

Understanding family and friends care: The largest UK survey

Aziz R, Roth D and Lindley B
Edited by Ashley C

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“Haroun has a life now instead of being invisible to his people. He was a very neglected and a very sad child from such an early age. Now he has friends from school over to play, his own bedroom, games, clothes, but more importantly he is safe from being hurt physically and emotionally, he is loved and loves us so much, he feels part of a family not an outcast, his violent behaviour is disappearing along with his tantrums. We have given him hope, trust and respect again, he has gone from being a boy with nothing (materially or emotionally) to a loving, kind and goodhearted person in his own right. Apart from the day when my own son was born, seeing the changes in Haroun's happiness since he came to live with us has been the greatest achievement of my life and I feel so proud he trusted and chose me to run to. Amidst all his suffering at home he knew he was loved by me from the day he was born and he reached out to me when he needed help most, no matter how frightening it must have been for him to speak up against his mother and stepfather's bullying and abuse. Haroun will grow up to be someone really special in life because he is such a strong and determined little boy with so much love in his heart to give. I could never imagine an 8 year old coping so well without his parents and having the guts to leave them when things got too much. He is a great example to other children who need to speak out and ask for help. We are so proud of him and would never be parted from him now no matter what unless it was what he decided he wanted. Not a day goes by without my wondering how his own parents could live without him, it's like they've given me this precious gift without realising the real value of him. I only hope one day they come to realise what a beautiful little boy they abandoned and make it up to him and tell him they're sorry. It is my lifetime's job now to make sure Haroun never comes to any harm again and lives with the happiness and family he deserves. He calls me “the dream of his heart” bless him and we have a very special bond for ever.

**An aunt describes the difference
she feels she has made to the life
of the child she is bringing up**

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1. Summary of key findings

About the family and friends carers

- 70% of the 493 carers taking part in the survey were grandparents.
- 26% had a long-term illness or disability.
- 88% were caring for one or two children,
- 12% were caring for three or more children.

About the children

- There were 762 kin children being raised by 493 carers. A quarter of the carers were also raising their own children.
- Nearly half the kin children (46%) had a disability or special need, such as emotional and behaviour problems.
- 56% of the carers were raising children who had at least one sibling living elsewhere, these siblings were three times more likely to be placed with non-relative carers (foster carers, adopters) than with other relative carers.

Making the placement

- 51% of the children came to live with the carers as the result of experiencing neglect, 30% because of emotional abuse and 21% physical abuse. Some children had suffered multiple abuse. Most cases featured parental drug and/or alcohol abuse, parental mental ill health or parental death.
- The local authority was involved in making almost 80% of the placements, and in two-thirds (62%) of the placements there was a child protection conference before the child came to live with the family and friends carer.
- One in five of the children had first been placed with unrelated foster carers before coming to live with the family and friends carer.
- Where the local authority had been involved, three quarters (76%) of the carers felt they did not have enough understanding of the legal options and the implications for support to make an informed decision.
- Where the child had been the subject of legal proceedings, 40% of carers had no legal representation.

Legal status of placement

- 61% of carers had taken out a legal order designed to secure the child's place with them (residence order or special guardianship order).
- Carers were most likely to be satisfied with their legal status if they had a special guardianship order. Those least satisfied were those where proceedings were ongoing and carers in Scotland who had been approved as a kin carer for a *looked after* child.

Housing

- 22% were in accommodation where the children had to share bedrooms, in some cases several to a room.

Work

- Only one in eight carers said that they had continued to work as before, and one in nine that their partner had continued to work as before.
- A third of carers (34%) had permanently given up work either because they'd taken early retirement and/or lost their job or had to give up work; and a further 4% had to give up work temporarily. More than 10% reported that their partner had ceased work for one of these reasons.

Finances

- 42% of carers were not receiving any income-related benefits
- Over 80% of carers had spent money on clothing, shoes and bedding for their kin children. 42% had spent £1000 or more on purchases for the kin children. In all four out of five carers had received no financial help from the local authority with such purchases.
- 125 carers stated that in the last year or so, they were having difficulty making payments on time for electricity bills, 108 said they were struggling to pay their gas bill on time
- More than 4 in 10 carers and their families have had no holiday in the last year.

Support

- 44% said they had not received any help from the local authority.
- Carers expressed very low satisfaction with the help they had received from the local authority, with more than half (54%) giving the lowest rating possible, and only 5% giving them the highest rating possible.
- When asked about unmet needs, over half of carers said emotional support for themselves.

The positives

- 281 comments were left on the positive effects that becoming a kinship carer had on their lives. The most common mentioned was seeing the child's development, that the child was safe and secure, the child's happiness and that becoming a family and friends carer had made them a better person.

2. Introduction

2.1 Context and Aims

Over the last decade there has been increasing recognition, both at a local and national policy level, of the role played by relatives and friends in raising children who are unable to live with their parents. These carers are known as family and friends carers and also sometimes referred to as kinship carers. For the purpose of this report the children they are raising are referred to as kin children.

A census analysis found that in 2001 there were 173,200 children being raised by relative carers.¹ This is a significant increase from 1991, and the number has probably continued to increase since then. Typically, these carers are grandparents, aunts, uncles, or siblings, who step in to care for a child because of parental difficulties, mental or physical ill health, domestic abuse, alcohol or substance misuse, imprisonment or bereavement. A small minority of these children (around 3%) are *looked after* by the local authority² and are then placed with their relatives or friends who are approved as foster carers for them³; but by far the majority are living with their relatives and friends either informally with the parents' agreement⁴ or under a residence order or special guardianship order which they are granted by the courts.

The government has recognised the proven benefits to children of living with family and friends carers, rather than entering the care system, by publishing statutory guidance for local authorities on how they should work with these carers. It has also passed legislation requiring local authorities to place *looked after* children with family and friends carers⁵, if this is safely possible, in preference to a placement with unrelated foster carers. Although such recognition is welcome, this survey highlights the extreme challenges many such carers face,

often losing their job to take on the care of the child, getting into debt and receiving little, if any, help.

Previous studies of family and friends care arrangements have provided invaluable information. It has been demonstrated that despite having suffered similar adversities to children entering the care system, and being raised by carers who receive little if any support, children who are placed with family and friends carers are likely to do as well as if not better than children placed with unrelated foster carers.⁶ However, earlier studies have been limited to carers in a particular geographical area, or who have been identified by one particular means, such as those known to particular local authorities, or those placed through care proceedings or under a special guardianship order.

By using the internet to reach as wide a sample as possible, the aim was to overcome these restrictions. The carers taking part in this survey were not limited by geographical location, legal status, or links with local authorities. The only requirement for taking part in this survey was that they should be a family and friends carer.

The purpose of this survey is to provide the most accurate picture to date of the lives and circumstances of these carers and children. Previous studies have shown that these carers are themselves often experiencing serious difficulties: they can fall into financial hardship, become overcrowded and feel isolated from their own network of family and friends as a result of taking on the care of a child or children who are not their own, often in an emergency. And yet they have shown high levels of commitment to the children they are raising.

The beneficiaries of collecting such information should be the carers themselves, and the children they are raising, as it will provide data which can be used by local authorities to allocate resources by anticipating the sort of issues that family and friends carers face. It will also enable carers and the organisations which lobby with them and on their behalf, to identify the greatest areas of unmet need among these carers and children.

The survey included questions on what carers felt to be the most important issues facing them,

1 Nandy, Selwyn, Farmer and Vaisey (2011) *Spotlight on Kinship Care: Using Census microdata to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK at the turn of the Twentieth century* Bristol: University of Bristol. The figures in this study only relate to children being raised by relatives, not those living with friends.

2 A child is looked after by the local authority if they are in care with the agreement of their parents or other with parental responsibility if they are under an EPO or care order. In these circumstances the relative or friend must refer back to the social worker about all major decisions concerning the child's life.

3 They must be approved in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards on Fostering, unless the placement is made in an emergency in which case they must be approved in accordance with Regulation 24 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.

4 Since they do not have parental responsibility for the child in these circumstances, they have to refer back to the parents in relation to most important decisions about the child's life. The child may also be removed from their care by the parents

5 who are approved as local authority foster carers, see chapter 3 for further information

6 Farmer and Moyers (2008) *Kinship Care: Fostering Effective Family and Friends Placements* London, Jessica Kingsley; & Hunt, Waterhouse and Lutman (2008) *Keeping them in the family: Outcomes for children placed in kinship care through care proceedings* London, BAAF found that children in family and friends care are as safe, and doing as well if not better, in relation to their health, school attendance and performance, self-esteem, social and personal relationships and a marked improvement to emotional behavioural problems when compared with children in unrelated foster care

and their suggestions for addressing these issues. These suggestions will form a cornerstone for the Kinship Care Alliance's⁷ policy agenda for securing improved recognition and support for these carers and improving outcomes for the children being raised by them and for enabling more children who cannot live with their parents, to be able to be raised safely within their wider family network.

2.2 Methodology

a) Design:

The survey was designed by Rachida Aziz, Cathy Ashley and David Roth of Family Rights Group, in consultation with Joan Hunt from the Oxford University Centre for Family Law and Policy and members of the Kinship Care Alliance tax and benefits working group including Alison Gillies, Jenny McLeish, Gary Vaux and Sarah Wellard.

The survey was designed, conducted and partly analysed using the web based research tool Survey Monkey. A questionnaire was devised and a pilot study was conducted with five family and friends carers to assess the feasibility of the survey and improve the length of the survey and adjust the questions to make them easily understandable.

It was intended that the main survey should work both as a stand-alone study which would provide valuable data in its own right, and also that it should provide data that could be analysed in combination with other research into family and friends care being conducted contemporaneously by Family Rights Group⁸. The impact would be to provide a wealth of new information that would significantly assist in both formulating policies and informing practice on family and friends care and in providing greater evidence to promote resulting recommendations⁹.

The survey therefore collected extensive data and explored in depth the individual circumstances of these family and friends care arrangements. Wherever possible, the survey asked carers for their views and opinions about the task they are doing, as well as factual information about themselves. This has informed many of the report's recommendations

The survey consisted of both straightforward multiple choice closed questions, where participants were asked to provide factual data, and opportunities for participants to write about their experiences and views, giving more qualitative data. A number of the closed questions gave space for the respondents to explain their choice of answer, or to provide another answer than the choices presented to them.

The survey was accessed via the Family Rights Group website and questions were grouped into five areas:

- about the carer and their family, and the child/ren they are raising;
- how the arrangement came about, and what the legal arrangement is now;
- questions relating to finance, housing, income and any additional costs related to being a family and friends carer;
- non-financial support received by the carer; and
- an opportunity for carers to comment on the impact that becoming a family and friends carer has had on their lives, and to suggest what could be done to make things better for them.

The survey used words and terminology that are familiar to carers where possible. For example, we asked questions about social services rather than Children's Services, as not everyone is aware of the change in terminology. It was also decided that carers participating in the survey should be able to skip questions they felt were not relevant to their circumstances. It is not possible to know however, why those who skipped any particular question did so.

7 The Kinship Care Alliance is a group of organisations, academics and practitioners who subscribe to a set of shared aims and beliefs on the issue of family and friends care. It meets regularly to develop a joint policy agenda and agree strategies to promote the alliance's aims. To find out more go to <http://www.frg.org.uk/involving-families/family-and-friends-carers/kinship-care-alliance>

8 Hunt J and Waterhouse S (2012) *Understanding family and friends care: the relationship between need, support and legal status* (FRG/Oxford University Centre for Family Law and Policy): in-depth interviews with 95 households; Aziz R and Roth D (2012) *Understanding family and friends care: analysis of a population study* (FRG): analysis of 77 kinship care children living in 68 households from Government's "Understanding Society" survey, contrasting them with other non-kin families from the same study; Roth D, Aziz R and Lindley B (2012) *Understanding family and friends care: local authority policies – the good, the bad and the non-existent* (FRG) based on a Freedom of Information questionnaire sent in October 2011

9 Ongoing work includes a study of decision-making about the legal status of family and friends care arrangements, and how this relates to support provided, being carried out by Family Rights Group and Oxford University with funding from the Big Lottery; and an audit of the effects of poverty on family and friends carers in three London Boroughs, funded by the Trust for London and the Tudor Trust.

b) Sample:

The family and friends carers who took part in this survey were recruited by publicising the survey as widely as possible including via the Family Rights Group website, self-help support groups for family and friends carers, Facebook groups of family and friends carers, and through organisations who work with and support these carers, including those in the Kinship Care Alliance.

515 family and friends carers participated in the survey. By using the IP addresses¹⁰, we eliminated duplication (possibly due to two carers from the same household both completing the survey) and thus cleaned the data. 493 participants made up the final sample to be analysed with 411 (83%) having fully completed the questionnaire.

c) Limitations of the survey include:

- i) Carers who were not involved in one of these support networks or in touch with any of the family and friends care support organisations could not have been recruited;
- ii) An internet survey is by its nature restrictive, excluding those who don't have easy access to the internet and/or are not familiar with computers/the internet. This is likely to particularly affect certain sections of the community, including much older and impoverished carers. Thus there can be a bias in the results. To help overcome this, we did also send out hard copies of the survey when requested for carers to fill in with a stamped addressed envelope, and then Family Rights Group inputted the data.
- iii) The length of the survey could have deterred carers including some for whom English was not their first language. We were mindful of this and tried to balance length with our wish to elicit extensive information from those who did fill in the survey.
- iv) An internet survey also carries its own constraints, compared to research which is based on interviews: there is no opportunity for dialogue, so that where the participant finds a question unclear, or where the researcher feels that the participant's answer does not provide the requested information, there is no opportunity for clarification through discussion. Also the researcher cannot follow up an interesting response with questions to explore an issue further. Moreover, internet surveys are often restrictive by their nature, for example by

using mainly multiple choice questions, they do not allow for the depth of narrative that can come out from an interview (although they can provide excellent factual data). We tried to address this by providing opportunities for participants to comment freely, and some moving and eloquent testimony has emerged from the participants' written comments.

- v) Some groups of family and friends carers may be under or overrepresented in this survey. For example, sibling carers make up a small proportion at only 2% of respondents in this survey, but an analysis of the 2001 census showed that they made up 38% of all family and friends carers.¹¹ This could be because they constitute a younger group of carers, who may be less engaged in the formal support networks and the agencies or voluntary organisations through which the survey was advertised.

d) Analysis

The quantitative part of the survey was analysed using SPSS and the statistical tools available in Survey Monkey. The qualitative part of the survey (open ended questions) was analysed with the software Nvivo9 and statistical tools from Survey Monkey.

e) Terminology

We have reflected in this report the language and terms that carers regularly used in responding to the survey. For example, carers tended to use the term social services, despite changes in local government structures which mean that most English authorities are now structured into Adult and Children's Services Departments. Some carers referred to themselves as kinship carers, others as family and friends carers, we have therefore used both terms during the report, interchangeably.

¹⁰ The Internet Protocol address is an identification number assigned to a specific electronic device e.g. computer

¹¹ Nandy, S., Selwyn, J., Farmer, E. and Vaisey, P (2011) *Spotlight on Kinship Care* Bristol: University of Bristol

2.3 Acknowledgements

Considerable thanks is due to The Big Lottery, Trust for London, Tudor Trust and The Noel Buxton Trust for funding our work in designing and analysing this survey.

We would also like to acknowledge organisations in the Kinship Care Alliance, those who sit on The Big Lottery Research Steering Group and the Kinship Care Alliance tax and benefits working group for informing the design of the survey, providing feedback and promoting the survey widely. The generosity and expertise of partner organisations explains the strength of much of the Kinship Care Alliance's work. We would particularly like to thank Paul Adams, Lynn Chesterman, Alison Gillies, Joan Hunt, Jenny McLeish, Robert Tapsfield, Madeleine Tearse, Gary Vaux, Sarah Wellard and Cherecee Williams for their significant input.

But most of all we would like to thank the family and friends carers who completed the survey, for giving up their time to fill it in, and also for providing their very moving testimonies.

3. The legal framework

3.1 Context

This chapter sets out the legal framework for promoting and supporting family and friends care in England and Wales. It does not cover the law relating to family and friends care in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Typically, relatives and friends who step in to care for children who cannot remain at home with their parents have two key needs:

- i) the need to be able to make decisions about how the child in their care is raised; and frequently,
- ii) the need to have financial and other support to care for them.

In March 2011 the government issued statutory guidance to local authorities on family and friends Care¹². This guidance requires every English local authority to have a policy, by 30th September 2011, setting out the support they will provide to family and friends carers and the children they are arising. The new statutory guidance says that ...*'No child or young person should have to become looked after... for the sole purpose of enabling financial, practical or other support to be provided to the child's' carer.*¹³ (para 2.19)., In practice however, as this report demonstrates, there is significant variation in how these needs are met, often linked to the legal status of the child: when children are *looked after* local authorities must support them and when they are not, local authority support is at the council's discretion. We have therefore set out the different legal statuses¹⁴ under which a child in family and friends care may be raised and the key relevant legal provisions about how decisions are made and what support is available.

The key legal statuses include:

- **Private arrangements** whereby children are living with family and friends carers as a result of a private arrangement between the parents and the carer. This can include private fostering;
- Children live with relatives or friends under a **residence or special guardianship order**; or
- **Children are looked after by the local authority** (whether in care or accommodation) and placed with relatives or friends who are approved as local authorities foster carers on a short or long term basis.

3.2 Private arrangements

What is a private arrangement and what are the implications?

When arrangements for a child to live with a relative or friend are made directly between the parents and the carers and the local authority is not involved, the carer does not have parental responsibility¹⁵ for the child (unless they are successful in applying to court for a residence or special guardianship order – see below). This directly affects their ability to make decisions about the child's care: they have a right to make decisions on most day to day matters¹⁶ but they must refer back to the parents or others with parental responsibility for all important decisions about the child's care¹⁷. This can be very difficult when there are tensions between the parent and carer or if the parent is absent since they will need their consent to important routine things like medical or dental treatment and school trips.

In these circumstances many carers need to be referred to:

- sources of independent advice and advocacy to find out how they may acquire parental responsibility for example by applying to court for a residence or special guardianship order¹⁸; and

12 DfE, *Statutory Guidance on Family and Friends Care* (2011), <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Family%20and%20Friends%20Care.pdf>. This guidance is issued under s.7 Local Authority social Services Act 1970 which means that The local authority should comply with it unless there are exceptional local circumstances to justify not following it.

