



Kinship Connected West Yorkshire

Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, Wakefield

Quarter 3, 2020 Review – Wednesday 1 July 2020

Grandparents Plus project workers, Rachael Sherrington and Karen O'Connor have been providing support to Special Guardians across the five local authorities covered by One Adoption West Yorkshire since October 2018. Kinship Connected and Kinship Response have been commissioned for a further 2 years in West Yorkshire from April 2020 to March 2022



In quarter 3 (Yr2), Rachael has been supporting Special Guardians in Bradford, Calderdale and Kirklees, Karen in Leeds and Wakefield.

Kelly Taylor joined the team on 22nd June 2020 and will be supporting Special Guardians in Bradford and Calderdale, while Rachael will support Special Guardians in Kirklees and Leeds. Karen will continue her support for Special Guardians in Leeds and Wakefield.

Support provided to date:

Local authority	Target no. of SGs to support (yearly)	Target no. of SGs to support (6 mths)	Total no. of referrals (Oct 2018 – June 2020)	No. of referrals Q3	Total no. Initial assessments completed Q3	Initial assessments booked	Support groups attended (virtual)
Bradford	46 (previously 32)	23	36	5	5	0	6
Calderdale	17 (previously 10)	9	10	2	2	0	5
Kirklees	31 (previously 20)	16	33	3	2	1 rescheduled at SG request - booked for 1 st July at time of writing	7
Leeds	57 (previously 40)	29	69	8	8	4 to be booked	7

Wakefield	29 (previously 18)	15	28	4	4	0	6
West Yorkshire (county)							2 – West Yorks virtual support groups 1 – West Yorks Facebook page
Total	180	92	176	22	21	1 (4 to be booked)	33

Karen currently has 27 open cases across Leeds and Wakefield. Rachael currently has 33 open cases across Kirklees, Bradford and Calderdale.

In Quarter 3, Karen has engaged with nine special guardians in Leeds and Wakefield regarding grant applications. A total of eight have been successful, one awaiting a decision. This has resulted in securing grants worth £3818, including tumble dryers, fridge freezers, gas cookers, bedroom furniture and bunk beds and money towards school uniforms and resources, a short break, laptop and Kindle.

Karen also made a significant number of holiday grants for special guardians, which are currently on hold due to the current Covid 19 pandemic.

Rachael has secured a washing machine, cooker, two bunk beds and mattresses. A number of holiday grants, which it is, hoped that in the coming weeks these can be re-considered and families given the option of sometime away.

Key themes arising from the support provided

Education

Following the temporary closure of all schools, many special guardians were anticipating a steep decline in behaviour. However, after this initial period of anxiety regarding school closures many families have experienced less problematic behaviour at home due to school based issues, with the perceived problems having been much worse than the reality.

There are some families who have experienced an increase of child on carer violence, and the lockdown has exacerbated this. However, some special guardians have reported an improvement in their relationship with their child, an improvement in behaviour and a steep reduction in meltdowns and arguments.

Many special guardians are anxious that their children, many who are already behind their peers by way of education attainment, are going to suffer more, given the lack of schooling. Many carers are older (some with literacy issues) and do not understand the teaching methods in place today. Most families report that they have tried to home school with varying degrees of success, most have been struggling.

Numerous special guardians report that any attempt at home schooling was met with arguments, tantrums and concerns about a child's mental wellbeing. Many report that they finally gave up, because it was not worth the child being in such distress.

Nationally, Grandparents Plus project workers have been working together to develop a pool of resources that are shared regularly with families, either via WhatsApp, emails or Facebook. Project workers continue to make calls to special guardians to check in, and are often about reassuring carers that by helping children be happy, settled and reassured about coronavirus, they are doing an amazing job in unprecedented times.

Behaviour

As above. Many families were anxious about how they could handle children's behaviour, especially when outside time is restricted. Project workers are encouraging physical activity in the home and garden, such as games, online PE lessons and online yoga etc. For many, the fear of the unknown has been worse than the reality.

Finances

Queries regarding losing jobs, furlough, affording food, the larger utility bills that are being created.

Grandparents Plus have shared a plethora of information about benefits, free school meals, MOTs, and advice about employment rights. There remains a high need for grants, but with increased capacity at Grandparents Plus, this need is being addressed quickly.

Mental health

With Covid 19 comes concerns over maintaining 'social connectednesses and simply being isolated. Grandparents Plus are working hard to create virtual support groups. West Yorkshire Kinship Carers Facebook Group is now live and has 89 members. There is also a WhatsApp groups for each Local Authority area.

Training Needs

Many special guardians are not IT literate, and find social media intimidating. Project workers are encouraging carers to sign up to Facebook and WhatsApp to ensure they are as connected as possible, while also supporting them to ensure their privacy settings are in place. Project workers are also facilitating introductory sessions where special guardians can try to join the training session, receive support to be guided through issues, without the pressure in a support group.

Support Groups

Rachael and Karen facilitate fortnightly virtual support groups for each Local Authority area. These groups are facilitated using the zoom platform. There are plans to trial the use of Facebook "rooms" to ascertain if an increase in special guardians would engage this way. The remote groups were initially established following consultation with group members to ensure the most suitable platform is utilised e.g. WhatsApp,

Messenger but that process is continual and could change as more carers work out what they are comfortable using.

