

Being a Kinship Family: Lessons from Research and Lived Experience

Dr Paul McGrath

and guest speaker

Carole Dent (Special Guardian)

Outcomes

- Understand more about kinship care.
- Explain the different types of kinship Care.
- Consider what it means to be a kinship carer and a kinship family.
- Reflect on some of the current debates into kinship care.
- Hear the lived experience of a grandparent special guardian.

What is kinship care?

- When a child lives with a person they are related to, or they know, when they are unable to live with their parents.
- Kinship arrangements can be short term, long term, permanent, or uncertain.
- They can be private arrangements, or there may be children's services involvement or a court order in place. This can affect who has parental responsibility for the child.
- The last accurate data from the 2011 census estimated 162,470 children were living with kinships carers. It is believed this number has grown significantly.

Different types of kinship care

- Private arrangements
- Private foster care
- Child arrangements order / residence order
- Special guardianship order
- Kinship foster care/connected person foster care

The kinship carer identity

- Many kinship carers do not know they are kinship carers.
- It is a complex transition from previous role to being a kinship carer.
- There is very little information for kinship carers.
- There are no real kinship carer role models.

Transitioning identity

- Motivation to care.
- History as a parent.
- Loss of previous identity.
- Experiences of children's services (in some cases).
- Changing relationship with the child's parents.

New identity as a kinship carer

- Parenting children who have suffered trauma.
- Helping children understand their situations.
- For grandparents there are added challenges around health and relationships with the parents.
- Not fitting in with other parents, the potential for isolation.
- Sometimes having to protect children from their parents.

Being a kinship family

- Understanding the family history and developing a new positive family story.
- Develop a new family identity.
- Learning how to be a family in a different way.
- How to think about the future.
- The impact of poverty.

Support (or lack of)

- Where does support come from?
 - Children's services,
 - Other professionals,
 - Friends and family,
 - Charities and peer support.
- The need for financial support

Debates in kinship care

- Who are kith and kin (and importantly, who aren't)?
- Is kinship care a natural family progression or a legal intervention?
- When should wider family be informed of child protection concerns?
- Should kinship carers be assessed, and should they be assessed to the same standard as stranger foster carers?
- How to consider the benefits of kinship care verses the potential risks?

Debates in kinship care continued

- Who should pay for the upkeep of the children?
- Should kinship carers automatically be offered support?
- How do professionals consider cultural issues?
- Do kinship carers need more legal rights?

Question and answer session:

A question-and-answer session between Paul McGrath and Carole Dent who is a special guardian and runs Norwich's Kinship Carer Support Group.

Questions from the audience

Contacts

- For further information about kinship care in general please contact p.mcgrath@uea.ac.uk or paul.mcgrath@norfolk.gov.uk
- For information about the Norwich Kinship Support Group please contact norwichareakinshipcarer@outlook.com

Organisations for both kinship carers and professionals

- Kinship - <https://kinship.org.uk/>
 - Kinship are the largest charity in the UK supporting kinship carers and professionals working with kinship carers. This includes facilitating a professionals' network.
- Family Rights Group - <https://frg.org.uk/>
 - Family Rights Group offer information and advice to kinship carers as well as all families who have children's social care involvement.