13 Ibid, para 2.19

14 Carers could also be testamentary guardians if they were appointed by the parents/special guardians in writing (often but not always in a will) to look after their child after they die, who have now died and the appointment has taken effect (s.5 Children Act 1989); or they could have adopted the child. In both cases they have parental responsibility, giving them the right to make decisions about how the child is raised and the child will not be looked after by the local authority unless this has occurred subsequently. However, since these statuses occur very rarely in family and friends care, we have not included the detailed legal provisions which would apply but further information about this could be obtained from Family Rights Group free confidential advice service on 0808 801 0366 open 9.30-3.30 Mon-Fri or email advice@frg.org.uk.

15 Parental responsibility is defined as: "All the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority, which by law a parent has in relation to the child and the administration of his or her property." (s.3(1) CA 1989). This includes consent to medical/dental treatment and school trips, what religion they will follow, agreeing to the child being taken outside the UK etc. One or more people can have parental responsibility at the same time.

16 s.3(5) Children Act 1989

17 ss. 2 & 3 Children Act 1989

18 They can be referred to Family Rights Group's free confidential advice service on 0808 801 0366 open 9.30-3.30 Mon-Fri or email advice@frg.org.uk. They may also be signposted to FRG's advice sheets: DIY Residence Orders for Family and Friends Carers and DIY Special Guardianship Orders for Family and Friends Carers <http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets>

- family mediation to help them negotiate any difficult issues with the parents¹⁹. Public funding is available for mediation in this context, although it is means tested.

The local authority is not usually involved in such arrangements unless they are providing support for the arrangement as outlined below. However, if the family and friends carer is not a local authority foster carer or a grandparent, aunt, uncle, stepparent or sibling²⁰ and the arrangements is to last more than 28 days then it will also be termed a **private fostering arrangement**. In these circumstances both the parent and the carer are under a duty to notify the local authority which must then investigate, inspect the premises and monitor the arrangement by regular visits²¹.

i) Financial support for private arrangements

The starting point is that the parents remain legally liable to support their child²²; the family and friends carer is not legally liable to maintain the child. However, the very nature of these placements means that the parents are often unable to provide for their child. The only other sources of financial support for family and friends carers when there is a private arrangement are²³

- state benefits, including child benefit and certain means tested benefits and tax credits to which they may be entitled if the carer is on a low income or is not working; and,
- if the child is assessed as being in need under s.17 Children Act 1989²⁴, they may be able to get discretionary support from the local authority under s.17 (6). Previously this provision only allowed cash help to be provided in exceptional circumstances, but this restriction has now been removed so that both one off and ongoing cash

19 To find a mediator, you can contact: your local National Family Mediation (NFM) service in your area. A list of services can be found at the following weblink: <http://www.nfm.org.uk> or you can also call NFM on 01392 271610 - open 9.00am - 5.00pm (Monday - Friday) or email: general@nfm.org.uk; or The Ministry of Justice's Family Mediation Helpline (on 0845 602 6627) who can refer you to a mediator from their joint register.

20 This is the definition of 'relative' set out in s.105 Children Act 1989

21 The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 s.1 Child Support Act 1991

23 For more detailed information see FRG advice sheet *Support for relatives and friends who are caring for someone else's child* <http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets>

24 The definition of a child in need is set out in s.17(10) Children Act 1989 and includes a child who is aged under 18 and:

- who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of appropriate services by a local authority; or
- whose health or development is likely to be significantly impaired or further impaired without the provision of appropriate services by a local authority; or
- who is disabled.

help can be given to family and friends carers provided the child is deemed to be in need. Moreover, the statutory guidance on family and friends care says that the

- 'local authority should have in place clear eligibility criteria in relation to the provision of support services under section 17, including financial support to children living with family and friends carers'²⁵. And
- 'where financial support is offered, a written agreement should be drawn up detailing the level and duration of the support that is to be provided, and the mechanism for review, to ensure that all parties remain clear about the arrangements'.²⁶

ii) Support for young people in further and higher education

Children in private family and friends care arrangements may receive some financial help with further and higher education:

Further education:

- There is a new 'bursary' scheme (which replaced Education Maintenance Allowance) for 16-19 year olds who stay on in further education after GCSEs.
- If the young person is not *looked after* by the local authority, the young person can apply to their school or college for the bursary but there is no right to it – it is administered by schools and colleges on a discretionary basis for students in non-advanced education (i.e. below university degree level).
- However, some young people do have a right to £1200 per year payment including:
 - those who are disabled (getting both ESA and DLA);
 - those on income support (e.g. because they are living independently); and
 - 16-17 year olds in the care system and 18-19 year old care-leavers.²⁷

Higher Education:

A student applying for university financial support is assessed on the basis of their own and their parents' household income.

- A parent is defined as a natural or adoptive parent, so it does not include any other type of carer. This means that the income of a family and friends carer under a private arrangement

25 Ibid para 3.7

26 Ibid para 4.23

27 See: <http://www.ypla.gov.uk/learnersupport/16-19-bursary> for more information.

will not be taken into account unless they have adopted the child.

- The young person will still be financially assessed on the basis of their parent's household income, even if they do not live with them, unless they are classed as an independent student²⁸. If the student is an independent student they will be financially assessed on their own income.

Calls to Family Rights Group's advice service and respondents to the internet survey indicate confusion about University finance for kin children both amongst decision makers and carers, causing the latter significant worry.

iii) Practical and emotional support

The local authority must also provide **other practical and emotional support** to children who are assessed as being in need in their area under s.17,²⁹ including those in family and friends care. However, how the local authority applies this in individual cases depends on the local authority assessing the individual's needs both to decide if they fall within their eligibility criteria to receive services under s.17 and to decide what services would be appropriate to meet those needs. The statutory guidance on family and friends care specifically states that the eligibility criteria should include children living in family and friends care.³⁰ Government guidance on child protection also says that this **help for a child in need should never be dependent on the child being at risk of harm**; it should be based on an assessment of the child's needs.³¹

The kind of services they can provide include:

- Counselling and social work support for the child;
- Day Care which could include day nurseries, playgroups, child minding, and out of school clubs;

- Advice and guidance for example about services available in their area including childcare, nurseries, schools, colleges, leisure facilities, etc³²; and also signposting to advice about benefits and tax credits³³;
- Help with contact arrangements to enable the child to stay in touch with members of the family whilst they are in family and friends care. This can include financial help and also being referred to contact centres and mediation services where support is needed to help resolve contact difficulties or adjust the arrangements.³⁴ If the carer is not eligible for public funding, help with the costs of mediation could be given out of the s.17 (6) budget;
- Help with accommodation: this should include help to obtain suitable accommodation with the housing and social care departments of the local authority working together to ensure that family and friends carers housing needs are prioritised to avoid the child becoming unnecessarily *looked after* (i.e. going into state care)³⁵. It could also involve Children's Services giving the family and friends carer financial help with the deposit to rent a bigger flat or in some rare cases to build an extension onto their house where their existing accommodation is too small to include the child, again out of the s.17(6) budget;
- Respite accommodation whereby the child may go to stay with unrelated foster carers for a short period, with the agreement of the parent or someone else with parental responsibility, in order to give the family and friends carer a break from their caring responsibilities. This service is most frequently available to disabled children on a 'short break' basis, but Children's Services can provide respite accommodation for any children in need who would benefit from this if they meet the criteria in s.20³⁶;
- Support groups for family and friends carers.³⁷

The local authority should publish information about these services, and how they can be accessed, in leaflets and on websites and should make sure that they are disseminated through a wide range of agencies. They should also appoint a senior officer who is responsible for ensuring that all staff are trained and are sensitive to the needs of family and friends carers, both in the local authority and

28 A young person is treated as 'independent' where they are estranged from their parents (in the opinion of the Secretary of State), or their parents have both died, or they were looked after by Children's Services for 3 months ending on or after their 16th birthday and before the first day of their further education course.

The 'independent student' category is decided on a case by case basis, depending on the particular circumstances of that family. Usually a young person will not be considered estranged from their parents unless they have had no contact for more than one year, or can show in some other way that their relationship with their parents has broken down irreconcilably. Further information can be found at <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/educationandlearning/index.htm>

29 s.17(1) Children Act 1989

30 Ibid para 3.6

31 *Working Together to Safeguard Children* 2010, para 5.75 <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/00305-2010DOM-EN.pdf>

32 Ibid para 4.15-18

33 Ibid para 4.20

34 Sched 2 para 10 Children Act 1989 and ibid paras 4.27-33

35 Ibid, para 4.24

36 s.20 Children Act 1989

37 Ibid paras 4.38-41

in other agencies. This person will be accountable for any failings of the local authority to have and implement such a policy. There is no requirement to have a dedicated kinship or family and friends care team but it is suggested that this may be helpful³⁸

What about children who are placed with family and friends carers by the social worker but are then deemed to be in a private arrangement?

When there is a crisis in the parental home and there is a risk to the child's safety and well-being, the local authority is likely to be involved in making sure plans for the child are safe and that their well-being will be promoted. This may be in the context of child protection enquiries³⁹ and/or they may refer the family to a family group conference.⁴⁰ It is increasingly common practice in these circumstances for the local authority to ask relatives or friends to look after a child without any court proceedings being initiated and sometimes without the parents being actively involved in making the arrangement. Such placements may be made in an emergency, with little or no planning in advance, yet frequently become the long term or permanent arrangements by default.

Such arrangements can be problematic for family and friends carers. It is common for the local authority to argue that the child is in a private arrangement, that they do not need to remain involved and that, as a result, they are not under any legal duty to provide financial or other support to the placement.⁴¹ This leaves the carer unclear as to what they are allowed to decide about raising the child since they do not have parental responsibility for the child and also removes their right to support from the local authority and leaves them dependent on discretionary support.

This practice however, has been held to be unlawful: the Court of Appeal has confirmed that where the local authority has been involved in making such a placement and has not agreed otherwise with the carer, the child should be treated as being *looked after* by the local authority,⁴² although obviously parental consent to this or a

care or emergency protection order should also be obtained. In such circumstances, the family and friends carer should be treated as a local authority foster carer and should therefore be assessed and approved as such⁴³. They should also be entitled to receive a fostering allowance and support to care for the child⁴⁴. This is discussed further below under section 3.5.

However many local authorities still seek to avoid this legal status for the child, at least in part because of the resource commitment involved. Family and friends carers in this situation should be referred to sources of independent legal advice as a matter of urgency.⁴⁵

3.3 Residence orders

A family and friends carer who wishes to have more autonomy over their care of the child often decides (sometimes with the encouragement of the local authority) to apply for a residence order. The local authority can provide financial assistance towards the legal costs incurred in making this application out of their s.17(6) budget⁴⁶ but again this is discretionary.

A residence order decides where a child will live and confers parental responsibility on the person in whose favour the order is made. It normally lasts until the child is 18 unless it is revoked or otherwise specified by the court. The child's parents have a right to apply to court to revoke a residence order and this would be decided on the basis of what the court considered was in the child's best interests.

i) Residence orders and making decisions about the child

Unless a court order specifically says otherwise, a family and friends carer with a residence order may make most important decisions about the child's care, for example regarding contact arrangements, and can also consent to dental and medical treatment, school trips etc. However they may not

38 Ibid paras 4.9 & 4.12

39 s.47 Children Act 1989

40 Further information about FGCs can be found in FRG advice sheet on Family Group Conferences <http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets> and Family Group Conferences in the Court Arena <http://www.frg.org.uk/involving-families/family-group-conferences/fgc-news-and-developments>

41 Tapsfield, R (2001) 'Kinship Care: A Family Rights Group Perspective'. In Broad, B (ed.) (2001) Kinship Care: the placement choice for children and young people (Russell House)

42 Southwark LBC –v- D [2007] 1 FLR 2181; A –v- Kent Local Authority [2011] EWCA 1303

43 Emergency assessments of family and friends carers would take place under Reg 24 CPPCRR; full fostering assessments are conducted in accordance with Regulation 3 Fostering Services Regulation 2011.

44 s.22C Children Act 1989

45 They can be referred to Family Rights Group's free confidential advice service on 0808 801 0366 open 9.30-3.30 Mon-Fri or email advice@frg.org.uk, or to a specialist child welfare solicitor: contact Solicitors Regulation Authority, Ipsley Court, Redditch, Worcestershire B98 0TD Telephone: 0870 606 2555 <http://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/find-use-instruct-solicitor.page>; or The Law Society of England and Wales, 113 Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1PL Tel: 020 7242 1222 Minicom: 0870 600 1560 Fax: 020 7831 0344 E-mail: info.services@lawsociety.org.uk www.lawsociety.org.uk or search their website for local solicitors who are members of the Children Panel: <http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/choosingandusing/findasolicitor.law>

46 S.17(6) Children Act 1989

take the child outside the UK⁴⁷ for longer than one month without the consent of everyone else with parental responsibility. Also, they may not appoint a testamentary guardian for the child which can leave carers worrying about what may happen to the child if they die.

ii) Residence orders and support

In terms of support, the position is similar to private arrangements. The parents are legally liable to support the child financially and the carer with the residence order is not, although they may end up having to do so in practice. As with private arrangements, where the parents are unable to provide, the carer with the residence order may be entitled to:

- state benefits including child benefit and certain means tested benefits and tax credits depending on their circumstances;
- if the child is assessed as being in need, the carer and the child may receive discretionary financial and other support from the local authority under s.17 as outlined under 3.2 above;
- a residence order allowance which the local authority has a discretionary power to pay⁴⁸. Case law confirms that this can be paid by the local authority even if it was requested by the carer *after* the residence order was applied for⁴⁹.

The position regarding support for further and higher education is the same as for private arrangements as set out under 3.2 above.

3.4 Special Guardianship Orders

Family and friends carers, who wish to seek a more permanent legal arrangement for a child, are increasingly choosing to apply for a special guardianship order (often with the support of the local authority).

A special guardianship order lasts until the child is 18 unless it is revoked by the court. It is more secure legally than a residence order because a parent cannot apply to revoke it unless they have the permission of the court and they will not get this permission unless they have evidence of a significant change in circumstances since the order was made⁵⁰. However, unlike an adoption order, it does not sever the legal relationship between the child and his/her birth family.

i) Special guardianship and decision-making about the child:

A special guardianship order gives the carer parental responsibility for the child which they may exercise to the 'exclusion of anyone else with parental responsibility'⁵¹. This means that the special guardian can make most decisions about the child without referring back to the parents⁵² and they can also appoint a guardian to look after the child if they die⁵³. However they still need the consent of everyone with parental responsibility or the permission of the court: to change the child's surname, to remove the child from the UK for more than 3 months, and where this is required by law (e.g. marriage between 16-18)⁵⁴. They also have no right to override the parents' rights in relation to adoption or placement for adoption and they must notify the parent if the child dies.

However, as with residence orders, the child's parents can apply to the court for a prohibited steps order or specific issue order (s.8 CA) to ask the court to decide how parental responsibility should be exercised by the carer in relation to a particular issue which is in dispute. This opens up the possibility of the parent challenging the carer about key decisions relating to the child's care in spite of the special guardian having parental responsibility for them.

ii) Special guardianship orders and support

Again, in terms of support for the arrangement, the position is similar to private arrangements, in that the child's parents are legally liable to support their child financially and the person with the special guardianship order is not, although they may end up having to do so in practice. A special guardian may be entitled to:

- state benefits, including child benefit and other means tested benefits, and tax credits depending on their circumstances;
- if the child is assessed as being in need, they and the child may receive discretionary ongoing financial and other support from the local authority under s.17 CA as outlined under 3.2 above.

51 s.14C(1)(b) Children Act 1989

52 A parent retains the right to apply to the court for a prohibited steps order or specific issue order (s.8 Children Act 1989) to ask the court to determine how parental responsibility is exercised in relation to a particular issue which is in dispute, but the court is less likely to grant such an order than under a residence order because of the exclusive nature of the special guardian's parental responsibility.

53 s.5 Children Act 1989 as amended by s.115(4) Adoption and Children Act 2002

54 S.14C Children Act 1989

47 Re B (A Child) CA (Civ Div) 24/7/2007

48 Sched 1 para 15 Children Act 1989

49 R(H) –v- Essex CC [2009] EWHC 353

50 s.14D(3)(b) Children Act 1989

In addition, the local authority has a **duty to establish special guardianship support services**.⁵⁵ This includes financial assistance, although this does not give an individual carer entitlement to a specific service: the help they get will depend upon the local authority's eligibility criteria and an assessment of their needs. The local authority should therefore have a special guardianship financial support scheme in place, with clear eligibility criteria. The scheme should cover payment of a regular income set at the level of fostering allowances to support the placement⁵⁶, subject to a means test⁵⁷.

Other support services include help with contact, support groups and assistance with legal costs, none of which are means tested.⁵⁸ In addition, if the child was *looked after* in the care system before the Special Guardianship Order was made, the local authority should also provide advice and assistance including financial support to the young person after they reach 18.⁵⁹

As stated an individual child or carer's access to these services will depend on an assessment of need. **If the child was *looked after* immediately before the Special Guardianship Order was made, the carer and child have a right to have their support needs assessed**; but in all other cases, although there is a strong expectation that the local authority will carry out an assessment, this is identified in statutory guidance as being discretionary⁶⁰. However, whether or not services are provided to meet the identified needs is a matter for the local authority's discretion informed by their assessment of need and detailed statutory guidance⁶¹.

The position regarding support for further and higher education is the same as for private arrangements as set out above.

3.5 Children who are *looked after* by the local authority and placed with family or friends

i) Who is a *looked after* child?

A child is *looked after* when they are in care under a care or emergency protection order or when they

55 s.14F Children Act 1989

56 Regulation 3, 6, 8, 9, 10 & 13 Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 (SGR)

57 R (on the application of B)(Claimant) –v- Lewisham LBC and MB [2008] EWHC 738

58 Regulation 3 & 13 SGR

59 s.14F (1) s.24 (1)A Children Act 1989 and Regulation 22 Special Guardianship Regulations 2005

60 Regulation 11 SGR

61 Regulation 12-16 SG

are in local authority accommodation by voluntary agreement with the parents/those with parental responsibility⁶².

ii) Priorities for deciding where a *looked after* child should be placed

When a child is *looked after* in the care system, the local authority must first of all consider making arrangements for the child to live with their parents or others with parental responsibility or a person who has a residence order (subject to essential checks⁶³ being made), unless to do so would be contrary to their welfare, or is not reasonably practicable.⁶⁴ But if they are unable to make such an arrangement, then, provided it is consistent with the child's welfare, they must place the child with relatives, friends or other people connected with the child, who are approved as local authority foster carers, in preference to unrelated foster carers, children's homes or other statutory placements⁶⁵. Such carers will be assessed under the new Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the new National Minimum Standards for Foster Care 2011.⁶⁶

iii) Emergency placements with family and friends carers

Looked after children can be placed in an emergency with a relative, friend or other 'connected person' provided the carer is approved on a temporary basis as a foster carer for them.⁶⁷ There is a new requirement for more detailed checks to be undertaken for any emergency placements than previously.⁶⁸ These do not necessarily have to be completed before the child comes to live with the carer but where this has not been possible, they must be done within days⁶⁹. These emergency arrangements can last up to 16 weeks (and in exceptional cases they can be extended to 24 weeks) during which time the carer needs to be fully assessed and approved as a foster carer⁷⁰ in order for the placement to continue.

