

Young Inspectors' REPORT

Report on kinship care support services 2022
'Unlocking the potential of family networks.'



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Camden Young People's report on kinship care support services 'Unlocking the potential of family networks'.

1. Who are the Young Inspectors?

The Young Inspectors programme of inspections has been providing input to service planning and development in Camden for the past fourteen years. Every year, a team of Young Inspectors undertake research into the views of other service users and professionals about the services provided by partner agencies responsible for safeguarding children.

The approach of the Camden Young Inspectors is to listen to those with lived experiences of the services provided by social care services. The views gathered from the young inspections and the analysis thereof form the core of this report.

This year, the Young Inspectors were young people aged 17 to 23. The team of six young inspectors applied their own experience of Camden services supporting kinship carers and special guardians, in the design and conduct of this research.

2. What was the aim of the young inspection of kinship care?

The 'Independent review of children's social care' by Josh MacAlister (May 2022) sets out steps for local authorities to take into consideration to improve children's social care. The importance of the support for family networks is given special recognition in chapter four entitled 'Unlocking the potential of family networks'.

"For some children, care will always be the best option... However, many children should and could safely – with the right help – remain within the family network rather than enter care. Growing up within the family network means retaining a strong sense of identity, culture and place" (Independent review of children's social care, Josh MacAlister).

The recommendations in the above chapter of MacAlister's report has provided the focus of this Young Inspection with the aim to:

- Find out about the experiences of young people in kinship care in Camden and the experience of Family members providing kinship care and Special Guardianship arrangements
- Obtain feedback from young people, parents, kinship carers and social workers on the recommendations made in chapter 4 of the report (Kinship Care)

- Identify main themes based on the feedback obtained from the focus group discussions, from interviewing managers of the service and from questionnaires
- Develop recommendations for the service based on the responses from families and professionals.

3. How did the Young Inspectors collect the feedback and information?

Young inspections involve a range of research tools such as: desktop research, interviewing professionals, consultation via questionnaires and focus groups to explore the views of young people, parents and carers who use the service as well as staff members.

This year, the process of gathering information included the following:

- **Obtaining feedback to questionnaires** from children, young people, kinship carers, special guardians and Social workers (68 responses in total)
- **Focus groups discussions** with young people in kinship care, kinship carers and special guardians and families receiving Family Group Conference (FGC) support (12 participants)
- **Interviewing** Camden professionals from the fostering and permanency teams, the Independent Reviewing Officer service and from the Family Group Conference service.
- **Desktop research** of publications and videos relating to kinship care. This included:
 - 'The Independent review of children's social care' Josh MacAlister (May 2022)
 - Children's Social Care – putting children's voices at the heart of reform, Children's Commissioner (Jan 2022)
 - Kinship care – Financial allowances survey, Kinship (June 2022)
 - Kinship care: what are the issues? Yvette Stanley, Ofsted social care (Oct 2019)
 - Family and friends care in Camden - advice and information, Camden leaflet
 - Special Guardianship Orders - advice and information, Camden leaflet
 - Kinship care, Family Rights Group
 - What is kinship care?, Kinship
 - Camden FGC video: Family Group Conference (FGC) - Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership CSCP.

Reflections & EVALUATION

of the project by the Young Inspectors

JENNY

Young Inspectors' team leader

Planning and working on the focus groups was the highlight of the project for me. I also learned that seeing all sides of a situation (young people, professionals and kinship carers) is important for drawing back the curtains and learning how the service works. I was able to make great connections this year with lots of professionals and I am looking forward to many future opportunities.

JOSH

Young Inspector



The Young Inspectors project gave me an opportunity to make new friends and learn new skills such as teamwork, interviewing professionals and having the confidence to express my own views. Writing notes from interviewing managers was the most challenging thing. What I found helpful was to listen to the voice recordings of the conversations and typing the content after the meeting. Leading an activity in the focus group with young people and kinship carers was a new experience for me. The team was very supportive in helping me to have confidence to take the lead on the activities. It was a very positive experience for me and something I have never done before.

LAMBA

Young Inspector

Thinking about questions for questionnaires was quite challenging as everything has to be almost perfect and professional. Also, we needed to make sure we are asking the right questions. Talking to kinship carers and young people gave me an understanding of how difficult life can be for some people.





Reflections & EVALUATION

of the project by the Young Inspectors

SOPHIE

Young Inspector

I enjoyed all aspects of doing focus groups with adults and with children. We planned icebreakers and activities to involve everyone with the conversations. The project made me aware of the importance of keeping family members together and how the local authority can implement this with help from family members, independent reviewing officers, social workers and Family Group Conference.



DANIEL

Young Inspector

The project made me realise that I need a routine and something to focus on during the summer holidays. It is important to have a purpose to the day. Also, I now have a better appreciation of the benefits of teamwork, working together and of listening to other people's points of view.

The project helped me to reflect on my skills and the areas I need to improve on. I have decided to catch up on my education and go back to college to do English and maths GCSE.

ADRIAN

Young Inspector

My most valuable learning from the project has been learning how to interview managers and how to prepare for them. Time management and improving research skills were the areas I have improved on as well my self-confidence. It is a massive achievement for the group, regardless of individual contributions, as each input has contributed to a good goal of improving an aspect of the service for other people just like us.



The case for kinship care by **young people**



Stable and connected

It has allowed me to stay stable and connected within the family. Being with a familiar person has helped with transitioning from one part of the family to living with another family member.

Family time

I still get to see my family and spend time with them.

Extended family

They are nice, I now have a foster brother and a sister.

Better all round

I get to see more of my real family and I get treated better than I used to. I get to explore the world more.



I HAVE A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH MY GRANDMA NOW.

The case for kinship care by **young people**



Maintaining contact

I still get to see my mum and brother.

Better with family

I'm not in care. It is better to be with my family.

More freedom

Being able to be in contact with everyone in my family and being able to see them regularly and freely. Not having to worry about my parents.

I love my family

I get to stay with my own family and relatives who have known me since I was born and I love them. Nothing like being closer to home, learning the ways of my culture and traditions, having closer relationship with other members of the family and learning my language.



