

# **In the family way:** Five years of caring for Kinship Carers in Scotland





## Foreword

All across Scotland, thousands of people care for children, because their natural parents are unable to do so. These carers – known as "kinship carers" – are often grandparents, but can also be aunts and uncles, siblings and other relatives or close family friends.

According to Scottish Government statistics on looked after children collated in July 2012, 1.8%, or 16,248 of Scotland's children are looked after by their local authority, and 4,067 of these are looked after in formal kinship care arrangements. Many more – an estimated 13,000 – live in informal kinship care arrangements, and this distinction can have a significant impact on financial and other support available to their carers.

In addition, arrangements for kinship carers are different across the local authorities of Scotland and kinship carers, like many others, have to navigate the welfare system – and the recent welfare changes that have come with it. This along with what can be a stressful, emotional time for families who are entering into kinship care arrangements.

Which is why five years ago when there was a clear need for a specific advice service for kinship carers, the Scottish Citizens Advice Bureaux began working with the Scottish Government to establish that service. This report celebrates the work of the Citizens Advice Scotland Kinship Care Service and highlights the need for it to continue to advise and support kinship carers as they navigate the changing landscape of welfare changes and the impact of the Children and Young People Act on their family circumstances.

We want to mark our five years caring for kinship carers and our successes in the field – most particularly the financial gain that has been gathered for kinship care clients – nearly £1million and that we have helped nearly 3,000 kinship carers receive the free independent advice they need tailored for each individual's circumstances.

That in itself is something to celebrate and highlight but so also is the level and provision of support we give kinship carers who can often have complex circumstances. Alongside the partnership and training support we do with local authorities and other support groups and our gathering of evidence and case studies of the issues kinship carers present with, the Citizens Advice Scotland Kinship Care Service has much to be proud of in its first five years. It is clear that the project is needed in the future because the number of kinship carers continues to rise and their need for advice increases also. The nature of the advice that is needed is also complicated and needs to be tailored not just to the individual family circumstances but also to the area in which they live. We have developed a level of expertise and capacity through our CAB network that could not be easily replicated or matched. Our CAB advice model is successful and locally responsive which is why we have consistently received excellent feedback from our service users and stakeholders.

So I look forward to the work we can do in the next five years.

Negt light

Margaret Lynch Chief Executive Citizens Advice Scotland

## Our Five Years

The Citizens Advice Scotland Kinship Care Service has been funded by the Scottish Government since 2008 to deliver specialist independent free advice and information to Scottish kinship carers. The project is currently funded until June 2014.

We are proud to be celebrating five years of high quality advice delivery to kinship carers across Scotland and this report covers our work from September 2008-2013.

The overall aim of Citizens Advice Scotland's Kinship Care Service is to improve the quality of life and standard of living of Scottish kinship carers and the children they look after. Over the past five years the project has delivered a high quality advice and information service specifically tailored to meet the needs of kinship carers. The service has developed significant expertise and delivers advice where it's needed - face-to-face, on home visits, through outreach support, and by telephone.

Direct advice to clients is delivered by Citizens Advice Bureaux and a national free telephone helpline delivered by Citizens Advice Direct (CAD) provides overall coverage. Support for bureaux and for CAD is provided by two part-time National Co-ordinators based at CAS in Edinburgh and four part-time Regional Officers based in CAB offices across Scotland who provide second-tier support for bureaux and work closely with local authorities. The Regional Kinship Care Officers have extensive experience and are able to carry out more complex case work.

## The project has successfully delivered:

#### **Caring for kinship carers**

We have advised, educated and empowered nearly 3,000 kinship carers to access financial and other support, by providing advice and information online at www. cas.org.uk, by telephone via a dedicated Kinship Care Helpline or in person at local Citizens Advice Bureaux. We have ensured kinship carers have received timely, accurate advice tailored for each individual by providing accurate kinship care information and advice resources to a local authority level, based on each local authority's differing policies and practices.

#### A £1million financial lifeline

We have improved financial circumstances for kinship carers across Scotland by a total of almost £1 million. We have helped kinship carers to maximise their incomes through detailed benefits work to reduce their levels of financial hardship, stress and isolation.

#### **Training to understand**

We have made it easier for kinship carers to access support from their local authority and from third sector agencies. This has been done by providing training and information to these agencies about the issues faced by kinship carers to ensure better and more consistent outcomes for kinship carers. We have also supported all councils to develop policy and practice for kinship carers. In addition, we have provided information, training and support to more than 2,000 CAB advisers.