62 s.22(1) Children Act 1989

63 Reg 15-20 Care Planning, Placement and Review Regulations 2010

64 s. 22C(2),(3)&(4) Children Act 1989. Following current case law, if a child was to live with a parent etc under these arrangements, they would not longer be 'looked after' unless they were the subject of a care order or interim care order - see GC v LD, DD, RBK, LCC [2009] EWHC 1942 (Fam) for review of case law on this point

65 s.22C (5)(6) & (7) Children Act 1989

66 Reg 3 Fostering Services Regulations 2011

67 Reg 24 Care Planning, Placement and Review regulations 2010

68 Sched 4 Care Planning, Placement and Review regulations 2010

69 Ibid para 5.5

70 Again, this assessment is in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the new National Minimum Standards for foster care (2011).

A relative or friend caring for a child in this context is required to enter into a fostering agreement with the local authority which includes mutual expectations and terms of the placement between the carer and the local authority, including social work and other support to be provided. They are able to make decisions about day to day care but, in relation to important decisions about the child's upbringing, must refer back to the local authority. This can seem quite onerous for a relative or friend caring for a child as they have little autonomy, but it reflects the fact that in such an arrangement they do not have parental responsibility for the child.

iv) Decisions and plans for *looked after* children

The child's needs, and how they will be met, should be set out in the child's care and placement plans. The placement plan should specifically include details of contact arrangements including with parents, grandparents and the child's other siblings, the financial arrangements for the placement and any delegated authority the carer has been given; for example they may be given specific authority to agree to a child staying overnight with a friend without having to refer back to the social worker. If the child is accommodated the child's care plan must be agreed with a parent or someone with parental responsibility or the last person caring for the child or the young person themselves if aged 16 or over.⁷¹ However if they are in care under a court order the local authority should consult with parents/ others with parental responsibility but they do not need their agreement to the plan.

v) Support for *looked after* children

In terms of support, family and friends foster carers have the same right to financial and other support as unrelated foster carers although there is discretion as to how much is paid, subject to the minimum allowances for fostered children in England⁷². This is confirmed by the Manchester case⁷³ in which Munby J held that it is unlawful to discriminate against family and friends foster carers by paying them a lesser amount as a fostering allowance than unrelated foster carers.

vi) Support for further and higher education

A young person who is *looked after* has a right to a mandatory grant of £1200 per year for further

education i.e pre-degree level e.g. sixth form college or further education college) and, provided they fall into one of the categories outlined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. They also have a right to support at university, including vacation accommodation and a higher education bursary of £2000.⁷⁴

3.5 Conclusion

Family and friends foster care placements represent only a small minority of placements of *looked after* children⁷⁵. Most kin children are not *looked after*. However these new legal requirements regarding placement of *looked after* children with family and friends foster carers in preference to unrelated carers combined with government guidance⁷⁶ to local authorities to consider wider family options before issuing care proceedings suggests that such placements are likely to increase in the future.

71 Reg 4 Care Planning, Placement and Review regulations 2010

72 s22B and 22C(10) Children Act 1989

73 The Queen on the Application of L and others -v- Manchester City Council; The Queen on the Application of R and another -v- Manchester City Council [2002] 1 FLR 43]

74 For further information see FRG advice sheet Support for relatives and friends caring for someone else's child and Support for young people leaving the care system <http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets>

75 Nandy, Selwyn, Farmer and Vaisey (2011) *Spotlight on Kinship Care: Using Census microdata to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK at the turn of the Twentieth century* (University of Bristol)

76 DfES, Vol 1 Court Orders, Children Act 1989 Regulations and Guidance 1989 Chapter 3 <http://www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/careproceedings.htm>

4. Family and friends carers: household composition

This chapter describes those who participated in the study, the carers and their household including the children they were raising.

In total 515 people filled in the survey. However, once the data was cleaned and duplicates eliminated, the number fell to 493 participants. This makes it the largest survey of family and friends carers conducted in the UK.

4.1 Children in the household

Table 4-1: Total number of children in households

Number of children in household	Frequency	%
1	230	47
2	147	30
3	77	16
4	27	6
5	7	1
6	5	1
Total number of children in households	928	
Total households	493	100

Table 4-2: Total number of kin children in households

Number of kin children in household	Frequency	%
1	301	61
2	134	27
3	43	9
4	12	2
5	2	0
6	1	0
Total number of kin children in household	762	100

A total of 928 children are being raised by the 493 family and friends carers who took part in this survey (Table 4-1). 762 of these children are being raised as kin children i.e. as part of a family and friends care arrangement (Table 4-2). This leaves 166 children who are living in 120 households for other reasons, the most likely being that they are the carers' own birth children.

Although a significant number of family and friends carers are taking on additional child-rearing responsibilities to those they already have, the majority of family and friends carers surveyed are raising kin children as the only children in their household. This could be because they are grandparents or older carers, whose own children have already grown up and left home, or they may be other relatives or friends, for example sibling carers, who do not have children of their own.

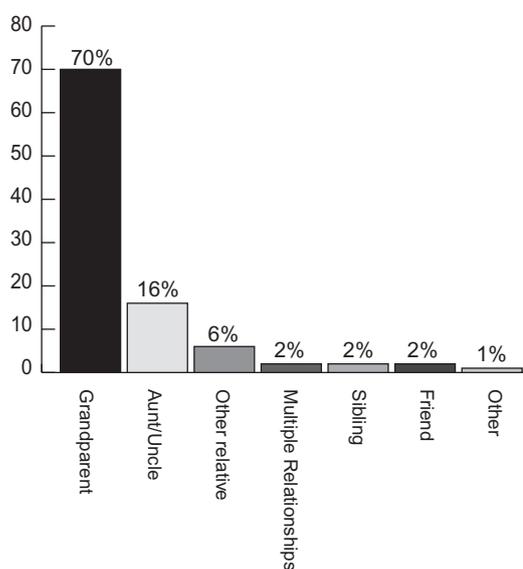
88% of the family and friends carers were raising one or two kin children, with the remaining 12%

raising three or more kin children. It is worth noting that some of the respondents to the survey have taken on huge levels of additional responsibility when they became family and friends carers. Twelve of the respondents had each taken in four children, two had taken in five children, and one was raising six children as their family and friends carer. There are also a further four households which now have a total of six children, as a result of taking in kin children in addition to their own.

Carers who take so many additional children into their family are likely to have had to make significant adjustments to their lives. Not only will their way of life have changed dramatically, as they adjust their lives and routines around meeting the needs of the additional kin children, their finances are also likely to be under pressure as they try to provide food, clothing, activities and all other aspects of a normal family life for the new children who have arrived in their families. In some cases, social workers have insisted that they give up work in order to be available for very needy children. These same households are at risk of being detrimentally affected by the forthcoming benefit cap that forms part of the Welfare Reform Act 2012. These are carers who did not plan to have large families, but acquired them as a consequence of stepping in to help out when children they knew or were related to could no longer live with their parents.

4.2 Family and friends carers' relationship to the child/ren

Figure 4-1: Family and friends carers' relationship to the child/ren (%)

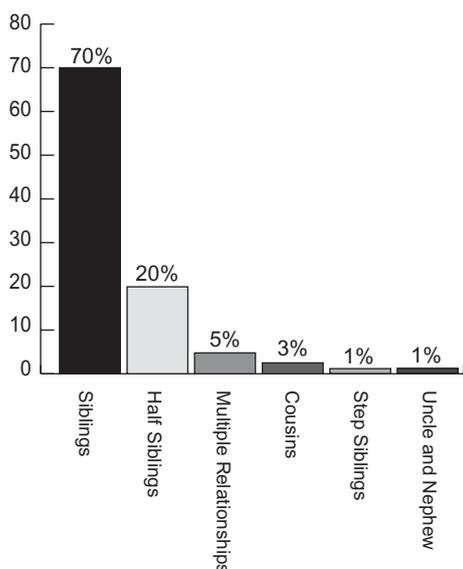


In line with most other studies of family and friends carers, fig 4-1 shows that the largest group of carers in this study were grandparents (70%). Unlike the

analysis of the 2001 census, which found that 38% of children in family and friends care were being raised by siblings⁷⁷, sibling carers made up only a small proportion (2%) of the respondents to this survey. No explanation for this difference emerged from the survey. However, previous research into sibling carers⁷⁸ showed that this particular group of carers were often not part of a support network of family and friends carers, for example they were less likely than other kinship carers to attend a support group or post regularly on online discussion forums for family and friends carer. It may be that the means of advertising and distributing the survey simply did not reach sibling carers in sufficient numbers.

4.3 Relationship between children raised by family and friends carers

Figure 4-2: Relationship between kin children (%)



Of those 182 carers who are caring for more than one kin child (Figure 4-2), 70% are raising children who are full siblings, i.e. they share both parents. A further 20% of carers are raising half-siblings, i.e. those who only share one parent. Where carers are raising their own children as well as the kin children, the children who are living *as if they were siblings* may have another family relationship, e.g. a grandparent's own child would be the uncle or aunt of the kin child. These findings are consistent with the requirements of legislation, which places a duty on local authorities to accommodate siblings together⁷⁹. Previous research has shown

77 Nandy, S., Selwyn, J., Farmer, E. and Vaisey, P. *ibid.*

78 Roth D, Lindley B, Ashley C (2011) *Big Bruv, Little Sis* London: Family Rights Group

79 s22C(8)(c) 1989 Children Act, as amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008

that where siblings were placed together the placement was less likely to break down.⁸⁰

4.4 Sibling living elsewhere

56% of family and friends carers are raising children who have at least one sibling living elsewhere.

This number is in line with the findings of Hunt et al.'s study⁸¹ of children placed with family and friends carers from care proceedings in which 57% of the children with siblings were separated from some or all of their siblings. Both Hunt et al. and Farmer and Moyers⁸² found that where children in kin placements were separated from their siblings, the siblings were often placed with other members of the extended family, and able to maintain a high level of contact with each other.

Table 4-3: Type of placement of siblings living elsewhere

Other siblings' placement	Frequency	%
Parents	107	40
Foster care	50	19
Adopted	34	13
Other relatives	30	11
Multiple placement	24	9
Over 18 or lives independently	18	7
Don't know	1	0
Residential school	1	0
(N=)	265	100

When asked where those siblings lived (N=265), 40% responded that the siblings lived with a parent; almost 20% responded that the siblings were in foster care, and 13% mentioned adoption (Table 4-3).

In light of the potential identified in other studies (Hunt et al., 2008; Farmer and Moyers, 2008) for siblings being raised by different family members to retain close contact with one another, it is interesting that in this survey only one in nine of the siblings living elsewhere are living with other relatives. Almost three times as many children had siblings who had either been adopted or were living in unrelated foster care. It raises the question of whether more of these children, who have been placed outside of their network of family and friends,

80 Schwenke, H., Hudd, S. and Vicary, D. (2006) Sibling relationships in the care system: attachment, separation and contact issues. *Children Australia*, 31(1): 5-11.; Farmer, E and Moyers, S. (2008) *Kinship Care: Fostering Effective Family and Friends Placement* London, Jessica Kingsley

81 Hunt, J., Waterhouse, S., and Lutman, E. (2008) *Keeping them in the family: Outcomes for children placed in kinship care through care proceedings* London, BAAF

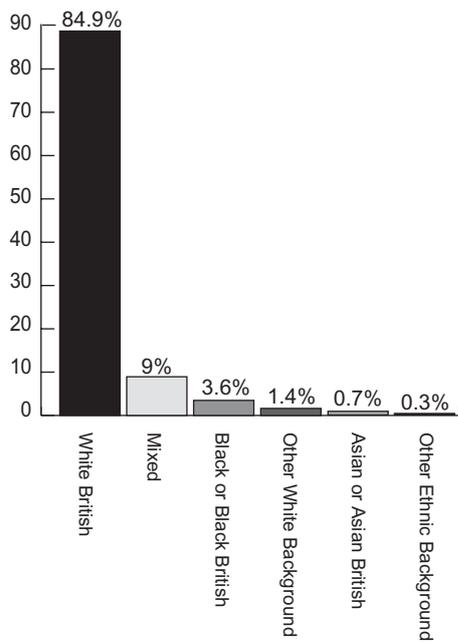
82 Hunt, J., Waterhouse, S., and Lutman, E. (2008) *ibid*; Farmer, E and Moyers, S. (2008) *ibid.*

could have been raised either by the carers who took part in the survey, or by other relatives or friends.

Earlier research has also highlighted the enduring sense of loss, felt into adulthood, by many children who were adopted separately from siblings⁸³. It would be interesting to know more about the feelings of the children in family and friends households who have been permanently separated from a sibling through the sibling being adopted. The survey findings raises the question of whether more could be done to place siblings together, or ensure they are able to remain in contact even if they cannot live together.

4.5 Children's ethnicity

Figure 4-3: Children's distribution by ethnic background (%)



Almost 85% of children raised by family and friends carers in this survey are White British (Figure 4-3). Children of mixed background made up 9% of the sample. Although this is broadly reflective of children in the wider population,⁸⁴ comparison with the analysis of kinship carers using data from the 2001 census⁸⁵ shows that children from other black

83 Pacheco, F. and Eme, R. (1993) 'An outcome of the reunion between adoptees and biological parents', *Child welfare*, 72:1, pp 53-64, found that more than a third of adoptees who had successfully traced their birth families said they got more from meeting siblings than from reunion with a birth parent.

84 Office for National Statistics (2012) Population Estimates by Ethnic Group estimates that currently 84.3% of children in England and Wales age 5-15 are white UK or white other. The remainder are members of ethnic minority communities or are of mixed parentage.

85 Nandy, S., Selwyn, J., Farmer, E. and Vaisey, P. *ibid*. In this study, 68.4% of kin children in England in 2001 were white British, Irish (white) or other (white), compared to 86.1% of the general population.

and minority ethnic groups are under-represented in this survey. Further focused research is required into the needs of these children.

4.6 Children by age group

Table 4-4: Distribution of kin children by age group

Age group	0-4 yrs	5-9 yrs	10-14 yrs	15-17 yrs	18 yrs	Total
Total kin children	160	269	187	62	8	686
%	23	39	27	9	1	100

Table 4-4 shows how the ages of 686 kin children in the survey were distributed, with their ages at the point the survey was conducted ranging from less than a year old to eighteen. 23% of the kin children were under five. The largest group of children are those aged between 5 and 9 (39%). After this, the older the children were the less often they showed up as being placed with family and friends.

This makes for an interesting comparison with the care population in March 2011⁸⁶. The proportion of children *looked after* who were under 5 was very similar at 24%, compared to 23% of kin-placed children. However, only 18% of children in care were age 5-9, compared to 39% of kin children. 37% of *looked after* children were age 10-15, and 21% were age 16 and over. In total, 58% of the care population were age 10 or over, compared to 37% of kin placed children in this survey. The survey does not provide any information on why there should be this difference in the age profiles of the two groups of children. It may be that children under five who enter care and then cannot return to their parents are likely to be moved out of care to be raised by carers who offer legal permanence, e.g. adopters or special guardians, whereas children under five who are placed with family and friends carers and then cannot return home might enjoy the stability of being able to stay on with the same carers.

Another comparison can be made with the age profile of the children living with family and friends carers in Nandy et al's analysis of the 2001 census. In the census analysis, the figures for children in the 0-4 and the 5-9 age ranges are relatively low, but show some increase for the 10-14 age range, and are highest of all for those aged 15-17 (these are overall trends, and there is some fluctuation according to variables such as gender, ethnicity

86 Department for Education: *Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England (including adoption and care leavers) - year ending 31 March 2011*. <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001026/index.shtml>

and geographic location). In other words, there is a generally upward trend, according to age: the numbers become higher as the children are older. This differs from the pattern for the children in this study, which increases for the 5-9 year age range and then tails off.

4.7 Kin children’s disability and other conditions

Table 4-5: Percentage of family and friends carers raising one or more kin children with special needs or other conditions

Type of conditions presented by kin child/ren	Frequency	%
Physical disability	29	6
Learning disability	61	12
Chronic health condition	23	5
Special educational needs	103	21
Emotional and behavioural problems	189	38
(N=)	493	

The survey asked respondents to indicate whether the child/ren they were raising had a disability or special needs. The carers could select as many as applied, and they were not restricted to describing one child or one condition. Table 4-5 sets out the responses. 229 out of the 493 carers stated that one or more of the kin children they were raising had a disability or condition. Table 4-5 presents these figures as a percentage of all 493 carers who completed the survey. A far higher proportion of kin children have a disability or special needs than in the overall child population.⁸⁷

The category most likely to be selected by the carers was ‘emotional and behavioural problems’, which was chosen by 189, or 38% of the total survey respondents. 103 (21% of total respondents) reported that they were raising a child who had special educational needs, while 61 were raising a child with a learning disability and 29 were raising a child with a physical disability. 23 were raising a child who had a chronic health condition.

120 (24%) of the total sample of 493 carers are raising children of their own as well as the kin children. In this particular subgroup of carers who

are also parents, almost two thirds (64%) are raising kin children who have one or more categories of disability or special needs. From the same subgroup, 20% are raising at least one child of their own who has one or more categories of disability or special need, in addition to kin children with these challenges. Out of 229 family and friends carers who care for at least one child with one or more conditions, 14% care for an adult with a disability, 21% care for their own children with a condition, and 5% care for both an adult and at least one own child with one or more conditions. In short, many family and friends carers who are raising children with special needs also care for other family members with special needs as well. This is a group who are likely to be experiencing high levels of stress, and who would particularly benefit from being offered respite breaks.