**THEY KNOW WHAT I LIKE
AND WHAT I DO NOT LIKE.**

The case for kinship care by **kinship carers**



Deep understanding

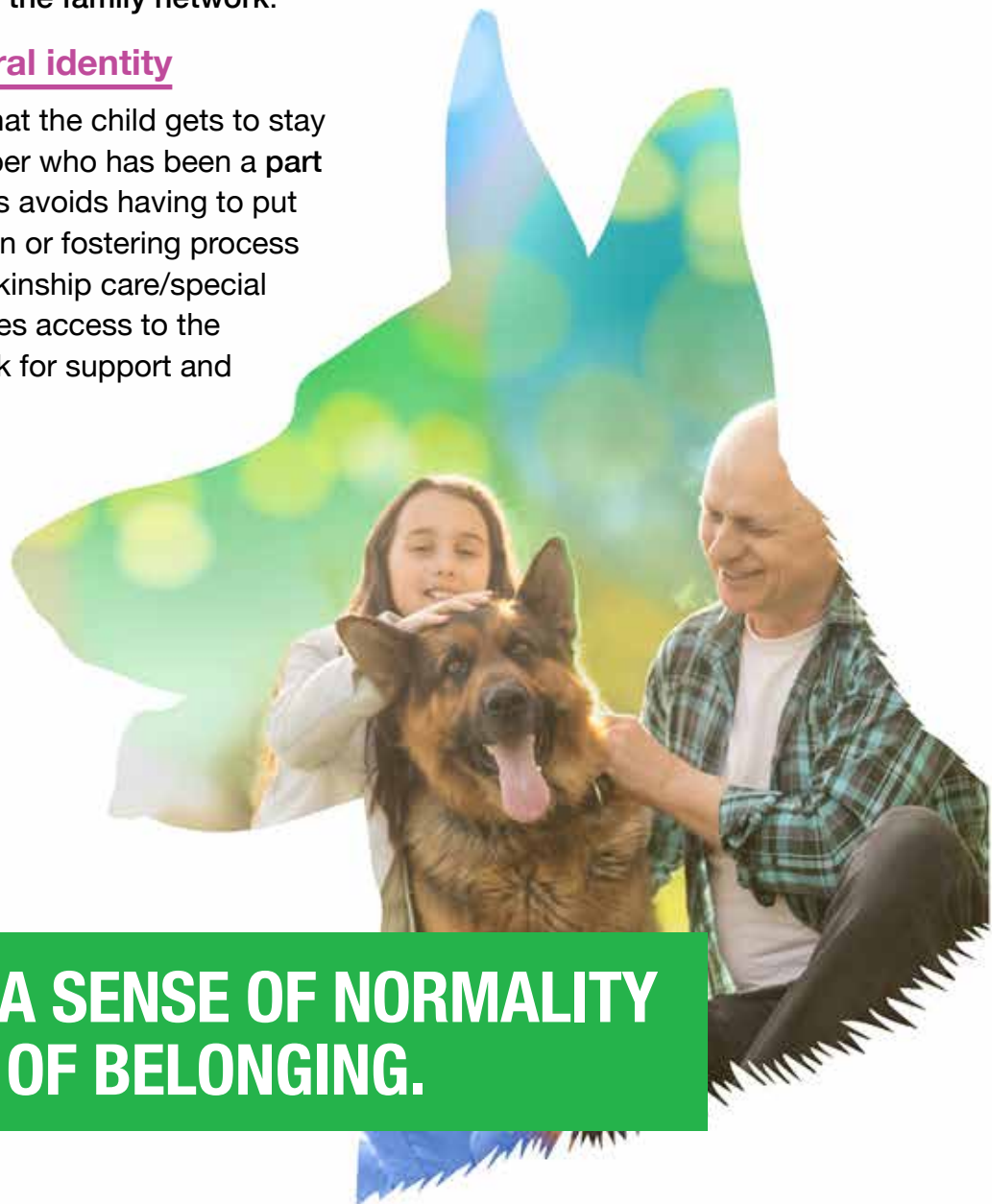
The child gets the opportunity to be raised by a close family member who has a **deep understanding** of the child's needs based on what they have been through.

Family network

It keeps the children **within the family network**.

Birth family and cultural identity

The best thing about it is that the child gets to stay with a familiar family member who has been a **part of their life since birth**. This avoids having to put a child through the adoption or fostering process to unfamiliar people. Also, kinship care/special guardian arrangements gives access to the family and relatives network for support and cultural identity.



**GIVING THEM A SENSE OF NORMALITY
AND A SENSE OF BELONGING.**

The case for kinship care by **kinship carers**



Contact with birth parents

The child gets to **maintain contact with birth parents** and retain family ties. Giving them a sense of normality and a sense of belonging.

Best start

Giving the children the **best start** under the circumstances.

Attention, acceptance and love

The child is part of a family; gets **acceptance and love** within the family. It is important for them not to feel neglected.

Stable and safe setting

Children get to **meet other children** in the same situation. Children are **stable, feel safe** and that's what they need!

Extra support

Having the **support** from social workers and the local authority.



THE CHILD GETS TO STAY IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH THE NETWORK OF FAMILY AND RELATIVES AND HAS ACCESS TO A WEALTH OF INFORMATION REGARDING FAMILY HERITAGE, CULTURE AND ROOTS.

Key findings from

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRES

Young People

**Kinship Carers and
Special Guardians**

Social Workers

Responses










Key findings



	YES	NO	NOT SURE
1 Do you know why you are living with a family member other than your parent(s)?	100%	0%	
2 Was it a right decision for you to live with a family member?	100%	0%	
3 Do you think the change has improved your situation?	100%	0%	0%
4 Did you receive information about what to expect from living with a family member?	46.2%	53.9%	

What other information would you have liked to get?

-  Initially, I would like to have had more of a sit-down discussion as to what the next few years would possibly look like and a more in-depth discussion as I got older.
-  What it would be like living with a family member.
-  How to see other family members who are important to me.
-  Information about contact with my mum.
-  I was too young to be told most of the information.
-  To see the legal documents on my situation.
-  To see my life story book.

Key findings



5

Were you involved in the meetings to discuss moving to live with a family member and your care plan?

30.8%

69.2%

6

Do you feel your views were taken into consideration when making a plan for you?

53.9%

46.2%

7

Did you have a Family Group Conference before moving out from your parent's home?

8

Are you happy with the contact arrangements with your parent(s) and siblings?

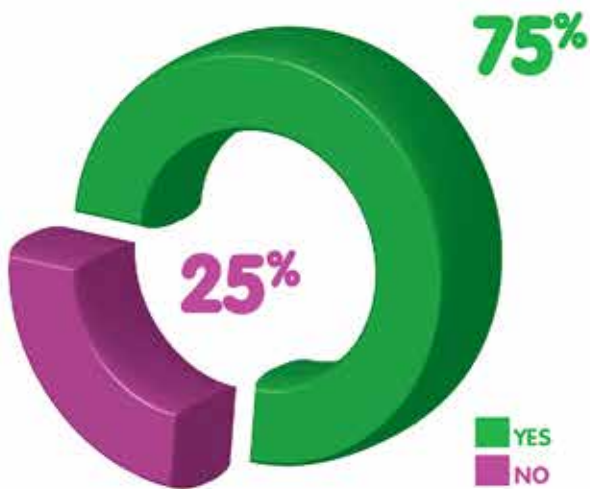


YES
NO

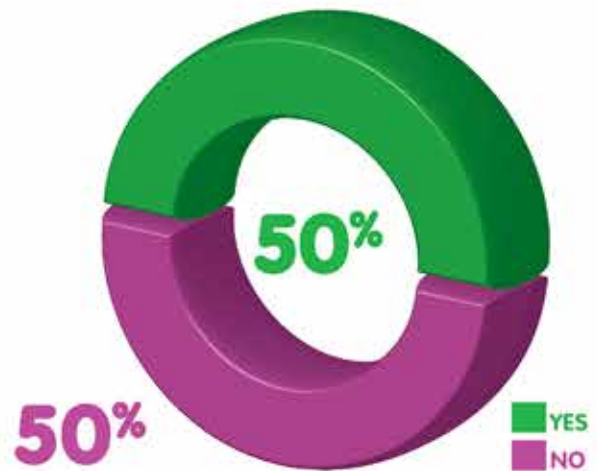


Key findings

9 Do you have regular contact with other members of your family (uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents?)



