

KINSHIP CARE ALLIANCE

The Kinship Care Alliance is a group of organisations which subscribe to a set of shared aims and beliefs on the issue of family and friends care. Members recognise that by working together we can increase our influence. We therefore meet regularly to develop a joint policy agenda and agree strategies to promote our shared aims.

The aims of the Kinship Care Alliance are to:

- Prevent children from being unnecessarily raised outside their family.
- Enhance outcomes for children who cannot live with their parents and who are living with relatives.
- Secure improved recognition and support for family and friends carers.

What we do

We are an Alliance that aims to influence policy and professional practice. In pursuit of our aims we:

- Work with national and local government to shape policy, practice influence legislation.
- produce joint briefing papers and joint responses to consultations.
- Share information and co-ordinate activities between member organisations.

Shared beliefs

There can be significant advantages for children, when they have to leave the care of their parents, in going to live with someone already known to them, such as a family member or family friend, rather than to a foster carer who is previously unknown to them. This is supported by a significant body of research evidence, which has found that children in family and friends care:

- tend to be in more stable placements than those placed with unrelated foster carers.
- feel loved and report high levels of satisfaction.
- can more easily maintain a sense of family and cultural identity.
- are more likely to maintain contact with family members than when children live with unrelated foster carers.
- appear to be as safe as those with unrelated foster carers and their behaviour is perceived to be less of a problem.

Despite these positive outcomes:

- There are children currently entering or being raised in public care, or being placed for adoption who could instead be living safely with family and friends carers. Some children are not living with family and friends carers because this is not adequately explored by local authorities at the point when children need to leave their parents' care.
- Many family and friends carers struggle, due to insufficient support, both in terms of finance and in terms of practical services. However, despite the hardships they face, many carers continue with these placements, sometimes in conditions of severe

poverty, dealing alone with children's very challenge behaviour and needs and family conflicts, because of their commitment to the child.

Our ambition

- That the potential advantages to a child of being placed with family and friends carers are fully understood by:
 - practitioners who are deciding whether a child should be placed with family and friends carers,
 - practitioners who are carrying out assessments of family and friends carers, and
 - panel members who are considering whether to recommend the approval of family and friends carers,
- That family and friends care should be used more widely for children having to leave their parents' care when this is in the child's best interests.
- That local authorities have policies which ensure family and friends care is explored as the first option for children having to leave their parents' care.
- That family group conferences are actively considered in all such circumstances.
- That family and friends carers should receive the support services they need in order to care for the child, regardless of the child's legal status. Support services should include (but not be limited to) support groups, counselling, respite, training, mediation, advice and information.
- That family and friends carers, who are caring for a child for more than 28 days as an alternative to them being taken into care, should be entitled to a national non-means tested, non taxable financial allowance to cover the real costs of raising the child.
- That government should collect and publish official statistics on children being raised by relatives and friends, including detailed socio-economic data.
- That government legislation, guidance and regulations should support these aims and their furtherance wherever possible.

How we work together

Membership is open to any organisation which supports our aims and shares our beliefs. Meetings of the Kinship Care Alliance are open to all members and minutes of meetings are circulated to all members.

Individuals with particular expertise may also be invited to join the Alliance in an advisory role to inform our work. They join in their individual capacity and do not necessarily represent any organisation.

The day to day business of the Kinship Care Alliance is undertaken by an executive committee made up of representatives from Family Rights Group, The Grandparents' Association, Grandparents Plus, BAAF, and the Fostering Network. Representatives will be sufficiently senior to be able to represent their organisation's view and take decisions on behalf of their organisation.

Current membership of the executive is as follows: Cathy Ashley from Family Rights Group, Sam Smethers from Grandparents Plus, Lynn Chesterman from The Grandparents' Association, Paul Adams from BAAF, Robert Tapsfield from The Fostering Network and Bridget Lindley from Family Rights Group who provides legal advice. Organisations represented may send deputies to meetings of the executive.

The organisations represented on the executive committee are agreed by the members of the Kinship Care Alliance and reviewed every two years.

Cathy Ashley, chief executive, Family Rights Group is the lead contact for the Kinship Care Alliance and Family Rights Group undertake secretarial services for the committee. Robert Tapsfield, chief executive the Fostering Network is the current chair.

The executive committee can agree strategy, sign off papers, and take other executive decisions on behalf of the Kinship Care Alliance. Decisions are taken on the basis of consensus.

Individual organisations retain the ability to act or discuss any issue from the perspective of their own agency, but members agree to adopt common positions on family and friends care wherever possible and to acknowledge the work of the Kinship Care Alliance in promoting these common positions or when drawing upon the work of the Kinship Care Alliance and its members.

Members wishing to organise events with the support of or on behalf of the Kinship Care Alliance should seek approval from the executive committee. Member organisations which are acting on behalf of the alliance will act in consultation with other alliance members before any activity is finalised.

For more information about membership contact Cathy Ashley on cashley@frg.org.uk

You can find out more about the work of the Kinship Care Alliance at:

http://www.frg.org.uk/kinship_care_alliance_campaign.html

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