Table 4-6: Number of challenging conditions identified by family and friends carers for kin children only

Number of conditions disclosed by family and friends carers for kin children	1	2	3	4	5	(N=)
Distribution of family and friends carers	128	50	33	11	7	229
%	56	22	14	5	3	100

Table 4-6 sets out the numbers of carers completing this section who describe the kin children as having one or more of the categories of special needs listed in Table 4-5. The carers’ responses could apply to more than one child: a carer who selected four categories could have done so on the basis of only one child, or of two or more children. While just over half of the carers selected only one category as applying to their child, and any one of these categories would in itself be enough to require some special attention by the carer who was responsible for the child, some carers are obviously raising children who have multiple difficulties and need a lot of care and attention. Eleven carers applied four of the categories to the child or children they are raising, and seven carers stated that all five categories applied.

⁸⁷ Mooney, A., Owen, C. and Statham, J. (2008) *Disabled Children: Numbers, Characteristics and Local Service Provision* London: Department for Children, Schools and Families. This audit of local authorities concluded that it was difficult to come up with a reliable and accurate national figure for children with disabilities and special needs, as local authorities had such different ways of recording and returning the information. However, by any reckoning the numbers were considerably lower than the figures for children living with family and friends carers in this survey.

Table 4-7: Type of disability or challenging conditions presented by own children in the household

	Frequency	%
Physical disability	8	7
Learning disability	15	13
Chronic health condition	10	8
Special educational needs	27	23
Emotional and behavioural problems	39	33
Total respondents to survey question	63	
Total FFC with own children	120	

63 carers stated that they were raising a child of their own with a disability or condition, as well as the kin child. Many of these children also had more than one condition that would need special care and attention.

4.8 Gender, age, ethnicity, health condition and marital status of carer

Table 4-8: Distribution of family and friends carers by age group

Age group	22-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	>65	(N=)
Distribution of family and friends carers	6	18	103	182	134	41	484
%	1	4	21	38	28	8	100

The age of the carers surveyed ranged between 22 and 77, with the largest number falling in the 45-54 age range (Table 4-8). However the young age of a small but significant number of carers shouldn't be overlooked. Similarly 139 out of 484 who answered this question (29%) were in households with at least one carer aged 60 or over. Out of 166 single carers, 33 (20%) were aged 60 or over, and out of 327 couples 56 (17%) were both aged 60 or over. Clearly, many of these carers are taking on parenting duties at an age when they might be expecting to leave such things behind, and be thinking instead about retirement and the lighter responsibilities of being an ordinary grandparent.

Table 4-9: Ethnic background of family and friends carers

Ethnic background	Frequency	%
Asian or Asian British	1	0
Black or Black British	17	3
Mixed	10	2
White – British	431	90
White – Other	22	5
(N=)	481	100

Almost 90% of those who answered the question about ethnic background were White British (431 out of 481). 14% of the children surveyed were described as being from a black or minority ethnic background, compared to 5% of the carers. This would seem to indicate that some black and minority ethnic children are probably being raised by white relatives or friends. In this context, it is worth noting that Farmer and Moyers⁸⁸, in their comparison study, found that while some kin-placed children were not ethnically matched with their carers, this was more likely to be the case for children placed with non-relative foster carers.

Carers also provided information about their own health status. Out of 473 who answered this section, 121 (26%) have a long-term illness or disability; and 29 (24%) of those 121 have a partner with a long-term illness or disability. This is from 327 respondents to the survey who were living with a partner. Of course, as already described, for many this means they are raising children with special needs while having to deal with their own sometimes substantial health issues.

Women were far more likely than men to take part in this survey. 90% of the carers who responded to the survey were female. Women were also more likely than men to be raising the children on their own. More than a third of female family and friends carers were single compared to 4% of the men.

88 Farmer, E. and Moyers, S. (2008) *ibid*

4.9 Nations and English regions

Table 4-10: Distribution, by UK nation and English region, of originating region of index child in this survey

Region children come from	Frequency	%
South East	67	14
London	59	12
North West	59	12
East	49	10
East Midlands	49	10
Scotland	46	9
West Midlands	43	9
Yorkshire and the Humber	40	8
South West	29	6
North East	25	5
Wales	21	4
Unknown	3	1
NI	2	0
Outside the UK	1	0
(N=)	493	100

Nandy et al's census analysis⁸⁹ showed that in 2001 the highest prevalence of children living with relative carers occurred in London, the North West and the West Midlands. For our survey, carers were asked to pick one of the children they were raising, the one whose name was closest to the beginning of the alphabet, and state which local authority area that child came from. Table 4-10 shows the results of this question: two of the three areas named by Nandy et al were also included in the three regions that children in our survey that children were most likely to come from (London and the North West). The region with the highest number of children in our survey was South East. The geographical spread in this survey may be influenced by factors such as whether a region contained a disproportionately large number of support groups whose members completed the survey.

89 Nandy, Selwyn, Farmer and Vaisey (2011) *ibid*

5. Family and friends care arrangement

In this section of the survey, participants were asked to focus on one particular kin child they were raising (the 'index' child). If they were raising more than one child, they were asked to select the one whose first name was nearest to A in the alphabet, which would make the selection random in terms of other variables such as age, gender, etc.

5.1 Reasons the child cannot live with either parent

Table 5-1: Reasons the child cannot live with either parent

Reasons the child can't live with either parent	Frequency	%
Neglect	229	51
Parental drug abuse	186	41
Parent could not cope	141	31
Emotional abuse	137	30
Parental alcohol abuse	123	27
Physical abuse	95	21
Parental mental illness	93	21
Domestic violence	96	21
Parent did not want to care for the child	75	17
Parental abandonment	63	14
Poor relationship child/parent	54	12
Parental death	54	12
Parental imprisonment	34	8
Parental learning difficulties	38	8
Parents' separation	37	8
Sexual abuse	23	5
Child beyond parental control	12	3
Parental illness	14	3
Parent/partner is a convicted sex offender	6	1
Other	5	1
(N=)	458	

Carers were asked to select as many as were applicable out of a long list of reasons that the selected child (referred to here as the index child) may have come to live with them. 458 carers completed this question and while the index child had usually come to the carers for multiple reasons, four main reasons emerged: parental drug abuse was indicated by 186, or 41%; neglect by 229, or 51%; parental mental illness by 93, or 21%; and domestic violence by 96, or 21%.

These figures corroborate the findings in other studies, that children living with family and friends carers had usually suffered multiple adversities before being placed with their carers, and that the level of adversities suffered was equal to if not

greater than the level of adversities suffered by children entering the care system.⁹⁰

5.2 Length of placement

Table 5 2: Length of placement with family and friends carer

Length of kinship placement	Frequency	%
Less than 1 year	60	13
1	58	13
2	58	13
3	64	14
More than 4 years	217	48
(N=)	457	100

In terms of how long the index child had been with the carers, there was a fairly even spread in the numbers of children who had been with the carers for less than a year, or for one, two or three years. However, almost half of the respondents had been raising the index child for more than four years. This certainly indicates a high level of commitment among the carers completing the survey, although it may be that experienced carers were more likely than newer carers to have found their way to the kinship support networks that were being used to advertise the survey.

5.3 Child's residence before placement

Table 5-3: Child's residence before placement

Child's residence before placement	Frequency	%
Parent's home	291	64
Unrelated foster carer	92	20
Home of another relative	25	6
New born, placed straight from hospital	24	5
Living with you and parent	18	4
Mother-baby unit	6	1
Children's home	2	0
(N=)	458	100

Table 5-3 indicates that more than two-thirds of the children (69%) were with at least one parent in some sort of living arrangement before being placed with the carer, whether this was in the parent's home (64%), living with the carer and the parent together (4%) or in a mother-and-baby unit (1%).

90 Hunt, J., Waterhouse, S. and Lutman, E. (2008) *ibid*; Farmer, E and Moyers, S. (2008) *ibid*.

One in five of the children had first been placed with unrelated foster carers⁹¹. Whilst in some cases it may not be possible to place children entering the care system directly with family members, this figure, along with the commentary provided by some carers about how they had to battle to be considered by the local authority, strongly suggests more could be done to explore and assess family and friends care at an earlier stage and to challenge the culture amongst some practitioners which is to make assumptions about and write off the entire family network, because of the actions of one or two of its members. A more systematic offer of family group conferences and improved training for social workers in family and friends care and the law could significantly assist in avoiding unnecessary multiple placements for some children.

“The younger 3 were in foster care for 2 years before I could get them out”

(Family and friends carer’s comment)

5.4 Local authority involvement

Table 5-4: Concern and involvement by local authority

		Social services’ involvement				
		Yes	%	No	%	(N=)
Social services’ concern	Yes	332	86	30	48	362
	No	53	14	33	52	86
	(N=)	385	100	63	100	448

Table 5-4 gives the figures where the local authority was

- (a) involved in making the arrangement for the carers to take on the caring of the index child, and
- (b) where the local authority had concerns about the index child before the child came to live with the carer.

⁹¹ Until April 2011 the law required local authorities to place a looked after child with foster carers who could be relatives or friends provided they had been approved or in a residential home or to make arrangements for them to live with relatives or friends provided it was reasonably practicable and consistent with the child’s welfare formerly S.23 (2)&(6) Children Act 1989). This is the law that would have applied to the majority of these placements. However, since April 2011 the law has changed such that it is now the case that, where it is not consistent with looked after children’s welfare to place them with their parents or others with parental responsibility, local authorities are under a duty to place looked after children with relatives, friends or other connected persons who are approved as foster carers as the first placement choice, again provided it is consistent with their welfare. There are also provisions to allow emergency placements with such relatives and friends as discussed in chapter 3.

448 carers answered this section of the survey, of whom 332 (86%) reported that the local authority were both concerned about the child beforehand and were also involved in placing the child with the carers. It was six times more likely that the local authority were involved in arranging the child’s placement with the carers (reported to be the case by 385 carers) than that they were not (63 carers).

As explained in chapter 3, where a local authority plays a significant role in placing a child with family and friends carers, the child should normally be treated as looked after, and the carers and the child should be supported and financed in the same way as any other foster placement, unless there has been an explicit agreement at the time of placement that this is a private arrangement and the carer agrees to be financially responsible for the child.⁹² The experience of carers is that too often local authorities make such placements and then fail to provide the requisite support. It is of particular concern if the local authority already knows a child is living in difficult circumstances, places them family and friends because of concerns, but still does not provide support that the child needs.

5.5 Understanding of basis of placement

Table 5-5: Understanding of placement conditions and local authority’s involvement

		Social services’ involvement				
		Yes	%	No	%	(N=)
Family and friends carer’s understanding of placement conditions	Social services were placing the child with me officially	216	56	4	6	220
	The child was placed by the court	62	16	15	23	77
	It was a private arrangement	34	9	30	45	64
	The child was placed by a children’s hearing	10	3	0	0	10
	Unclear	65	17	17	26	82
	(N=)	387	100	66	100	453

⁹² Southwark LBC –v- D [2007] 1 FLR 2181; A –v- Kent Local Authority [2011] EWCA 1303

Table 5-5 shows what family and friends carers said was their understanding of the legal position at the point when the index child came to live with them, by reference to whether the local authority was involved in making the placement or not.

Of the 387 carers who reported that there was local authority involvement, 216 (56%) thought it was an official placement by the local authority. A further 72 (19%) reported that the child had come to live with them as a result of legal proceedings, either in court or in a children's hearing (Scotland).

Of particular concern are the 65 carers where the carers' understanding was the placement was made by the local authority, but who state that, at the time of placement, they were unclear about what the legal arrangement was. Even allowing for the fact that some of these placements may have been made in emergencies, if the local authority was involved, they should have provided clarity.

5.6 Family and friends carers' ability to make informed decision

Table 5-6: Understanding of legal options and implications

Understanding of legal options and implications to make informed decisions	Frequency	%
Yes	102	23
No	346	77
(N=)	448	100

Carers were also asked whether, at the time the index child came to them, they felt they knew enough about the legal options, and the implications of those options in terms of support, to make an informed decision (Table 5-6).

Over three quarters of the carers felt they did not have enough understanding of the legal situation to make an informed decision. We then broke this down further:

- Where the local authority had been involved, 289 (76%) of the carers felt they did not have enough understanding to make an informed decision.
- Where the local authority had not been involved, an even larger proportion (86%) of carers felt they did not know enough about the legal options.

Overall, this would confirm a picture of carers who wanted to do the right thing, by taking in a child who is part of their family or known to them in some other way, when that child needed somewhere to go to, but were largely unaware of the legal options and consequences of what they were doing.

The concern must be that this lack of knowledge

results in legal arrangements that are not the most suitable for them and the child. For this reason, it is particularly important that local authorities should provide family and friends carers with this information as early as possible, in accordance with recent government statutory guidance:

*"Information should be provided about the meaning and implications of different legal situations, the rights of carers and of the children's parents, and the nature of decisions which family and friends carers will be able to make in relation to the child."*⁹³

It also highlights why it is so important that family and friends carers are directed to and have access to independent advice.

5.7 Type of local authority involvement

Table 5-7: Type of local authority involvement

Has the child ever been subject to/of:	Frequency	%
A child protection conference	256	62
A children's hearing	97	24
A child protection plan	232	56
A child in need plan	141	34
A family group conference	135	33
A supervision order	2	1
A care order / interim care order	179	44
Voluntarily accommodation under (S20)	63	15
Don't know	37	9
(N=)	411	

Carers were also asked about the type of social work involvement there had been with the index child. 411 carers answered this question, and their answers seem to show that where the local authority was involved it was often due to serious concerns about the child's welfare. 256 carers (62%) reported that there had been a child protection conference, but only 141 (34%) that there had been a child in need plan. The number that reported a family group conference was lower than the number reporting court proceedings, i.e. a care order, supervision order or children's hearing. Clearly many families are still not being offered the option of a family group conference at the pre-proceedings stage.

93 Department for Education (2011) *Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities*

5.8 Legal representation

Table 5-8: Legal representation for family and friends carers in cases where the child was subject to legal proceedings

Legal representation in cases where the child was the subject of legal proceedings	Frequency	%
Yes, throughout	183	45
Yes, some of the time	64	16
No, but had access to legal advice	53	13
No	109	27
(N=)	409	

Carers were asked if the child had been the subject of legal proceedings (e.g. a care order, special guardianship order, residence order or contact order) and whether they were legally represented by a solicitor and/or barrister in court proceedings. 409 carers answered this question (Table 5-8). Overall 40% of the carers who answered this question had no one at all to represent them in court – with a further 16% having only limited representation. Presumably many of these acted as litigants in person i.e. represented themselves in court.

Given the substantial legal costs that can be involved in a court case, particularly if it is contested, this would suggest that further consideration needs to be given to the matter of paying the legal costs of family and friends carers who find themselves involved in court proceedings. We are extremely concerned that legal aid reform proposals currently being debated in Parliament may restrict significantly more carers' access to legal aid and thus increase further the numbers of litigants in persons or discourage some from seeking a permanent legal order for the child.

5.9 Current legal order

Table 5-9: Child's current legal order

Child's current legal order	Frequency	%
Interim residence order	12	3
Residence order	157	35
Special guardianship order	116	26
Adoption	1	0
The child is looked after and I'm being assessed as a kinship foster carer	14	3
The child is looked after and I'm a kinship foster carer	64	14
The child is looked after and I have been assessed as an approved kinship carer (Scotland)	12	3
Court proceedings are on-going	43	9
None of the above, it's a private arrangement	35	8
(N=)	454	

Carers were asked what the current legal arrangement was for the index child (Table 5-9). 454 respondents answered this question, of whom 60% (273) had taken out a legal order designed to secure the child's permanent place with them and giving them parental responsibility for the child. 157 of them had a residence order for the child, and 116 a special guardianship order. Only one respondent had adopted the child. A further 12 carers had an interim residence order, presumably because the case was still in proceedings, and with the possibility that they would be granted a residence or special guardianship order at its conclusion.

One-fifth of the respondents were bringing up children who were 'looked after'. These carers do not get parental responsibility for the child and hence will be unable to make many key decisions about the child.

The 35 carers (8%) who are raising the child as a private, informal, arrangement would also be unable to make key decisions about the child, as they do not have parental responsibility for them⁹⁴. They would also not be entitled to any support or allowance from the local authority, although the local authority could use its discretion to provide these, using section 17 of the 1989 Children Act.

⁹⁴ Normally, only the parents would have parental responsibility unless anyone else had already been granted it by agreement with the parents or court order – see for example s.4, s.4A Children Act 1989

Carers who said they had never been assessed or supported as foster carers were asked in the survey whether they would have wanted to be, and invited to explain their answer. 114 carers (56% of those who responded) said they would have liked to be treated as foster carers, and the two reasons most commonly given for this were that they would have been better off financially and that they would have received better support. A further 51 (25%) said they didn't know whether they would have liked this or not, the main reason given being that they had not been given enough information about what being a foster carer involved.

5.10 Satisfaction with current legal status

Table 5-10: Satisfaction with current legal status

Satisfaction with current legal status	Frequency	%
Yes	224	58
No	154	40
Don't know	8	2
Neither	2	1
(N=)	388	100

Carers were invited to explain why they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the child's legal status. Out of 224 carers who explained why they were satisfied, only 19 offered reasons that were to do with the finance and support they receive. They were more likely to be satisfied because they felt they had the right legal order (44), or because the child was secure or settled under this arrangement (40).

"Our grand daughter is placed with us and is very settled, and social services aren't involved and the decisions that need to be made we can do."

Among the 154 carers who gave reasons for being dissatisfied with the legal arrangement, the reasons most commonly given were lack of or no support (28 respondents), preference for special guardianship (28), and the lack of security under the legal arrangement (27).

"No support from social services, lies & wrong legal advice from social services. Being blackmailed into a residence order. No financial support past 3 months or until we go to court."

"I would prefer a special guardianship order but the local authority are vague at what level of, if any, financial support I would receive on such order."

Some were dissatisfied because they disputed the child's legal status with the local authority. Typically this is because, as explained in chapter 3, if the child is looked after, then the carers are entitled to all the support services and financial allowances that would be paid to any foster carer, and local authorities often attempt to deny children looked after status.

"B was returned 3 months ago after unsuccessful reunification that we opposed a year ago (we are LA foster carers and he was placed with us as such) but now we are told we agreed to take him as grandparents (negated in letter to head of children services in first week of his return!) and we are currently having to take legal action to get his legal status ascertained. My daughter initially said she didn't want him placed with us... so theoretically social services have helped us abduct him!"

"The local authority sent the children to us to prevent them being taken in to care then closed the case and brushed their hands of it. The court said we had to keep them and said we could apply for residency but not until a fact finding was finished. That took 18 months and we still have temporary care status and no parental rights, no financial support but can't send children back to mother even though she is well again!?"