10 Has the arrangement changed relationships with your parents?



It is still the same with how mum treats me when I was living with her. However, the atmosphere around me and the living conditions have improved.

I'm safer where I am now but I worry about my mum sometimes. When we meet for contact, we have more fun now.

Because I wasn't adopted, I have been able to keep a relationship with my mum.

I do not get to see my dad even though I miss him, I am extremely terrified of him.

I have been living with my aunt for the past 10 years and have only been able see my parents through supervised contact.

I had not seen my mother for the past 9 years until summer of 2022 when I had an undesirable meeting. I have ceased contact with my father.

I don't see my parents as often as I used to.

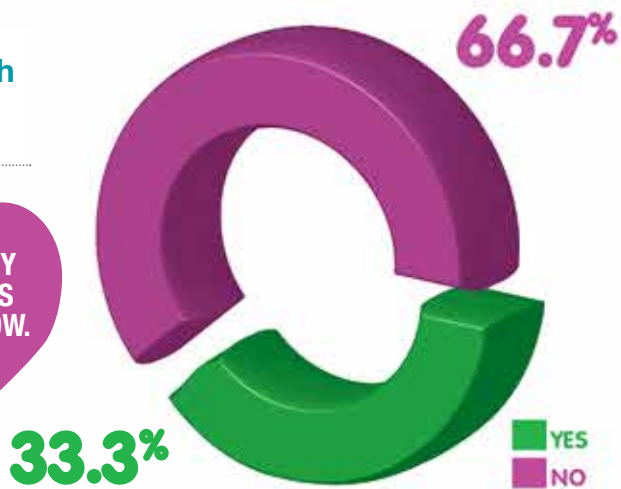
Key findings

11 Has it changed your relationship with the relative you are living with?

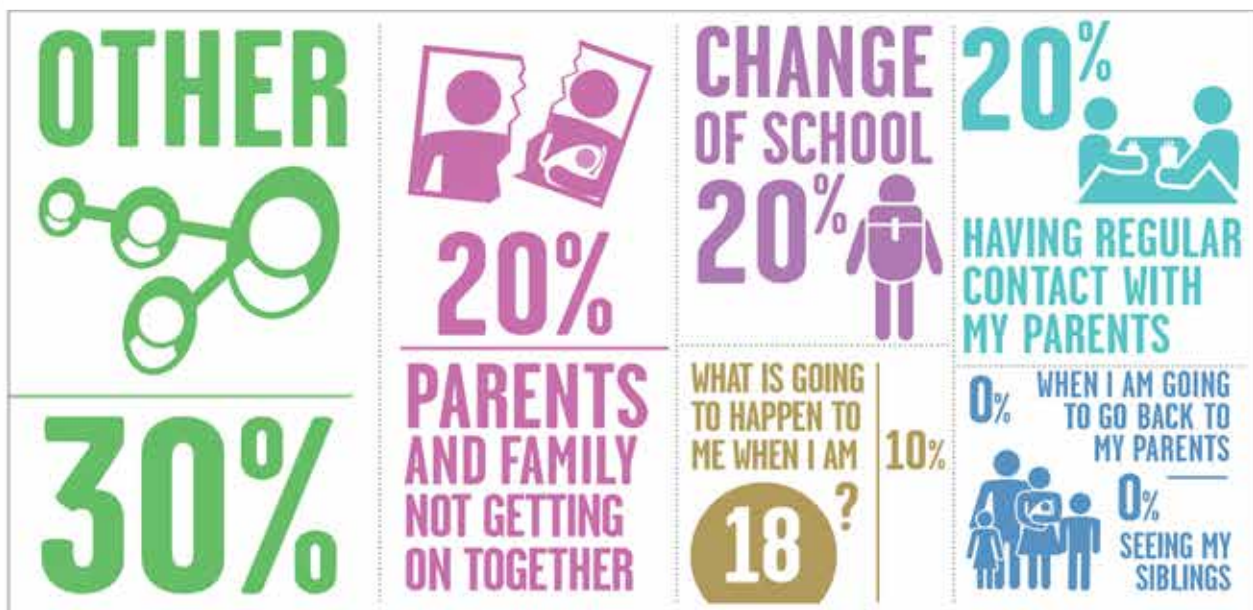
MY GRANDMA IS A BIG PART OF MY LIFE NOW.

MY AUNT HAS TAKEN A MORE PARENTAL ROLE AND WE HAVE A STRONGER RELATIONSHIP NOW.

I KNOW MY RELATIVES BETTER NOW.



12 What is the biggest worry for you about being in kinship care with a family member?



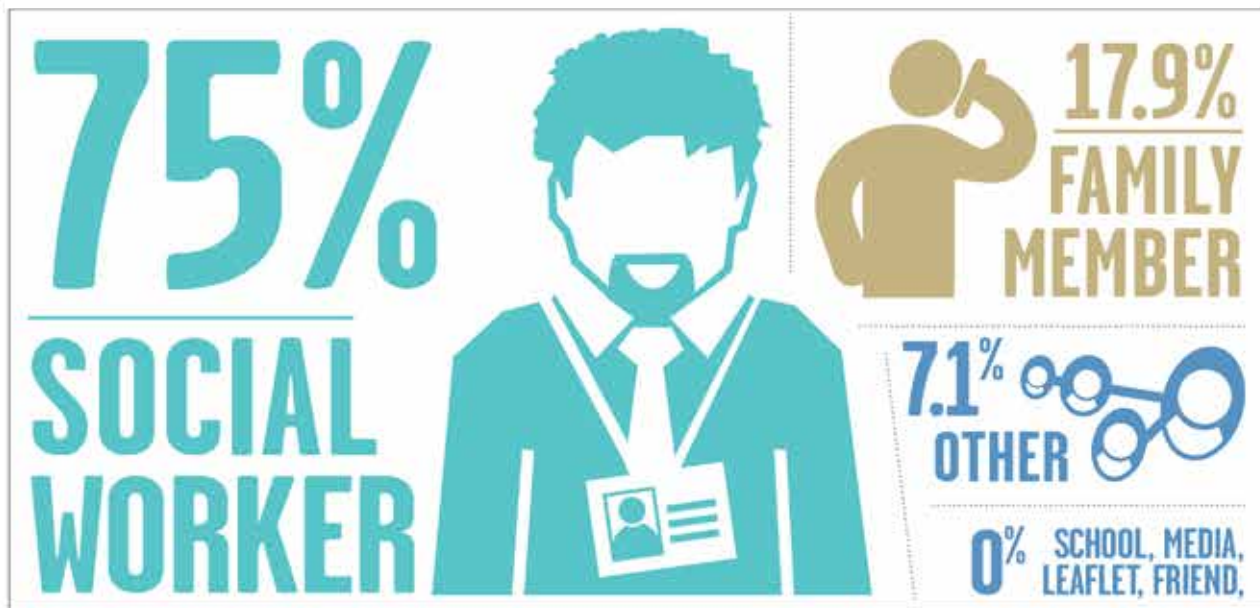
13 What would you like to change?

