

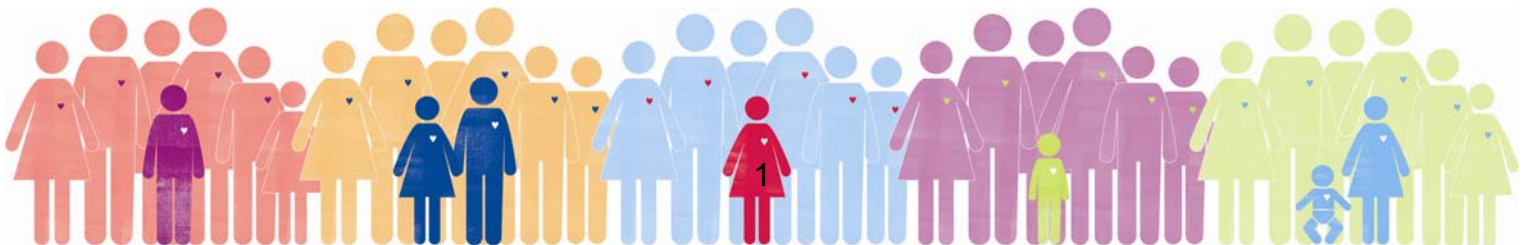


**WE LISTEN, WE SUPPORT,
WE TAKE ACTION**
For Scotland's vulnerable
children and families

“Knowing she is with Family and not Strangers”

**Final report of CHILDREN 1ST survey
with kinship carers**

January 2012



1. Introduction

CHILDREN 1ST has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to develop and implement a national service for kinship carers and their families. The service aims to help kinship carers find their voice, providing emotional and practical support through a free and confidential helpline (ParentLine Scotland) and training, outreach and capacity building.

A key initial task has been to establish the priority needs and concerns of kinship carers to inform the development of the service. Between August and December 2011, CHILDREN 1ST conducted a survey of kinship carers to gather base line information about their current circumstances in terms of the provision of support and their thoughts on what would improve their circumstances and those of the children in their families.

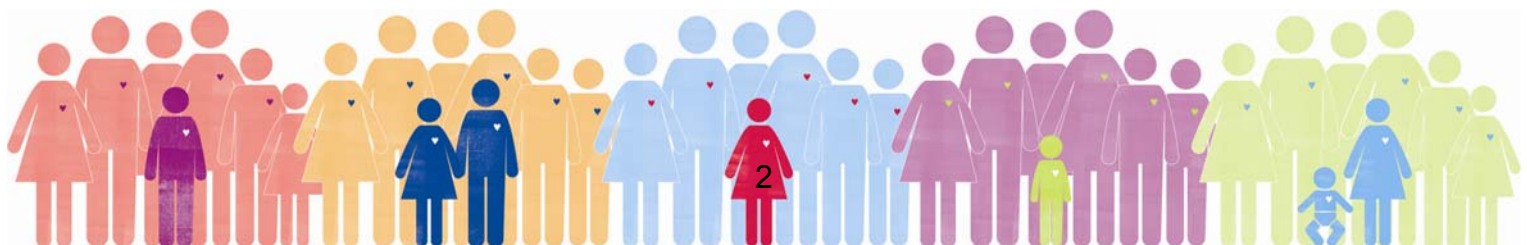
2. Methodology

The survey was conducted through a questionnaire with 15 questions covering the areas outlined above (a copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix 1). Kinship carers were able to take part in the survey either by completing a paper copy, responding online or by contacting Parentline who recorded their answers on their behalf. We sent information about the survey and paper copies of the questionnaire to all the kinship care groups that we have details for and we also promoted it through the relevant contacts in the social work departments of local authorities and other relevant agencies.

In addition to the survey we held four regional forums for kinship carers (in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Ayr) that were attended by a total of 96 kinship carers at which we talked in more detail to participants about their support needs. At the regional forums we used the interim findings of the survey to ask kinship carers for more details about the types of support that would be most useful for them. This was done through discussions in small groups that were facilitated by a member of CHILDREN 1ST staff.

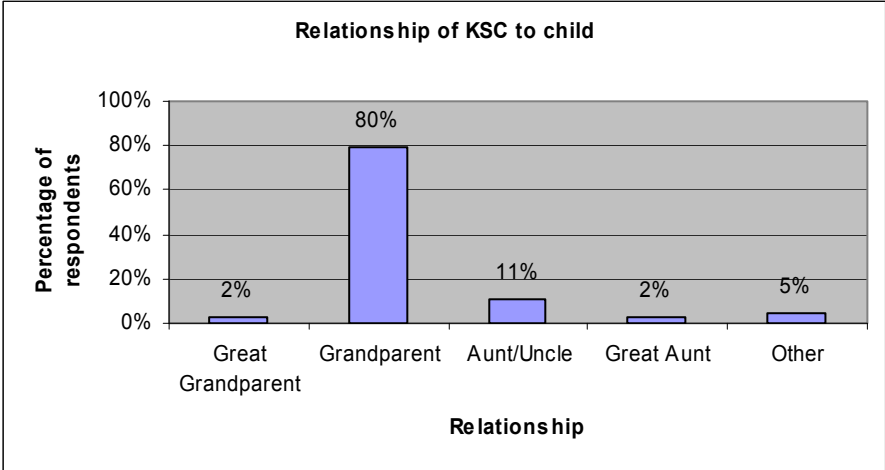
In addition to the above information over the past few months we have also met with kinship care groups and individual carers and some of the anecdotal information gathered during these meetings has also been included in the report where appropriate.

This report is based on the 128 survey responses we received from kinship carers and the information gathered through the regional forums. It provides a profile of the respondent's families and an overview of respondents thoughts on: their experiences of being a kinship carer and the experiences of the children in their families; the support currently being received by respondents and the types of support they feel would make their role easier and the support they believe that their children would benefit from.



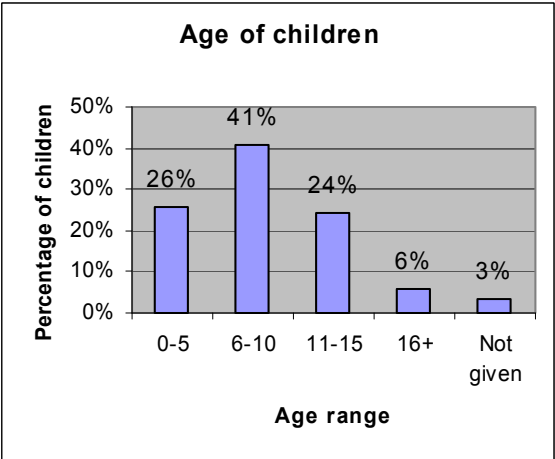
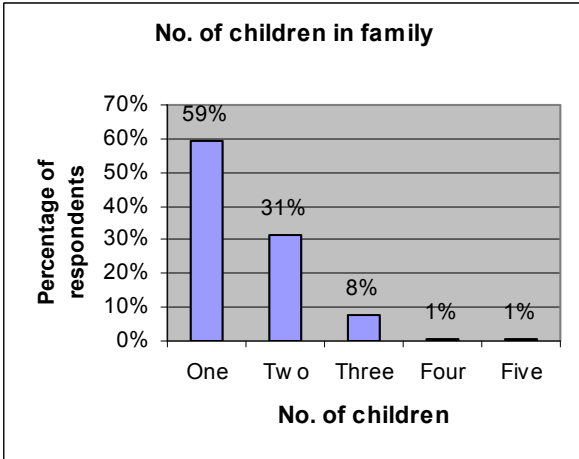
3. Profile of kinship care families

We asked respondents to tell us about their relationship to their child(ren); how many children they are kinship carers to; the age of the child(ren) in their family and the legal status of the child(ren).

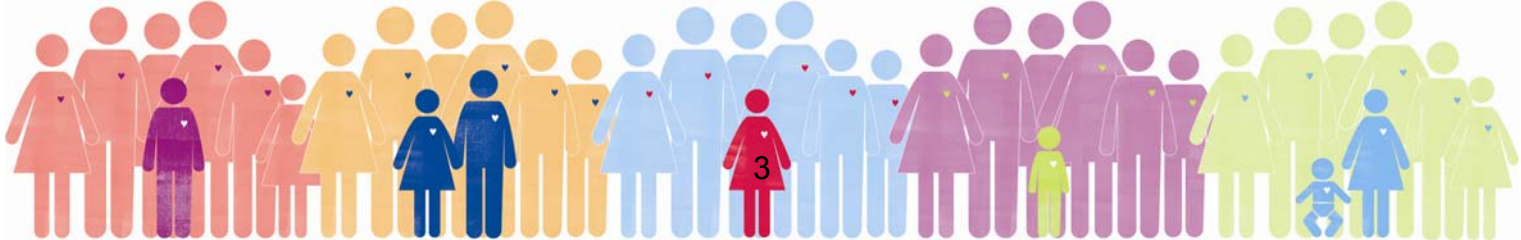


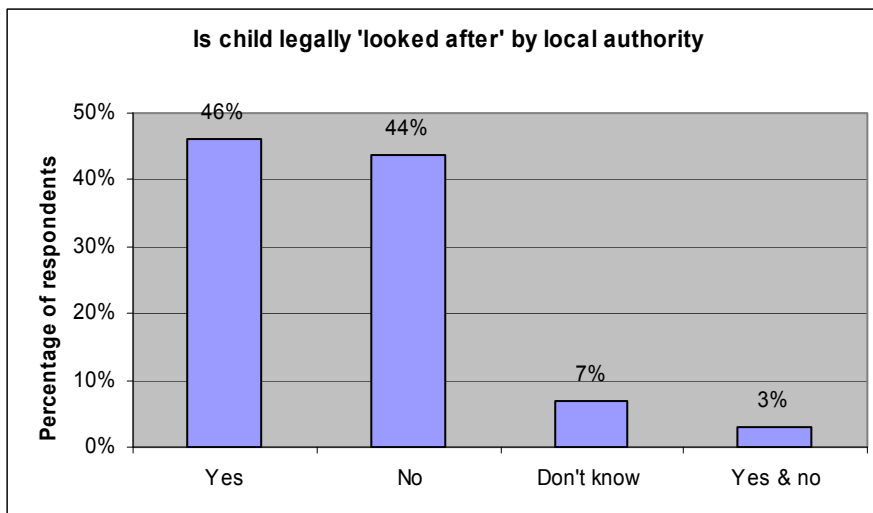
*Other includes: one respondent who only identified themselves as a kinship carer and five respondents who indicated that they were caring for a child who was not a relative.

Most respondents told us that they are grandparents to the children in their care which is consistent with other kinship care research which shows that grandparents make up the largest group of kinship carers. We have not received any responses from kinship carers who are caring for their siblings. At this stage it is not possible to ascertain why this is but it suggests that further consideration may need to be given as to how to reach this group of kinship carers.



In total the respondents are caring for 184 children and more than half are caring for one child, with around a further third caring for two children. Two thirds of these children are aged between 0-10.





* Yes & no refers to families with both looked after and non-looked after children

There is an almost equal split between respondents whose children are legally looked after by the local authority and those who are not. The results of the survey indicate that the legal status of the children appears to impact on the access to some forms of support for kinship carers. This is discussed later in the report in section 4.4.

4. Experience of being a kinship carer

We asked respondents to tell us about their experience of being a kinship carer: what was rewarding for them, what causes them stress or difficulty and the worries they have for the children they are caring for.

4.1. Rewards of being a kinship carer

The strongest themes to emerge, in terms of the rewards of being a kinship carer, are the importance of knowing that the child(ren) is/are safe and living in a secure environment, with half of all respondents highlighting the significance of this.