The above quote raises significant questions as to whether the local authority was acting legally.

Some carers felt that the legal status was not secure enough for the child, or did not ensure enough support.

"I feel that not enough has been done to help these children who carry so much emotional baggage of feeling unwanted and abandoned by their parents."

"We thought we would get financial help and we don't."

Table 5-11: Satisfaction according to child's legal order

Child's legal order	Yes		No		Neither		(N=)
A residence order	77	60%	51	40%	0	0%	128
A special guardianship order	82	83%	16	16%	1	1%	99
Court proceedings are on-going	10	27%	27	73%	0	0%	37
Interim residence order	5	45%	6	55%	0	0%	11
None of the above, it's a private arrangement	15	48%	15	48%	1	3%	31
The child is looked after and I have been assessed as an approved kinship carer (Scotland)	2	29%	5	71%	0	0%	7
The child is looked after and I'm a kinship foster carer	28	57%	21	43%	0	0%	49
The child is looked after and I'm being assessed as a kinship foster carer	3	30%	7	70%	0	0%	10
(N=)	22	60%	148	40%	2	1%	372

Table 5-11 also shows the breakdown of carers who were satisfied or dissatisfied with the current legal status, according to their different legal arrangements for raising the child.

The highest level of satisfaction was shown by carers who had special guardianship orders. These orders have the advantage that they:

- were likely to make the child's placement with the carers secure;
- sometimes led to the child and carer being assessed for financial assistance and support services⁹⁵; and
- gave the carer the ability to make decisions for the child.

"SGO gives stability to the child & gives us the authority to make all decisions regarding the child."

"SGO is very secure order and good to be free of local authority involvement."

"It has given us all stability and child is well settled now"

"Yes because having had 8 years fostering it was a relief to not be living in a goldfish bowl and having everything monitored, even though we recognise that the child was the responsibility of the local authority. It was a really stressful time being a foster carer for one's grandchildren and having to report every action of one's daughter to them."

"I have legal parental control now of my grandchildren and I can make all the decisions"

"A residence order has allowed me the parental responsibility I have needed over the years."

However, carers with a residence order or interim residence order were less likely overall to be satisfied with the child's legal status. This was because:

- residence orders were perceived to be vulnerable as the parents could go back to court to discharge the order, and therefore the child was less secure;
- few carers with residence orders received little if any financial or practical support from the local authority.

It is interesting that carers who identified themselves as kinship foster carers were more satisfied (57%) than dissatisfied (43%) but only by quite a small margin (14%). Out of all the different legal arrangements, fostering is the one that bestows the highest level of entitlement to financial help and support services, so it might have been anticipated that many more kinship foster carers would be satisfied with the child's legal status than dissatisfied. However, foster carers do not hold parental responsibility for the child, and cannot make plans about the child without consulting social workers, who can legally make many of the significant decisions about the child. It may be that for many the additional support does not compensate for not having a higher level of responsibility for the child.

Carers were more likely to be dissatisfied than satisfied where there was some uncertainty, e.g. if court proceedings were ongoing, they had an interim residence order, or if they were going through a kinship fostering assessment. Although

95 For more information see section 3.5 in chapter 3.

their numbers were small, carers who had been approved as kinship carers in Scotland also showed a high level of dissatisfaction with the child's legal status, by a margin of more than two to one.

Carers who were bringing up the child as an informal, private arrangement were evenly split between being satisfied and not. This may depend very much on the particular circumstances, and in particular on the sort of relationship the carers have with the child's parents.

Family and friends carers who had never been treated as foster carers (i.e. those who had a special guardianship order, residence order or no legal order) were asked whether they would have liked this option. It is interesting that of those who answered:

- 114 (57%) said they would have liked to be foster carers
- 38 (19%) said they would not
- 51 (25%) said they did not know

The reasons most commonly given for wishing to be foster carers were they would have been better off financially (59: 29%) and they would have been better supported (46: 23%).

One family and friends carer who said she wishes she'd been treated as a foster carer explained *"It has been tough financially, and emotionally because of having no back up to deal with an unstable mother."*

Some specifically cited support with contact and training as help they would have liked to receive.

"Yes had I known this was an option as I would have had the same support emotionally and financially as a foster carer. I have since had to give up my career to meet my grandson's needs."

"In the early days we held a IRO [interim residence order] and were struggling to pay nursery fees, we asked to be kinship carers but were told by social services that this could not be as the children were too young and would not be fostered but would go to adoption, if we did not take SGO [special guardianship order]."

"Would have opened door better for grandson to be given counselling and for us to be given advice, training and financial help."

"It would have brought additional support and protection particularly around contact."

Of those who did not wish they had become foster carers, the most commonly given reasons were so that they and not the local authority could be in control of the placement, and a fear of losing the child. Some also preferred a different legal option that offered greater security.

"I wanted to be a foster carer but social services said it would take up to 2 years and my grandson would be adopted by then and I would not stand a chance of getting him back so we went for guardianship."

"Because we have no faith in our local social services. They do not listen to grandparents whatsoever, and do things to suit their own purpose. We prefer the residence order to make sure our grandchild is secure with us as a family unit."

"Don't want social services interfering with kids. Special guardianship is more permanent"

Three quarters of those who did not know whether or not they would have liked to foster said the reason they did not know was a lack of information. Some were also unsure because they could see both advantages and disadvantages to being a foster carer.

"I would have liked to have had the option to consider this but had no idea at the time."

"Don't know what this is or what it involves."

"I would like this if it had entitled me to any financial support and emotional/counselling support for child but not if it meant that I didn't have parental responsibility or that social workers would constantly be visiting our home."

5.11 Reasons index child could not live with parent

Table 5-12: Reasons child can't live with either parent and treatment of carers as kinship foster carers

Reasons child can't live with either parent (could tick more than one answer)	Treated as a kinship foster carer on a short term or long term basis						(N=)
	Yes		No		Don't know		
Parent/partner is a convicted sex offender	3	60%	2	40%	0	0%	5
Child beyond parental control	5	42%	7	58%	0	0%	12
Emotional abuse	55	41%	59	44%	21	16%	135
Physical abuse	38	40%	41	44%	15	16%	94
Sexual abuse	9	39%	11	48%	3	13%	23
Parental learning difficulties	15	39%	17	45%	6	16%	38
Neglect	84	37%	110	49%	32	14%	226
Parental alcohol abuse	44	36%	56	46%	21	17%	121
Domestic violence	34	36%	42	45%	18	19%	94
Parental drug abuse	62	34%	93	51%	29	16%	184
Parental mental illness	32	34%	45	48%	16	17%	93
Parent could not cope	44	31%	76	54%	21	15%	141
Parental imprisonment	9	26%	19	56%	6	18%	34
Parental abandonment	14	23%	42	69%	5	8%	61
Parents' separation	8	22%	24	65%	5	14%	37
Parental death	11	21%	35	66%	7	13%	53
Poor relationship child/parent	11	20%	34	63%	9	17%	54
Parent did not want to care for the child	14	19%	43	60%	15	21%	72
Parental illness	2	14%	9	64%	3	21%	14
Other (please specify)		0%		0%		0%	5
(N=)							445

Table 5-12 examines the respondents who replied to the question about whether or not they had ever been treated as foster carers, and breaks them down according to the reason for the kin children being unable to live with their parents. Carers were able to indicate multiple reasons for why the child could not live with parents.

If the carers reported that they had ever been treated as foster carers, then the implication would be that the local authority had some involvement, either in arranging for the child to be placed with them, or in deciding that because of the child's circumstances he or she needed to become a looked after child. However, the reverse would not necessarily be true: if a child was not looked after, it need not imply that the local authority was not involved in arranging for the child to be placed with the carers, or that the child's circumstances might not be such that he or she could have benefitted from becoming a looked after child.

Table 5-12 shows that, regardless of the reasons for the child being placed, it was more likely that the carers had not been treated as foster carers than that they had been. The only exception was where the parent or partner was a convicted sex offender, and then three of the carers had been treated as foster carers compared to two who had not. Apart from this category, the figures were closest when the child had been emotionally abused or physically abused, or the parents had learning difficulties.

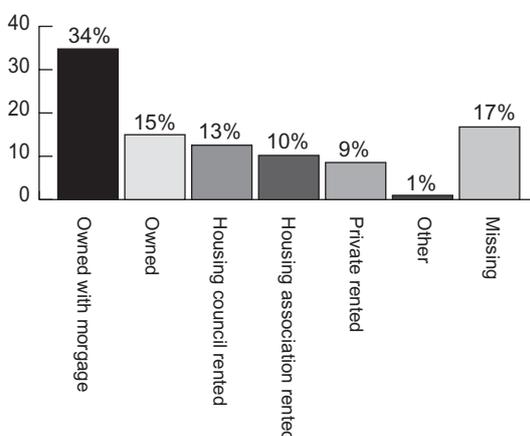
The carers who were the least likely to have ever been treated as foster carers were those where the placement was due to parental illness or death, or those involving difficult family relationships (parental abandonment, parents' separation, poor child/parent relationship).

The carers who were the most likely to not know whether they had ever been treated as foster carers were those where the parents did not want to care for the child, and those where there was parental illness.

6. Financial and economic circumstances of family and friends carers

6.1 Housing

Figure 6-1: Distribution of family and friends carers by type of property ownership (%)



Almost half (49%) of the respondents owned their own homes, either outright or with a mortgage.

Of those who were renting, the largest number were council tenants, followed by those who were renting from a housing association, and then those who were privately renting.

These findings are broadly consistent with Family Rights Group's analysis of the Understanding Society Survey⁹⁶. Of the family and friends carers in that survey, 55% were home-owners. Of those who were in rented accommodation, three quarters were in social housing (i.e. council or housing association) rather than privately rented.

Table 6 1: Number of bedrooms compared to number of children in the household

How many bedrooms are there in your accommodation?							
Number of bedrooms	Total Children in household						(N=)
	1	2	3	4	5	More than 5	
1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
2	52	20	3	0	0	0	75
3	106	68	34	12	1	1	222
4	31	23	21	7	3	2	87
5	4	2	7	3	2	1	19
(N=)	193	114	65	22	6	4	404

Table 6-1 gives some idea of the level of overcrowding that respondents and their children might be experiencing, by linking the number of children in each household to the number of bedrooms each family has. This cannot be a complete picture, as it does not include information about the age or gender of the children, children's earlier experiences of abuse which may make it important for them to have their own bedroom, or the size of the bedrooms, nor how many adults are living in the household. However, taking all this into account, there are some situations where it seems impossible that the families will not be overcrowded.

Of the carers whose households have six or more children in them, one is living in three bedroom accommodation, meaning that if the carers have their own bedroom the children will be sharing three to a room, and two are living in accommodation with four bedrooms.

In total, 87 out of 404 carers (22%) who answered this question are living in households where it would not be possible for each child to have their own bedroom. All of these households are not necessarily overcrowded, as it may not matter that some children in some households are sharing bedrooms. However, a comparison with the Understanding Society Survey⁹⁷ shows that one in four (25%) of the family and friends carers in that survey felt that they did not have enough bedrooms for the children in the household, which, again, is fairly similar to the proportion of households in this study where each child would not have their own bedroom.

The carers with the largest number of bedrooms were most likely to be homeowners. 10% of those who owned their homes outright, and 5% of those with a mortgage, had five bedrooms. A quarter of homeowners had four bedrooms.

Compared to this, only one council tenant had five bedrooms, and one in eight carers who were renting from the council or from a housing association were living in properties with four bedrooms. Householders who were renting their property rather than owning it were more likely to be able to rent a large property privately than through social housing: 5% of those privately renting had five bedrooms, and 23 % had four bedrooms.

This indicates the importance of arranging protocols for transfers to larger accommodation for carers who are living in social housing, whether this is with a housing association or the council⁹⁸. Taking

⁹⁶ Aziz R and Roth D (2012) *Understanding family and friends care: analysis of the social and economic circumstances of family and friends carers* (FRG)

⁹⁷ Aziz R and Roth D (2012) *Understanding family and friends care: analysis of the social and economic circumstances of family and friends carers* (FRG)

⁹⁸ This is consistent with Family and Friends statutory guidance chapter 4

in additional children may well lead to overcrowding: Farmer and Moyers⁹⁹ found that 35% of the family and friends carers in their study were overcrowded. Our findings indicate that the carers with the least space, i.e. the most likely to become overcrowded by taking in additional children, are renting social housing. A route to larger accommodation if it is required would assist these households enormously.

Carers claiming housing benefit are also less likely to live in larger accommodation: none of them had five bedrooms, and 80% had two or three bedrooms. Housing benefit is payable to those who are not working or on a low income, so this is an indicator that households on lower incomes are likely to be living in smaller accommodation. The legitimate fear that housing benefit may not cover larger rental costs may be a factor in explaining why such carers are living in small accommodation. This situation is likely to be exacerbated by the impact of benefit cap introduced in the Welfare Reform Act 2012. It could be a strong deterrent in such carers taking on any additional kin children.

6.2 Employment

Table 6-2: Paid work

Do you do paid work?		
Answer Options	Frequency	%
Yes, part-time	96	24
Yes, full-time	81	20
No	121	30
No, retired	50	12
No, but I am actively looking for work	18	4
No, because of disability or ill-health	40	10
(N=)	406	

44% of carers were in full or part-time work, with more working part-time than full-time. The remainder of those who answered were not doing paid work. Of those who gave a reason, 12% were retired and 10% were not working due to disability or ill health. Only 4% were actively seeking work.

Table 6-3: Do you or your partner do paid work?

		If you have a partner living with you does he/she do paid work?			
		No	Yes, full-time	Yes, part-time	(N=)
Do you do paid work?	No	89	52	16	157
	%	57	33	10	100
	Yes, full-time	30	27	8	65
	%	46	42	12	100
	Yes, part-time	16	47	12	75
	%	21	63	16	100
	(N=)	135	127	36	298

In 57% of cases where the carer had a partner, neither they nor their partner had paid work. 33% had a partner who works full-time and 10% had a partner who worked part-time.

Table 6-4: How did the children coming to live with you, affect you or your partner's employment status?

Did any of the following apply to you, or your partner if you have one, as a result of the child/ren coming to live with you?		
Answer Options	Frequency	%
I had to give up work permanently	103	31
I had to give up work temporarily	47	14
I had to reduce my working hours permanently	76	23
I had to reduce my working hours temporarily	29	9
I had to increase my working hours to afford taking on the care of the child	19	6
I had to take early retirement	10	3
I had to delay my retirement	17	5
I had to take a lower-graded job	17	5
I lost my job	20	6
I continued working as before	42	13
My partner had to give up work permanently	19	6
My partner had to give up work temporarily	8	2
My partner had to reduce her/his working hours permanently	25	8
My partner had to reduce her/his working hours temporarily	17	5
My partner had to increase his/her working hours to afford taking on the care of the child	20	6
My partner had to take early retirement	9	3
My partner had to delay her/his retirement	14	4
My partner had to take a lower-graded job	2	1
My partner lost her/his job	4	1
My partner continued working as before	37	11
(N=)	327	

99 Farmer, E. and Moyers, S. (2008) *ibid*

327 respondents answered the question about the effect that becoming a family and friends carer had on their job or their partner's job. Only one in eight said that they had continued to work as before, and one in nine that their partner had continued to work as before.

Discounting respondents who gave more than one answer (for example some ticked that they had lost their job and given up work permanently), the survey found that of those who responded to the question 'how did the children coming to live with you affect your employment status', 112 (34%) had permanently given up work (either because they'd taken early retirement and/or lost their job or had to give up work; and a further 13 (4%) had to give up work temporarily.

More than 10% reported that their partner had ceased work for one of these reasons.

For those who remained in work, a number reported they had made changes to the way they worked. 32% had to reduce their working hours, temporarily or permanently, while 5% had to take a lower grade job. Others were under so much financial pressure that they had to increase their working hours (6%) or delay retirement (5%) in order to manage financially.

These problems also affected respondents' partners, of whom 12% reduced their working hours, at least temporarily, while 6% increased their working hours. This would indicate that the respondents, who were 90% female, were far more likely than their partners to have stopped work or reduced their hours or responsibilities in order to be more available for the child. However, the partners were as likely as the respondents to have increased their hours or delayed retirement.

Overall, the picture presented was that carers were likely to have made sacrifices at the workplace in order to care for the kin children. Very few just carried on working as before. Many decreased their working responsibilities, and their income, by reducing their hours or stopping work altogether, sometimes at the insistence of social workers. Others have had to work harder and longer.

Table 6-5: Child's condition, where carer had to give up work

Kin child's condition	Change in employment status		
	I had to give up work temporarily	I had to give up work permanently	(N=) with this condition
Physical disability	1	13	29
%	3	45	100
Learning disability	1	20	61
%	2	33	100
Chronic health condition	1	10	23
%	4	44	100
Special educational needs	8	33	103
%	8	32	100
Emotional and behavioural problems	23	49	189
%	12	26	100

Many carers had to give up work when they took in a child with a disability or special needs. This was true for nearly half of those who took in a child with a physical disability (45%) or a chronic health condition (44%). A small number of these carers only had to give up work temporarily, but for most it was a permanent decision that they had to make. Carers for the neediest children in the survey stand a good chance of having lost their income from work, in most cases permanently.

6.3 Household income

Table 6-6: Average weekly household income after tax (including earnings, benefits and pension and allowance e.g. special guardianship order allowance)

Average weekly income	Frequency	%
Under 200	26	11%
200-350	51	21%
350-400	41	17%
400-600	56	23%
600-800	49	20%
800-1000	16	7%
Above 1000	6	2%
(N=)	245	100%

Table 6-6 shows that 11% of carers had a total income after tax of less than £200 a week.

Table 6-7 Average weekly income after tax, by number of children in the household

		Average weekly income after tax (£)							(N=)
		0-200	200-350	350-400	400-600	600-800	800-1000	1000+	
Number of children in the household	1	13	21	19	22	21	9	2	107
	2	7	16	14	22	14	6	2	81
	3	4	12	8	6	7	0	1	38
	4	2	1	0	3	5	1	1	13
	5	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	3
	5+	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
Total		26	51	41	56	49	16	6	245
% in income bracket		11	21	17	23	20	7	2	100

The UK government's poverty line is where household income is below 60 per cent of the median UK household income. In 2009/10 the poverty line for a lone parent with 2 children was £256 or below. For a couple household with 2 children it was £345¹⁰⁰.