<p>MUM TO COME EVERY WEEK INSTEAD OF HER APPEARING WHEN SHE FEELS LIKE IT AND NOT LETTING ME KNOW WHEN SHE IS OR IS NOT COMING.</p> <p>Tuesday</p>	<p>TO SEE MORE OF MY WIDER FAMILY.</p>	<p>I WOULD LIKE TO SEE MY PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER AT LEAST 3 TIMES A MONTH. I MISS GOING TO SEE HER. BEFORE MY MOTHER DIED, I USED TO GO TO HER HOUSE MOST OF THE TIME AND WE DID LOVELY STUFF TOGETHER</p>
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Key findings

1

How did you find out about kinship care?

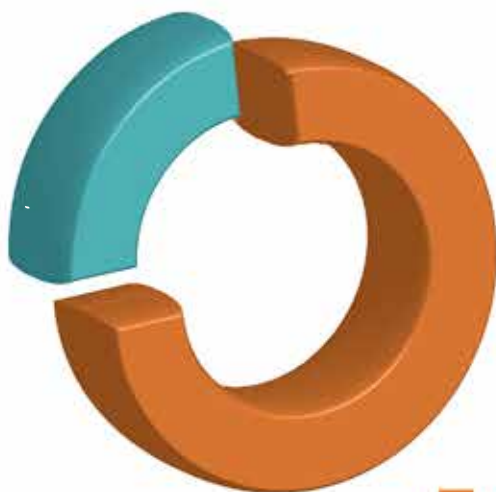


Key findings

2 Did the information you received provide a clear explanation about kinship care, your rights and what support you can get from services in short term and long term?

29.6%

70.4%



YES
NO

INFORMATION ABOUT JOINING A KINSHIP SUPPORT GROUP.

3 What other information would you have liked to get?

All of it - I was told to get legal advice and have had to find out everything myself. This was 9 years ago though, and I think things have changed.

You do not know what to ask until you start dealing with each situation..... Then if anything came up I had all my questions answered and taken seriously. They tried to help as best as they could with my queries.

The initial explanation was limited. When the looked after children social worker was allocated they provided much more information.

To include information about coffee mornings for kinship carers and other kinship care groups.

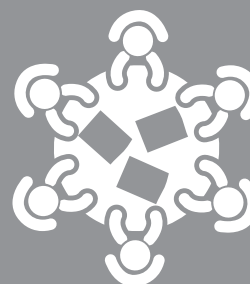
I had all the information I needed and a good social worker.

A list of everything involved, including expectations, rights and support.



MORE SUPPORT AROUND COURT MATTERS.

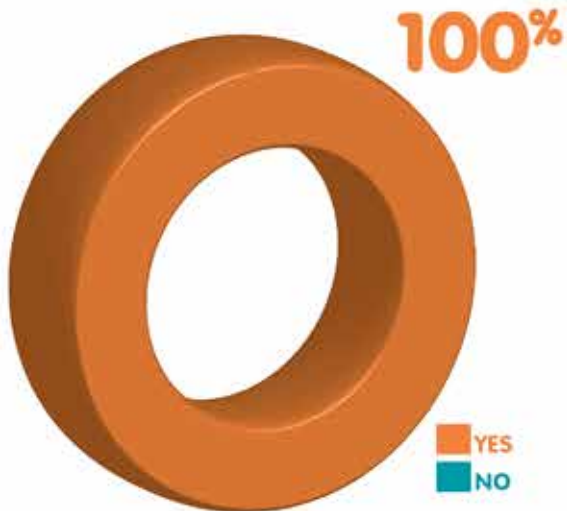
MORE UNDERSTANDING OF THE LEGAL ASPECTS OF KINSHIP CARE.



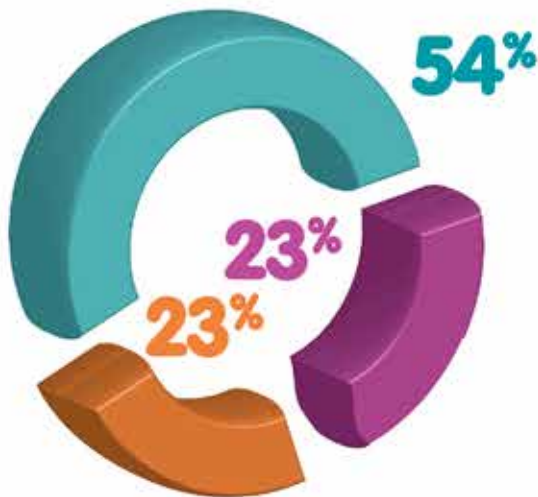
Key findings

Kinship carers and special guardians' Responses

4 Was it the right decision for you to become a kinship carer or a special guardian?

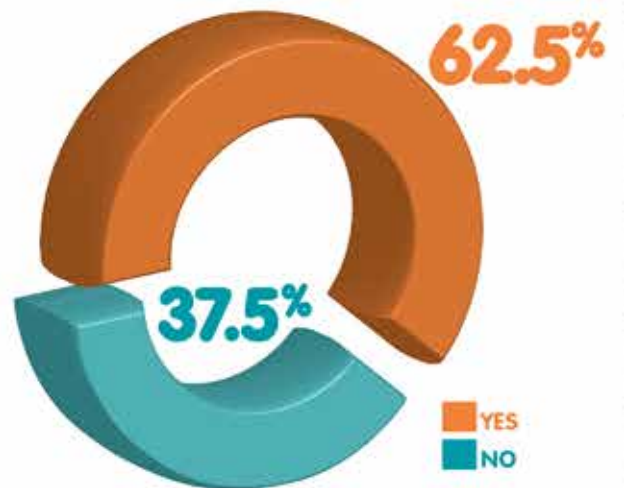


5 Were your support needs identified at the right time?




- IT TOOK TOO LONG TO GET THE RIGHT SUPPORT.
- OTHER.
- I HAD SUPPORT AT THE RIGHT TIME.
- I DID NOT RECEIVE SUPPORT.

