

## **Westminster Hall debate on child bereavement**

### **Briefing on bereaved children raised in kinship care**

On Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> March at 230pm in Westminster Hall, Christine Jardine MP will lead a debate on support for bereaved children.

Some children who have lost their parents will move to live with relatives or friends, known as kinship care. For many children in kinship care it can be difficult to access the therapeutic support they need to come to terms with their loss.

#### **What is kinship care?**

- Kinship carers are family or friends who step in, often in an emergency, to raise children who cannot stay at home. Kinship carers are often grandparents, but may be aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters or family friends.
- More than 180,000 children across the UK are being raised in kinship care. Many more children are raised in kinship care than are in the care system or adopted.
- Only a small minority of children raised in kinship care are formally in the care system, living with family and friends who are also the child's foster carer – known as kinship foster care. Others are living with their carers under a special guardianship or child arrangements order or have an informal arrangement.
- The death of a parent is one of the reasons children can find themselves raised in kinship care. Other reasons include parental mental ill health, parental substance misuse, domestic abuse, parents being unable to cope, or a parent's illness, disability or imprisonment. Data on children's journeys into kinship care is limited.

#### **The benefits of kinship care**

- Research shows that emotional, behavioural and educational outcomes for children in kinship care are on the whole better than for children living with unrelated foster carers.
- Being raised in kinship care allows children to develop a stronger sense of their own identity, maintain relationships with their birth family, and a feeling of belonging that comes from the stability of living within their wider family and friends' network.
- However, on average, children in kinship care do not fare as well as children in the general population on metrics such as educational achievement. They have often suffered tragedy and trauma which has a long-term impact, and many have additional emotional, behavioural and educational needs as a result.

#### **Difficulties accessing bereavement support**

- Children raised in kinship care have invariably experienced loss, tragedy or trauma.
- Their carer may also be having to cope with the loss of the parent, who might be their son or daughter.
- Many kinship carers struggle to secure the therapeutic support the child needs to help deal with the impact of the trauma they have experienced, including bereavement support and counselling.
- Often the kinship carer has stepped in to raise the child without the involvement of children's services. In these incidences, their entitlement to extra support is limited or indeed non-existent.
- Difficulties for children in accessing mental health support through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are well known.
- The Adoption Support Fund pays for a range of therapeutic support for previously looked after children who are adopted. Since April 2016, children who were previously looked after and now raised by special guardians have been eligible for the fund. However, awareness and understanding of the fund is far lower among special guardians than among adoptive parents (Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care, 2020). All other children in kinship care are not eligible.



## **Kinship care is often misunderstood and undervalued – a single legal definition is needed**

- Family Rights Group has proposed a single definition of kinship care be written into primary legislation, encompassing the different types of legal arrangement that kinship care can take. This would bring clarity to the system and ensure clearer access to support for all kinship carers regardless of the legal arrangement they have and whether or not the child has been formally looked after.
- We can learn from the example of developing a common definition of domestic abuse which has cut through differing interpretations of that issue.
- The Government has partly accepted this proposal, recently publishing a working definition as part of its children's social care reform implementation strategy. However, they have not committed to enshrining the definition in legislation which is a crucial step if it is to have sufficient weight and recognition by local authorities and other agencies families come into contact with.
- Read more about Family Rights Group's Time To Define Kinship Care proposals [here](#).

### **Policy asks:**

- **In the immediate term, to ensure children in kinship care can access bereavement support and counselling, Government should extend the Adoption Support Fund to all children raised by kinship carers.**
- **The Department of Education has recently committed to investing in a [training and support offer for kinship families](#) as part of its children's social care reform implementation strategy. This offer should include helping carers to support the child they are raising to deal with bereavement and loss.**
- **To deliver more fundamental change, Government should legislate for a single definition of kinship care and link this to an entitlement for all children who meet the definition to be able to access bereavement support and counselling when they need it.**

*This briefing has been prepared by the Public Affairs and Communications team at Family Rights Group, who provide the secretariat to the [All Party Parliamentary Group on Kinship Care](#).*

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