“knowing I am providing a safe and stable environment”

“seeing her growing up in a safe environment”

“being able to ensure that my granddaughter is safe”

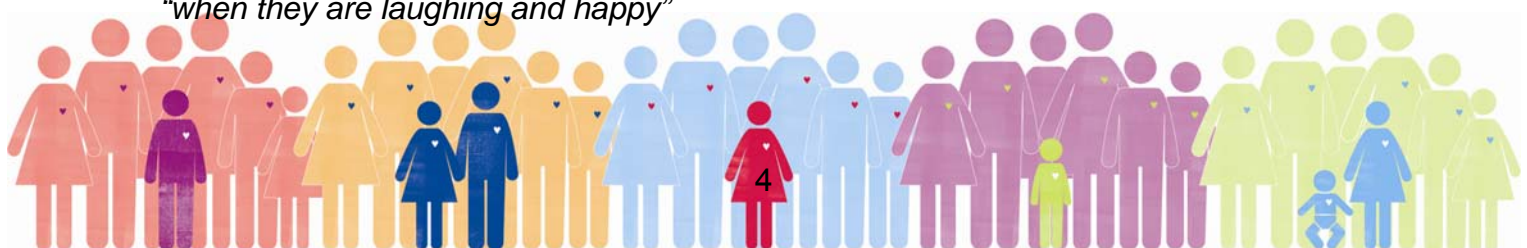
“the joy of seeing her grow up in a loving, safe, secure home”

Around a third of respondents talked about the rewards of knowing and seeing that the child(ren) is/are happy.

“seeing her smiling face”

“the joy of seeing a happy smile from the child”

“when they are laughing and happy”



“seeing them happy and getting on with their lives”

Being part of and contributing to the child’s development is also shown to be significant for kinship carers, with around a third of respondents talking about the importance of this.

“knowing he has been given a chance to grow and develop in a caring environment and hopefully grow up to be a caring and successful adult”

“watching her develop into a confident and caring child”

“watching them grow with confidence, make friends and enjoying their childhood”

“being able to see him, do well, progress and being able to help with his aims in life”

“watching him grow and flourish and knowing you’re doing what’s right for the child”

About a fifth of respondents talked about the rewards of knowing that the child(ren) is/are being brought up in an environment where they are loved and cared for.

“knowing my granddaughter is loved and cared for in my own family and is safe”

“to show him that there is someone that really does want him and to show them love”

“knowing the child is safe and loved and all the kisses and cuddles you get from that child”

“knowing that he is getting the love and attention he deserves in his own family”

“knowing that I am giving the children the best chance they have to be loved and cared for”

A number of respondents also talked about the rewards of being loved by the child(ren) in their family.

“getting kisses and cuddles”

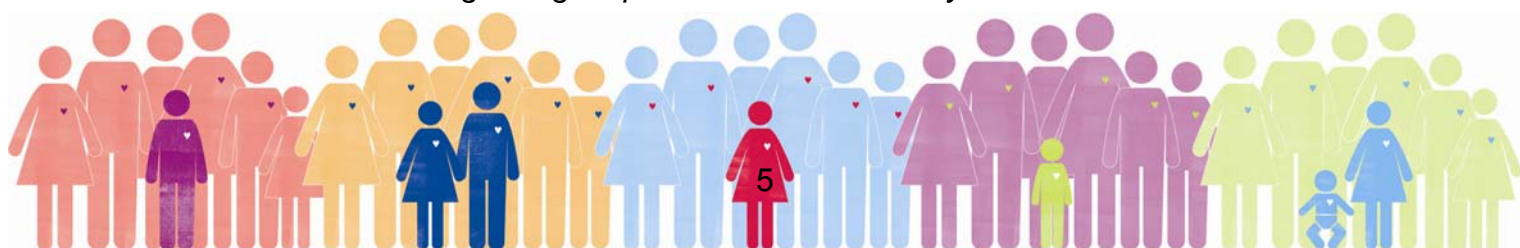
“getting the love of the children is a pleasure”

“when he gives me a hug and tells me that he loves me”

Other issues that were highlighted as important included the child(ren) being healthy and that the child(ren) is/are being cared for within their own family.

“knowing she is with family and not strangers”

“the children are being brought up within their own family”



“seeing the child progress physically and emotionally”

“watching the children grow – laughing, happy, healthy”

4.2. Difficulties and stresses as a kinship carer

The responses to the question about what causes difficulties and stresses as a kinship carer show us the main issues faced by the respondents.

The strongest theme in this area was that of difficulties with the relationship with the child’s parents and the impact that this can have on the child(ren) which was highlighted by around a third of respondents.

“still having to deal with the parent”

“emotional turmoil between daughter and grandchildren”

“dealing with the child’s mental health and the damage that has been caused to that child”

“how to deal with her emotions and relationship with her mother as I am emotionally involved with both but have the child’s interests closer to my heart”

“parents letting the kids down and putting up with the parent’s abuse”

For around a fifth of respondents a key difficulty was coping with the child’s behaviour and for many people this was closely linked to the child’s experiences with their parent(s).

“his psychological health as he worries about his mum”

“dealing with the child’s mental health and the damage that has been caused to that child”

“his emotions with him trying to come to terms with what has happened in his life”

“the challenging behaviour is always stressful”

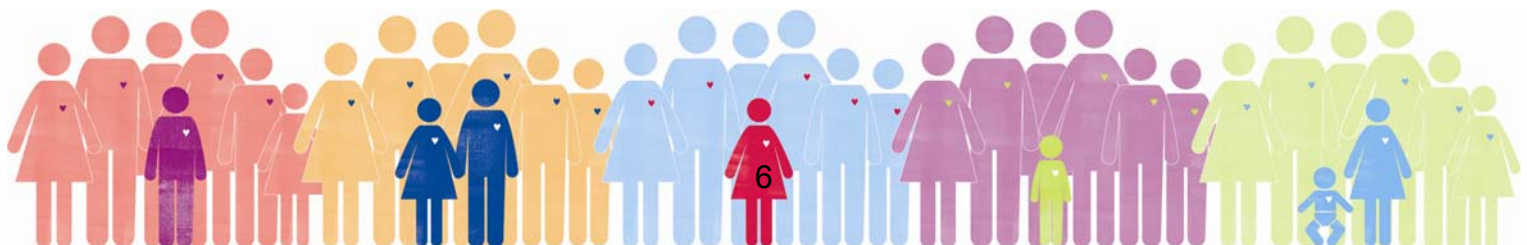
“she can go into really bad rages”

Financial difficulties were highlighted by around a fifth of respondents as causing them difficulty with a similar number also identifying a general lack of support as a particular difficulty.

“financial and mental strain”

“finances are stressful”

“lack of support and money”



“our financial resources all used up, worry that we don’t have any money left”

“the feeling of being alone and relatively ignored by society”

“finances, stress, giving up own life to accommodate”

Other issues that were highlighted included the impact on relationships with other family members and worrying about what would happen to the child(ren) if something happened to the carer(s).

“relationships with other grandchildren are affected”

“my children are having to share me instead of having me to themselves”

“the only thing that bothers me constantly is what if something happened to me. The not knowing what would happen to the girls haunts me”

“my age and not knowing what will happen to the children in the future”

“what will happen if one or both of us have a serious illness and can’t manage to look after him”

4.3. Worries for children

The responses to the question about what worries respondents have for their children reflect, to some degree, the issues that kinship carers told us cause them difficulty. Once again the strongest theme to emerge was that of the impact or potential impact of the behaviour of the child’s parent(s) which was referenced by 40% of respondents.

“parents letting the kids down by not attending contacts and the kids emotional feelings when this happens”

“confusion about the goings on around them”

“as teenagers may see parents as role models and follow their lifestyles”

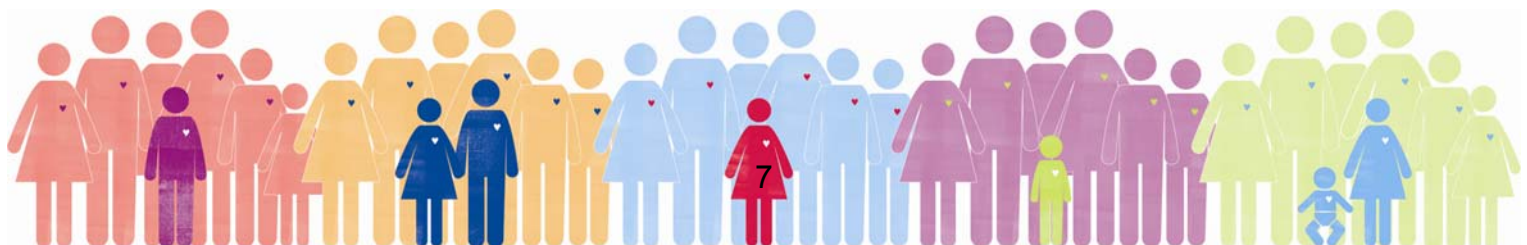
“impact on children for the future”

“child getting upset when parents fail to visit”

“that he will have emotional difficulties as he grows up trying to understand his circumstances and his parents’ circumstances, or feels unloved or unimportant”

Around 15% of respondents are also worried about the possibility of the child(ren) being returned to their parent(s)

“the concern that she may be returned to a dangerous environment”



“what will happen if/when he goes back to his mum”

“that when and if they go back to their mother it will slip back to the way it was before they came to stay with me”

A similar proportion of respondents also highlighted the issue of what would happen to the children if something happened to them.

“what would happen if our health deteriorates”

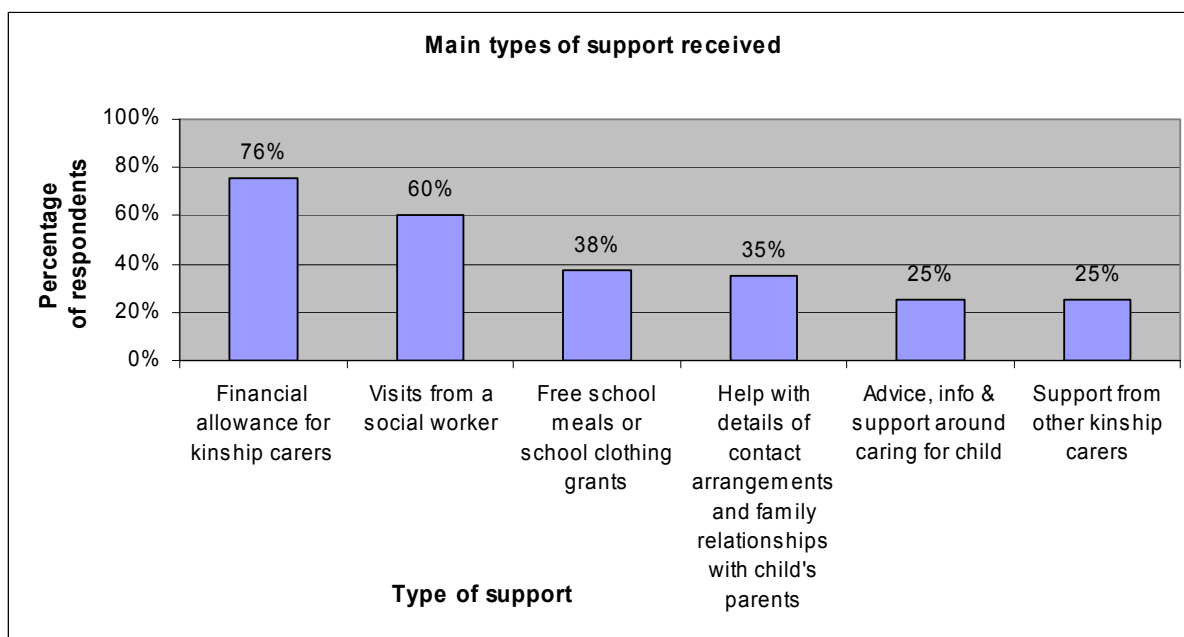
“who would take care of him should anything happen to me”

“what will happen to my granddaughter when I am no longer able to care for her or if I die suddenly”

It should be noted that nineteen respondents specifically stated that they did not have any worries for the child(ren) in their care and a further twenty did not provide any response to this question which would suggest that around a third of respondents have no significant worries for the children in their families.