6 Has becoming a kinship carer or a special guardian changed your relationship with the parents of the child?



MOTHER OF THE CHILD BLAMES US FOR HER CHILD BEING REMOVED FROM HER CARE. SHE IS STRUGGLING WITH ACCEPTING OUR ROLE AS KINSHIP CARERS.

YES, IT HAS CHANGED AND CAUSED FAMILY DRAMA OVER THE YEARS.



Key findings

Comments from kinship carers and special guardians regarding any change in their relationship with the parent(s) of the child:



Broken relationship

My son, who is the father of my grandson/granddaughter has stopped contacting me. We have no relationship now!



Good relationship with nephew but...

I was able to continue the good relationship with my nephew without his parents interfering and trying to disrupt the placement. I still do not have good relations with either parent.



Setting boundaries

I had to set boundaries with both parents as they were not in agreement with the Special Guardianship Order (SGO). They did not follow contact guidelines.



Parent or grandparent not both

The parent of the child is my daughter and I had to stop being her parent and put the kinship child first. It has been 9 years now and we are building a better relationship.



Speaking terms

We did not speak for 2 years but now the relationship has improved.

LETTER CONTACT WAS CONTINUED AND PHONE CALLS FOR A WHILE. HOWEVER, SHE CONTINUED TO DISRUPT AND THAT WAS STOPPED. HER SEVERE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS CONTINUE TO PLAGUE HER TO THIS DAY SADLY AND WE HAVE BARELY ANY CONTACT.



Key findings

Comments from kinship carers and special guardians regarding any change in their relationship with the parent(s) of the child:



Contact ceased

My son, who is the father of my grandson/granddaughter has stopped contacting me! We have no relationship now.



Parents unhappy

Because the children are young, parents believe that the children have been taken away. Dad is becoming more grateful, mum is not as supportive. Parents aren't as grateful for support.



Mental health challenges

Parents of the child have severe mental health challenges, along with many other issues, so I'm having to see them less often than before the Special Guardianship Order (SGO) (apart from when contact is due). I am keeping relative distance to avoid conflict.



Conflicting priorities

I had to abandon my daughter to be able to raise my grandson.



Poor outcomes

Relationship has deteriorated.

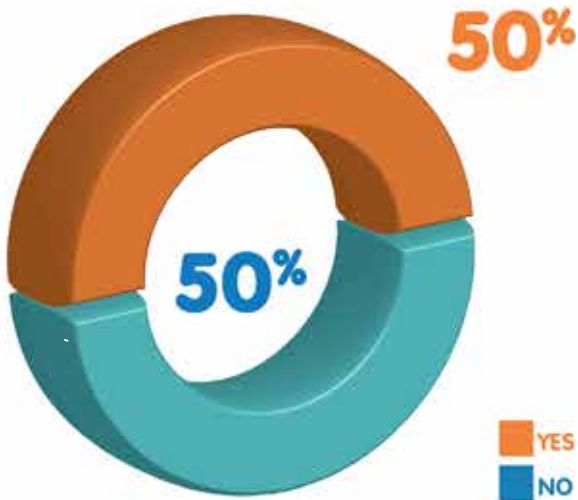
THE RELATIONSHIP
WENT BETTER BUT IT
WAS STRESSFUL.



Key findings

7

Has it changed your relationship with the child?



I LOVE MY NEPHEW VERY MUCH AND WE HAVE BECOME VERY CLOSE. IT HAS BEEN A PLEASURE AND A PRIVILEGE TO BE HIS KINSHIP CARER AND TO BE BRINGING HIM UP FOR THE LAST 9 YEARS.

I HAVE LEARNED AND GAINED SO MUCH THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE. AND HE HAS HAD LOVE AND STABILITY IN HIS LIFE WITHOUT STRESS AND A 'NORMAL' UPBRINGING. WITH EXTRA SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, FRIENDS, OUTINGS AND HOLIDAYS WHICH HE WAS NOT GETTING BEFORE. MOST IMPORTANTLY, HE STAYED WITHIN THE FAMILY. HE KNEW HE WOULD BE LOVED AND WOULD NOT BE WITH STRANGERS.



Key findings

Further comments

Stronger bond

We have built a strong bond.

Loving relationship

I have a much stronger and loving relationship now with the child.

More time

We have been having more time to advise the parent of the child.

Mother or grandmother

I have become mother to my grandson.

Brought us closer

I was not present through the pregnancy so found it difficult to bond with my granddaughter when I visited her with my son at the contact centre. However, it has brought us closer and I love and protect her dearly.

Better relationship

It has changed the relationship in a good way, we now have a stronger bond.

Much closer

Much closer loving relationship than before as we have formed a mutual bond.

Together as a family

They are together as a family, they are so young, so always around - brings us closer so it will be better for them. Even though they are young, they can tell the difference.

NOTHING LIKE HOME CLOSER TO HOME, LEARNING THE WAYS OF MY CULTURE AND TRADITION, CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILIES. LEARNING MY LANGUAGE ETC.