#### **Policy matters**

By gathering evidence and campaigning to exert a responsible influence on relevant policy development we hope to improve the experiences of Scottish kinship carers and highlight the impact of negative policies.

#### Working in partnership

We have provided a seamless service to kinship carers by offering links between our services and those provided by other agencies, such as Children 1st, Mentor UK and kinship care peer support groups to maximise awareness and uptake of the service.

## Top ten successes

We have dealt with nearly 3,000 kinship carers in the past five years. 2770 people contacted the Citizens Advice Scotland Kinship Care Service and benefited from advice, support and information between September 2008 and September 2013. This represents a significant proportion of Scottish kinship carers, helped by the service to better understand their rights and responsibilities.

Kinship carers gained nearly £1 million in client financial gain. This £988,776 as a result of good advice, concentrated on topics like benefits, debt, and help in navigating the maze of social work regulations for kinship carers.

**Comprehensive advice is provided for complex problems.** Advice for kinship carers is complicated. More than three quarters of our clients (77%) approached the service with multiple issues, with just under a quarter (23%) identifying four separate reasons for seeking advice and support.

Support provided by the service ensures that **all kinship carers living in Scotland get the tailored advice they need.** A kinship carer living in Fife or Aberdeen will require completely different advice from a kinship carer living in Glasgow or Orkney.

**Local authorities** report that they have benefited from contact with our service, with the majority seeking advice and information from the service and taking up training opportunities.

**Regularly updated training and support**, developed and delivered by the service, ensures that more than 2,000 CAB volunteers can answer enquiries on kinship care.

**Kinship care peer support groups** report that the service has provided them with invaluable advice and information. We have worked directly with around 24 kinship care peer support groups, and provided input into other groups through our partner agencies.

**High quality kinship care information resources** developed by the service are an integral part of CAB advice provision, and also well-utilised by external stakeholders such as local authorities & family support groups. In addition regular internal audit demonstrates that our advice is consistently scored as being of very high quality.

**Our expertise and experience** means that we have oversight of both national trends and regional variations, and can play a vital role in the development of kinship care policy and practice at both national and local levels.

**Good practice in local authorities** is captured by our locally responsive comparative data. We share this data formally through the training sessions delivered to local authority officers. We have also shared good practice and information through our participation in the About Families Project report on kinship care, and informally with the Scottish Government as part of a review of kinship care policy which fed into the shaping the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act.

"Kinship carers step into difficult circumstances to help vulnerable children and young people, often at short notice, at times of stress or heartache and make the world of difference. Often they do this without knowing about what support they are entitled to, or that there are experts on hand to help and advise them.

That is where the Kinship Care Advice and Information Service plays an invaluable role in supporting kinship families and why as Minister for Children and Young People I am delighted that the Scottish Government has been able to provide funding to Citizens Advice Scotland to deliver this service.

Over the past five years the service has provided support, advice and information to thousands of kinship families, both formal and informal, ensuring that they do not suffer through a lack of knowledge of their rights or the services available to them. The service has made a positive difference to children and young people living in kinship care across Scotland and has contributed to our aim of making Scotland the best place in the world for children to grow up."

Aileen Campbell, MSP Minister for Children and Young People

## Caring for kinship carers

Reviews and research we have carried out across the five years have shown that our service is appreciated highly by kinship carers, local authorities and support groups. Our service provides detailed advice both face-to-face and via a dedicated telephone helpline which increases kinship carers' awareness of their legal rights and responsibilities and financial entitlements, and helps them make more informed choices.

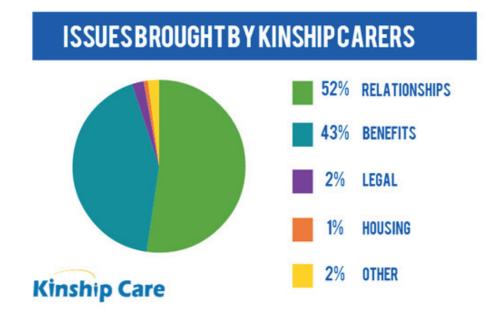
Across Scotland, kinship carers provide care for the children of relatives or close family friends, when families break down and children are at risk. Most kinship carers are grandparents, but many are aunts and uncles, cousins, siblings, greatgrandparents, and other relatives or friends – the only requirement is that the kinship carer has a pre-existing relationship with the child. Kinship care arrangements occur when children are at risk of harm or neglect, often because of parental substance misuse, domestic violence, physical or mental ill health, imprisonment or bereavement. Many children live in kinship care families due to a combination of these factors. Unlike foster-care arrangements, kinship care arrangements are almost always unplanned, with kinship carers resourcing essential items such as bedding and baby equipment at very short notice and without financial support.