4.4. Support received as a kinship carer

We asked kinship carers to tell us about the types of support that they currently receive. The table below shows the main types of support currently being received by all respondents:

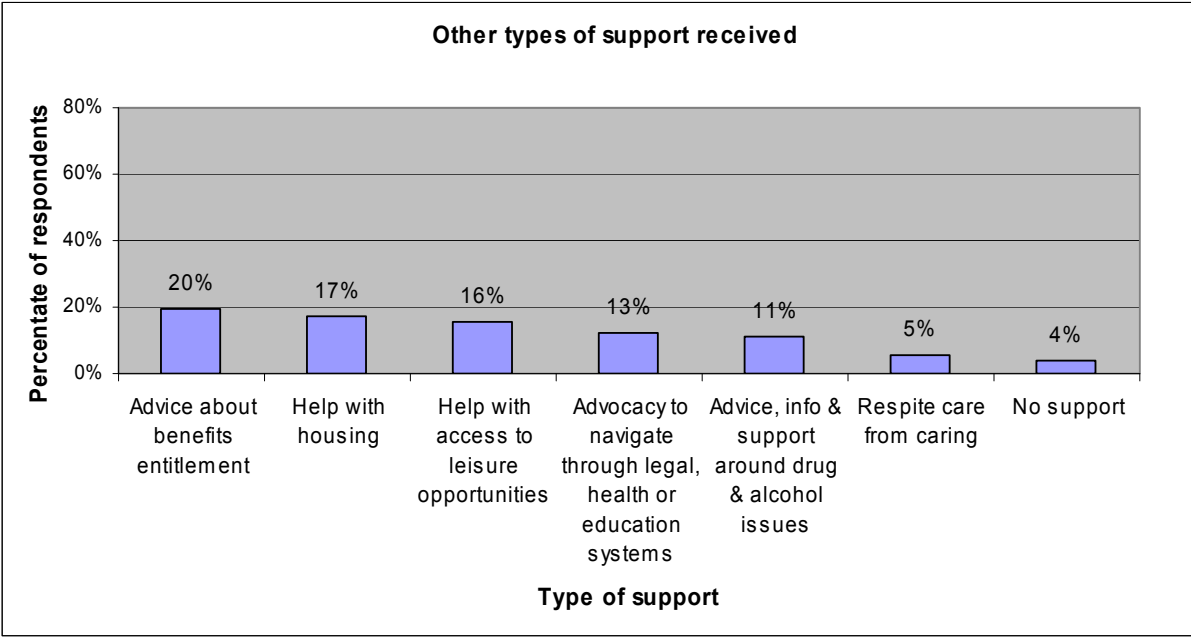


Three quarters of respondents receive some sort of financial allowance and just under two thirds have contact with a social worker. The levels of other types of support then drop considerably. Only about one third of respondents receive help with contact arrangements and family relationships with the child's parents with a

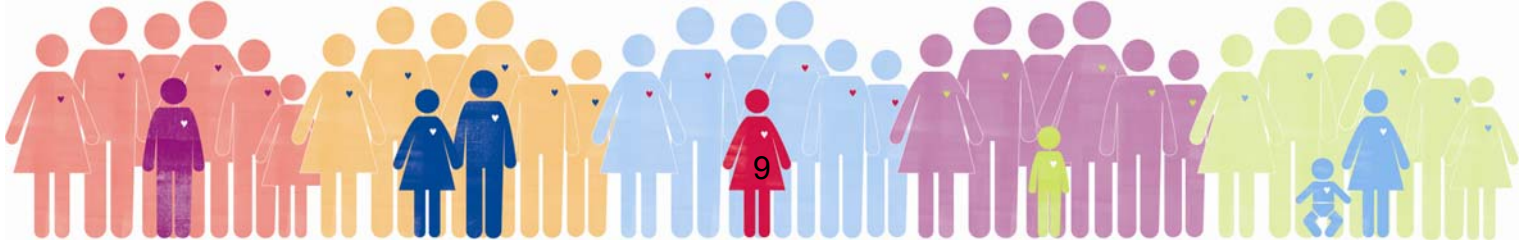


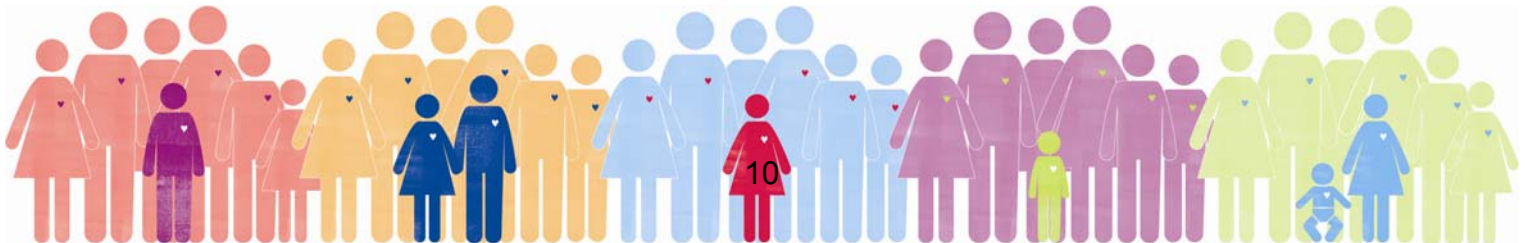
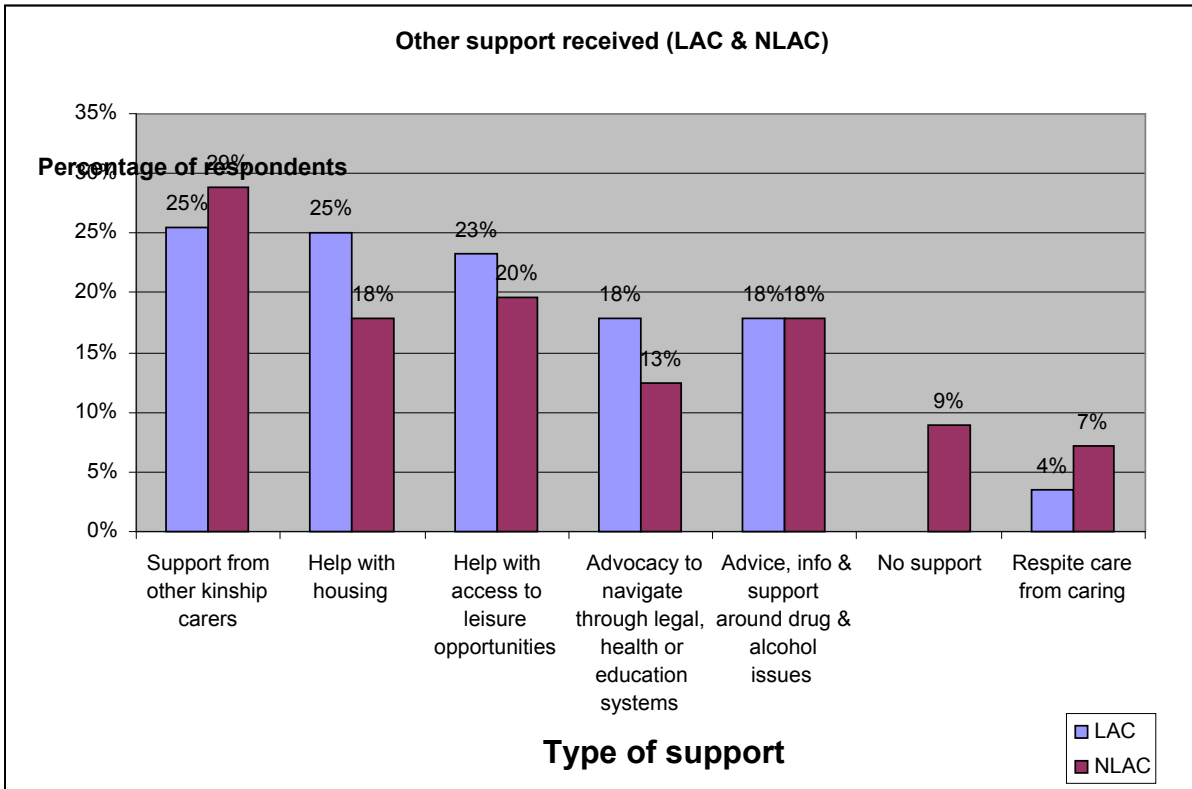
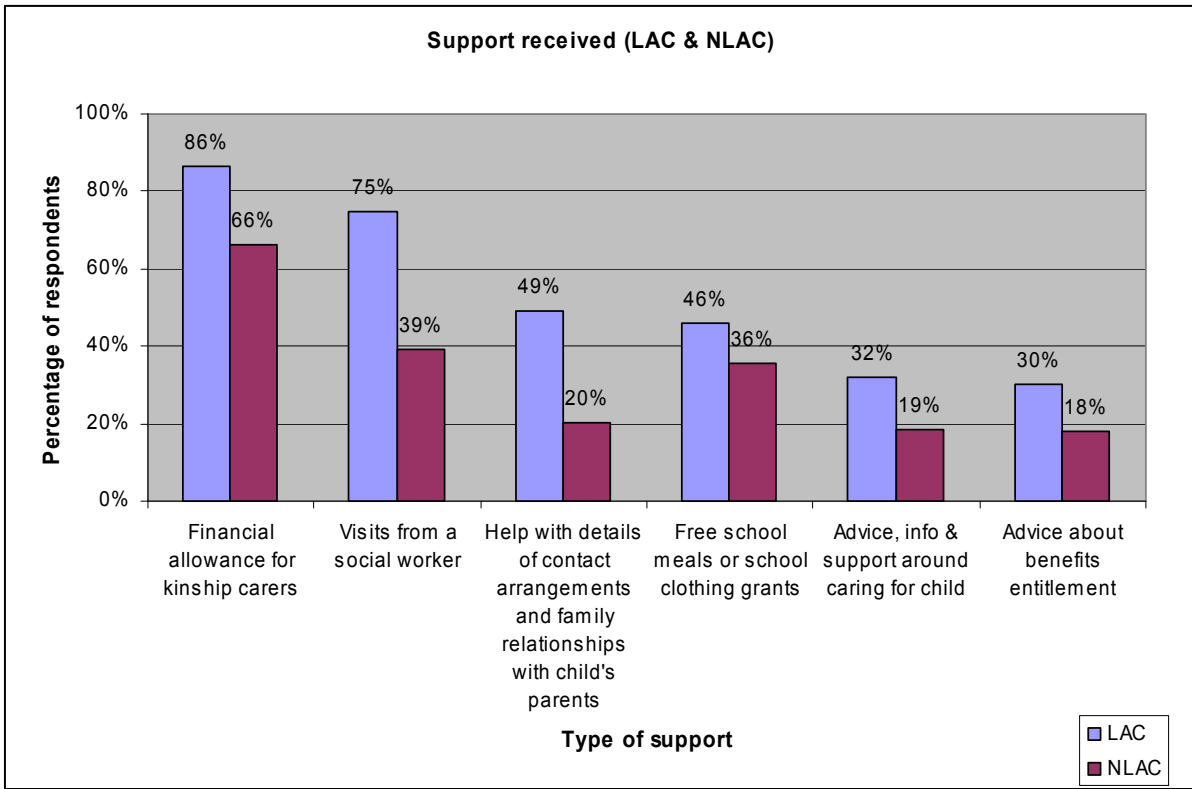
similar proportion receiving free school meals or school clothing grants. Less than a third receive advice, information and support around caring for child(ren) and support from other kinship carers.

The table below shows that the levels of support in other areas are even lower with 80% or more of respondents currently not receiving any support in regards to things like housing , information about health or education entitlements and getting a break from caring.