Karen has attended the first Leeds LA virtual Skype special guardian support group session. The plan is that this continues monthly.

Since lockdown each face-to-face group/LA area has its own WhatsApp group established, allowing special guardians to connect and network with each other.

West Yorkshire - Special Guardian Support Group via Zoom

Karen and Rachael have established a monthly West Yorkshire Zoom support group. This group is focused on a key issue identified by special guardians. An outside speaker is invited to deliver training or facilitate a discussion, in response to support needs. These groups have been well attended.

May 13th facilitated a legal theme, Helen Moody from Ridley & Hall law firm attended and discussed legal issues regarding contact during COVID and provided clarity regarding any other questions.

June 18th, Martin Honnor from the Wakefield Youth Offending Team give a Webinar about Attachment disorder. Martin is returning on July 16th to deliver the second part of his training "How Attachment manifests itself in adolescence".

August 20th - Catherine Beal, Educational Psychologist is scheduled to attend to provide a session relating to reducing anxieties in children and carers on the return to school life.

September 17th - Rhian Beynon is scheduled to provide a webinar about FASD for special guardians.

West Yorkshire Facebook Page

Karen and Rachael have established the West Yorkshire Facebook Page. Currently this page has 89 special guardians who have joined. It provides a platform to share targeted and localised information across all five LAs. We will further develop this group to form a connected community with mechanisms in place to monitor comments.

Case Study 1

SG1 cares for her grandson. SG1 lost her daughter to a heroin overdose and has cared for her grandson since. SG1 was referred by the Local Authority due to financial worries. On talking to SG1 the project worker learnt that she has limited emotional support. SG1 revealed that this initial phone call was the first time she had opened up about being a special guardian, about losing her daughter, and the hardships she feels now caring for her grandson. SG1 spoke about feeling alone, and how no one understands how she feels. The project worker has referred SG1 to the Grandparents Plus advice line for a benefits check, to discuss a grant, and a referral has been made to the Someone Like Me Program where a trained volunteer kinship carer will call SG1 as a listening ear. SG1 is kept up to speed with the referrals being made so she has clear expectations, feels listened too and valued.

Case Study 2

SG2 cares for her granddaughter. She was a regular attendee of all Wakefield support groups and reported on multiple occasions how she looked forward to the groups and found them a supportive outlet for her. When COVID 19 arose, there was a significant rise in contact from the special guardian who was feeling anxious, isolated and upset at the thought of not being able to attend support groups. She is a self-confessed techno-phobe. The project worker spent significant time on the phone talking through downloading WhatsApp, then Zoom and had practise sessions with the special guardian. This resulted in the special guardian now attending the online support groups, including the countywide group.

Case Study 3

SG3 cares for her two x grandsons. The project worker supported her to reduce multiple financial concerns that she had. The project worker applied for a short-term holiday, which is currently being held with the Family Holiday Association due to COVID 19. One of SG3's grandsons has food issues, and as the special guardian didn't currently have a dining table or money to buy one, the project worker applied for a grant for this, as the family were also missing out on much needed family bonding time at meals. The application was rejected as the charity said the family did not meet their current criteria. The project worker challenged this on behalf of SG3, pointing out multiple areas of need, and crises that the family had endured and reapplied. This time the charity accepted that they had not fully understood the family situation and awarded the grant.

Rachael and Karen continue to contact and check in on those families they are working with, prioritising those over 70 or with underlying health issues. They have also been contacting those clients, who although cases are closed, are likely to need more support given the complexities of living in isolation and social restriction.

Many families we work with have underlying health issues, whether as a result of old age, or simply poor health. Many suffer with COPD, chronic asthma, depression or anxiety, which can be exacerbated by the news and constant fear. Many are scared of what will happen if they fall seriously ill, or worse, die due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Rachael and Karen have been offering emotional support and practical advice on issues such as contact, benefits, work and schools.

Catherine Beal, an Educational psychologist who wished to coordinate a Kinship Celebration event in Leeds, approached Karen. Karen has worked with Catherine, other relevant charities and local authority contacts to discuss ideas and share contacts. Catherine visited the Leeds - Pudsey support group to hear the views of special guardians. An initial date of Tuesday July 7th was booked with a college in Leeds. Plans were in place to involve Grandparents Plus, local authority, relevant charities, coffee groups, mindfulness sessions, poetry sessions, Ridley and Hall solicitors among others to make the day a celebration, as well as a chance to bring together relevant contacts that Kinship Carers often need. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, it is likely this event will be postponed.

Key Achievements

1. Continued referrals from all local authorities.

2. Quickly adapting and moving support groups to virtual groups via WhatsApp and Zoom.
3. Quickly adapting 1-1 project worker sessions to virtual support via WhatsApp and Zoom.
4. Development of the West Yorkshire Facebook page for special guardians.
5. Development of the monthly county wide West Yorkshire Special Guardian Support Group via Zoom – focused on information sharing on key issues affecting SGs
6. Significant successful grant applications made for Special Guardians across all areas.