

**Aim:** To ascertain what support and services are available to families in Kinship Care arrangements with particular focus on 'informal' i.e. non- looked after arrangement.

**Objectives:** Based on action plan

- To consider what is available for support and guidance at cluster levels through universal and targeted services
- For staff in cluster and targeted services are aware and able to support the vision for Kinship Carers
- To arrange on Outcome Based Accountability event for this service area

Work completed on part-time basis June to November approximately 20 working days.

**Academic Research:**

**Buttle Trust: "The Poor Relations? Child and Informal Kinship Carers Speak Out" 2013, highlighted some key areas:**

- Information and advice: From the outset carers would benefit from advice about how to talk sensitively to children about their past and their parents problems. In turn children and young people needed help to deal with the stigma and bullying. Thus advice on how to manage information about where they live including, where appropriate to develop a cover story and needed encouragement to speak about bullying.
  - They identified 3 groups that were in particular need of support: namely young kinship carers; carers with severe problems or disabilities and carers with multiple caring responsibilities especially those supporting the children's parent (s).
- Housing issues.
- Training for solicitors/schools/ voluntary agencies in respect of kinship arrangements, both formal and informal to raise their awareness of the reality of kinship care.
- Access to Therapeutic support for behaviour and emotional issues.
- Specialist teams to support formal and informal arrangements.

**Scottish Government and COSLA 2007: "Relative Value: the experience of kinship carers using the Scottish CAB Service" made the following recommendations for Government:**

- There needs to be whole system change with a national allowance and amending the definition of 'child in need'.
- To make allowances attached to court orders more equitable e.g. when Private Law orders are granted.
- Provide more support for flexible working.
- Easier access to better information and development on an information network. For example, a resource pack for Kinship Carers; national helpline and on line information exchange.

**Nandy and Selwyn 2011 research based on population census of 2001**

- In England 1 in every 77 child lives in Kinship Care
- 95% of children living in Kinship Care in 2001 were informal: with older children 15-17 years accounting for the most likely to be living in Kinship care
- Ethnic minority children were over represented among the Kinship Care group.
- Key finding was that between 1/5 and half of the children were living with a sibling ( 1/3 with Brothers and remainder with sisters)

#### **Project Development work:**

Work was completed through 3 strands: research as to what is currently available; focus groups and meeting with some key partners.

#### **Practice Research**

I sought out agencies, professionals and services to ascertain what support they were offering Kinship Carers: this was across the local authority from universal to targeted; third and private sector.

Findings: A great variation of service delivery and understanding of what kinds of support may need to be provided due to a lack of knowledge and awareness of these arrangements.

**Appendix A** is a summary of whom I made contact with.

#### **Focus groups: 3 in total**

I compiled a series of open questions to get an appreciation of what the families experience was and **Appendix B** reflect the discussions in the room.

With both adult groups it was noted that some improvement had occurred: those entering into formal kinship arrangements in past 2-3 years felt more supported and clearer than those who had done so longer ago.

- Special Guardianship Support hosted by Kinship Care Team 15 attended.
- Grandparents Support group with Grandparents Association 10 attended.
- Young person's focus group facilitated and hosted by Willows Carers Project 4 attended.

#### **Meeting with Grandparents Plus; Grandparents Association and Homestart**

These 3 organisations are actively working in the city to support Kinship Carers and it was considered pertinent to bring them together to explore how this work could be broadened and linked more with Leeds City Council. There are tensions in some aspects of the working relationships between these agencies and the meeting sought to address how this could be eased.

**Appendix C** is the notes from this meeting.

From all of the above work several themes emerged across the board:

1. Need for consistency in language/terms used and support offer so that professional and agency knowledge and awareness could be extended. Thus what it means to be 'informal' not looked after; family and friends or 'connected other' etc. Leeds Kinship Care (Family and Friends) Policy assists here and perhaps greater profiling and dissemination is required.
2. There were no readily available systems for collecting information on 'informal' arrangements: therefore raising awareness is important.
3. From the outset families need access to high quality advice and information on the range of options available to them with all the consequent outcomes from this. This needs to include robust legal and financial information. There may be challenges for some families as to where to turn for this information especially if they do not have recourse to legal aid.
4. The emotional needs of the carers and children with strong feelings of guilt, loss and shame were prevalent. This aspect can be perpetuated where contact with birth parent's is in dispute and/or this creates conflict within the family. With few agencies to turn to for assistance or mediation. Some of the carers had been formally involved with CSWS and their children had been brought up in care. This added further emotional distress.
5. That families were reluctant to ask CSWS for assistance if having particular problems due to the stigma attached and the view was echoed that families did not want 'authorities' involved. A perceived view was that if the family did not step in then they may lose contact with the children through the care system. In that they may not be permitted to see the children and /or as they would be in new families that they could potentially move away.
6. Families would benefit from more flexible parenting courses/training: that group-work does not suit every individual and that they also need to take account of 'non blood' carers.
7. Drug and alcohol agencies reported that they are coming across an increasing number of kinship carers. Grandparents or other family members begin by offering some informal support and the level of support grows as the addiction and associated difficulties for the birth parents become more problematic. Therefore not a conscious decision to care for the children and can happen by default.
8. That support needs to be front loaded at the point new care arrangements begin: thus short term interventions may be helpful, however some families need ongoing and long term support. Therefore services in clusters need to be adaptable to allow for further needs over time to be addressed.

This led to conclude that the following would be helpful to advance this work:

- A dedicated information and advice line that is specific to Leeds and is available beyond normal working hours. That it provides accurate legal and financial advice is essential.
- A robust support arrangement when placements commence.
- That robust legal advice line is bolted on to general helplines for kinship arrangements and to explore collaboration with the private sector through child friendly initiatives and corporate social responsibility.
- That support from Universal to Targeted needs to be clear; flexible and responsive to meet the needs of Kinship Carers: especially at the commencement of these arrangements and over time as needs change.
- Tailored parenting support/training and access to support for emotional health for C&YP.
- Mediation and advice.

- Raising awareness with common language is required across the board with Leeds City Council, Third and private sector to engender a cultural shift.