The tables above show the levels of support currently being received by the respondents as a whole. However, we also wanted to tease out any differences between families with looked after children and those in informal kinship care arrangements. The charts below show the comparison between the two groups.



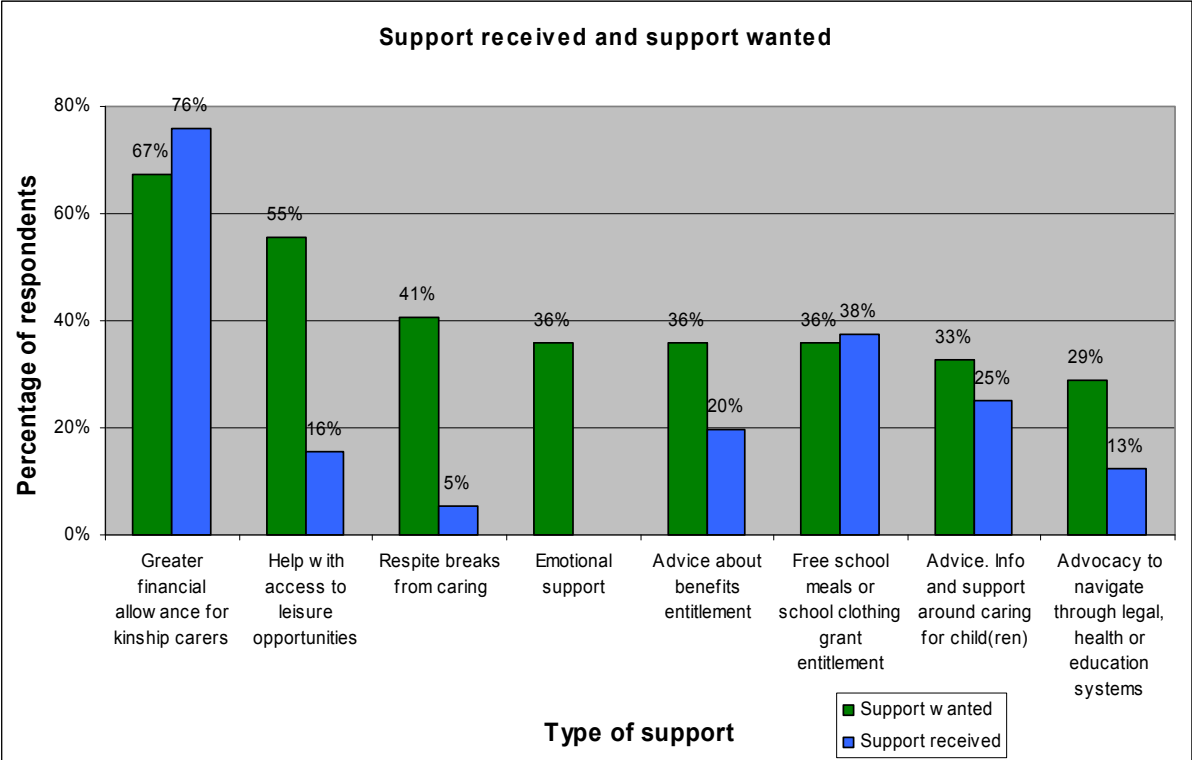


The information provided by respondents indicates that the legal status of the child can affect how much support is available to kinship carer families. It is to be expected that carers of non-looked after children will have less contact with social work as their children are less likely to be involved with the statutory system. However, the other areas of difference are of concern particularly those where there is the most significant difference namely: help with details of contact arrangements and family relationships; access to a financial allowance; advice, information and support around caring for child and advice about benefit entitlement.

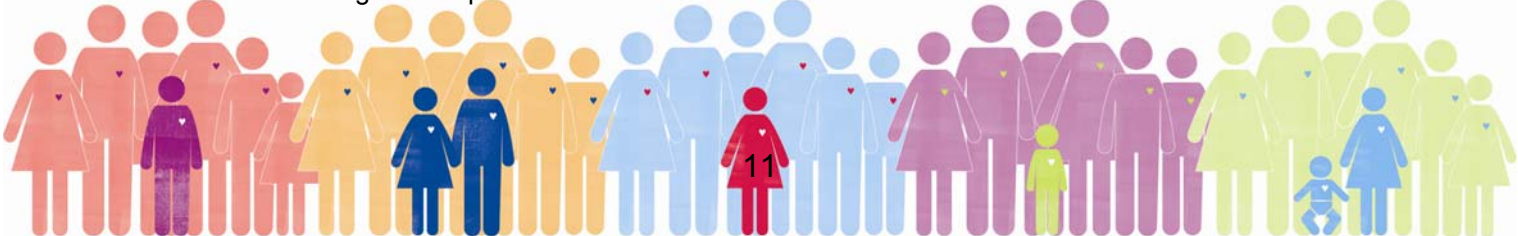
This difference in the availability of support was also reflected in our conversations with kinship carers at the regional forums where a number of participants talked about not being able to access support if their child(ren) was not legally looked after or of having support removed if they took on legal responsibility for the child(ren). It is also important to note that the five respondents who indicated that they received no support were all caring for non-looked after children.

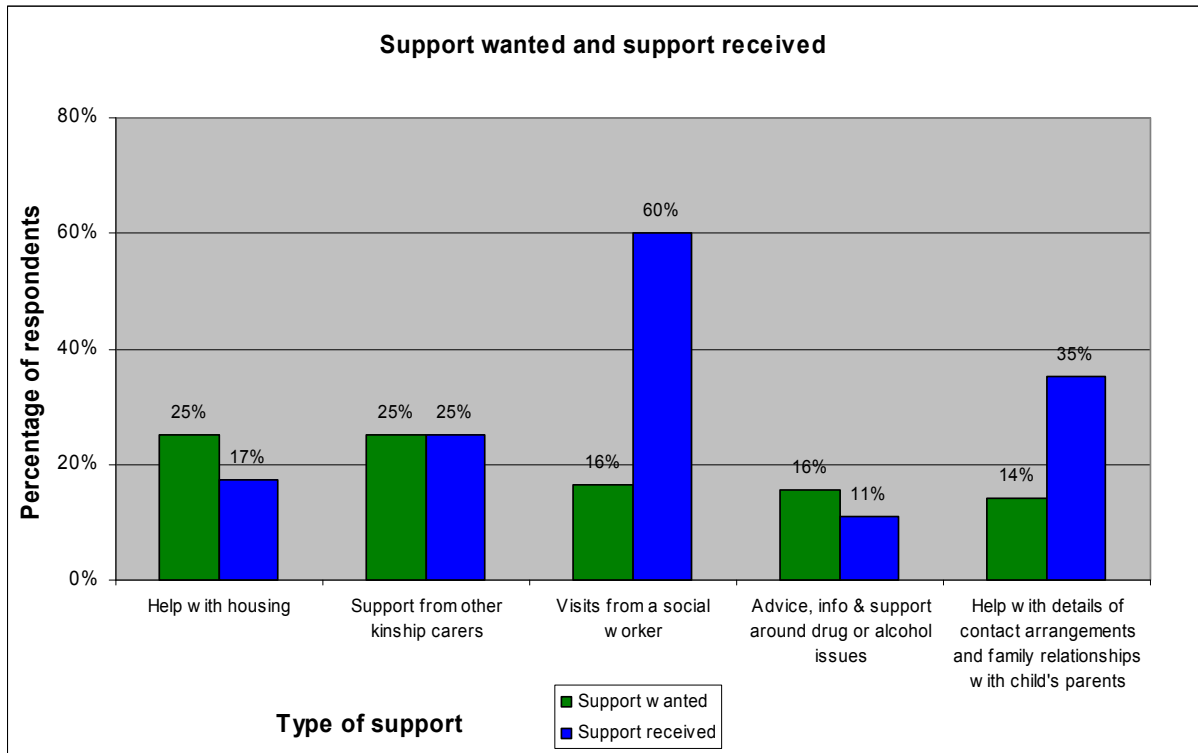
4.5. What would make being a kinship carer easier?

The information above tells us about the support that respondents are currently receiving but it does not necessarily help us to understand the kind of support that they would like. For this reason we asked respondents to tell us about what would make being a kinship carer easier for them and the information gathered for all respondents is shown below with a comparison to the information about the support currently being received.



* for the question about support wanted the category about financial allowances was titled 'greater financial allowance for kinship carers'
 ** the category 'emotional support' was only included in the question about what types of support would make being a kinship carer easier.

