and the state.

The #ValueOurLove campaign is calling on any future Government to make four urgent changes as a priority to equalise the support between kinship families and foster and adoptive families:

1. Equal financial allowances

More than two thirds of kinship households are deprived, and most kinship carers do not receive any financial support when they unexpectedly take on the care of a relative or friend's child.

We want to see all kinship carers get the financial support they need, including a financial allowance which at least matches the guaranteed financial allowance provided to all foster carers.

2. Equal paid leave from work

Our *Forced Out* report revealed that more than 8 in 10 kinship carers had given up work permanently or reduced their hours after taking on their caring role. The lack of paid leave for kinship carers is unnecessarily pushing them out of work and into poverty, and robbing them of protected time where they can focus on settling in a child to their new home.

We want to see a new right to statutory pay and leave for all kinship carers, at least on a par with that for adoptive parents.

"I have thought about whether I can go on like this, or whether I should hand her back to social services. It makes me feel awful to even consider it, because she's my granddaughter, but what if I can't give her what she needs?"

Grandmother and kinship carer

3. Equal therapeutic and educational support for children

Children growing up in kinship care have typically experienced trauma, separation and loss. But unlike their counterparts in the care system, most don't have access to vital help at school or with their mental health.

We want to see all kinship children get the support they need to heal and thrive, enabling them to understand their journeys into kinship care and get professional help to manage their social, emotional and mental health needs.

4. Equal access to training and support

Unlike foster care or adoption, kinship care often happens in a crisis and so most kinship carers don't get the preparatory training and ongoing advice and support they need. 25% of kinship carers rate the support provided by their local authority as very poor, and 35% rate the information provided as very poor.

We want to see all kinship carers offered independent expert advice and the ongoing training and support they feel they need to best support the children in their care.

"It's a constant fight to get the right support in a school setting. I feel as if I am not listened to as a kinship carer. I also believe there is stigma attached to the children or teachers do not have the relevant training in supporting children like ours."

Aunt and kinship carer



"Kinship care is undervalued in all aspects of society from employment to local authority support. As family members we are just expected to be grateful to give up our hopes and dreams for our future and live in poverty to raise the children of our relatives."

Grandparent and kinship carer

3

Build a new system

Beyond the urgent changes outlined above, the next Government must turn its attention to building a kinship care system that's fit for the future.

Current plans for children's social care have rightly put kinship care and support for family networks at the heart of reform. But a future Government must go further to give kinship care the comprehensive legislative framework it needs to operate effectively across the children's social care and family justice systems.

This new kinship care system must recognise the unique needs, strengths and experiences of kinship families and design bespoke policy solutions in response, not simply extend support designed with foster or adoptive families in mind. The next Government should invest further in the things that we know work and where there is strong evidence of impact, including our Kinship Connected programme and peer support.

"He's more trusting, he knows we won't let him down and we have an open and honest relationship. Many adults let him down in the past including social services."

Aunt and kinship carer

A new system needs to end the legal and postcode lottery to guarantee that all kinship families – regardless of the type of arrangement – get the support they need and deserve. It must consider the impact of racial disparities in kinship care and ensure that all kinship families are visible and acknowledged in policymaking across government.

Most importantly, the system must be built alongside kinship families: the views and experiences they bring must be respected and acted upon by any future Government. We're incredibly grateful for all of those kinship carers who have contributed their insights and expertise to develop policy solutions and advance our campaigning in England and Wales, including those valued members of the #ValueOurLove campaign steering group.



Kinship care constituency map

Learn more about the kinship families in your constituency and call on your MP candidates to make a commitment to better support kinship families.

kinship.org.uk/constituency-map



About Kinship

We are Kinship. The leading kinship care charity in England and Wales.

We're here for kinship carers – friends or family who step up to raise a child when their parents aren't able to.

Together, let's commit to change for kinship families.

kinship.org.uk



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