Specific barriers faced by kinship carers include lack of knowledge about entitlement to financial support from the local authority, unfamiliarity with the process of applying for benefits and anxiety surrounding contact with social services. When this is impacted by feelings of grief caused by the actions - or death - of the parent of the child they care for, or by feelings of guilt that they are in some way responsible for the situation in which the child has been living, kinship carers tell us that they feel isolated and feel they have nowhere to turn for support.

Because of all of these factors and because of the interaction between different local authority policies and the UK benefits system, and a bewildering array of associated legal jargon, kinship carers face a uniquely complex set of circumstances, which require individually tailored and localised information and advice.

## The need for advice

Levels of inquiry to bureaux and to the helpline show that the service has reached an impressive number of kinship carers between September 2008 and September 2013. **2,770 people** contacted the Citizens Advice Scotland Kinship Care Service with a total of **3,652 kinship care issues**. This represents a significant proportion of Scottish kinship carers, helped by the service to better understand their rights and responsibilities and benefit from advice, support and information. We do not see any particular differences in the need for advice between those kinship carers who had looked after children or non looked after children. As you can see from the graph below, by far the biggest area of advice is within what we call relationships advice (our relationship advice code relates to areas of advice including issues such as child adoption and fostering, child protection, parental contact, child support, adoption, childcare) followed by benefits advice. This accounts for 95% of all advice given to kinship carers.



This profile of issues brought by kinship carers differs from the profile of issues brought to the CAB service as a whole. Kinship carers by the nature of their situation are disproportionately affected by benefits and relationships issues and there is a clear need for a national support service, like the one provided by CAS, that is able to respond to their unique needs with expert and up-to-date advice on these – and other - subjects.

## **Complexity and workload**

The majority of kinship care enquiries are complex and there is a significant workload attached to their resolution. Although some clients require only one appointment to address their needs, the majority require a range of responses from follow up appointments to lengthy and detailed case-work. Analysis of our 2013 Client Survey showed that the majority of respondents (77%) approached the service with multiple issues, with just under a quarter (23%) identifying four separate reasons for seeking advice and support.

#### Case study - Karen and Lucy

On the evening before Karen's five year old grand-daughter, Lucy, was due to start school, she went, with her mother, to a building which she described as "the drug house". At around 2.30 the following morning, aware that there was no-one competent to provide care for her, and anxious that she would miss her first day of school, Lucy left "the drug house" and set out to walk 13 miles to her grandmother's house, at the end of a busy dual carriageway. Lucy was noticed by an officer in a passing police car, an emergency social worker was contacted, and Lucy was delivered to Karen's home at 7.30 that morning. Initially, Lucy was placed in her grandmother's care for a few days, but the placement became a long term one, and Karen became a kinship carer.

### **Over the years**

As you can see from the graph below, the need for advice has followed legislative change and our ability to provide advice due to funding constraints for the service.

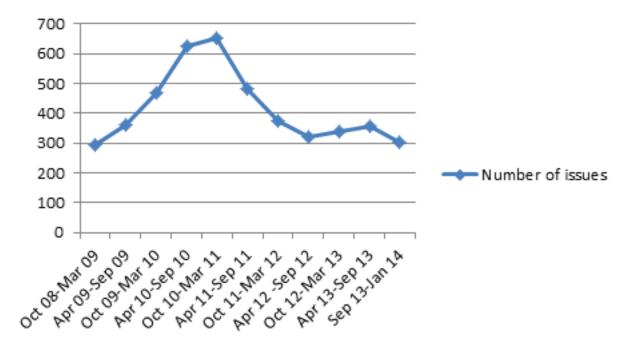
There was an initial surge in enquiries following the launch of the service in 2008. This highlights that the new service plugged a previously unfilled 'advice gap', and for which there was significant need.

The number of enquiries peaked in the six month period between October 2010 and March 2011. This represented a period of significant change and uncertainty for kinship carers, as local authorities introduced new kinship care schemes prior to the April 2011 deadline contained in the Scottish Government/CoSLA concordat.

The number of enquiries dipped over the following 18 months, between April 2011 and September 2012. These figures reflect the impact of the reduction in our funding which affected the number of hours in which regional officers were available to deliver the project.