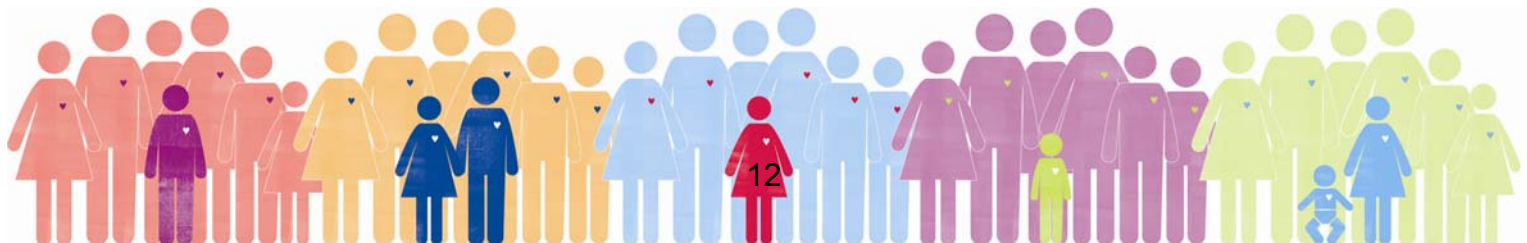


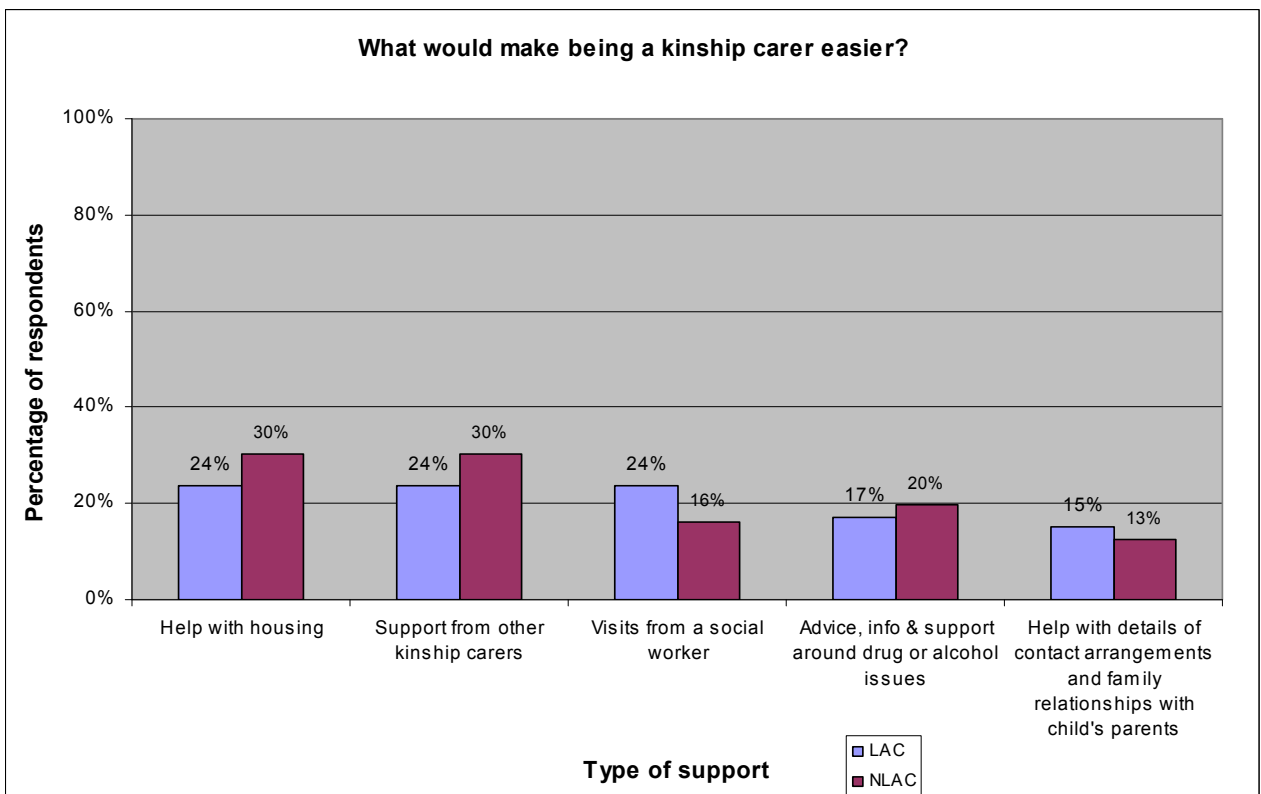
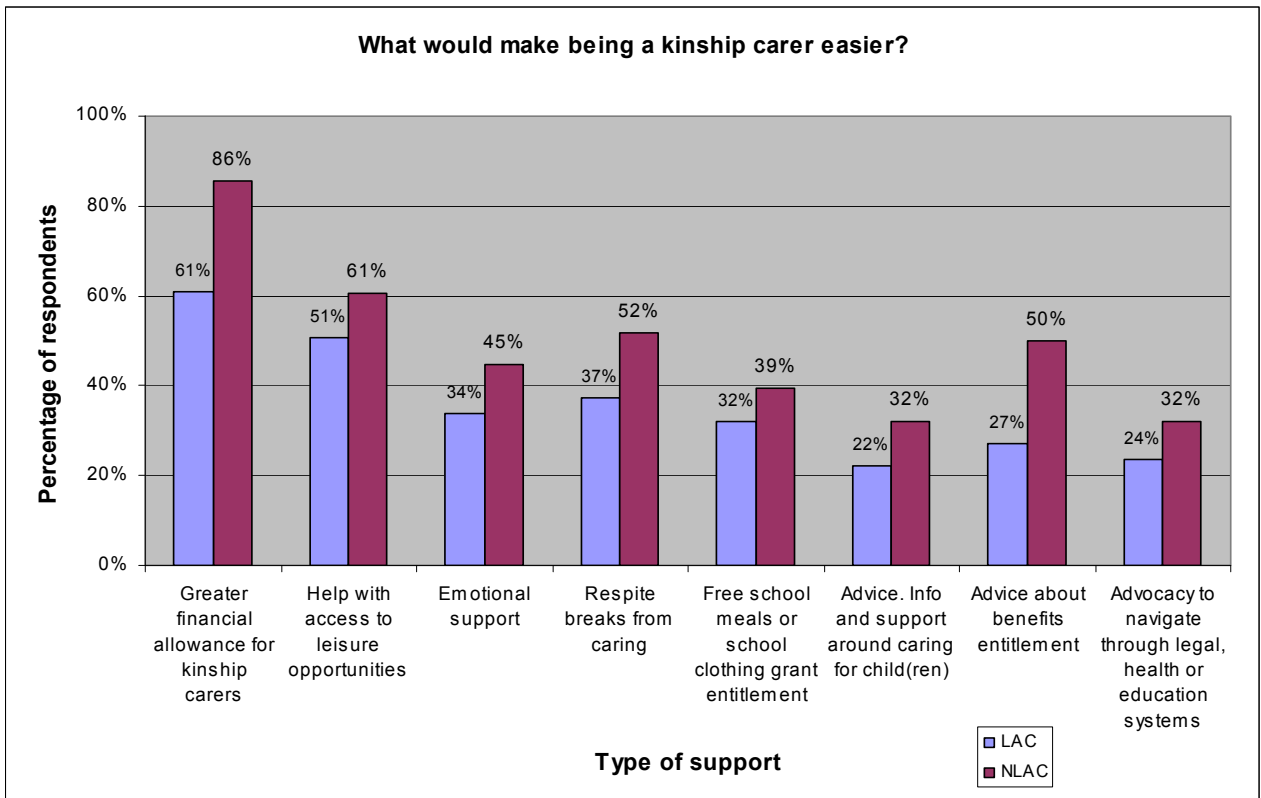


It is to be expected that the largest demand is for greater financial allowances for kinship carers as it is already recognised that this is a key issue for them. Although it is interesting to note that when asked about what caused them difficulty as a kinship carer only about a fifth of respondents specifically referenced financial issues.

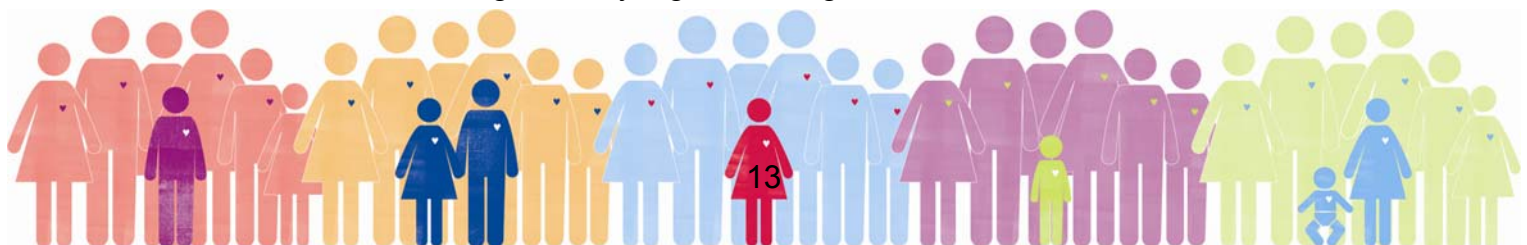
The area of greatest demand after financial allowances was for help with access to leisure opportunities which was specified by more than half of respondents. Just under half of respondents would like more respite from their caring responsibilities. Around a third of respondents indicated that they would like emotional support; advice about benefits entitlements; free school meals or school clothing grants; advice, information and support around caring for child and advocacy to navigate through legal, health or education systems.

It is also useful to again compare the responses from those caring for looked after children with those from carers of non-looked after children. This can be seen in the charts below.





Again we can see some differences between the two groups. The desire for a greater financial allowance is significantly higher among carers of non-looked after children



as is that for advice about benefit entitlements. This is not surprising when considered alongside the evidence from the question about support currently received by carers which indicated that carers of non-looked after children were less likely to be receiving any financial allowance.

There is less difference between the two groups across other areas of support but between 10-15% more carers of non-looked after children would like more support with: respite from caring; access to leisure opportunities and advice, information and support around caring for children.

We also asked respondents to tell us about types of support other than those listed that would make being a kinship carer easier. Responses included:

“More availability of child care (playgroups, nurseries etc) as grandparents don’t always have contact with other children of child’s own age.”

“Being able to afford a holiday with the family as a whole, to get away from it all. Not able to look ahead to that due to expense”

“Babysitting”

“After school clubs”

“Fewer visits from a social worker - weekly is a bit intrusive. The child tolerates them but it’s not very normal”

“More accessible child care at a reasonable cost”

“A holiday which should be paid for once a year - every child deserves a holiday”

4.6. Additional information from regional forums for kinship carers

At the four regional forums that we held for kinship carers in November and December 2011 we asked kinship carers to talk to us in more detail about what types of support would make a difference to them. We used the interim findings of the survey to direct this conversation and asked participants to tell us more about what they want in terms of emotional support, respite care, advice about caring for their children, access to leisure opportunities and advocacy to negotiate through legal, health or education systems.

In terms of emotional support one of the key themes was the importance of having someone to talk to who would really listen to an individual’s experience. Many of the participants at the forums talked of the benefits of talking to others with similar experiences through support groups aimed specifically at kinship carers. A significant number of the people at the forums were active members of support groups and they felt that this was one of the best types of support as it gave access to others who were in the same situation and they believed that talking to others who ‘understood’ the difficulties faced by kinship carers was very important.



For some of the forum participants this was the first time they had met other people with similar experiences and the benefits of this type of mutual support were very clear as we saw people, some for the first time, be able to talk to other people who they felt really understood their experiences.

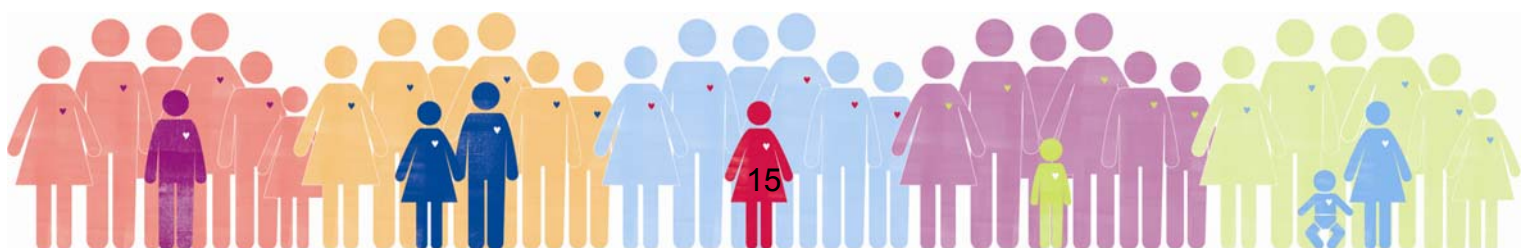
However, it was also acknowledged that support through groups was not the only means of emotional support that could be effective and many participants felt that the support offered through the kinship care helpline provided by ParentLine Scotland would also be useful to many kinship carers. Some participants thought that access to this kind of instant and anonymous support would be of benefit to many kinship carers and indeed, this is reflected in the feedback from the forums.

When we asked about respite care an interesting picture emerged about what this meant to the participants at the forums. For the majority of people respite did not mean that they wanted the child to be away from their family for any significant period of time, and many forum participants were very clear that this was not what they wanted at all. However, there was considerable agreement that being able to have simply a few hours a week to themselves would be of huge benefit. People talked about going shopping for a couple of hours, socialising with partners and friends or simply being able to have a bath. When talking about this type of respite there was a consistent theme of linking being able to get a break for themselves with the provision of support for their children. Many forum participants felt that providing their children with access to a befriender would provide the child with additional support from someone that they trusted and the carer with a few hours of time for themselves. A few people at the forums had experience of this and were very positive about the benefits that it had brought both them and their children. Other forms of support that were discussed at the forums included increased access for leisure opportunities for children and the provision of babysitting services.

On the issue of access to leisure opportunities there was a clear link to the financial hardship faced by many kinship care families. Most of the forum participants talked of wanting to be able to give their children the opportunity to take part in a range of different leisure activities but found this very difficult because of the costs involved. Many people felt that being able to get help with the costs of leisure activities, for example through the provision of some type of leisure card, would be of enormous benefit for their families.

We asked participants at the forums what kind of advice, information and support about caring for their children would be useful to them and they identified a wide range of issues including:

- child development
- behavioural issues
- supporting their child(ren) with their education
- dealing with anger (both the child's and their own)
- the impact of parental substance misuse
- stress management
- bereavement and loss



- understanding new technology – e.g. computers, social networking
- managing challenging behaviour
- recovery from trauma
- managing family relationships

However, the way in which this type of advice and information is delivered is important. Many people were very clear that they did not want to be told how to be parents and some felt that the current provision of parenting support was not always suitable or accessible to kinship carers. Participants at the forums wanted flexible and accessible advice and information that is specific to their and their children's needs. This suggests that this type of support needs to be delivered in a range of ways that enables carers to be able to access it when they need it and in a way that feels appropriate.

