

Kinship Care

Thousands of grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings and family friends care for children in Scotland. These “kinship carers” step in when children’s parents are unable to manage, whether because of drug misuse, being sent to prison, becoming a parent at a very young age, poor physical or mental health, or a range of other reasons.

While all these arrangements are informally described as “kinship care”, the term has no specific legal meaning. And the legal status of each arrangement – such as whether the child is “looked after” or not – will vary depending on whether or how a court, a Children’s Hearing or local authority is involved with the case.

In its Getting it Right for Every Child strategy, launched in December 2007, the Scottish Government recognised the need to acknowledge and support all kinship carers. The Government also made a specific commitment to kinship carers of “looked after” children. That commitment is to provide these carers with allowances and treat them on an equivalent basis to foster carers by 2010/11.

For those kinship carers who do receive payments from local authorities, a number of issues may arise, including:

- a kinship care payment can disqualify a carer of a “looked after” child from claiming Child Tax Credit
- each local authority sets its own level of payment and levels vary significantly across Scotland
- children being cared for may come from a different local authority area paying a different rate
- each local authority can choose one of several legal mechanisms for making payments – the particular approach taken can affect the calculation of means tested benefits.

The Scottish
Citizens
Advice Bureau
(CAB) Service
is working
with Scottish
Government to
deliver an advice
and information
service for
kinship carers.

Contact

Sandra Blake, National Kinship Care Co-ordinator

Citizens Advice Scotland

1st Floor, Spectrum House, 2 Powderhall Road, Edinburgh, EH7 4GB
t: 0131 550 1000 f: 0131 550 1001 w: www.cas.org.uk
need advice? www.adviceguide.org.uk

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

**citizens
advice
scotland**

In addition to the extensive advice and information services they already offer, citizens advice bureaux across Scotland now provide an individually tailored advice service for all kinship carers. This approach is necessary because each case is different and any entitlements are affected by the legal status of the arrangement.

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) ensures that bureaux are prepared to deliver the service through a range of supporting activities. These include:

- **Training** – both e-learning materials and regional days
- **Information** – AdviserNet, our electronic information system, includes detailed information on kinship care. This information is reviewed and revised on a regular basis
- **Marketing** – materials and promotional support to assist kinship carers identify the Scottish CAB Service as a source of help for their particular circumstances.

Regional Support

Using specialist workers, five bureaux spread across Scotland are providing a support service to the other bureaux in their region. They assist with:

- managing the regional delivery of the kinship care advice and information service
- providing casework support, as cases involving kinship care are often very complex
- co-ordinating and collating social policy and statistical information for analysis and publication by CAS. This information will then be used to provide invaluable information to policy makers on the number, nature and extent of problems faced by kinship carers across the country.

Through our national network, bureaux are reaching out to local authorities – especially through social work departments and schools – health settings, carers groups and other relevant organisations to ensure that as many kinship carers as possible can benefit from the project.

National Helpline

In addition to the regional service provided by all Scottish bureaux, Citizens Advice Direct offers an initial contact point for any kinship carer across Scotland, and can be contacted on **0844 576 2955**.

Case evidence

|| *A west of Scotland CAB reports of a couple who are being asked to take on the care of the four children of a close family member. The children are “looked after” and are from a neighbouring authority who say that they don’t recognise a kinship arrangement and that as the family is agreeing to it, they have no responsibility. The CAB completed benefit calculations. A meeting has now been agreed with the local authority and clients know the minimum level of payment needed to improve on any benefit claim.*

|| *A central CAB reports of a couple who have cared for their granddaughter without any assistance for seven years following the death of their daughter. The child is now causing severe disruption and is clearly distressed. The CAB advised of immediate entitlement to Child Benefit and Guardians Allowance and suggested the client contact social work for support and possible kinship payment if “looked after” status can be established.*