Key findings



8

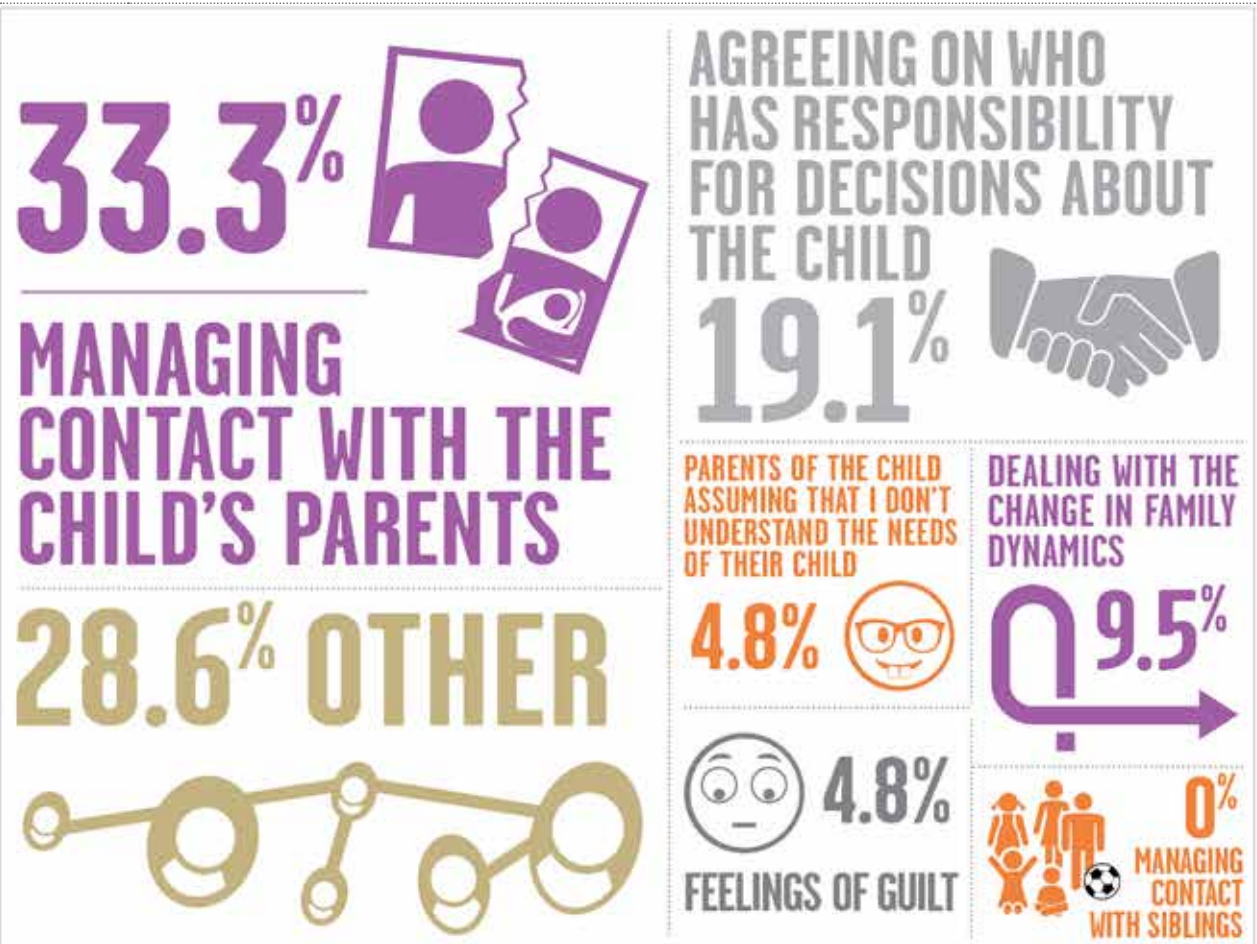
What support from services is most important to you?

Ranked in a scale of importance 1- 5. 1= Not important 5= Very important

	1	2	3	4	5
Financial support	0%	0%	4%	21%	75%
Legal support	0%	0%	21%	17%	62%
Help with new school uniform	0%	12%	29%	17%	42%
Help with finding a new school	0%	12%	33%	8%	46%
Child's behaviour	0%	0%	0%	29%	71%
Child's emotional wellbeing	0%	0%	0%	25%	75%
Information about kinship carers support groups in my area	0%	4%	8%	29%	59%
Meeting with other Camden kinship carers	0%	0%	30%	30%	39%
Information and training on specific topics	0%	0%	21%	33%	46%
Managing contact/relationship with child's parents	0%	0%	12%	17%	71%
Short respite breaks	0%	4%	12%	37%	46%
Help during transition when child approaches adulthood (18)	0%	0%	8%	25%	67%

Key findings

9 What is the biggest challenge of being a kinship carer or a special guardian?



Key findings

What would you like to change or improve about the service?

More support

Making sure that carers know the likely behavioural challenges of the child before they become carers; more support around contact/family. Finance is always important.

Birth parents

More ongoing support is needed to manage contact with birth parents as they are both extremely difficult to deal with and there's often conflict and disagreements about contact arrangements.

(Camden and subsequently Barnet handled the above very well.)

Timing

I feel that she should have been brought into care earlier.

Better communication

Better communication between social workers and mental health workers, especially in crisis situations as child arrived a day earlier than planned without any clothing/belongings.

Handovers

Handover between a social worker to the looked after children social worker could be improved as the social workers needed a lot of information from me to be clarified.

More information

Needing more information and guidance at an earlier stage in the placement.

Managing contact

Support managing contact with parents.

Support groups

More regular general information about support groups and other things taking place.

Financial support

More support with finance, contact with birth parents and emotional support for kinship carers.

Rights and benefits

Similar rights and benefits for kinship carers and special guardians as for foster carers.



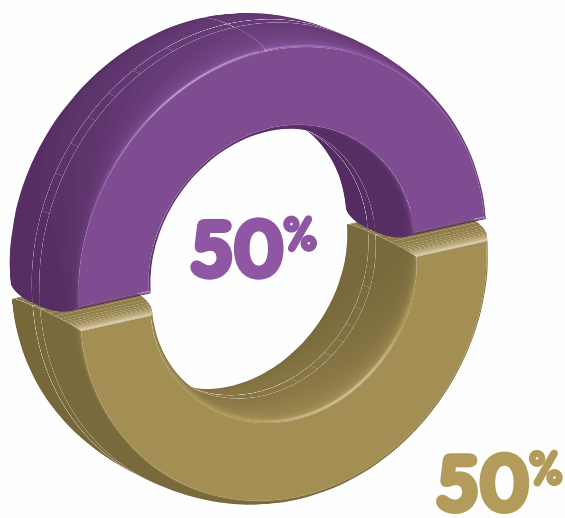
HANDOVERS



INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

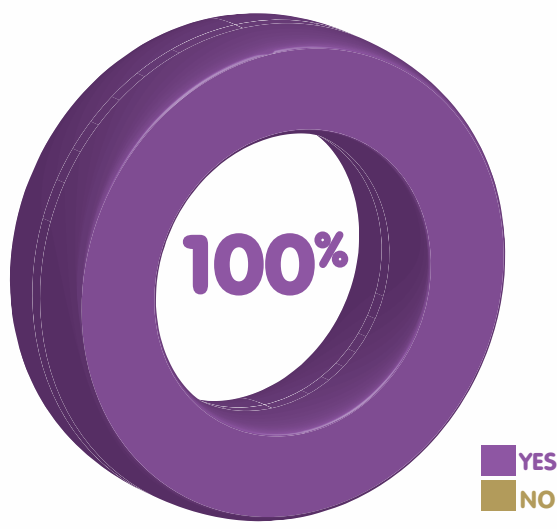
Key findings

1 In your experience, did families have an Family Group Conference prior to making the kinship care arrangement?



■ YES, MOST OF THE TIME
■ SOMETIMES ■ NEVER

2 Do we provide information to kinship carers and special guardians about their rights and available support in the short and long term?



■ YES
■ NO

3 What other information should be provided and when?

Carers' pack
A pack for carers which they can read at their leisure.

Providers
Information on practical supports from the Local Authority and external providers.

Clarity
Clarity on processes and finances.

Teams
Which teams should be doing what as many children are with other teams: children in need, looked after children, permanency.

