



Ending child poverty: making it happen

Consultation Response from Family Rights Group - addressing children on the brink of care who are being raised by family and friends carers

Family Rights Group is the Charity in England and Wales that advises and supports families who are involved with local authority children's social care services about the care and protection of their children.

Family Rights Group strongly supports the Prime Minister's intention to enshrine in legislation the Government's pledge to eradicate child poverty in the UK by 2020. The Child Poverty Unit's consultation document *Ending child poverty: making it happen* thus is welcome. However, we believe it could be significantly strengthened by recognising the needs of the many impoverished children on the edge of care living in family and friends care arrangements.

It is estimated that between 200,000 and 300,000 children are living with family and friends carers.¹ Children live in these family and friends care arrangements because they are unable to live with their parents due to tragedy or trauma and as an alternative to entering the care system. The evidence is that, that children living in such arrangements have experienced as many pre-placement adversities as children living with unrelated foster carers.

Family and friends carers are likely to be significantly more impoverished, living in overcrowded accommodation, in worse health and older than unrelated foster carers.² However many receive neither financial nor practical support, potentially to the detriment of the child³.

For further information contact:

**Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive (cashley@frg.org.uk) or
David Roth, Principal Policy Adviser (droth@frg.org.uk)
Tel: 020 7923 2628**

¹ Richards A and Tapsfield R (2003) *Funding Family and Friends Care: The Way Forward* (Family Rights Group)

² Farmer and Moyers (2008) *ibid*; Hunt, Waterhouse and Lutman (2008 forthcoming) *Keeping them in the Family: Outcomes for abused and neglected children placed with family or friends carers through care proceedings* (BAAF)

³ Farmer and Moyers (2008), *ibid*

When taking on the care of a young relative, kinship carers incur the additional expenses involved in raising a child which they had not planned for, whilst simultaneously also experiencing a loss or reduction of their own income arising from:

- having to give up work or reducing their hours in order to look after the child;
- having to take early retirement, thereby reducing their pension entitlement;
- having to pay substantial legal bills because they are just outside the eligibility levels for public funding; and/or

Currently the support available to such carers is limited to benefits and tax credits and discretionary support from the local authority, unless they are approved as local authority foster carers and the child is in the care system (in which case they receive a mandatory fostering allowance). Research evidence shows that many such carers live in or on the edge of poverty and that such support is inadequate⁴.

We would urge the government to consider ways of tackling poverty for this particular group of children. Specifically, we suggest that the government needs to:

- § eliminate the postcode lottery which currently exists, where the level of financial and other support (if any) depends upon the policies of the local authority responsible for providing this support when exercising their discretion, and the legal status of the child whilst living with family or friends carers. This needs to be addressed in the forthcoming guidance to local authorities on family and friends care as part of the revised Children Act guidance on care planning (due in late 2009);
- Introduce a non-means tested national allowance to cover the real costs of raising a child. This should be paid to relatives or other persons already connected to the child, who take on the care of a child for more than 28 days continuously in the following circumstances:
 - a) Where the child comes to live with the carer as a result of plans made within a section 47 child protection enquiry; or
 - b) Where a child comes to live with the carer following a section 37 investigation;
 - c) Where a carer has secured a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order to avoid a child being looked after, and there is professional evidence of the impairment of the parents' ability to care for the child; and/or
 - d) Where the carer has a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order arising out of care proceedings; or
 - e) Where the carer has a Residence Order, Special Guardianship Order following the accommodation of a child.

⁴ Farmer, E and Moyers (2008) *ibid*, Hunt et al (2008) *ibid*; Aldgate J and McIntosh M (2006) *Looking after the family: a study of children looked after in kinship care in Scotland* (Social Work Inspection Agency)

These criteria are designed to ensure that the financial allowance will only be received where:

- a) the carer is raising the child; and
- b) the parent is unable to care for the child and there is judicial or professional evidence of this.

If you would like further information about this please do not hesitate to contact us. We would also welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the needs of this group and our proposal for how they can best be met.