Table 6-7 shows that:

- 11% (26) of family and friends care households had an average weekly income from all sources including earnings and benefits of less than £200. 9 of these households included 2 or more children and 5 included at least two adults.
- a third of households (77 households) had an average weekly income from all sources of less than £350 a week. 43 of these households included 2 or more children (birth children and kin children). More detailed analysis reveals 32 of these 77 households included at least 2 adults.

The income data partly explains why so many family and friends carers who completed the survey feel that life is a continual financial struggle. This is made harder for many who cannot increase their income by working extra hours or taking on a job because of the responsibilities of caring for the kin child/ren, and yet many are also having to pay out significant sums to cover the extra costs of the children.

Further examination of the financial data will take place in the coming months. This will include also considering how many family and friends carers would be classified as in poverty if we used an alternative definition included in the Child Poverty Act 2010, of household income below 70% median household incomes, combined with a measure of material deprivation.

6.4 Benefits and other financial help

Table 6-8: Benefits received

Do you receive any of the following benefits?		
Answer Options	Frequency	%
Income support	71	20
Pension credit	15	4
Job-seeker's allowance	12	3
Employment and support allowance	9	2
Housing benefit	103	29
Council tax benefit	135	38
Incapacity benefit	41	11
Disability living allowance/attendance allowance for yourself or your partner	59	17
Carer's allowance	74	21
None	151	42
Other (please specify)	1	
(N=)	356	

Table 6-8 examined further the income-related benefits received by carers. 42% of carers were not receiving any income-related benefits. Those who were receiving any were most likely to be receiving housing benefit or council tax benefit.

A number of carers were receiving benefits that related to the disability of someone in the household, whether themselves or another member of the household. One in five were being paid carer's allowance, which is payable to people who spend more than 35 hours a week caring for someone who is ill or disabled. One in 6 were receiving disability living allowance or attendance allowance, which are benefits that can be paid to disabled people or the parents/carers of disabled children. A small number (2%) were also being paid employment and support allowance, a benefit that can be paid to people who have a disability that affects their ability to work. The overall conclusion is that, of the carers who are receiving benefits, a significant number are receiving benefits that relate to the disability of one or more members of the household.

Carers were also receiving benefits that are payable to people who are unemployed, such as income support (20%) or job-seeker's allowance (3%).

Housing Benefit (29%) and Council Tax Benefit (38%) are both indicators of households being on a low income. Only carers who were renting their accommodation would be eligible for housing benefit, while all householders would qualify for council tax benefit, so for example a homeowner who was living on a pension might be able to claim council tax benefit but not housing benefit.

100 Child Poverty Action Group <http://www.cpag.org.uk/povertyfacts/index.htm#line>

When asked the amount the household received in benefits, 39% (117 of 297 carers who responded) said under £100 per week and a further 37% said less than £200 per week.

When asked what benefits carers were receiving for the kin children, of the 320 carers who responded, 92% said child benefit, 67% cited child tax credit, 17% working tax credit, 17% disability allowance for the child(ren) and 13% Guardian's allowance. In other words, there was a heavy reliance on tax credits and benefits.

When asked the amount the household received in pension (state and private) income 134 carers answered, of whom 73% received £200 or less.

When asked whether the household received income from any other allowances, 83% of the 196 carers who answered said they received £200 or less a week.

Table 6-9: Financial help received from the local authority for kin children

Are you currently receiving any of the following financial help from the local authority for the child/ren you are raising as a family and friends carer?		
Answer Options	Frequency	%
Fostering allowance	74	27
Residence order allowance	45	16
Special Guardianship order allowance	66	24
Section 17 Local authority assistance	6	2
Kinship care allowance (Scotland only)	30	11
Single one-off payment	10	4
Occasional one-off payment	7	3
Payment on special occasions, eg child's birthday, Christmas, Eid, etc	28	10
Help with childcare costs	16	6
Help with transport costs	15	6
Help with adaptations to your home	3	1
None	36	13
Any other local authority allowance (please specify)		11
(N=)	273	

273 carers responded to the question about financial help from the local authority that they receive as family and friends carers. The largest number (74) were those being paid a fostering allowance, followed by special guardianship order allowance (66) and residence order allowance (45). Only 6 carers (2%) reported they were receiving section 17 financial support. 11% were being paid the Scottish kinship care allowance.

It is interesting to compare these figures with the data given earlier for the current legal status of the children. In particular, 35% of carers reported having a residence order, compared to 26% having a special guardianship order. However, despite the higher numbers having residence orders, there are fewer receiving a residence order allowance than a special guardianship order allowance (16% v 24%). This would seem to indicate that carers with a special guardianship order are more likely to be paid an allowance than those with residence order, which is unsurprising given the more extensive statutory framework for financially supporting special guardians than those with a residence order. Carers who are considering which legal order to apply for would be well advised to bear this in mind, if financial support would be important to them.

8% of carers stated earlier that they were caring for the child as a private arrangement. The financial support that could be paid to carers doing this would be section 17 local authority assistance, but only 2% of the carers who describe being financially supported by the local authority are receiving this. It seems carers often receive little or any financial help from the local authority when the arrangement is regarded as 'private'. The findings from this survey are consistent with calls to Family Rights Group's advice line and are particularly concerning given the number of arrangements which local authorities have classed as private despite being involved in the placement

A minority of carers also reported receiving financial help for specific costs, either as a one-off, such as for home adaptations or festivals and celebrations, or for regular costs such as childcare.

Two hundred carers answered a separate question addressed to those not currently receiving financial help from the local authority. A third (67) said that they had previously received it, and two thirds stated that they had not. Twenty-five stated that they had been paid an allowance of some sort: this included fostering, special guardianship order, residence order and section 17 allowances.

28 carers described receiving payments for a particular purpose, such as a 'setting up' grant when the child came to them, help with tiding them over while they claimed benefits for the child, nursery or childcare costs, and help towards a school uniform.

"At first the local authority gave us £100 per week, this was for approx 3 months. They are now requesting this back as they state it was an advance until benefit was sorted, a fact they forgot to tell us!!!!!!!"

“We had to go thro a Stage 2 complaint in order to get some backdated nursery fees for our granddaughter, and we were also given a very tiny amount of maintenance for the 5 months before we got the residence order.”

“My granddaughter was first in my care when she was 10 months old, I myself went to the Social Services office to ask for help and their involvement, I received 6 weeks help in childcare that is all I have ever received, due to being a public sector worker. I work for the NHS and constantly work shifts. This proves to be very hard as I am on my own raising my granddaughter.”

“We had some money from the Education department to cover the cost of a printer (about £260), and to cover some holiday activity clubs (about £120). One child is receiving tutoring at home which is also being paid for by Education.”

“A set up allowance of bed, bedding, and a computer about 5 years ago.”

32 carers also said they had been given financial help from another source, often a charitable grant that was for a particular purpose:

“A grant for some drumming tuition from a local charity and then some extra ones from a fund for helping children to achieve their potential who couldn’t pay for the lessons in any other way. He received about 30 lessons with a value of about £450.”

“Health visitor arranged some funds to help with replacing a broken cooker.”

“In the form of a Barrister from The Bar Pro Bono London.”

Family and friends carers often describe having to wait before they receive any local authority financial support. 36% who received financial support had to wait more than 6 months after the child had come to live with them and a further 12% waited 3-6 months. Carers who had never been treated as foster carers appeared to face longer delays: they made up only 21% of carers who received monies straight after placement but 53% of those who waited for help for over 6 months.

Carers often take in a child with little more than the clothes they arrive in, and without the bedroom furniture or baby safety equipment that the child

might need. Providing children with clothes and a bed or cot to sleep in would certainly exceed the income of carers living on benefits. This can be a particular issue where the legal status of the child is disputed, and having made the placement the local authority is denying any responsibility for supporting it. Although some carers have succeeded in challenging this and then received backdated payments, those carers are likely to have experienced hardship while this is sorted out, often using a complaints procedure that can take months.

As mentioned, further painstaking examination of the household income data (including earnings, pensions, benefits and local authority allowances) would enable us to get a more detailed picture of levels of deprivation, with factors to consider including employment status, children’s age and conditions, carers’ age and conditions, household size, the factors that led to the child coming to live with the carer and the child’s legal status. Family Rights Group will be working with the Kinship Care Alliance, tax and benefits experts and academics in the coming months to undertake this work, which will inform our policy, campaigning and lobbying strategy.

6.5 Purchases and accommodation costs when taking on the care of the child(ren)

Table 6-10: Purchases made by carers when the kin child came to live with them

What things did you need to buy when the child care to live with you?	Frequency	%
Clothes	378	95
Bedding	336	85
Shoes/trainers	320	81
Bed	312	79
Toys	289	73
Other furniture	260	65
Nappies	242	61
School uniform	225	57
Other baby equipment	183	46
Items to help the child keep up or start an activity or hobby (e.g. music or dance classes)	163	41
A different or a bigger car	119	30
Items to meet child(ren)’s special needs	58	15
Holiday	4	1
Other	61	
(N=)	397	

Over 80% of carers who answered this question had spent money on clothing, shoes and bedding for their kin children.

Some carers and their families had also made significant personal sacrifices.

“After my grandson sharing a double bed with my 22 yr old son for 5 months and after a lot of threats to expose the local authority for not helping they agreed to my request for bunk beds. My son eventually had to move out. At 22 sharing a room with a 3 yr old is not ideal.”

Table 6-11: Amount spent by carers on necessary purchases and financial help towards these costs from local authority

	Amount spent on changes to accommodation and purchases for the child(ren)							
	£0-100	£100-500	£500-1000	£1000-2000	£2000-5000	£5000-10,000	£ Over 10,000	(N=)
Help with these costs from the local authority (£)								
No	6	78	67	43	42	18	18	272
%	60	73	82	77	89	90	75	79
Yes	4	29	15	13	5	2	6	74
%	40	27	18	23	11	10	25	21
(N=)	10	107	82	56	47	20	24	346

Table 6-11 provides information on the amounts carers had spent on necessary purchases for the kin children. This ranged from under £100 to over £10,000 depending upon circumstances. 42% had spent £1000 or more, 7% had spent over £10,000.

In all four out of five carers had received no financial help from the local authority with such purchases. 83% of those who had spent £1000 or more had received no financial assistance from the local authority.

Table 6-12: Necessary changes carer needed to make to accommodation and whether the local authority provided financial help

	Financial help from Local authority		
	No	Yes	(N=)
Necessary changes made to accommodation			
Extended the house	24	8	32
%	75	25	100
Decorate/refurbished room	207	56	263
%	79	21	100
Moved to a bigger house	44	13	57
%	77	23	100

Carers were also asked about necessary changes to their accommodation, and whether they had been helped with this by the local authority. 32 carers reported having to build an extension to their home, and 57 to move to a bigger home, while 263 carers had to decorate or re-furbish a room for the arriving child. Again, the majority of carers received no financial help from the local authority, with only one in four getting assistance.

It is interesting to note that carers were slightly more likely to be helped with an expensive item such as building an extension, or buying a bigger car than with other start-up costs. No explanation for this emerged from the study, which is perhaps an unexpected finding. Possibly there are clear procedures and criteria for helping with larger items, which would usually have to be agreed by a senior manager or budgetary panel, while lesser amounts may be at the discretion of local managers with limited budgets and competing demands.

In any case, despite the financial help being provided to the minority, the vast majority are receiving no help with costs that may be quite substantial, even though in many cases they would not have had to spend this money unless the local authority had placed the child with them.

The carers most likely to receive immediate financial support with purchases or accommodation were special guardians and foster carers, rather than those who had children with residence orders or under a private arrangement. Half of foster carers (24/47) were provided with this assistance, and 30% of special guardians compared to 10% of carers with residence orders (12/125) and only 4% of carers raising children under a private arrangement (1/27). None of the carers in Scotland who were raising a looked after child and had been approved as a kinship carer received any assistance.

It is likely that this is in part because local authorities are more likely to have policies in place, with criteria for providing this sort of assistance to foster carers and special guardians, than to carers with residence orders, despite the needs of many of the kin children subject to a residence order. We therefore recommend that local authorities review their policies, so that their criteria for helping family and friends carers with housing and other necessary costs are based on the needs of the child and the carer rather than the child's legal status.

6.6 Expenditure on child care and leisure activities for kin children

Table 6-13: Weekly childcare expenses for kin children

Childcare expenses	Frequency	%
Under £20 a week	21	21
Between £20-£50 a week	32	32
Between £50-£100 a week	24	24
Over £100 a week	23	23
(N=)	100	100

Table 6-14: Weekly expenditure on out of school/leisure activities for kin children

Weekly spending on out of school/leisure activities for the child/ren	Frequency	%
0-£5 a week	47	17
£5-£10 a week	75	27
£10-£20 a week	70	25
Over £20 a week	85	31
(N=)	277	100

Carers informed us about some of the weekly costs they incur in raising the kin children. One hundred carers told us that they paid weekly child care costs (Table 6-13). The most common sum they paid was between £20 and £50 a week (32%), but 23% of them were paying over £100 a week. 277 carers also informed us about weekly expenditure on out of school leisure activities for the children. While 17% were paying less than £5 a week, and 27% were paying between £5 and £10 a week, 31% of carers were spending over £20 a week on these activities for the kin children (Table 6-14).

6.7 Legal costs

Table 6-15: Legal costs

Legal costs in relation to the child(ren)	Frequency	%
No	190	51
Yes	184	49
(N=)	374	100

49% of carers stated that there had been legal costs in relation to the kin children. Those who said there had been, were then asked what were the reasons for legal costs.

Table 6-16: Reasons for legal costs

Reason for the legal costs (carers could tick more than one reason)	Frequency	%
Legal advice	115	60
Legal representation in court proceedings	133	69
Cost of bringing court proceedings	86	45
Other	27	
(N=)	192	

Table 6-17: If you received help with legal costs, who was it from?

Type of help with these legal costs	Frequency	%
I qualified for public funding (legal aid) for part of the legal costs	37	28
I qualified for public funding for all the legal costs	38	29
I received some help from the local authority towards legal costs	23	17
The local authority covered the legal costs	34	26
(N=)	132	

We are also aware, from an earlier Family Rights Group study¹⁰¹ that legal costs can be a major expense for family and friends carers. Carers in the earlier study had spent an average of £3,640 on legal expenses, mostly getting no help, and with some having spent tens of thousands of pounds in contested cases to get an order on a child. Carers in the present study were asked how much they had paid in legal costs. The amounts varied significantly from virtually nothing, when they self represented, to £25,000 in one case with proceedings still ongoing.

"We have an outstanding bill with a London solicitor for about £14,000 – we have no agreement from the local authority to have them pay for that; we have

¹⁰¹ Ashley, C. (2010) *The Harsh Reality – a survey on the financial circumstances of family and friends carers* Family Rights Group

a \$8,000 bill for an immigration lawyer, which we have paid but the local authority Kent have agreed to reimburse us for; we have about \$4,000 for home study and other immigration costs (finger prints, application for US immigration approval), some of which the local authority have agreed to pay for.”

“We paid nothing – my local authority were very good.”

Family Rights Group’s analysis of local authority family and friends care policies¹⁰² showed four in five won’t pay carers’ legal fees or make no mention in their policies of paying them. Whether or not carers receive this sort of financial assistance seems to remain something of a postcode lottery.

“It’s really difficult as we can only afford to give him £8 a day for food and as he leaves by 7.30am and doesn’t come back until 6.30pm we know that it isn’t really enough. There are no subsidised meals available in the college he is at. Fortunately he only has to go in three days a week. Given his learning difficulties he is finding it difficult to find part time work.”

“I am concerned that when my grandson leaves school next year I won’t be able to manage. The government will have stopped the child benefit and education maintenance allowance.”

6.8 Financial impact of children coming to live with you

125 carers stated that in the last year or so, they were having difficulty making payments on time for electricity bills, 108 said they were struggling to pay their gas bill on time, whilst others also mentioned problems covering their water bill, council tax bill, rent, mortgage and other loans.

Some raised the problem that they could no longer work overtime to bring in more money because of the kin caring responsibilities.

Table 6-18: Have you or your family taken or booked a holiday in the last 12 months?

Have you or your family taken or booked a holiday in the last year?	Frequency	%
No	173	43
Yes, paid for by ourselves	187	47
Yes, paid for by a charity or other organisation	15	4
(N=)	401	

Table 6-18 shows that more than 4 in 10 carers and their family have had no holiday in the last year.

Carers were also asked, if they had a kin child in higher education, how they were managing these costs. A number expressed considerable anxiety as to how they were to continue to cover the costs and feared for the future. A few mentioned a leaving care grant or other assistance.

¹⁰² Local authority family and friends care policies – the good, the bad and the non-existent Roth D, Aziz R and Lindley B (2012) Family Rights Group

Carers were asked for their comments on the overall financial impact of the child coming to live with them. 332 carers answered this and the following comments highlight the plight many are experiencing.

"We have to go without, we have to think about everything we spend."

"Huge. We are able to manage, but we are not spending money on the things we would have been enjoying in retirement if we didn't have our granddaughter, and we are well aware that our savings cannot be replaced because my husband is now retired, so we worry a lot about what we spend and the cost of bringing up our granddaughter."

"Since losing SGO allowance we are finding things difficult especially feeding the gas and electric meters and price of food. Adults only eating once a day so child doesn't go without most."

"The overall impact has been devastating, mostly due to the legal fees and the prolonged nature of court hearings plus the lack of assistance from any quarter while my income has reduced substantially. We are now nearing the point of bankruptcy I believe and no-one is listening."

"I had a job which paid about £20,000 p/a. I had my own small car and a well furnished house. I was single and could spend my free time as I pleased. I got the boys and after six months full time work I had to reduce my hours to part time. Six months later I had to finish work as the youngest child was seriously ill. I have very little in pension (currently it'll pay £3 per week). All our income is spent on the boys. I'm trying to eradicate the memories of them having no food/heating/sheets on the bed/clean clothes/no healthcare etc. I've only just started going out one night per week to a meditation class. I have to attend return to work interviews despite one child being disabled and the other having learning difficulties. I will have no money to look after them all as school leaving age is now 18 and RO allowance stops at 16. I SHALL have to return to work when the disabled child is able to look after himself (currently his school attendance is 62%). No holidays but we have days out."

"I go without food, clothes, personal items and all things to make sure he has most of the things others have. It is the sacrifice I make for him simply because I love him. He came to me with nothing."