Behaviour issues
Information about group training sessions for potential special guardians to inform them about the process and the issues of dealing with their grandchildren or nieces and nephews in this new context being affected by trauma and behaviour issues.

Preparation
Many people struggle to understand the process and feel victimised - also you need to prepare them for what is ahead as it usually ends up being far harder than they expected. Get existing special guardians to contribute to the forum and training.

Key findings

What other information should be provided and when? (Continued)

Post placement resources
Provide resources post Special Guardianship Orders / kinship placement.

Reviews
Information about annual special guardians reviews.

Assessment process
To include information about the assessment process and where to get advice from other local authorities.

4

What additional preparation and training (not available at present) should be offered to kinship carers/ special guardians?

Support and training
Support and training to be offered to special guardians and kinship carers before they start the assessment, in the same way as the preparation offer for foster carers and adopters.

Understanding
Supporting carers to understand the impact of trauma on children, attachment issues, contact with birth parents.

Therapeutic parenting
Training on therapeutic parenting such as non-violent resistance and emotional impact on children as they grow up.

Contact and birth family
Managing family contact / relationships with birth family and Delegated Authority.

CAMHS
Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) support.

Specialist support
Skills to foster training or a specialist training for kinship carers.

Better links
Better links with other kinship carers.

Specialist training required
Provision of the same training offer as foster carers and adopters for example training around attachments, supporting children's emotional wellbeing, dealing with teenagers/issues relating to CSE, county lines, gangs etc.



Key findings



5

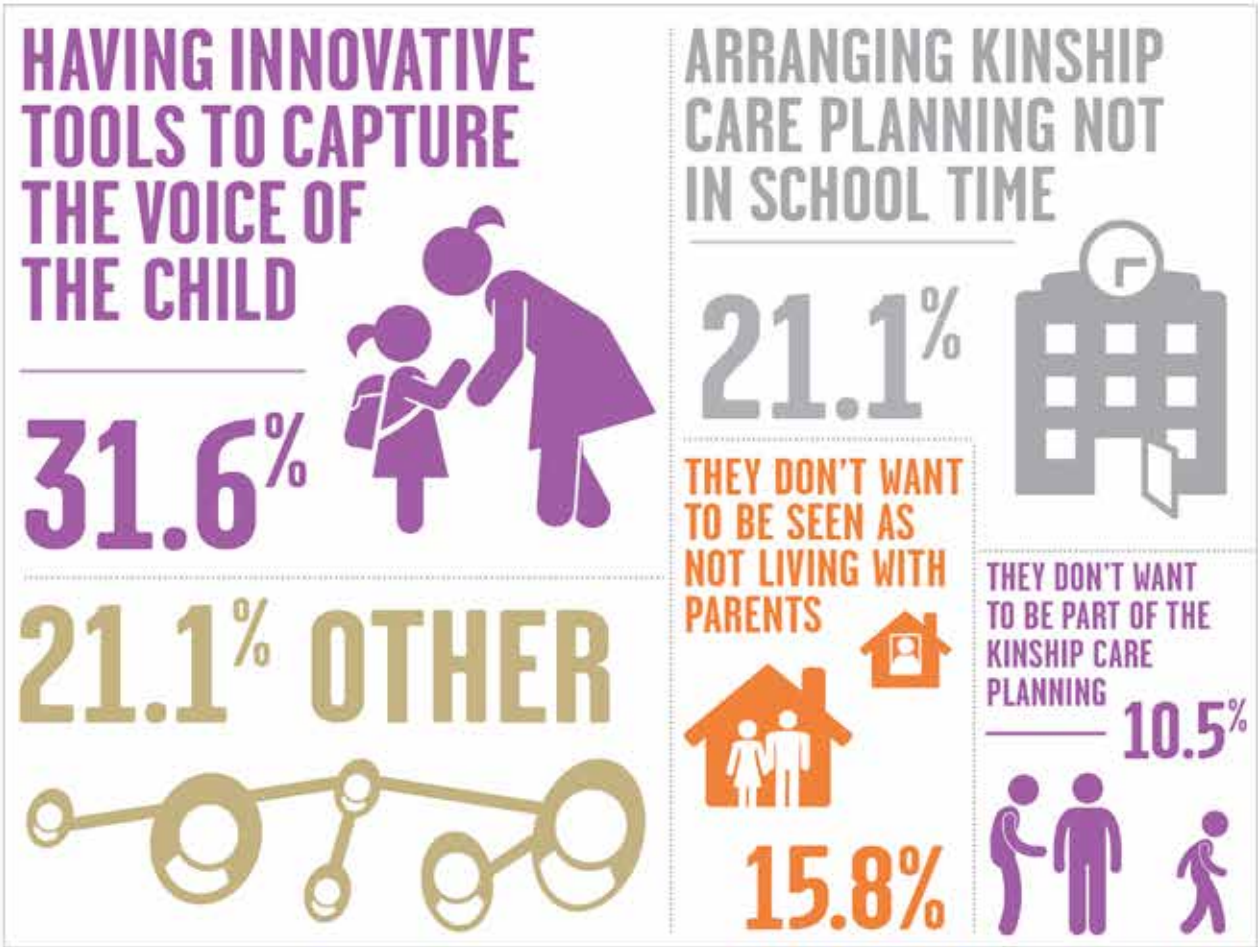
From your experience what do kinship carers need most?

Ranked in a scale of importance 1- 5. 1= Not important 5= Very important

Financial support	7%	0%	0%	14%	77%
Legal support	0%	0%	7%	43%	50%
Help with new school uniform	0%	29%	29%	36%	7%
Help with finding a new school	0%	14%	14%	57%	14%
Child's behaviour	8%	0%	0%	38%	54%
Child's emotional wellbeing	7%	0%	0%	21%	71%
Information about kinship carers' support groups in my area	7%	7%	21%	36%	29%
Meeting with other Camden kinship carers	7%	14%	14%	36%	29%
Information and training on specific topics	0%	8%	8%	46%	38%
Managing contact/relationship with child's parents	7%	0%	7%	14%	71%
Short respite breaks	0%	29%	21%	2%	29%
Help during transition when child approaches adulthood (18)	7%	0%	7%	36%	50%

Key findings

6 What are the challenges faced by social workers to ensure that the voice of the child is captured in kinship care plans?



Key findings

7 What would you change or improve about the kinship service in Camden in order to better meet the needs of kinship carers and to keep children in contact with their family, their heritage and community?

Preparation groups
 Preparation groups for all those undertaking special guardian assessment; preparation for the reality of caring for a child full time and understanding the child's emotional needs.
 More discussion during the assessment in respect of the importance of contact with birth parent and extended family.

Mediation
 To involve Family Group Conference (FGC) to bring families together and to consider mediation between families to resolve conflicts.
 More financial support to be provided to special guardians and kinship carers like we do with foster carers, for example financial support to help with childcare costs such as nursery fees, pay for transport to and from contact centres, help with cost of living, funding with school meals / school uniforms.