In terms of support with the health, legal and education systems many carers talked about struggling to be able to find good information about their rights and the support that they might be entitled to. One of the sessions provided at two of the forums presented an overview of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Sco) Act and looked after children's (and other children in support needs) entitlements and rights within that framework. For many, this was the first time they had ever heard of this source of support for their children. The clear message from the forums was that carers want to be able to access clear, accurate and unbiased information about these issues that will enable them to make informed choices about what is best for them and their children.

5. The experience of children in kinship care

We asked respondents to tell us about the experiences of the children in their family in terms of positive changes, difficulties faced by the children and types of support needed for children. The main issues highlighted are detailed below.

5.1. Positive changes for the child(ren)

As with the responses to the question about the rewards of being a kinship carer, the strongest theme was the child(ren) being safe and/or having stability and security.

“they have told me they feel more safe and secure”

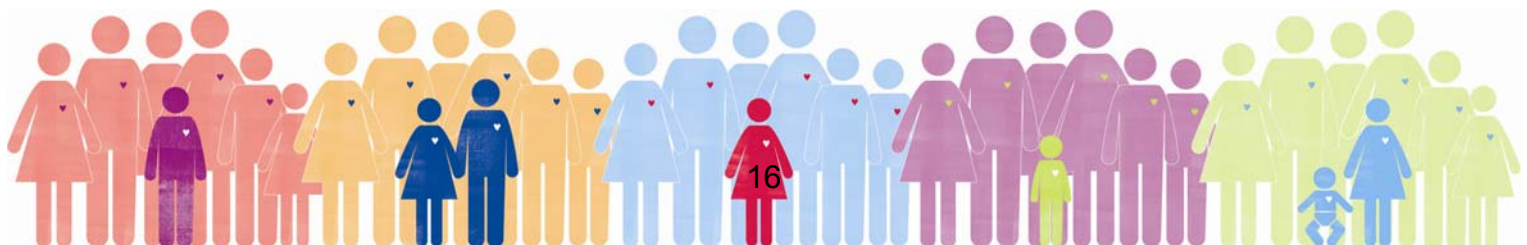
“she has a feeling of security and knows that she can trust us”

“a life free from fear and anxiety”

“being looked after in a more structured, safe and loving environment”

“knowing that we will always be there for them no matter what life throws at them”

Another key theme was the child(ren) being happy and loved which was mentioned by just over a third of respondents.



“child is extremely happy, well cared for and loved so much by myself”

“happy and safe and knows he is loved”

“gets all the love and care that a child needs”

“they are living with a family that loves them”

“they are happy, content, clean and positive”

Around a quarter of respondents talked about improvements in their child’s confidence and physical and emotional well being.

“his confidence and self esteem have grown being nurtured in a consistent environment.”

“since coming to me she is a confident, happy girl”

“she is confident, happy, getting on at school and has lots of social activities”

He is much healthier, he looks after himself a lot better and his education is really improving.

A fifth of respondents highlighted that their child(ren) had more routine/boundaries/structure in their lives which was of benefit to them.

“their whole lives have completely changed. They’ve got security here. They get fed regularly here. They’ve got routine and discipline”

“they are loved, have routine, boundaries, are taught right from wrong, how to be polite and treat others with respect”

“they have consistency and someone always there for them”

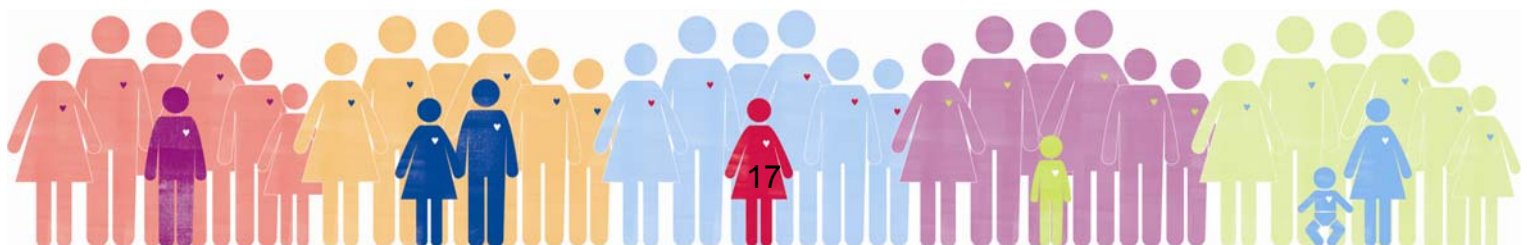
“proper daily routine, not getting dragged round the streets all times of the day and night”

5.2. Difficulties the child(ren) are coping with

When we asked kinship carers about the difficulties their child(ren) is/are coping with the key issue that emerges is that of the difficulties the child(ren) have with their relationship with their parent(s) and other family members. This was referenced by almost half of all respondents.

“relationship with his mum – he still worries about her”

“he does sometimes get angry when his mother has contact”



“sometimes the transition from a weekend with mum back to staying with me can be emotional for them”

“the fact that he only gets to see his mother once a week for an hour must be confusing for him”

“his parents’ consistent lack of interest in him”

A fifth of respondents also talked about emotional/behavioural difficulties. For many respondents this was linked to the impact of parental behaviour on the children.

“temper tantrums due to bad memories”

“still not trusting other adults due to being let down in the past”

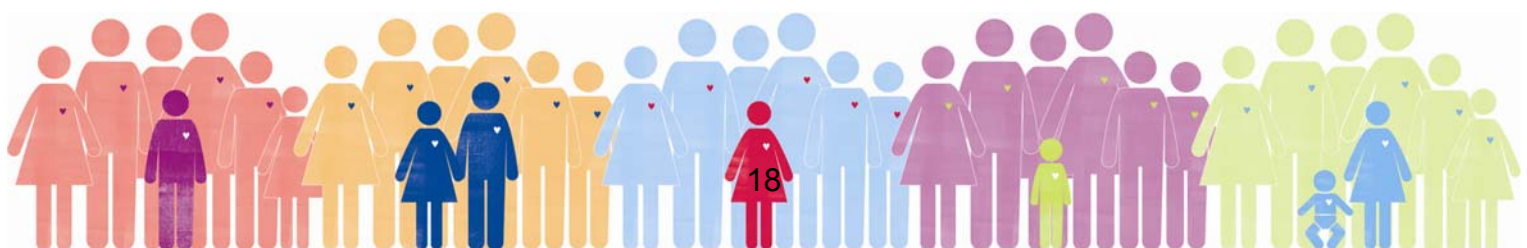
“emotional issues like ‘what’s the next upheaval’”

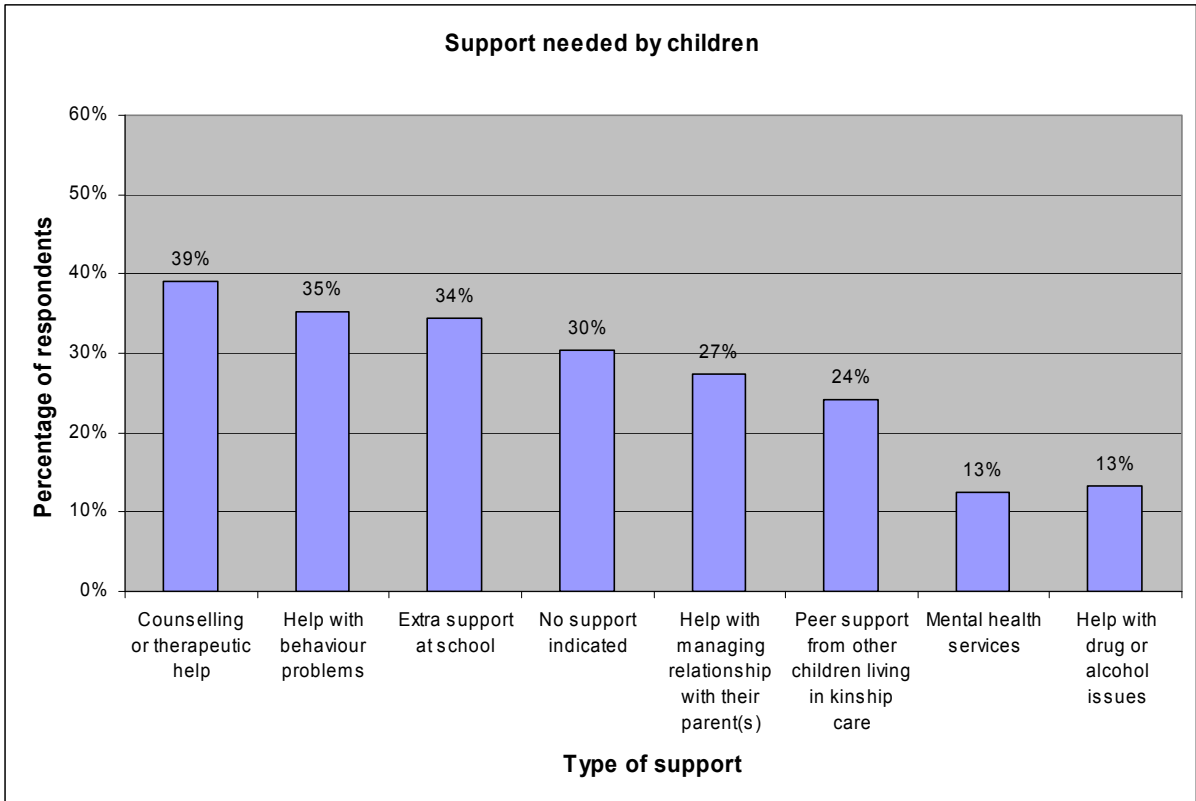
“he seems to be stressed and angry”

As with the previous question about the worries respondents had for the child(ren) in their care it should be noted that 36 people did not provide any answer to this question and a further 20 specifically stated that there were no particular difficulties. This suggests that more than a third of respondents did not feel that their child(ren) has/have any particular difficulties.

5.3. Additional help and support needed by child(ren)

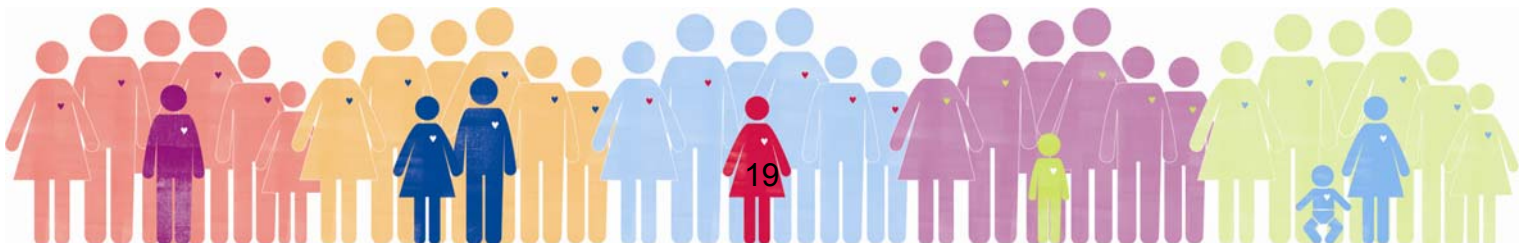
We asked respondents to tell us about the types of additional support and help that they felt the child(ren) they are caring for could benefit from. The chart below shows the main issues.