"We are absolutely broke, can't afford to run a car or holidays or days out. It is the school hols and all I can afford is a picnic in the local park. I worry every day about money and I am forever juggling and in debt."

"Initially I was told I was not allowed to seek employment. After a year I started working but then the childcare was £160 per wk and only received a percentage of help towards costs. My initial outlay was extreme as my grandchild was a newborn and required everything a newborn needs, pram, cot, carseat etc. I was given no financial help towards these costs. I am now in debt, where I wasn't before I took on my grandchild. My kids had to squash into a bedroom and help care for my grandchild if I had to work and the times the childminder didn't work. (They were young teenagers). They had to give up a social life to help me work so I could afford to care for my grandchild. This ended up in a lot of resentment from them. My husband and I divorced as a result of the financial and emotional pressure placed on us. I can't afford treats or holidays for my family and have recently had to give up work as I have moved to be closer to family in the hope of extra support from them as it is lacking from authorities without being made to feel guilty or threatened with the removal of the child."

7. Non financial support

7.1 Support from social services

Table 7-1: Type of help received from social services

Type of help ever received from social services (carers could tick more than 1 response)	Frequency	%
No help	167	44
Regular contact with child(ren)'s social worker	152	40
Regular contact with my own social worker/link worker	77	20
Support with managing child(ren)/family contact	57	15
Training courses	50	13
Counselling for children	39	10
Support group specifically for family and friends carers	39	10
Help with child(ren)'s behaviour/emotional difficulties	35	9
Someone working directly with the child(ren) e.g. on life story	22	6
Respite care	21	6
Other support group	15	4
Mediation with other family members	10	3
Counselling for carer	11	3
Assistance with prison visits	2	1
Other	78	21
(N=)	379	

Carers were asked what type of help or support they had received, at any time, from the local authority. Table 7-1 shows the variety of different types of help that carers reported, although 44% said they had not received any help. The most common form of help from the local authority mentioned was regular contact with the children's social worker (40%). Carers were also invited to leave comments. More than half of those who commented (41/78) stated that support had been inadequate or non-existent.

"I have been horrified at the lack of support and help. A lot of intrusion for 12 months during the special guardianship application but no support/ advice or help at any time."

"Social services closed the case after about 6 months. In that time my niece's support worker went on maternity leave and we had no follow up visits at all."

"The older child was particularly affected by past abuse and we found ourselves viewed by the local authority as responsible for the challenging and at times extreme behaviour expressed. We have felt undermined rather than supported."

"She only had play therapy briefly at the beginning and could do with some now...as parents' lack of contact is an issue and I booked a Webster Stratton course off my own back that I'd heard about, no one from Social Services helped or found this for me...I have asked for Training continuously and a support group for kinship carers and life story work and respite and assistance with contact issues. They don't have the resource or funding I am told. I would also like assistance with Mediation with parents and one of the other grandparents and have asked for this quite often."

It is important to emphasise though that a few were very positive about the assistance they'd received: *"Social services are always at the end of phone with advice if needed."*

"We are now foster carers and feel the fostering team has helped most."

Some carers were also appreciative of the training they received, and also of support groups, even if they had found these or set them up themselves:

"Social worker provided me with details of parenting classes and is trying to get the eldest boy CAMHS after much meandering"

"I started up my own grandparents group"

"I discovered the local support group by myself and not through a Social Services recommendation."

The type of practical support provided for carers was broken down according to the carers' legal status. Those who receive regular contact from a social worker are more likely to be kinship foster carers and/or those in the process of being assessed as kinship foster carers. They are also the ones most likely to get counselling or support as a carer or to have training.

Carers were also asked about the support they were currently receiving from the local authority. 64% said they were not now being helped.

"No help whatsoever, this was brought to the Court's attention and the case was adjourned until Sept 1st for a plan to be put in place, 8 months down the line there is no care plan, no PEP or assessment of children's needs"

"All help stopped when residence orders were in place - although saying that there was very little"

help previously - I also supervise contact for one of the children who I care for and her sibling who lives with paternal family”

“The area I live in doesn’t offer support.”

“We would give our EYE TEETH for some respite care”

38% of carers (98 out of 259) told us that changing the child’s legal status had had an impact on the support they received from the local authority. We delved further and asked carers for their comments. Those who responded typically referred to losing some (18) or all (38) of the support they had been receiving:

“As soon as we got residence order never saw them for dust”

“Only when child was on At Risk register was I able to access any support. Once SGO went through and child was no longer the local authority’s problem, all support stopped – just when I needed it most.”

A few however, obtained more support than they had been previously receiving. Five carers stated they had started to receive a financial allowance as a result of getting a particular order, one started to be provided with social work support and four said support had improved.

“When a care order was granted we were assessed as foster carers and that is when the support started. Approx 8 months from taking child.”

“I got nothing with the residence order (she lived with me for a year before the court case) then I got some form of allowance whilst she was on an interim care order with no power to remove, whilst they assessed me as a kinship carer, so after a little while got a foster allowance, which they then reviewed in Sept 2010 and halved - because the period was over and because I am related to the child. Despite the fact the child costs the same.”

7.2 Family and friends carers’ level of satisfaction

Table 7-2: Satisfaction with help received from the local authority (social care services)

Rating of help received from social services (1 is very poor and 5 is excellent)	Frequency	%
1	213	54
2	66	17
3	67	17
4	26	7
5	19	5
(N=)	391	100

Generally carers gave a very low rating for the support they had received from the local authority, with more than half (54%) giving them the lowest rating possible, and only 5% giving them the highest rating possible. This leads to fundamental questions not only about the amount or type of support provided, but also about the relationship between children’s social care services and family and friends carers.

Table 7-3: Rating of help received from social services according to child’s current legal status

Rating of the help received from social services (1 is very poor and 5 is excellent)	A residence order/Interim residence order		A special guardianship order		Court proceedings are on-going		Private arrangement		Kinship foster carer or being assessed as a kinship foster carer	
1	70	54%	51	53%	18	47%	14	70%	43	57%
2	28	22%	13	13%	8	21%	2	10%	11	14%
3	23	18%	12	12%	9	24%	1	5%	15	20%
4	4	3%	12	12%	2	5%	1	5%	6	8%
5	5	4%	9	9%	1	3%	2	10%	1	1%
(N=)	130	100%	97	100%	38	100%	20	100%	76	100%

When broken down according to legal status as shown in Table 7-3, it is noticeable that those who are approved or being assessed as foster carers were the least likely to give top scores for support: that was most likely to come from special guardians (9%).

The carers who were most likely to give the local authority the lowest score were those who were caring for the child under a private arrangement. When considering negative scores of 1 or 2, carers with a residence order (76%) scored social services almost as badly as the private arrangement carers (80%).

The carers who were most likely to give a neutral score of 3 were those who were still in proceedings, possibly because they were withholding judgement until the outcome of the court case was known. The least likely to be neutral were the private arrangement carers, who were willing to award both positive and negative scores in significant numbers.

We will be exploring this data further as part of the next stage family and friends care research being conducted with the University of Oxford, funded by The Big Lottery. For example, does the reason the child came to live with the carer and whether the child was subject to a child protection conference, have a bearing on subsequent satisfaction rates with local authority help received?

7.3 Other types of help received

Table 7-4: Other type of help received by family and friends carers

Help received from any other sources (carers could give more than one answer)	Frequency	%
Family and friends	201	58
School	150	43
Health visitor	115	33
On-line support group	96	28
CAMHS	93	27
GP	83	24
Children’s centres	48	14
A local support group specifically for family and friends carers	48	14
Surestart	44	13
Charity or voluntary organisation	37	11
(N=)	349	100

The commonest source of support for carers comes from their own network of family and friends (Table 7-4), although carers had also frequently been helped by schools and health services (including health visitors, GPs and CAMHS). Peer support was also notable, both online (28%) and through local support groups (14%).

7.4 Unmet needs

Table 7-5: Type of unmet needs reported by family and friends carers

Support needed but not met (carers could give more than one answer)	Frequency	%
Emotional support for family and friends carer	176	52
Help with child(ren)'s own behaviour/emotional difficulties	147	44
Respite care	133	40
Counselling for children	121	36
Support with managing child(ren)/family contact	117	35
Counselling for family and friends carer	97	29
Contact with other family and friends carers	96	29
Someone working directly with the child(ren) e.g. on life story	87	26
Training courses	79	24
Regular contact with child(ren)'s social worker	71	21
Mediation with other family members	59	18
Regular contact with my own social worker/link worker	36	11
No additional help or support needed	25	7
Assistance with prison visits	11	3
(N=)	336	100

Asked to consider what unmet support needs there were (Table 7-5), the one most commonly cited, by over half, was emotional support for the carers themselves. It's perhaps unsurprising that further analysis indicated that 66% of the carers (193 out of 293) would be interested in joining a support group for family and friends carers.

The second greatest unmet need was help with the child's behavioural and emotional difficulties. Any plans to provide support to kin-care households will clearly need to consider how to support the emotional needs of both carers and children, with significant numbers also citing a need for counselling for the child and/or for themselves.

26% would also have liked to have someone to do direct work with the child.

Family relationships are also cited as needing to be supported, with 35% wanting support with the child's family contact, and 18% wishing for mediation with other family members. A substantial number of carers (40%) would also welcome the opportunity for a respite break.

Given space to state what sort of additional support they would have liked, the one most commonly mentioned by carers was financial:

"Help with legal costs, and increased mortgage costs."

"Taking on new born would have benefited from employee Maternity Benefits given to both mothers and adopters"

Carers would also have liked better information: *"Just someone who could explain to us what was happening/what should have been happening."*

They wanted support that actually helps: *"While we are getting respite, it has been provided in the home authority 100 miles away, which has distressed the child and put the placement at risk. I have a stage 2 complaint with the local authority to try getting the respite moved closer to home."*

This included various types of practical support: *"Practical support with lifts (as no car), bus pass would be good too, toys, clothes, furniture, handyman to fix stuff (I used to pay someone when working as live alone), practical support, liaise with charities on my behalf, babysitting circle all CRB checked so I could go out for once. Haven't been out since I have had her here April 2007."*

It is important not to categorise all carers' experiences as negative. Some report being well assisted by social workers and the local authority. Nevertheless such reports appear to be exceptions rather than a common story. We need to learn from those authorities and practitioners who are getting it right.

8. The impact of being a family and friends carer

8.1 What difference have you made to the children's lives?

Carers were asked to spell out what differences they felt they had made to the lives of the children they were raising. The differences most commonly mentioned were that they had been able to provide the children with stability, security and love. Carers also felt they had been able to promote the children's sense of wellbeing, and give them a better chance in life. It was important to some that they had been able to help the child keep their family links, that might otherwise have been lost by going into unrelated foster care or being adopted. Carers also mentioned promoting the child's education, health and development. Many felt that they had ensured the child was kept safe, or even alive.

"My nephew is more happy than he's ever been, for the 1st 6 months he never slept. Even when he lived at home with his parents he never slept. But with constant love, care and security he is now feeling safe."

"Given them stability, a normal home free of violence and alcohol misuse, moral guidance, protection, love, support, a home where they feel free to bring friends."

"We have opened the possibilities to have a more settled and fulfilling life, while building a more positive self esteem. We have removed them from a home where all they knew was abuse and neglect. They may not see it right now, but they will as they get older."

"They arrived like wild animals. They were dirty and smelling terrible. They had no concept of life outside drug addicts. The baby never cried because he never received any attention. Nor could the baby even pull himself into standing position at 14 month old. Now they are well mannered, well dressed, well adjusted boys who understand and appreciate the situation they are in."

"Apart from keeping him safe the most important change we have made is giving him back his childhood, he now has a childhood. He feels safe, happy, confident and contented. He is thriving at home and in school and enjoys after school activities"

"The children were being neglected, abused (emotionally and sexually) and not taken to school regularly. Since being with us their life has turned around 180 degrees. They go to school every

day and are doing extremely well, they are fed, nurtured, have friends and clubs (which they weren't allowed with their parents). The child with special educational needs and behaviour problems can now manage with frustrations immensely and is doing really well at school and has grown in confidence. The eldest is doing extremely well at high school and year on year has outstanding school reports and is emotionally stable now. The youngest girl has grown in personality, as when with her parents could only do and act as her mother told her to and was not allowed to grow as an individual. All 3 are now confident, stable, children."

"My grandson has been able to remain with his grandparents who love and cherish him completely and he is also able to have a relationship with extended family members instead of being placed in the care system. We have also been able to protect him from his parents who caused him physical harm. My grandson is now happy and thriving."

"My grandson has a serious medical condition and was severely behind. In the 18 months he has lived with me I have seen a dramatic improvement in speech and many other areas. My grandson is now doing as well as his peers although his behaviour is erratic and attachment is proving difficult. I am reading books on the attachment theory in an effort to help him. My grandson's life is so very different now and I am rewarded with lots of love and the knowledge that he now has a chance in life!"

"We feel we have made an immense difference, the oldest child we took on is now going to university despite missing almost three years of school whilst used as a babysitter. None of the children had routine or discipline in their lives, we dread to think where they would have ended up or how they would live."

"I have given them a chance to be who they should be and become the best they can be, I have stopped them from getting hurt and possibly dying, I am keeping them safe and most of all happy, giving them the start in life every child should have."

"I have turned her life around in a good way. She was in the lowest set at school now she is above average. She has so much more confidence and is happy, but most of all she is loved and cared for which in turn has made her shine."

“Since the death of their mam, as their grandmother I feel they know they are loved dearly by me and they feel secure. I can’t replace their mam but I hope I can give them loads of happiness, enjoyment and a good start for their adult life”

8.2 Advice to others

Carers were also asked what advice they would give to someone who was thinking of doing what they had done. The response to this was heartfelt and overwhelmingly positive, although laced with caution. Only seven out of 345 advised ‘don’t do it’ (ten times as many said ‘do it’), but 64 (18%) did say that it would require careful thought. Carers’ advice also included, checking legal options, checking what support would be available, checking out financial support, being wary of what was said by social workers, speaking to other family and friends carers, and being aware that it could be hard. 82 (23%) advised that it would be worth it.

“Go with your heart and enjoy every minute make sure you have a good solicitor and go on to FRG website they will help you out and also kinship foster carers website they are invaluable with their wealth of information”

“Be prepared for a long journey but a very rewarding one”

“Think very carefully about all the implications of having someone else’s children to care for. It is rewarding but so many things can go wrong and your heart is constantly breaking. There has been absolutely no help financially, emotionally or mentally. Social Services have buried their heads in the sand and have been so utterly unhelpful to myself and to the children they have made me feel like a social outcast.”

“Financially you really need to budget, but even when times are tough (emotionally and financially) the feeling I get when they kiss and hug me goodnight and tell how much they love me gives me the best feeling.”

“Think carefully as it is very hard when you are older but also rewarding. A child in this position may have had a lot of people leave her and she does not need any more.”

“Do it. It is what the child needs, don’t ever think twice, yes it’s tough going with court things but in the end you are making sure the child is away from

harm and loved and happy. Do it, it’s worth it.”

“Think carefully about what they are about to undertake and get all the advice they can and get in touch with other people in the same situation for their support, because when we first undertook this we felt like we were the only ones, but I don’t regret it, when I see how happy the children are.”

“I would advise people to take legal and professional advice before making any decisions. The love and reward you receive from the children is great and so positive in your life. However there are many negatives in doing this role which I have discovered the hard way. For the children and the family it is a valuable asset to all if managed and supported correctly. However it sure is not easy and is nowhere near as recognised and supported as it should be. By far.”

“Be prepared for an emotional roller coaster, don’t take no for an answer from social services, seek legal advice, don’t give up, take good support where it is offered, use FRG. I found their info on special guardianship very useful. And take great pleasure in watching your child/children blossom, and stick with it”

“So rewarding and fulfilling to help a child in need. Best job in the world.”

“Research the options especially funding and support you could receive. Turn to FRG and grandparents’ organisations, do all you can to make sure you know what you are getting into and if there is any outside support you can access.”

“Do it but avoid social workers as much as you possibly can.”

“Get some help, I found the Family Rights Group a Godsend as I did not have a clue what to do, social services were of no help and did not want to know, they said it was a private family arrangement. Get help.”

“Make sure you have the strength and resilience to do this. Make sure that the social worker doesn’t just ‘dump’ the children and walk away, satisfied that the children are being cared for. Make sure that you have a good support network of friends to help you.”

“Get straight on the internet and speak to others in the same situation as yourself. The longer you

leave yourself isolated the more you reinforce the feeling that you are alone. You aren't alone. It's tough and strange for us all no matter what the circumstances of our kids arriving. You WILL get through it but you need support. You will lose a lot of family members, a lot of friends (older people can't be bothered with you taking your kids round as you used to when you were alone) and you need advice from others who already have kinship children because this is so different to adopting an anonymous child. Do NOT expect your LA to show you the way because they aren't interested in telling you. It boils down to finances and if they keep you in the dark you don't ask then they don't have to eat into their budget!!"

"Do not let the local authority make you feel that you are not an important part of the process."

"Think very very long and very very hard before you allow social services into your lives, as they will tear you apart, and criticise your every move. Never trust the courts, appointed guardians or social services, trust only the solicitor you are employing. Keep your cards close to your chest and never reveal your hand until SS have revealed theirs. Trust no-one. If you want to remain sane then do not become a kinship carer, you will not be valued."

"Go in with your eyes open, don't rely on social services for anything. Unless you are happy to give up your own life for the sake of the child don't do it, if you are it is the most rewarding feeling ever when they say Thank you I love you"

8.2 Impact of being a family and friends care

Table 8-1: Negative impact of being a family and friends carer

Negative impact of being of a family and friends carer (carers could answer more than one)	Frequency	%
Impact on my finances	302	79
Impact on my plans for the future	275	72
Impact on my social life	278	72
Impact on my leisure/holidays	260	68
Impact on my standard of living	197	51
Impact on my relationship with partner	152	40
Impact on other members of the household	152	40
Impact on my health and wellbeing	150	39
Impact on my self-confidence	66	17
None	40	10
(N=)	384	100

Table 8-1 shows that 384 carers recognised that becoming a family and friends carer had had some sort of negative impact on them or others in the household although many of them made it clear that there were positive factors that more than counterbalanced the negative impacts.

A negative impact on their finances was cited by 79% of the carers who answered this question. This in turn may well have led to other impacts: on standard of living, leisure/holidays and plans for the future.

Almost as significant as the effect on finances was the impact on carers' social life, cited by 72%. Given the stated wish of 52% of carers for emotional support, it is notable that carers have also cited a cost in terms of the impact on their relationship with their partner (40%) and their self-confidence (17%). 39% also feel that their health and wellbeing has suffered.

