

HOUSING NEED & KINSHIP CARE

KINSHIP CARER BRIEFING 2024

KINSHIP CARE IN SCOTLAND AND HOUSING

Kinship care is when a child lives with a relative or close family friend, usually because their parents are not able to care for them.ⁱⁱ Research suggests kinship care can offer several benefits for kinship children including greater stability, and greater family connection.ⁱⁱⁱ 'Formal kinship care' is usually where children have been placed in the care of relatives or friends by social workers, sometimes following the decision of the children's hearing system. 'Informal kinship care' tends to be where families have made the care arrangements themselves. Children in formal kinship care are considered 'looked after' in the same way as those in other forms of care like fostering and residential care. This means organisations, including Local Authorities and the Scottish Housing Regulator, have duties towards children in formal kinship care as a 'Corporate Parent' under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.^{iv}

BACKGROUND

We undertook a project during 2023-24 to explore housing need for kinship families in Scotland. Current strategies for looked after children (notably, the *Promise*),^v housing (notably, *Housing 2040*),^{vi} alongside the current housing emergency, provide context for this work. To find out more, we hosted two roundtable events and an action orientated dissemination workshop to discuss current issues and potential solutions. We also conducted two surveys about housing issues in kinship care, one with kinship carers and one with kinship practitioners.

KEY POINTS

- There is a housing emergency in Scotland and overcrowding and affordability issues are pressing issues for many kinship families. It is important discuss your short and longer-term housing needs with a social worker as early as you can.
- Understanding the availability of local housing can help you make decisions about the priorities for your family.
- Other kinship carers can be a good source of information and it may be worth linking in with local groups.
- Practical support may be available from social work services that could make a difficult situation a little better until a fuller solution can be found.
- Links to further information on these topics can be found at the end of the briefing.ⁱ

KEY INSIGHTS FOR KINSHIP CARERS

If you are struggling with housing issues you are not the only kinship carer in this situation. Just under half of the kinship families who responded to our survey were in housing need, primarily due to overcrowding. Carers gave examples of them having to share rooms with non-infant children, of sleeping on makeshift bedding in living rooms, and of growing children sharing cramped rooms. We heard that overcrowding impacts on the mental well-being of all members of a kinship household, including birth children, and can have physical health impacts, particularly for older kinship carers, such as grandparents. Rent or mortgage affordability was the second most notable housing difficulty for kinship carers and we heard that services could make assumptions that kinship carers were not in financial need, particularly those living in owner-occupied properties.

- **We heard it would help kinship carers for social workers to clearly discuss carers' housing needs at all stages of involvement, including before placement.** If your housing needs have not been raised then you should raise this with social workers: housing should always be considered as part of a holistic social work assessment. Where kinship children are placed with you in an emergency then discussions about housing should still occur at the earliest possible time afterwards.
- We know that there is a shortage of social housing stock, so there are likely to be waiting lists for properties, particularly larger ones. **We heard kinship families benefit from receiving clear, straightforward, information from social housing providers about average turnover times for properties of the size sought, and details of the allocations process.** Some housing providers give some priority to kinship families in their allocations process, while others use the 'reasonable preference' priority within the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 to secure appropriate tenancies for kinship families. **It would be useful to inquire about this directly with the housing provider you have registered with, or via the social worker working with your family.**

- Kinship carers told us they want to see all available housing options considered. **Local Authorities can make grants for housing adaptations or extensions to address overcrowding. However, please be aware that these are hard to get and the process for acquiring them is a long, bureaucratic one.** Housing in neighbouring Housing Associations and/or Local Authorities and use of private sector landlords may provide additional options, which might be a consideration for you. **Some housing providers are also using mutual exchange websites to advertise potential social housing swaps or keeping waiting lists with neighbouring organisations: see Mutual Exchange Partners <https://www.b-with-us.com/content/Aboutus/MutualExchange>.** We learnt that some kinship carers have used mutually beneficial housing exchanges which they organised directly between themselves through their own networks of kinship carers. **There are kinship carers groups across the country that are a great source of information, advice, and support. Talk to your social worker or KCASS (details below) to find out about groups you could join.**
- If your family are overcrowded but unable to move, **you should discuss with social work services what financial support they can provide to help adapt your home to make it as comfortable and usable as possible within space constraints.** This may, for example, involve funding for housing equipment such as new beds, a sofa bed, or additional storage options where a daily living space is also being used as a bedroom.
- **If you have a specific query that is not addressed please note that The Kinship Care Advice Service for Scotland (KCASS) provides free, confidential, impartial advice to kinship families and professionals working with them.**
Call: 0808 800 0006
Email: advice@kinshipscot.org
Opening times: Mon-Fri 10am-2.30pm

ⁱ For the full report please see https://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/research-projects/Kinship_care_Report_digital_2024.pdf. Separate briefings for housing officers https://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/research-projects/Kinship_care_Housing_officer_brief_digital_2024.pdf and kinship practitioners https://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/research-projects/Kinship_care_Practitioner_brief_digital_2024.pdf.

ⁱⁱ See <https://compass.kinship.org.uk/advice-and-information/what-is-kinship-care/> for more information on kinship care

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838015611673>

^{iv} <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/faq/what-is-a-corporate-parent/>

^v <https://thepromise.scot/>

^{vi} <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-2/>

^{vii} <https://kinship.scot/>