

Government launches investment in support for kinship carers

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£126 million of support confirmed for family members such as grandparents, aunts and uncles who care for relatives' children in new pilot scheme.

Thousands of children living in kinship care are set to benefit from earlier, more consistent support as the government today announces seven new Kinship Zones across England.

Kinship carers are adults who step in to provide a loving and supportive home to children in their family whose parents are unable to care for them full-time for a wide range of reasons. They are often grandparents, aunts, uncles or family friends.

These children have often experienced trauma and might otherwise end up in the care system, where outcomes in areas like education and health are significantly worse.

Currently, kinship carers do not receive consistent financial support, unlike foster carers and adoptive families. This is despite the fact that kinship care is shown to lead to better outcomes than residential care homes, with a 2021 report by University College London showing lower rates of long term illness and higher rates of employment for adults with a history of kinship care compared to those that grew up in foster or residential care.

The government is now trialling a financial allowance to eligible kinship carers, backed by £126 million to reach around 5,000 children, recognising the vital role carers play in the lives of their vulnerable children.

This starts with a pilot in the seven local authority area Kinship Zones announced today, with kinship carers to be provided with funding per child, equivalent to what foster carers receive.

Minister for Children and Families, Josh MacAlister, said:

As a country we owe kinship carers our thanks and our support, and the new financial allowance which we're trialling as part of our plan for change recognises the vital role they play ensuring families can stay together.

We promised to introduce this scheme to support kinship carers who step up for the children they love and give every child the best possible start in life.

These Kinship Zones will lead the way in showing the impact for children when we unlock the power of grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives who could care for their kin in the place of the care system.

Dr Jo Casebourne, Chief Executive of Foundations, said:

Kinship carers play a vital role in helping to ensure that children can stay safely looked after in their family networks. That's why we're pleased to undertake the evaluation of the kinship financial allowances pilot announced today, to help to build the evidence base and shape future support for kinship carers and the children they care for.

Jahnine Davies, National Kinship Care Ambassador, said :

The launch of the Kinship Zones pilot marks an important milestone for kinship carers and the children they care for. For the first time, we have a government-led initiative that will not only examine how best to provide financial support for kinship families but will also encourage local authorities to look holistically at the support they offer and adopt a genuine 'think family' approach.

Alongside this, my report, also published today, sets out key learning in this area, and I hope it will be a valuable resource for all local authorities as they review and strengthen their approach to kinship care. I look forward to working with the Kinship Zones and celebrating the launch of this vital pilot.

Children's Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza said :

Kinship carers provide stability and love during moments of significant upheaval in a child's life - their value often goes under-acknowledged, but the commitment they offer can be transformative.

The overwhelming majority of children in kinship care who I have spoken to as Children's Commissioner tell me they feel loved and cared for, a true testament to the unique bonds formed during kinship care.

I have called for kinship carers to be given a financial allowance that supports the transition into these new living arrangements - so I am grateful to the government for listening and taking this important first step.

Cathy Ashley OBE, Chief Executive of Family Rights Group said:

All children should be raised safely in their family wherever possible. Kinship carers step in, often at a moment's notice, to make that happen. They often save the state thousands in care costs but many face real financial hardship in doing so. The pilot is taking a groundbreaking step which will make a difference to 4,500 children and their families in seven areas.

In the meantime, as all local authorities develop their kinship local offer, this is a critical

moment for national and local government to go further to build a fair, effective support system for all kinship families.

James Bury, Head of Policy, Research and Development at CoramBAAF, said:

This is an encouraging and positive important announcement for kinship carers and CoramBAAF welcomes the launch of the financial allowances pilot. This important initiative will provide much needed financial support to kinship families in seven local authorities.

Through our work supporting practice and hearing directly from families, we know the challenges that kinship carers can face, as well as the challenges facing local authorities in providing consistent and fair financial support. We look forward to seeing the impact of the pilots and look forward to this potentially leading to a wider roll-out to enable families across the country to benefit.

Lucy Peake, Chief Executive of Kinship said:

Today's announcement is an important first step towards ensuring kinship families have the financial support they need to provide children with stable, loving homes. A guaranteed allowance equal to the foster care allowance will be life-changing for kinship carers in the local authority areas where this is being piloted, many of whom struggle to afford the basics for the children they have unexpectedly stepped in to raise.

Following years of campaigning alongside kinship carers, we're pleased the government has recognised the current system is inequitable and is putting a huge strain on kinship families, pushing many into poverty. Providing financial support to kinship families and investing in family networks will help children stay safely with those who love them, and reduce the need for more costly options in the care system.

Kinship carers hold our care system together, and they deserve the right support to continue doing so.

This ambitious pilot programme – the largest government investment in kinship care of its kind to date – will support around 5,000 kinship children, backed by over £126 million of new funding confirmed for the first two years with further funding to be confirmed in the next Spending Review period.

The pilot will run for up to three and a half years, with further expansion to be confirmed after evaluation.

The seven confirmed Kinship Zone local authorities are:

- Bexley (Greater London)
- Bolton (North West)
- Newcastle (North East)
- North East Lincolnshire (East Midlands)
- Medway (South East)
- Thurrock (East of England)
- Wiltshire (South West)

Each Kinship Zone will receive a package of funding and support, enabling local authorities to tailor delivery to local needs. Money saved by local authorities thanks to central government pilot funding will be redirected to other support schemes for family networks.

The seven local authority areas were chosen following a selection process last June. Together, they offer a useful mix of geography, demographics, and service models. This was intentional: the pilot is designed to test what works at scale in varied local contexts, so robust learning can be generated for future decisions.

Some councils offer support to kinship carers, but it can vary greatly. The Kinship Zones programme will enable the DfE and participating councils to work out how best to deliver financial support to kinship carers across the country and how it should be delivered in future.

The ultimate goal is to support more children to grow up within their family networks, avoiding care. The children's care organisation Foundations, working in partnership with consultancy Alma Economics, will track outcomes for carers and children throughout the pilot to inform future decisions.

The Department for Education will publish findings from the programme to ensure transparency about what works and how support can be strengthened nationwide.

The Kinship Zones programme marks a significant step forward in ensuring they receive the right help at the right time, while building a strong evidence base to shape future national policy.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-investment-in-support-for-kinship-carers>