Despite recognising that there had been some negatives associated with becoming a family and friends carer, the majority of carers took the opportunity to comment, often with some warmth and emotion, on the positives that it had brought them as well, mostly associated with the sheer pleasure that they were taking in the child. 281 comments were left on the positive effects that becoming a kinship carer had on their lives.

- 53 carers took pleasure in seeing the child's development
- 48 cited seeing the child safe and secure as a positive
- 45 carers mentioned the child's happiness
- 43 felt that becoming a family and friends carer had made them a better person
- 41 saw it as a positive because of improved family togetherness
- other reasons cited include: the joy of being a carer; the knowledge of doing something good; the carer's love for the child and the child's love for the carer; and quite simply that it was fun.

Many cited several of these reasons in their replies, in a remarkable outpouring of joy and love.

"Please do not misunderstand me. The above things (negatives) I have ticked are facts, it's true, these things have been impacted and affected, some in a big way. The positive aspects well, the biggest positive aspect is my grandson himself, the wave of emotion he brings out in me, the amount of love I feel wow, is amazing. My grandson has many issues, but he is a sweet, beautiful, loving outstanding little boy and I have the privilege to

share my life with him. The feeling we have of having made a big difference, and the pride I feel when he overcomes a hurdle in his life which is there because of his history with his birth parents, shows us that we have had a positive effect in his life - that means everything to us, we want him to have a usual happy life and we feel we are helping him achieve this, very slowly, but we are getting there, what more positive effect could there be !!"

"My grandson is healthy and happy and is developing appropriately. We love him dearly and wouldn't be without him. He keeps us going and always makes us laugh. My daughter aged 10 has learnt skills she wouldn't otherwise have, yet she has also suffered greatly as her whole life has to change."

"To see a child well nourished, keen to go to school, having 'pals' over for 'sleepovers' even making demands: Grampy can I have etc. The opportunity to pass on life's experiences in order for a child to grow is a wonderful experience."

"My grandchildren remain within the family rather than being adopted preventing the loss and feelings of bereavement this would no doubt have generated throughout the family. I gain satisfaction from seeing my grandchildren thrive in what for them is the best placement possible given their circumstances."

"We love him and we can't imagine life without him - it's very good to see what a difference we've made to him, after a while his whole expression changed-- all the tension went that we used to see, he became cheerful, confidence appeared - and without us he would not be part of a family with all that that implies in terms of all those people who know him and care about what happens to him."

"I enjoy laughing with them and seeing them reach attainments professionals thought impossible. I have a second chance to visit museums, exhibitions and art galleries and see things from a child's perspective again. I didn't know I would have the emotional strength to bring up a disabled child until life gave me the opportunity. I haven't had so many picnics in years (my youngest child is 28)."

"It is the best thing I ever did but there are sacrifices too. The feeling of pride and pleasure how well our little girl is doing is the best and unexpected thing. We are sad for the other two siblings we couldn't take on, they are in care and we do not see them."

"The love and devotion from the children and watching them and their characters and confidence grow. The love that I have received from them and the happiness they have brought to my life. They have given me a whole sense of purpose and changed my life around."

"The satisfaction of having my grandchildren with me rather than losing them entirely (they were being twin-tracked for adoption). The pleasure of raising two bright little souls and trying to help them achieve their full potential."

"Loads: loving relationships, pride, strong family unit, joy at helping a child progress and come to terms with negative past experiences, helping them to gain greater confidence, enhanced self esteem and independence and most importantly contentment, security and happiness. Overcoming challenges."

"I have a loving granddaughter and I am enjoying watching her discover the world. It keeps me young."

"The children enrich your life. Do not dwell on the things that are no longer open to you. However go for the things that you can do. For instance I am now studying for a degree and student finance pays the younger child's nursery fees. We may not be able to do the travelling that we wished for in retirement but we can do new things, a person I know is learning to play a musical instrument at 49."

"I am able to spend all day every day with my two delightful grandchildren. I am a happier person since giving up the rat race."

"The joy of sharing a young life and helping to positively shape their future, the cuddle from little arms and sound of their laughter fills the house. My grandson will not always be a toddler, he has made me more positive. My core values have changed for the better, I can confidently say I know what is truly valuable and that is beyond price."

"Made me less selfish, as previously only had myself to think about."

"It has led to a change of career for me and I am now a Support Worker working for Social Services within a Child Protection Team"

"It has made me young again, and my home is full of laughter again with a young granddaughter living

with me. It has increased my energy levels and almost made me younger again, with someone to care for, and look after. She is a wonderful little girl and I love having her living with me, able to give her love and affection that sadly her own mother couldn't. She has taught me about computers!"

"To have a wonderful addition to my household, she is an amazing, loving, caring incredible child. And a (surrogate) sister to my son. It has also taught me how resilient kids are, and how much difference you can make to someone's life. A life changing experience but I wouldn't change it, except to have my sister back."

"Children keep you young. We are able to look after 6 children and go to sleep at night knowing we have made a difference. This is better than a social life. My son aged 30 had to move out to make room for the children yeah, we will never be rich as far as money is concerned but we have love and fun and time for everyone we in all have 17 grand children when they come to visit they don't want to go home. They all want to stay and some do just for a while we love it."

"The anxiety I felt from worrying about her safety has gone and I enjoy watching her grow and change. I love that feeling of knowing she is in bed at night safe which I didn't have before."

"That she is safe with me, I can sleep soundly at night."

"He gives me a reason to get out of bed every morning, a reason to jump in puddles and remember all the good things I did with my children. He makes me want to give him the world."

8.4 How carers think the government and local authorities could help them

Respondents to the survey were offered an open opportunity to say what they thought national and local government could or should do to help them. 347 carers answered this question, and the single most important issue, singled out by over half of them (54%) was financial support, with many suggesting there should be parity with payments to foster carers. 35% advocated for better support services, and 26% that advice, information and training should be made available to them. 12% simply wanted more recognition of what they were doing, with 10% specifying emotional support, 6% saying that they would like to be listened to, and another 6% suggesting respite or childcare provision.

"Be supportive - provide a social worker for the family, rather than just for the children; get resources to families more quickly - we shouldn't have to wait months to get money that is owed; provide a more open, collaborative legal process rather than 'we'll have our legal people talk to your legal people' approach."

"More training, more financial help, more understanding of the complexities of this situation. And equal pay/rights as foster carers"

"More money, less interference. Personal budget would be good - that way we could choose to receive help from whoever we wanted, rather than being stuck with CAMHS etc."

"Sort out proper care and finances, be clear and transparent about this not play emotional blackmail and hide your rights. Move from the how can we do it as cheaply as possible and off load as many children as possible to worried family members without providing the right ongoing support emotionally and financially. All I have had is sign this or elseand we will see you again sometime over to you sunshine. Nobody cares how I survive or if I survive it's another 3 children off the list and on to someone else. Budget is the word that matters most. They are in a safe environment now someone responsible has signed on the dotted line nobody cares what sacrifices you have to make to do this and they should"

"Recognise that we do an incredibly worthwhile job, and that we need to feel valued. Give us the means to continue to live a life where we can enjoy all the normal things that others, who are working, take for granted. Most of us have worked all our lives and to suddenly find that you are not sure where the next penny is coming from, is not easy for us, or the children we are bringing up. It is going to be hard enough for the children to have others asking why they live with their grandparents, and to have to go without basic needs is not fair on them. Value the experience we can bring to these children, and respect that not all of us want the world and his wife knowing we are now living on state benefits, a bit of discretion in that area would be nice. Give us more information about groups etc and respite care so that we can have a break sometimes. It is a bit like swimming around in toffee!!"

"Provide us with the support and training and finance that they provide foster carers. My

guardianship allowance is currently means tested so I forfeit it if I earn money, foster carers can still go to work and improve their family living standard. I cannot. I am completely stuck in relative poverty-when my granddaughter reaches 18 I will be in abject poverty and I have no way of saving for that eventuality or for the travelling which I had planned to do."

"Listen to and take into account the carer's views. Be more transparent in what they are doing and why. Publish their procedures and e.g. allowances"

"Listen to them they know the children and what they need. More support from local authorities as these children through no fault of their own are often very mentally scarred and need a lot of help to see them through"

"Have a consistent policy for carers that doesn't rely on postcodes. There should be a firm policy that one shouldn't have to fight for in order to get heard. I'm quite fed up with trying to find out who I should be contacting, being fobbed off with another number and in one case being redirected to a children's charity who didn't know what I was talking about!"

8.3 How can Family Rights Group and the Kinship Care Alliance help?

Carers were also asked what they thought Family Rights Group and other members of the Kinship Care Alliance could do to help family and friends carers. This was an open-ended question, that was answered by 295 carers. The answer that was most commonly given, by 77 (26%) of carers was that these organisations should provide them with support. 50 carers suggested keeping up the good work, 45 carers looked to be provided with advice, and 44 wanted to be provided with information. Other suggestions were to campaign for finance, campaign for better support, being an advocate for kinship carers to government, and putting carers in touch with other carers.

"Continue to advocate for a fair, transparent system with parity across different authorities. Don't forget the children who are not classed as 'looked after' as in my experience they fall through the system at every turn. Continue to offer phone and internet help/support."

"Give support advice and a listening ear. Social Services don't know what they are doing"

"Be there for support when we need it"

"Continue to exist, continue to provide excellent advice and support, consider providing training courses."

"Keep on with the fight for us and with us. By caring about what happens and understanding how we struggle on a daily basis."

"Get advice out to people. Let kinship carers know their rights. Be there when we need help, someone to talk to. To actually, genuinely care about us and how we are doing or feeling"

"Help us through the maze of problems we encounter - particularly in dealing with financial issues - and knowing ours, and the children's, rights. Be an "ear" for us - someone to lean on when it all gets too much & extended family don't want to know as they get sick of you moaning!! It's SO much easier to talk to people in the same situation who REALLY understand you..."

"Advice both legal and practical, continuing to lobby government on these vital issues and creating support groups"

"Be their voice!! Politicians will listen to an organisation not individuals."

"Continue doing what you are doing. Continue campaigning to give carers and children a voice. Without people/organisations like you we do not have a voice."

"To give advice on how legal system works and a listening ear"

"The help is already there with the forums and advice line. It is a lifeline to us"

"To carry on providing an excellent advice line, and online support. I don't know what I would have done without it at times before my grandson came home."

"Listen and advise, I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them.....(huge thank you)"

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of the survey was to gather in-depth information on family and friends carers' experiences and circumstances and that of the children they are raising. It is notable not only because of the large number of family and friends carers who took part, but also because of their willingness to write eloquent personal testimonies about their own experiences. Carers have told us about the joys, disappointments and hardships of being a family and friends carer. The data they provided about their lives, and the lives of the children they are raising, has helped us to evaluate and enumerate how widespread are the experiences they describe.

Running from August to October 2011, this web survey covered the period either side of the deadline when local authorities were required to publish a family and friends care policy, in accordance with statutory government guidance¹⁰³. As such, the survey provides a snapshot of how carers felt about the support they were getting from local authorities at the outset of this requirement to have a written policy. Although a few carers described good experiences of being supported by local authorities, sadly most did not, and over half gave the lowest possible score for the support they had received. Clearly there is work to be done by local authorities in translating the aspirations of the statutory guidance into local practices and services that will meet the needs of these children and carers.

9.1 Drawing upon the detailed findings in the report, the following points stood out:

- 56% of the carers were raising children who had at least one sibling living elsewhere. 40% of these siblings were living with parents, 19% in foster carer, 13% adopted, and only 11% were with other relatives. Siblings placed with other family members are more likely to remain in contact with one another, and yet three times as many are placed with unrelated foster or adoptive families as with other relatives.
- Significant numbers of carers have multiple caring responsibilities. Almost half are raising a kin child who has special needs (46%), with many of those also caring for a disabled adult, another child with special needs, or in some cases both.
- 20% of children in the study had been placed with unrelated foster carers before going to live with their family and friends carer. Why were

more of them not placed directly with their current carer, saving them from the disruption of multiple moves?

- Carers' working lives are severely disrupted by becoming family and friends carers. Over a third had to give up their job. Others have to increase their work commitments (increase hours, postpone retirement) in order to manage financially. Some carers find themselves stretched in both directions, a situation almost impossible to manage without support.
- Carers tended to welcome the parental responsibility and decision-making that came with acquiring a residence or special guardianship order, but noted that this often came at the expense of lost finance and support. However, family and friends carers who became foster carers tended to welcome the finance and to a more limited extent the support they got, but regretted having to consult social workers about making decisions for the child.
- Three quarters of carers felt they hadn't had the information to make an informed decision about the legal options at the time the child came to live with them and many felt they were not signposted to independent advice, listened to and respected by the local authority to be able negotiate the best solution for the child, rather than necessarily the cheapest.
- Carers often faced significant emotional stresses and isolation as a result of becoming a family and friends carer, which often placed a significant strain on their relationship with their partner. The sacrifices many carers made went beyond material ones.

9.2 Recommendations

9.2.1 Government should:

1. Audit local authorities' response to the statutory guidance on family and friends care¹⁰⁴ to ensure it is being faithfully and effectively implemented across the country.
2. If this is not effective then consider legislating to give family and friends carers a statutory entitlement to support irrespective of legal status. This could be achieved by a duty on local authorities to establish family and friends care support services, including a dedicated family and friends care worker/team. This could be modelled on the duties on local authorities in respect of adoption and special guardianship

103 DfE (2011) Statutory Guidance on Family and Friends Care,

104 DfE (2011) Statutory Guidance on Family and Friends Care,

support services. This duty would need to be funded by central government¹⁰⁵.

3. Establish a duty on local authorities, and fund local authorities to offer all families a family group conference prior to a child becoming looked after (or in an emergency, soon afterwards).
4. Introduce an amendment to the definition of who is a child in need in Children Act 1989 s.17 (10) to include "(d) children being cared for by family members or friends".
5. Introduce a national financial allowance to cover the real costs of bringing up a child for family and friends carers who take on raising a child for more than 28 days continuously as an alternative to the child being taken into the care system.
6. Exempt family and friends from the total cap on welfare benefits introduced in the Welfare Reform Act.
7. Exempt family and friends carers who are permanently raising a child from income support rules which currently require that if the youngest child they are raising is aged 5 or over they must comply with specific job-seeking requirements (modelled on the foster carer exemption).
8. Introduce a period of paid leave from work for family and friends carers when the child comes to live with them, modelled on statutory adoption leave and pay.
9. In order to address the fear expressed by some family and friends carers about the potential cost of supporting the young people through higher education, amend regulations and guidance to recognise that young people who are in family and friends care are a distinct group of young people who cannot live at home with their parents, and should therefore be specifically included as a category within the definition of 'independent eligible student' within the Education (Student Support) Regulations.

10. Ensure that changes to legal aid do not prevent or deter potential family and friends carers from being able to apply to court to obtain a permanent secure legal order for a child, who could otherwise be in state care.
11. Ensure the provision and funding of specialist independent advice services for family and friends carers.
12. Reconsider proposals¹⁰⁶ to reduce court scrutiny of care plans, particularly in relation to sibling arrangements.
13. Introduce a duty on local authorities to collect and publish official statistics of children in family and friends care to whom they provide support whether or not the child is looked after.
14. Enable family and friends carers to obtain parental responsibility without having to bring a case to court, by allowing parents to enter into a parental responsibility agreement with a relative (as defined in s.105 Children Act 1989), as has already been extended to step parents.

9.2.2 Local authorities should:

15. Implement the statutory guidance on family and friends care, ensuring they formulate, publish and act in accordance with policies which reflect the principle that support is based on need not legal status, and that children and carers receive the financial and other help they require. This includes commissioning, running or assisting in the provision of tailored services, such as local support groups, as well as ensuring that universal and specialist services (e.g. mediation services, CAMHS etc) are available to and understand of the needs of children and carers and that protocols and agreements are drawn up with other relevant parts of the council (e.g. housing allocations), schools and colleges (e.g. re admissions and discretionary bursary schemes) and other agencies.
16. Assess the needs of siblings who have to live away from their parents, so as to ensure family and friends placements are considered for all of them, and consideration is given as to how they will be able to remain in contact if they are placed separately.

¹⁰⁶ Dfe (2012) *The Government's Response to the Family Justice Review: A system with children and families at its heart* <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CM-8273>

17. Implement legal changes regarding placement of looked after children, with preference being given to placing the children with relatives, friends or other people connected with the child, who are approved as local authority foster carers, over unrelated carers, provided it is consistent with the child's welfare.¹⁰⁷
18. Ensure they are acting lawfully when taking decisions about the legal status of a child entering family and friends care and that their social workers are aware of case law¹⁰⁸ as to when a child should be treated as accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.
19. Ensure carers and potential carers are in a position to make an informed and carefully considered decision about the legal status of the arrangements. This requires not only information and explanations about the full range of legal statuses available to them and the implications of each in terms of support, but also signposting carers to independent sources of information and advice.
20. Consider paying family and friends carers' legal costs associated with taking on the care of a child who might otherwise be in the care system.
21. Ensure that all staff working with family and friends carers are competent in this area of practice and work with carers in a spirit of partnership.
22. In the pre-proceedings stage, explore all family and friends care options as soon as it is likely that the child cannot remain with their parents. This is particularly important in view of the proposed reduced time limits in care proceedings and reduced court scrutiny of care plans.¹⁰⁹
23. Allocate a family and friends care support worker to all family and friends carers, known to Children's Services, irrespective of legal status.
24. Give clear information to carers about the support available and how it can be accessed.
25. Take account of other caring responsibilities that family and friends carers may have, particularly if they are already responsible for disabled children or adults, and liaise with other service providers, such as Adults Services, to ensure that all of the household's support needs are being met.

9.2.3 Further research should address:

- The experiences of children in family and friends care who are separated from their sibling: could more be done to place them together, or with other relatives?
- The experiences of black and minority ethnic children living with family and friends carers.
- The experiences of family and friends carers as litigants in person.
- The long term outcomes of children being raised in family and friends care.
- Children's perspectives of family and friends care.

¹⁰⁷ Section 22C Children Act 1989 (as amended)

¹⁰⁸ Southwark LBC v D [2007] EWCA Civ 182; R (SA) v Kent County Council [2011] EWCA Civ 1303

¹⁰⁹ DfE (2012) *The Government's Response to the Family Justice Review: A system with children and families at its heart* <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CM-8273>

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