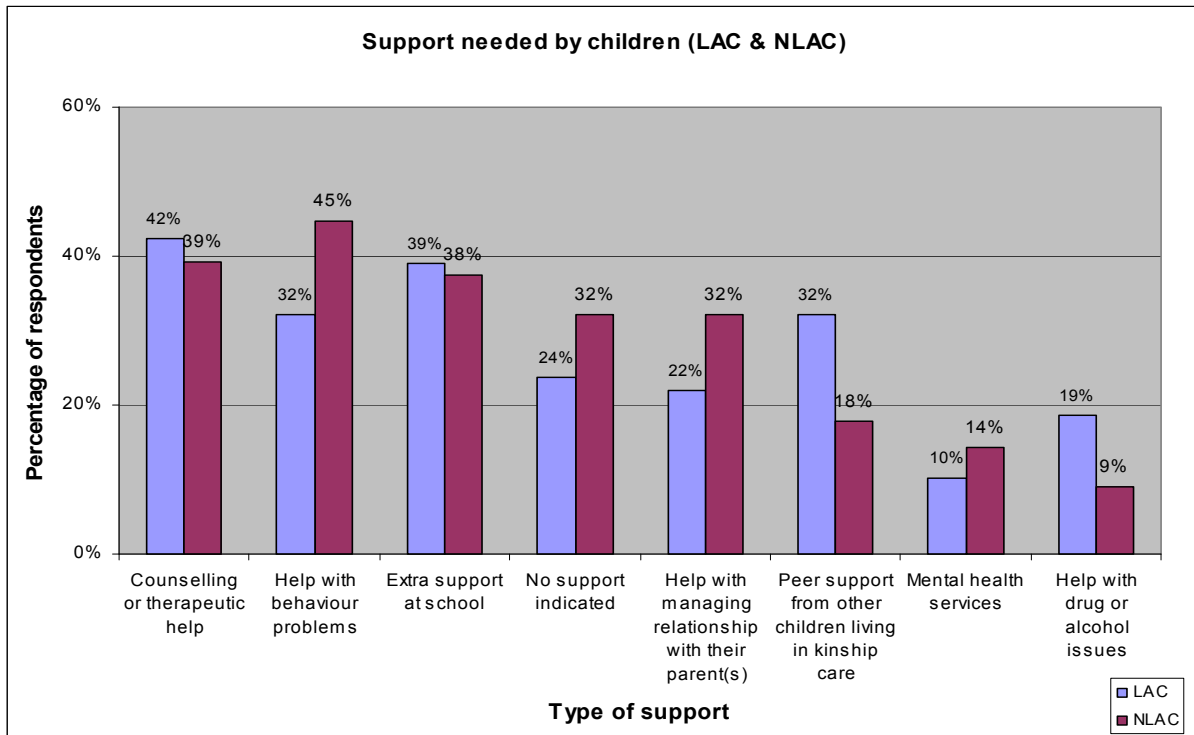




Around one third of participants feel that their child(ren) would benefit from counselling or therapeutic help; help with behaviour problems; extra support at school and help with managing relationship with parent(s). A significant proportion (just under a third) of respondents did not indicate that any additional support was needed either by specifically stating this or by not answering the question.

Once again we compared the responses from carers with looked after children with those caring for non-looked after children:





There is no discernible difference between the two groups in terms of demand for counselling or therapeutic help and extra support at school. However, there is more demand from carers of non-looked after children for their children to be given help with behaviour problems and help with managing their relationship with their parents.

We also asked respondents to tell us about any other types of support they felt that the child(ren) they are caring for were in need of and the responses were:

“group activities with other kinship families so they can see there are others in the same position”

“bereavement issues”

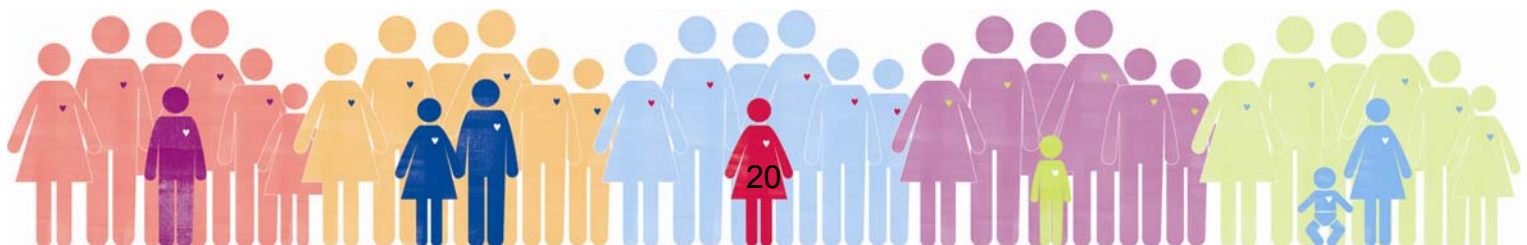
“understanding father and mother's drug issues”

“managing anger”

“extra time at nursery”

5.4. Additional information from regional forums

At some of the regional forums we asked participants to tell us more about what they felt their children needed in terms of additional support. These discussions were less specific than those about the support needs of the carers themselves, perhaps because the needs of children are very individual and related to their very specific circumstances.



However, most participants advised that children living in kinship care are more likely to be in need of additional support that can help them overcome the difficulties that have been caused by their parents both in the past and on an ongoing basis. Overall carers at the forums agreed with the findings of the survey that the priority needs for children were for counselling or therapeutic help and help with behaviour problems. Some of the specific issues identified were: dealing with anger; the impact of parental behaviour; attachment issues and the effects of parental substance misuse, either in terms of its impact on the relationship with the child or the possible effect misuse had on the child's physical and emotional wellbeing and development in the past.

Over the next year CHILDREN 1ST plan to engage directly with children and young people living in kinship care families and as part of this we will be exploring with them what kinds of support they think would be most useful to them. It will be interesting to compare their thoughts with those of their carers and to identify areas of similarity and difference. Engagement with both kinship carers and their children will enable us to develop a very clear picture of how children and young people in kinship care can best be supported.

6. What local authorities or the Scottish Government could do to make the role of kinship carers easier

We asked respondents about what they would like their local authority or the Scottish Government to do to make their role easier. Around half of the respondents made comments about improving financial support for kinship carers, an established key issue for kinship carers and their families. Most respondents commented on financial issues in quite general terms, simply highlighting the need for additional financial support. A few, however, did talk about it more specifically:

“it would be easier if we got more financial support regarding legal and court costs as this can be very worrying when you need most of your money to keep kids clothed, fed, warm etc”

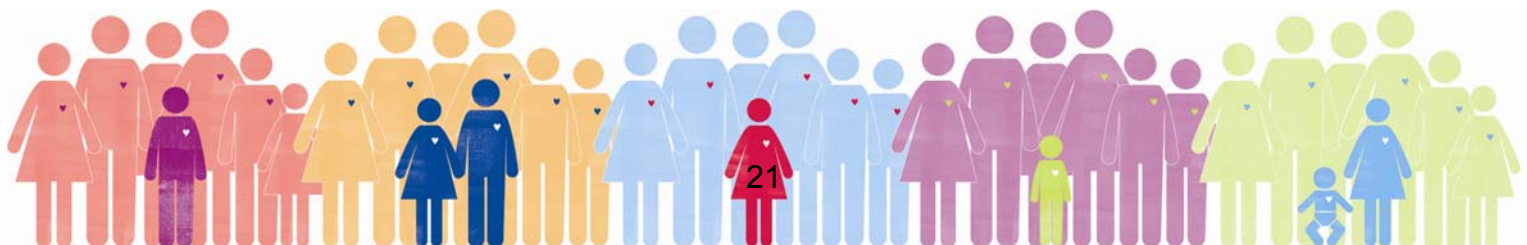
“would the Government or local authority be willing to help with finance when children want to go to university?”

“money is really tight and there are few treats and no holidays Would like the Government to pay for or subsidise holidays and free passes for leisure things”

A few respondents talked about having their kinship care allowance cut recently and the difficulties that had been caused by this.

For a number of respondents, the issue of finance was strongly connected to the issue of kinship carers having parity with foster carers. Around a fifth felt that kinship carers should be paid the same allowance and have access to the same range of support as foster carers.

“put us on the same money as foster carers”



“why are there different payments for foster care and kinship care?”

“kinship carers should have the same financial support as foster carers regardless of looked after or non-looked after status”

“to provide all the training, finances and support foster carers have”

“the same emotional and financial support as foster carers get”

Around one third of respondents wanted improvements in other types of support including:

- respite from caring
- help with housing
- emotional support
- free access to leisure activities
- more kinship care groups and better support for them
- free legal advice and support
- information on support available

Some respondents highlighted the need for support to be available regardless of the legal status of the child(ren) while others highlighted the need for consistency of support across the local authorities.

“acknowledge that just because some are no longer under social work we have the same expenses as carers who are”

“support for family after residency has been granted”

“I’d like the Government to ensure that all kinship carers are treated equally by their local authority”

“Not to make payment for kinship carers on postcode issues”

A few respondents mentioned difficulties with housing as an issue and anecdotally from our discussions with carers at forums and in other settings we have heard that many carers face significant over crowding in their housing circumstances and that they can struggle to be able to find help with this.

“Housing is a big problem. Many kinship carers have had to find alternative accommodation because their homes are not big enough to take on the children. The local housing association and the social services should work together to help people in this area.”

“Must prioritise housing, It's very hard with everything cramped in plus damp.”

Another problem is the lack of immediate support at the start of a kinship care arrangement in both financial and practical terms. Many carers talk of a children



arriving in emergency placements late at night and being expected to provide the child's immediate needs, such as a bed, clothing, nappies, without any financial support.

We also asked respondents to tell us about any other changes or improvements that they felt would help them and the children they care for. Most respondents identified a need for more support in a wide range of areas. As one respondent put it:

“Blimey, I would need a bigger box to type it all in”

7. Conclusions

One of the key messages to come from the survey and the regional forums is the huge amount of love and happiness that there is in kinship care families. Time and time again kinship carers have talked to us about how proud they are of their children, how cherished they are and how much joy having them in their families brings. They have told us about seeing how their love and support has provided their children with the basis for positive physical and emotional development. This is a demonstration of one of the fundamental positive aspects of kinship care, that it can provide children, who have often had a very difficult and damaging start to their lives, with loving, safe and secure families.

However, while it is clear that kinship carers will do everything in their power to keep their children within their families and to provide them with all the love and support that they need, it is also clear that many families are facing very real and ongoing difficulty in being able to access the types of support that they and their children need.

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the survey and the regional forums are the very real and ongoing financial hardships faced by a very large number of kinship carers. We have heard many stories of individuals being faced with taking on a child or children with no preparation or warning and finding that they cannot get any financial help to meet the immediate and practical needs that they have, such as providing the child with a bed or clothing. Many kinship carers were already living on a low income and it is clear that finding themselves with the considerable additional costs of caring for a child or children is causing many families substantial and ongoing difficulty.

The introduction of kinship care allowances has gone some way to address the financial situation of kinship carers but the message that we have been given is that many families are still struggling to meet the additional financial costs that caring for their children brings. One aspect of this that needs further consideration is the extent to which an increase in other forms of support could help to alleviate the financial burden of kinship care families. For example, many carers talked about how free or reduced cost access to leisure activities would make a significant difference to their ability to provide their children with positive and rewarding activities.



The kinship carers we have spoken to are very clear that they want increased levels of better and more accessible support. However, they are also very clear that they want it delivered in a way that is appropriate for them and their families. Many are very resistant to any suggestion that they need any sort of 'training' in being a parent but many are interested in advice, information and support on issues that will help them better understand and support their children. They have also given a clear message that they want access to clear, accurate and unbiased advice and information on areas such as legal rights, benefits entitlements and access to health and educational services. The challenge now is to develop advice, information and support in a variety of formats in order that all kinship carers can access the most appropriate format for them. Over the next few months CHILDREN 1ST will be working meet this challenge by developing workshops, factsheets, good practice guides and web resources based on the issues that kinship carers have told us are important to them.

One of the things that we heard time and time again, both in the survey and at the regional forums, was kinship carers talking about how they wanted to be 'treated the same' as foster carers in terms of financial and other support. However, we believe it is important to introduce a note of caution to this as it could bring a danger of increased regulation and formalisation of kinship care that could be to the detriment to these families. One of the absolute benefits and strengths of kinship care is that it is not the same as foster care as its focus is on keeping children within the more informal setting of their own family. It is understandable that kinship carers feel resentment to what they see as the vastly better levels of finance and support that are available to foster carers. We want to explore these issues further with kinship carers and consider how a framework of support could be provided that is comparable to that of foster carers but which recognises the unique nature of kinship care and is able to address the specific needs of carers and their children.