Timely support
 To make sure that support with start-up equipment and payments of allowances are on time.

Life story work
 More training for kinship carers on managing contact and Life Story work.

Permanency team
 To consider different specialist staff roles within the Permanency team such as: assessments and court work leads and leads for support work, supervising contact, mediation and engaging special guardians and kinship carers in support groups.

Regular support groups
 Provide regular support groups for kinship carers.

Specialised social workers
 Make sure there is a specialist team of social workers dealing with kinship carers / special guardians.

Specialised team
 It has been recognised that kinship carers need specialist practitioners and specialist kinship care teams (L. Peak - Chief Executive of Kinship).

What specialist training would help you to support kinship carers with the unique complexities of their role?

- non-violent resistance, therapeutic parenting, therapeutic life story work
- managing family relationships
- understanding trauma
- managing contact
- training around interracial placements, placing children with carer of a different race / ethnicity
- benefits and housing advice
- finance and kinship support
- complexities with family dynamics.

Emerging key themes and RECOMMENDATIONS

Camden Social workers, kinship carers and special guardians have provided their feedback in response to the recommendations made in the 'Independent Review of Social Care' by Josh MacAlister (please see the table with responses below).

'Unlocking the potential of family networks' recommendations of the MacAlister Report

Ranked in a scale of importance 1- 5. 1= Not important 5= Very important

■ Kinship carers ■ Social workers



	1	2	3	4	5
1 Before a child is accommodated, there should be consultation with the wider family via Family Group Conference leading to a Family Network Plan to support the child/parent.	0%	0%	24%	29%	48%
	0%	0%	29%	14%	57%
2 Family Network Plan (a new type of plan) should be introduced and enabled in law to support and give oversight to family-led alternatives to care.	0%	5%	24%	19%	52%
	0%	0%	29%	14%	57%
3 Carers looking after children under special guardianship or child arrangement orders should be able to access statutory allowances at the same rate as fostering allowance. This is to avoid the child becoming looked after and carers having to become foster carers just to access adequate support.	0%	0%	5%	14%	81%
	0%	0%	7%	21%	64%
4 Legal aid should be provided in a range of circumstances where special guardians and kinship carers with a Child Arrangement Order interact with the family courts.	0%	0%	0%	35%	65%
	0%	8%	8%	31%	46%
5 All new special guardians and kinship carers with a Child Arrangement Order should be given kinship leave, which matches the entitlement given to adopters.	0%	0%	14%	29%	57%
	0%	7%	7%	21%	64%
6 As part of the national children's social care framework, local authorities should develop peer support and training for all kinship carers.	0%	0%	10%	19%	71%
	0%	0%	0%	62%	38%
7 Government should develop a new legal definition of kinship care, taking a broad range of circumstances into account.	0%	0%	19%	33%	48%
	0%	0%	29%	7%	64%

Analysis of RESPONSES

The conclusions we have drawn are:

- 1** All of the (68) respondents have ranked the importance of having a **Family Group Conference (FGC)** and making a family led plan (recommendations 1 and 2) at 5, the highest importance (on a scale of 1 to 5). This emphatic response was echoed by kinship carers and special guardians in the focus group discussions.
- 2 Access to a statutory allowance** was equally given the highest ranking (5) by kinship carers, special guardians and social workers. Financial support has also been recognised as one of the areas requiring most of the support.
- 3** Kinship leave (recommendation number 5), has also received the highest ranking from all respondents.
- 4** Recommendation number 6, **development of peer support and training for all kinship carers** received the highest ranking by kinship carers and a high ranking by social workers. Also, this need has been strongly expressed in the feedback to questionnaires with details of particular areas of support.



Two CONSIDERATIONS

In addition, the feedback from focus groups discussion and responses to questionnaires has highlighted other important themes to kinship care.

1. Young people are not always clear about **what to expect from a kinship care placement** and what will happen when they become 18 years old.
2. **Contact arrangements** with birth parents are very important to children and young people; such contacts can however, be difficult for children to cope with.

These two considerations are evidenced by the following comments from young people and kinship carers:

I'm safer where I am now but I worry about my mum sometimes. When we meet for contact, we have more fun now.

Because I wasn't adopted, I have been able to keep a relationship with my mum.

I do not get to see my dad even though I miss him; I am extremely terrified of him.

I have been living with my Aunt for the past 10 years and have only been able to see my parents through supervised contact.

The relationship with the parents of the child has changed and caused family drama over the years.

I had to stop being a parent for my daughter and be a parent for her child.

I had to abandon my daughter to be able to raise my grandson.

Mother of the child blames us for having the child removed from her care.

- The consultation identified the need for more thorough preparation for kinship carers and special guardians to be aware of the reality of caring for a child full time and understanding the child's emotional needs and behaviour issues. It can be more demanding than what they expect.

- The need for a specialist team of social workers dealing with complexities of supporting kinship carers and special guardians.
- Many kinship carers can struggle to understand the process and can feel victimised.
- When a child is placed with a kinship carer or a special guardian, the relationship with birth parents can change and become stressful for the relatives.

Main RECOMMENDATIONS

The main recommendations which emerged from the analysis of responses to questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews with service managers are as follows:

- 1 To ensure that prior to making any kinship care arrangement, a Family Group Conference always takes place in order to make a Family Network plan to support the child and the parent(s) and provide support to ensure that the plans are carried out by family members.
- 2 To ensure that all children and young people in a Kinship care or Special guardianship arrangement are provided with age-appropriate information, including what to expect from living with a family member, contact arrangements with parents and what happens at 18.
- 3 To ensure that appropriate support is provided (e.g. direct work, advocates, etc) so that the voice of the child is effectively ascertained and given due weight in kinship care assessments.
- 4 More consideration to be given to providing preparation groups and workshops for applicants wishing to become kinship carers or special guardians.
- 5 To provide access for kinship carers and special guardians to undertake a wide range of training including understanding trauma, non-violent resistance, life story work and managing contact and conflict with family members.
- 6 To set up a regular meeting space for a support group for kinship carers and special guardians and to advertise the support group.
- 7 To provide information to kinship carers and special guardians to clarify what financial support is available from the service and how to apply for additional help.
- 8 To consider specific training for social workers in the permanency team on managing contact, complex family dynamics, understanding and supporting young people living with the effects of trauma.
- 9 To consider the Family Group Conference (FGC) service facilitating meetings to bring birth parents and extended family members together to resolve conflict around contact.
- 10 To consider allocation of specialist staff resources to the Permanence team for areas such as court reports (Viabilities Assessments and Special Guardianship Assessment), co-ordinating complex needs contact and engaging special guardians in support groups.





If you would like to be a **Young Inspector** or would like to know more about the project, please email elzbieta.chandrasena@camden.gov.uk or contact us via www.backchatonline.org.uk