Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership

Understanding Kinship Care

1. What is Kinship Care?

Kinship care is when a child is cared for by a relative or close family friend when their parents are unable to look after them. This could be a grandparent, aunt, uncle, older sibling, or family friend who steps in to provide a safe and stable home. Kinship arrangements may be informal, supported by the local authority, or established through legal arrangements such as a Special Guardianship Order.

Across England and Wales, more than 141,000 children are being raised in kinship care, making it a significant part of the children's social care landscape.

2. Why Kinship Care Matters

Kinship care helps children remain connected to the people, places and relationships that are important to them. When it is safe and appropriate, remaining within their wider family network can help children maintain their identity, culture, community links and sense of belonging.

Many children in kinship care have experienced difficult circumstances, including family breakdown, parental ill health, substance misuse, bereavement or other crises. Kinship carers provide stability during these challenging times and often prevent children from entering the care system.

3. Who Are Kinship Carers?

Kinship carers come from all walks of life and often take on caring responsibilities unexpectedly. They may be grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings or close family friends who step in during a family crisis to provide a safe and stable home for a child. Many take on this responsibility with little preparation, simply because they want to keep a child connected to their family and support network.

4. Challenges Faced by Kinship Families

While kinship care can provide positive outcomes for children, carers often face significant challenges.

These can include:

- Financial pressures and increased household costs.
- Changes to employment or retirement plans.
- Navigating legal processes and social care systems.
- Supporting children who may have experienced trauma, loss and instability.
- Accessing consistent support and advice.

Nationally, many kinship carers report feeling under-recognised despite the vital role they play in caring for children and supporting family stability.

5. The Role of Multi-Agency Professionals

All agencies working with children and families have a responsibility to understand and recognise kinship care.

Professionals can make a difference by:

- Identifying when children are living in kinship arrangements.
- Understanding the unique strengths and challenges of kinship families.
- Signposting carers to available support and services.
- Working collaboratively with education, health, social care and voluntary sector partners.
- Ensuring the voices of children and kinship carers are heard in assessments and planning.

A good understanding of kinship care helps professionals provide more effective and trauma-informed support to children and their carers.

6. Kinship Care in Westmorland and Furness

Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership promotes awareness of kinship care and the support available locally through the Kinship Local Offer.

Kinship care includes a range of arrangements where a child is cared for by a relative, friend or other connected person when they cannot live with their parents. These arrangements may be informal family arrangements, private fostering arrangements, or arrangements supported by Children's Services. Understanding the different types of kinship care helps professionals identify families who may need advice, support or assessment and ensures children and carers can access the right support at the right time.

7. Resources

Westmorland and Furness Kinship Information and Local Offer: Kinship local offer | Westmorland and Furness Council

National Kinship Charity: https://kinship.org.uk

Kinship Care Week Resources: https://kinship.org.uk/get-involved/kinship-care-week/