Over the last year, the number of issues brought to the service has started to rise again. Case evidence indicates this is in part due to repeat visits by kinship carers as their circumstances shift, for instance as a result of a change in local authority practice. Carers who have already received advice from the service are now returning to seek advice again as they know they receive good independent advice from a specialist who understand their circumstances.

Our experience indicates that the service faces a surge in enquiries around periods of legislative change. Our expectation is that the recent upturn in the number of enquiries will continue between 2014 and 2017 as the changes brought about by the UK government's welfare reform agenda (eg Universal Credit, changes to housing benefit, disability benefits) and the Scottish Government's Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (which provides for stronger rights for the kinship carers of non looked after children, and makes other provision, such as for pre-school children and care leavers, which will also impact on kinship care families) are implemented and introduced.



### What kinship carers say about our service

"I have had a very positive experience of contact over a long period of time. The adviser I spoke with and emailed was very knowledgeable about the whole process of kinship care and the local authority's responsibilities. Always received an informative reply. Very, very helpful."

Kinship carer, East of Scotland

"The adviser whom I spoke with was very helpful in explaining my situation and what other help I may be entitled to. They were so friendly and listened to all my problems concerning the child in question."

#### Kinship carer, West of Scotland

"This service is much needed within our communities, especially in relation to supporting the kinship carers themselves." Diane Littlejohn, Project Co-ordinator, Sure Start Grandparents group

"Excellent service, even aftercare service was great." Kinship carer, South East of Scotland

"Very supportive and informative." Kinship carer, East of Scotland

## A £1 million Financial Lifeline

Helping kinship carers to maximise their incomes through detailed benefits work to reduce their levels of financial hardship, stress and isolation, is one of the main areas the CAS Kinship Care Service deals with. Across the service, the scale of client financial gain is huge. From the launch of the service, total client financial gain is just short of £1million (£988,776).

Nearly half of that total client financial gain - £468,114 - is the increased receipt of local authority kinship care allowance payments for clients who have contacted the helpline.

"Thanks to the intervention of the CAB, my constituent got a £10,800 backdated [kinship care allowance] payment. Keep up the good work"

Councillor, West of Scotland Local Authority Council (2013 Stakeholder Survey)

### **Increasing income**

One of the key benefits for clients using the kinship care service is an increase in disposable income as a result of the advice and support they receive. Maximising income in this way directly benefits clients and the children for whom they are responsible. For kinship carers in significant hardship, this increase in disposable income can represent a financial lifeline. Improved family finances can help lead to better outcomes for children and young people.

It is well documented that kinship carers live with high levels of disadvantage and deprivation. CAS's 2010 report on kinship care clients, 'Relative Value: The Experiences of Kinship Carers Using the Scottish CAB Service', found that more than half of the kinship carers in the study were not in employment, with many having given up their employment because of their kinship caring responsibilities.

Kinship carers are also significantly more likely to be unable to work due to disability or ill health than the general population in Scotland. In combination, these factors can often result in kinship carers and the children they care for experiencing not only financial hardship, but significant levels of stress and isolation as they cannot take part in or engage in activities with friends, schools, the local community and so on.

Our Kinship Care Service delivers support and advice in order to tackle these issues for clients. This includes benefit checks, assistance with applications, help resolving problems and representation at appeal.

#### Case Study: £14,000 in payments gained

A regional officer helped a client gain entitlement to four years of backdated kinship care allowance totalling over £14,000. A client approached a South of Scotland CAB in May 2013, requesting support to lodge a complaint regarding her local authority's decision to not backdate payments of kinship care allowance.

The client had been caring for her niece for many years when, in 2008, she was granted a Residence Order. The client lives in a local authority that makes payments of kinship care allowance to carers of not looked after children, and so she was entitled to financial support from this date. However, despite ongoing social work involvement in the case, the local authority did not inform the client of her entitlements. In September 2012, she was alerted to her status as a kinship carer by a third party, and contacted the local authority. She was approved as a kinship carer in December 2012, but not awarded back dated payments. When she queried this decision, she was told that their policy had changed and that, as of October 2012, they no longer made back dated payments.

The Kinship Care Service Regional Officer supported the client through Stage 1 and 2 of the Local Authority's complaints procedure, at which the complaint was not upheld. In September 2013, it progressed to the Complaints Review Panel, at which the Regional Officer presented a summary of the case and the client's grounds for believing she was entitled to back dated payments.

The panel concluded that the client would receive a one-off payment for the full amount of kinship care allowance that should have been in payment since October 2008. The payments will total between £14,000 and £15,000.