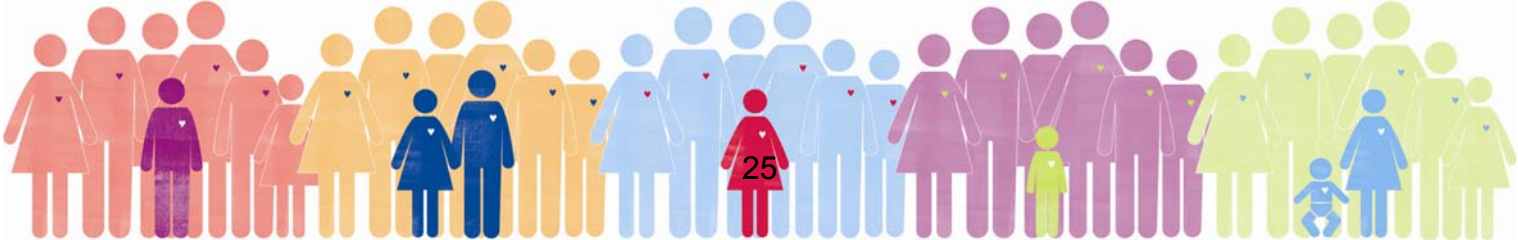
The information from the survey gives some indication that the legal status of the child can have an impact on the type and level of support that is available to both kinship carers and their children. This was echoed by some of the carers who attended the regional forums who talked of being unable to access support or it being withdrawn when the child stopped being officially looked after. This situation is compounded by the approaches by different local authorities to providing support for non-looked after children.

Kinship carers want to provide stable and permanent homes for their children and know that one route for doing this is to take out residency or permanency orders but in many areas they find that this leads to a reduction or withdrawal of the support that is available to them. It is clear that, where appropriate, providing a secure and permanent foundation for kinship care families is in the best interests of the children involved but this does not mean that the need for financial and other support for kinship carers is necessarily reduced or that the difficulties that some children have suddenly disappear. Kinship carers need access to support to be based on their family's individual needs rather than on what can appear to be arbitrary decisions based on the legal status of the child.



We know that kinship carers are often caring for very vulnerable children whose experiences with their parents have left them with multiple and complex difficulties. Kinship carers are doing their very best to support their children and to provide them with the love and security that they need. However, a consistent message from the survey and the regional forums was that many children are in need of additional support from professionals to help them overcome their difficulties. In particular carers talked of children needing counselling support, help with behavioural problems, more support at school and help with managing their relationship with their parents.

It is apparent, despite the obvious need, many carers find this type of support very difficult to access and that this is causing a great deal of ongoing difficulty within their families. This situation is compounded when access to this type of support is dependent on the legal status of the child. Kinship carers have sent a very clear message that they need increased and improved access to support for their children. They need clear pathways that enable them to access a range of support that is based on an individual assessment of the child's needs.



Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

Listening to kinship carers

Kinship carers are very important people, giving love, support, and a stable home to many vulnerable children in Scotland. But we also know that being a kinship carer can be really tough.

A new National Kinship Care Service, run by CHILDREN 1ST and funded by the Scottish Government, has been set up to give information, advice and other support to kinship carers and children living in kinship care across Scotland. The National Service will also speak out about the issues affecting kinship carers so that the services and support that they need are prioritised. You can find out more about this service online at www.children1st.org.uk or by filling in your contact details at the end of the survey.

CHILDREN 1ST wants to make sure that this new Service is the best possible source of advice and support for kinship carers, and that we speak out about the issues that matter most to kinship carers and the children that they look after.

That is why we are asking kinship carers from across Scotland if they will fill in the 15 questions below. You can feel free to put as much or as little information as you like - your response will be kept confidential, and the results from all the surveys will be summarised and made anonymous.

You can fill in the survey on paper and post back to the address at the end, email policy@children1st.org.uk for alternative formats, or you can fill it in online at <http://children1st.kinshipcarers.sgizmo.com/s3/> Alternatively, you can phone ParentLine Scotland on 0800 028 2233 and they'll record your answers for you.

1. **How many children live with you currently, and what age are they?**
2. **What is your relationship to these children?**
3. **Are the children that you're caring for legally 'looked after' by your local authority?**

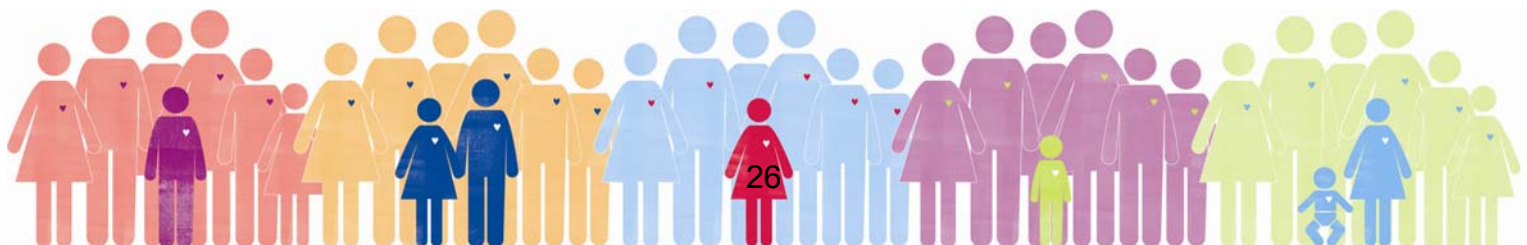
Yes

No

Don't know

4. **What is the most rewarding part of being a kinship carer?**

5. **Being a kinship carer can sometimes be really tough. What, if anything, causes you difficulty or stress as a kinship carer?**



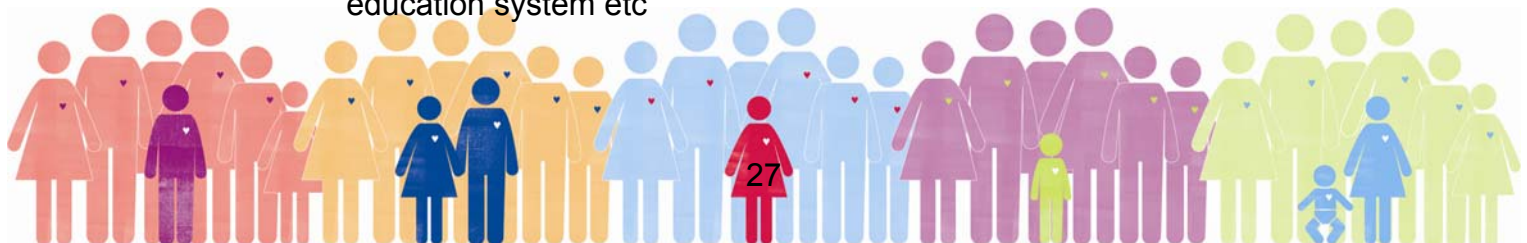
6. What worries, if any, do you have for the children that you are caring for?

7. What types of help do you get because you are a kinship carer? (please tick all that apply)

- Visits from a social worker
- Financial allowance for kinship carers
- Help with access to leisure opportunities such as free swimming, for the children you look after
- Free school meals or school clothing grants entitlement
- Help with housing
- Advice, information and support around drug or alcohol issues
- Advice, information and support around caring for your child(ren), such as dealing with behaviour problems, working out the education system etc
- Respite breaks from caring
- Support from other kinship carers
- Advocacy to navigate through legal, health or education systems
- Advice about benefits entitlement
- Help with details of contact arrangements and family relationships with child's parent(s)
- Something else? Please put here...

8. What would make being a kinship carer easier? (please tick your top 5 options from the list below)

- More visits from a social worker
- Advice about benefits entitlement
- Greater financial allowance to meet costs of looking after child(ren)
- Help with access to leisure opportunities such as free swimming, for the children you look after
- Free school meals or school clothing grants entitlement
- Help with housing
- Advice, information and support around drug or alcohol issues
- Advice, information and support around caring for your child(ren), such as dealing with behaviour problems, working out the education system etc



- Respite breaks from caring
- Support from other kinship carers
- Advocacy to navigate through legal, health or education systems
- Help with details of contact arrangements and family relationships with child's parent(s)
- Emotional Support
- Something else? Please put here...

9. Living in kinship care can be really positive for many children. What has changed for the better for the children since they came to live with you?

10. Are there any particular difficulties that they are coping with?

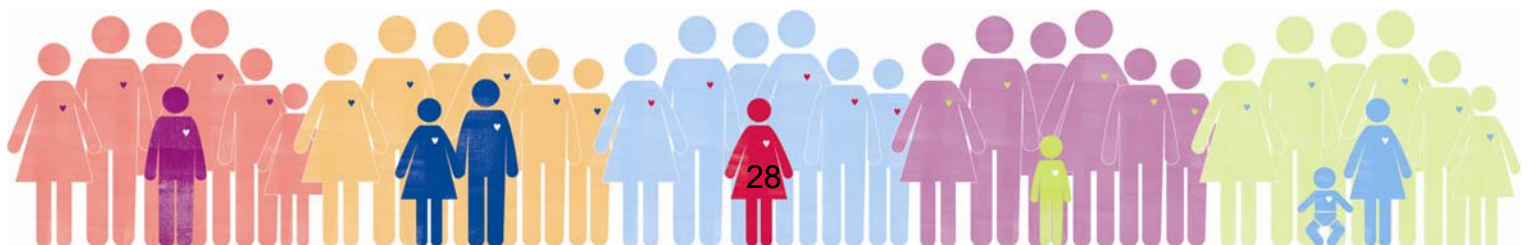
11. What, if any, kinds of extra help or support do the children who are living with you, need? (please tick your top 5 options from the list below)

- Extra support at school
- Counselling or therapeutic help to cope with past experiences
- Mental health services
- Peer support from other children living in kinship care
- Help with managing relationship with their parent(s)
- Help with drug or alcohol issues
- Help with behaviour problems
- Something else? Please put here....

12. Over the next year, CHILDREN 1ST will be organising free support and information workshops for kinship carers in different parts of Scotland. They will include opportunities to talk about experiences and advice with other kinship carers, as well as with people who work with families. These workshops could cover a whole range of topics, for example, drug and alcohol issues, making sense of the education system, dealing with difficult behaviour, handling family conflict, or something else entirely.

Would you take part in these workshops or other similar events for kinship carers?

- Yes
- No Not sure



If no, what are some of your reasons for not wanting to attend?

- Not interested
- Childcare is not easily available to attend such events
- I/we can't afford to travel to these events
- Too busy at work and in caring for children to attend
- I/we prefer to learn on our own
- I/we don't need any information or support as a kinship carer
- Something else? Please put here...

13. Do you have any ideas about what would be helpful topics to cover in these workshops?

These workshops could be open only to kinship carers, or could be open to a variety of people caring for children including kinship carers. Which would you prefer?

- Open only to kinship carers
- Open to a variety of people caring for children, including kinship carers
- Don't mind

14. CHILDREN 1ST campaigns for better support and recognition of kinship carers' important role. We want to know what kinship carers want the Scottish Government and local authorities to do to make their role easier.

Do you have any comments on what you would like your local authority or the Scottish Government to do for kinship carers and the children that they look after?

Are there any other changes or improvements that you would like to see that would help kinship carers and the children that they look after?

15. Are you part of a local group of kinship carers? If so, please let us know the name, area or contact for this kinship carer group here:

If you are not part of a kinship carer group, but you would like to be, tick here and put your name & address at the bottom and we can let you know if there is group in your area.

If you are already part of a group, are there particular kinds of support, advice or information that would be helpful for your group?