Our 2013 Client Survey showed that, for those clients whose reason for contacting the service was mainly financial, 69% were either better off or expected to be better off as a result of their contact with the service. Some clients were better off as a result of gaining access to regular, weekly payments (such as kinship care allowance, or child benefit). For these clients, the amount of weekly income gained ranged from £25 to £317. Some clients were better off as a result of receiving one-off back dated payments (from the local authority, DWP or HMRC). For this group, the range of one-off payments received ranged from £400 to £25,000.

## **Expertise and Experience**

Providing kinship carers with advice and information on financial entitlements is complex and requires significant levels of technical expertise, knowledge and experience as well as access to specific information sources. This is due to both the complexity of issues and cases and also changing policy and legislation, benefits regimes, and differing policy and rule variations across UK, Scottish and local level.

As you can see from the following examples of variations, as a result of this complexity, kinship carers require bespoke and detailed advice, provided by experts. A kinship carer living in Fife or Aberdeen will require completely different advice from a kinship carer living in Glasgow or Orkney. The CAS Kinship Care Service's operational structure ensures that all kinship carers living in Scotland get the tailored advice they need. The project provides second tier support to advisers in bureaux and in many cases the Regional Officers take on the case work themselves.

## **Regional Kinship Care Allowance variation**

All local authorities across Scotland pay kinship care allowance at different rates and via different legal mechanisms. Some local authorities pay kinship carers of not looked after children, others don't.

#### Child benefit

Some local authorities deduct child benefit form the amount of allowance they pay but others don't. A few local authorities make 'additional payments' designed to cover expenses such as birthdays, Christmas and school holidays. Some local authorities pay kinship carers a flat rate irrespective of the age of the child, whilst others make payments which are age dependent.

#### Interactions with the benefits system

Local authority kinship care allowance interacts with benefits such as Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit. However, the precise nature of the interaction varies from carer to carer, as it depends on a number of factors such as the amount of kinship care allowance paid in their local authority, the legal mechanism by which the allowance is paid, and their income. If they receive kinship care allowance, some kinship carers might not be entitled to claim benefits that other carers in similar circumstances are entitled to claim. Some of these kinship carers might actually be better off not receiving kinship care allowance and claiming other benefits instead.

#### Case study: Marjorie and Louis

Marjorie is 63 and is the grandmother and kinship carer of Louis, who is 14. Louis' mother – Marjorie's daughter – died following a long illness. Marjorie lives in a different local authority to the one in which Louis and his mother lived, but because she was keen to avoid further disruption to Louis' life, she decided he should remain at the school he knew, with supportive friends and teachers. However, this involves Louis taking two busses to travel to school, which at a cost of £15 per week, proved to be expensive for Marjorie, who is retired and receives a state pension.

Marjorie contacted her local authority to request a bus pass for Louis, but was refused, as he did not attend school in the local authority – the local authority in which he attended school also refused, as he did not live there. Marjorie approached the Citizens Advice Scotland Kinship Care Service, and, while the two local authorities were unable to help, the Kinship Care Service was successful in securing funds from a local charity to pay for a bus pass for Louis. The Kinship Care Service was also able to advise Marjorie that, she may be entitled to apply to Louis' school for free school meals and school uniform vouchers. As Louis is not a looked after child, Marjorie is not entitled to apply for kinship care allowance from her local authority, which would have amounted to £142 per week, but instead receives Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit totaling £86 per week.

# Provide training and support to local authorities to improve local authority practice and ensure better and more consistent outcomes for kinship carers.

It has always been important to the CAS Kinship Care Service to build good working relationships with the 32 local authorities across Scotland. They have parental responsibility for the 4,067 looked after children in kinship care arrangements in Scotland, and ultimate responsibility for any child in need and they routinely seek advice and information from the Kinship Care Service.

In response, the CAS Kinship Care Service interacts with local authorities in a number of different ways, including the delivery of training to social work practice teams, case work support with individual clients, input into the design and delivery of policy and practice, hosting information-sharing events, implementing referral systems and monitoring variations in policy and practice. All of these activities help to ensure better outcomes for kinship carers and the children they care for and help to improve local authority practice. Real progress has been made over the life of the project and local authorities remain positive about our continued input and support.

The Kinship Care Service works with local authorities in a number of different ways, including the delivery of training, case work support, input into the delivery of policy and practice, attendance at relevant meetings, hosting information-sharing events, implementing referral systems and monitoring variations in policy and practice. All of these activities help improve local authority practice, and ensure better outcomes for kinship carers and the children they care for. Although real progress has been made over the life of the project, local authorities continue to need support in developing their services.

#### Feedback from local authority representatives attending our national training:

"I would like to see more of this training – every local authority should attend."

"I have a better understanding of the benefits available to kinship carers."

"Highlighted that benefits are a minefield."

"It was all very relevant and useful."

"As a social worker in training, this was very helpful training."

"All very informative."

### Feedback

In November 2013, CAS issued a questionnaire to local authorities and gathered the following results:

- Of the local authority respondents who had referred kinship carers to the local CAB, 88% of respondents rated the service as 'very good or 'good'.
- In response to the value of training delivered to local authority officers, 81% of respondents rated the training as 'very good or 'good'.
- 74% rated CAB resources and services as 'very good' or 'good'.

#### Case study: Kate and her grandchildren

The company Kate worked for ceased to trade and Kate lost her job and applied for Job Seekers Allowance while she looked for employment. However she unexpectedly became the kinship carer of her three grandchildren, aged six, three and eleven months. She attended the Job Centre to explain that she could not now seek employment, and to apply to change her benefit application to Income Support. This was refused, on the grounds that she could not produce evidence of her entitlement to receive Child Benefit for the children.

Kate explained that the children had just been placed with her, that they were looked after children, but that the Child Benefit had not yet been transferred into her name. The Job Centre staff were sympathetic, but stated that, without the correct documentation, she could not have Income Support, and also, as she had declared herself unwilling to look for work, she could not now have Job Seekers Allowance either.

Kate was very distressed when she contacted the Citizens Advice Scotland Kinship Care Service because, when she was denied access to Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance, she also lost her entitlement to Housing Benefit and was left with no income, three children to care for, and a requirement to pay rent. The Kinship Care Service spoke to the local authority social work department and the Job Centre on her behalf, and it was arranged that the children's social worker would provide evidence that the children were placed with Kate, and she was granted Income Support.

## Policy matters

Gathering evidence and campaigning to exert a responsible influence on relevant policy development to improve the experiences of Scottish kinship carers is an important part of our role if we are to make lives better for kinship carers.

The project has gathered and analysed client case evidence, identified problems with policies and practice, and then conducted evidence-based campaigning to bring about positive developments in policy. Historically, the focus of much of this work was with the DWP and HMRC, as we clarified areas of uncertainty in relation to the interactions of kinship care allowance and benefits. More recently, the focus of our campaigning activity has been on working with the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament on kinship care issues. Examples of some of the other policy work we have done recently follows.

#### **Financial Modelling**

The Kinship Care Service has also acted as a key player in providing information and financial modelling for the Scottish Government's ongoing financial review of kinship care. This has included attending meetings, supplying case studies and undertaking financial modelling on request.

#### **Children and Young People Act**

The project played an active role in relation to the development of the Scottish Government's Children and Young People (Scotland) Act. In September 2012, we submitted a response to the Scottish Government's consultation on the proposal for the Bill. This was followed in July 2013 with a written submission to the Education and Culture Committee, on the general principles of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. Our evidence focused on the proposal within the Bill to introduce a Kinship Care Order, and raised ongoing concerns about the ability of the proposals as they stand to meet the stated objectives. Representatives from the Kinship Care Service have also raised these concerns in a number of other forums, including meetings with Scottish Government officials and with the relevant Bill team.

We worked with Children 1st, CPAG Scotland and Mentor UK to bring forward amendments to the bill, many of which were taken on by the Scottish Government. Working with the above partners, we produced a formal position statement in relation to financial support for kinship carers, which we issued alongside a briefing for the Stage 1 debate. Uniting together as a small coalition and identifying common ground strengthened our position and our voice for kinship carers.

#### Presenting the evidence

In January 2012, CAS was invited to provide oral evidence to the Education and Culture Committee as part of its round table discussion to consider the effectiveness of current support mechanisms for kinship carers. We submitted written evidence in advance of the session, which provided Committee members with a background to the CAS service, a profile of CAB kinship care clients, and the types of issues they bring to bureaux.

#### Case study: James and Sarah and their granddaughters

James is a serving member of the armed forces and he and his wife, Sarah, currently live in army accommodation in Germany. They are also the grandparents and kinship carers of two girls, aged 12 and 14. James and Sarah were unaware that their granddaughters had been taken into local authority care until they received a message from the elder child to say that they were living with foster carers. Sarah contacted the local authority to say that they were willing to provide care for the girls, resigned from her job in Germany, and travelled to Scotland. The children were formally removed from foster care and placed with James and Sarah in a kinship care arrangement, and Sarah remained in Scotland with the children while an application was made to the court for a Residence Order.

This process took three months, and the children moved from being formally looked after by the local authority and placed with James and Sarah, to being the subjects of a Residence Order, which removed their formal looked after status. The local authority did not inform Sarah that she and James would be entitled to receive, initially, kinship care allowance, and then a residence allowance (at a slightly lower rate), and Sarah returned to Germany with the children, with no financial support from the local authority. Three years later, following a chance conversation with a colleague, James contacted the Citizens Advice Scotland Kinship Care Service and learnt that he should have been receiving a weekly payment for both girls, since the date they were placed.

Following negotiation between the Kinship Care Service, on behalf of James and Sarah, and the local authority, it was decided that they should receive residence allowance and a backdated payment, and consequently they received a cheque for £25,000, with ongoing payments of £200 per week which will continue until the children are 16. Working in partnership to maximise awareness and uptake of the service, and to ensure that kinship carers receive seamless support has been a significant achievement in highlighting the issues kinship carers face.

The project has a strong track record of partnership working to ensure that kinship carers across Scotland can access the right support at the right time through the right channel.

The service has excellent referral mechanisms in place, to provide this support seamlessly. Over the past five years, the helpline alone referred a total of 562 clients onto other local organisations, and received a total of 825 referrals from these organisations. Key partnerships include Scotland's local authorities, Children 1st, CPAG Scotland, Mentor Scotland, DWP, HMRC, About Families, and the Scottish Book Trust.

What our local partners say about the Kinship Care Service:

"This is an excellent and invaluable service. The partnership working with this service is seamless and crucial to my work with and for the families."

Selina Ross, West Dunbartonshire CVS

"The Regional Officer has been a fantastic asset...providing our kinship carers with much needed home visits, something which is not provided by any other service and is extremely important to our families."

Emily Milton, Kinship Care Family Support Project, Edinburgh, Circle Scotland

"The knowledge and guidance of staff was exactly what was required and they knew exactly where to signpost to."

Rhonda Wylie, Kinship Care Family Support Project, West Lothian, Circle Scotland

"Excellent and much needed resources for families and practitioners and particularly relevant in today's current climate." Selina Ross, West Dunbartonshire CVS

"Friendly, approachable and knowledgeable staff." Meg Marr, Support in Mind, Scotland

"Having the Regional Officer to turn to has been a real asset in my role supporting kinship carers."

Jemma Carroll, Kinship Care Family Support Project, West Lothian, Circle Scotland

## Local partnership

Overall, 100% of local partnership organisations rate the support they have received from the Kinship Care Service as 'very good' or 'good'.

At a local level, the Regional Officers have worked in partnership with a number of different organisations and agencies. These include the Scottish Prison Service, substance misuse agencies, Women's Aid, Children's Panel members, and police forces across Scotland to develop intelligence, resources, and the co-ordination of services.

## National partnership

# Overall, 100% of national partnership organisations rate the support they have received from the Kinship Care Service as 'very good'.

At a national level, the project has worked in partnership with a number of organisations to promote the work of the service and ensure that kinship carers receive a seamless service, getting the right support at the right time from the right people. Key partnerships include Children 1st, CPAG Scotland, Child Law Centre, One Parent Families Scotland, DWP, HMRC, Citizens Advice England & Wales, Mentor Scotland, and local peer support groups.

What our national partners say about the Kinship Care Service:

"Good to work with professional knowledgeable people. "The staff are experts in their field and I feel very comfortable in sending service users to their information and services. It is such a shame that with funding cuts staff are stretched in their remit. If further funding was secured, CAS staff would have more flexibility and enhance what they already provide."

#### Heather McVeigh, Scotland Director, Mentor UK

- "Doing a fantastic job do not know what kinship carers would do without the support and signposting from the CAS service"
- Anne Wilson, Action for Sick Children Scotland
- "Huge wealth of knowledge and expertise which CAS was willing to share. Complementary aspects of our two services meant that kinship carers got a better service from us both, especially when we pooled our resources and knowledge on training and outreach."
- Kate Higgins, Policy Manager, Children 1st
- "Good to know there are knowledgeable well-trained staff to signpost kinship carers to when they call our helpline. Very often they require further help outside our remit."
- Catriona Thomson, Information and Development Officer, Enquire
- "We were very confident about the information we requested and received. A CAS Kinship Care presentation at our annual conference was one of the highlights of the day."
- Christine Duncan, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Families Affected by Drugs and Alcohol

Three of the key drivers that led to the initial creation of the project are just as relevant to kinship carers today:

- the rapidly increasing number of kinship carers
- the complexity of kinship carers' advice needs
- a changing policy and practice landscape.

#### Numbers of kinship care arrangements have continued to rise

The number of children in kinship care continues to grow, meaning there is significant continued demand for an advice and information service tailored specifically to the needs of kinship carers.

When the service launched in 2008/09 there were 2,990 children and young people in looked after kinship care arrangements. In 2012, this figure had risen to approximately 4,700 children. In 2006/07, it was estimated that there were just under 10,500 children in not 'looked after' kinship care arrangements. The Scottish Government's current estimate is that there are approximately 17,000 children in not looked after kinship care arrangements – this figure is based on data from the 2009 Scottish Household Survey, and is likely to have risen still further in the subsequent four years.

#### Advice for kinship carers remains very complicated

Our experience suggests that delivering advice and particularly advice on financial and legal issues can be very challenging for kinship carers, as they face a unique set of circumstances. This is the result of both regional variations, for example in local authority practice relating to kinship care payments, and complex interactions between Scottish and UK law in relation to kinship care payments and welfare benefits.

#### The current model works

Our current model in which bureaux and the Citizens Advice Direct (CAD) telephone helpline provide frontline advice, supported by second-tier specialists is seen by kinship carers and stakeholders as the right model for kinship carers. This feedback from various stakeholder groups has consistently shows that our work is appreciated by service users, councils, and other support groups.

Our service believes kinship carers would not be as well-served for financial and legal advice if the model were to change from the specialist service CAB and CAS provide. We have developed a level of expertise and capacity that is already available from the CAB service that would be daunting, time-consuming and expensive to replicate or match.

#### Changes in the law point to an increased need for advice

We believe the picture for kinship carers is likely to get increasingly complicated in 2014/15 and beyond. This is due to kinship carers who will feel the impact of legislative changes brought about by the substantive welfare changes being rolled out by the UK government and new policies to be introduced through the Scottish Government's Children and Young People Act.

The national framework and holistic nature of the Citizens Advice service means it is uniquely placed to support kinship carers through these changes by providing comprehensive benefits checks, combined with detailed expert national and local knowledge of kinship care policy and practice.

## **Final thoughts**

As this report clearly demonstrates, the financial implications of being a kinship carer can be complex and bewildering and the technical jargon surrounding kinship care can be difficult to understand. The Citizens Advice Scotland Kinship Care Service looks forward to continuing to help new and existing kinship carers to navigate the changing landscape of kinship care as it is impacted by welfare reform and the new Kinship Care Order contained in the forthcoming Children and Young People (Scotland) Act.

We are grateful for the continuing support of the Scottish Government and are pleased to work with our partner agencies, including Children 1st, Mentor UK and Child Poverty Action Group to provide a comprehensive, up-to-date and relevant advice and information service to kinship carers across Scotland.

Our key stakeholders feel very strongly about the future need for our service:

"The introduction of welfare reform is complex and can and will impact on kinship carers and it is important that they continue to have access to expert benefit advice and support to ensure they are not suffering financially." Social Worker, Aberdeen Council

"The cut in funding has reduced the hours CAB are able to offer - with the number of carers increasing daily, it is important that allocation of funding reflects this." Social Worker, Aberdeen Council

"Great service – it needs further funding for the great work that they do." Heather McVeigh, Scotland Director, Mentor UK

"The role for these services is not yet complete, given all the legislative changes coming down the line." Social Worker, West of Scotland

"We hope it continues in its current guise, and if possible expands, as the issue of kinship care is one that will be with us for generations to come." Christine Duncan, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Families Affected by Drugs and Alcohol Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS), our 61 member bureaux and the Citizen Advice Consumer helpline form Scotland's largest independent advice network.

Advice provided by the Scottish CAB Service is free, independent, confidential, impartial and available to everyone. We are champions for both citizens and consumers and In 2012/13 we helped over 314,000 people deal with over a million issues. Our financial gain for clients in this year was £121 million.

Our bureaux deliver frontline advice services through more than 200 service points across the country, from the city centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh to the Highlands, Islands and rural Borders communities. This network of dedicated staff and volunteers is ideal to represent and assist the consumers in Scotland in all transactions and services they operate in.

Our vision is paramount to all our goals in the consumer landscape as well as being simple but robust:

"A fairer Scotland where people as citizens and consumers are empowered and their rights respected."

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Get advice online: www.adviceguide.org.uk/scotland

The Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux - Citizens Advice Scotland (Scottish charity SC016637)