



KEY ISSUES IN KINSHIP CARE IN AUSTRALIA

Kinship Care Forum with visiting expert Dr Lucy Peake
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Benefits of kinship care for children



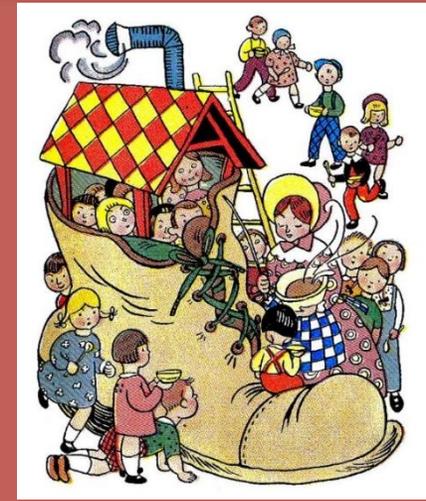
- Placements are more stable than foster care.
- More frequent contact with parents, siblings and wider family.
- At least as safe as foster care.
- Broadly, children do as well as in foster care.
- Children generally appear to be happy with kinship care, seeing it as more natural.

(Nixon 2008)

The well of unmet need

- Financial hardship.
- High levels of physical and mental health issues.
- Many difficulties with parental contact arrangements.
- Expensive and protracted legal contests over care arrangements.
- Myriad unmet support needs including: respite care, emotional support, and help for children with emotional & behavioural issues.

(Kiraly, 2015, Review of kinship carer surveys)



Aboriginal kinship care



17,787 indigenous children and 24,470 non-indigenous children in Out of Home Care, i.e. four-tenths (39%) are indigenous (AIHW, 2019).

Care rate for indigenous children is **11 times** higher than for non-indigenous children.

All the hardships of kinship care are magnified in Aboriginal kinship care families.



Kinship care myths

1. ~~The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.~~

If they're with family, they're safe.



2. Kinship care is nearly all grandparent care.

3. Kinship care is nearly all care in the extended family.

4. Carers are people who know the children well and love them.

5. Non-familial kinship care is similar to familial care.

6. Kinship care is a type of foster care.

7. A kinship family is just like a normal family; families can manage any issues they have with universal services.

8. Kinship care is cheaper than foster care.



Challenges – for statutory kinship care

- Shortage of alternatives to kinship care can drive practice borne of desperation rather than the best alternative for an individual child.
- Net widening to find placements includes people not known to the child.
- A lack of reliable data about who exactly all these kinship carers are.
- Wide acceptance that it's OK to have a child in placement for weeks or months before the placement has been fully assessed, justified by an assumption the child is with family members who love them & nurture them. This is a significant erosion of the standards set in foster care.
- Belief that kinship care is cheaper and that families can manage 'like a normal family' leads to rationalisation of poor financial support, limited resources for placement finding, assessment, active case management, implementation of guidelines for financial support.



Challenges – for all children in kinship care (informal & formal)

- A lack of data about how many Australian children are in kinship care – our census cannot tell us this.
- The National Framework 2009-2020 has not had a strong focus on children in kinship care.
- Commonwealth benefits for kinship carers appear to lack a policy underpinning. The small Grandparent Advisor program has recently been extended to other ‘non-parent carers’, yet is not badged as such. Lack of clarity about entitlements and conditions for ‘non-parent carers’.



A colleague's comment: 'It's not a thing.'

2014 Senate Inquiry into Grandparent Care – Recommendations



- Improving census data to identify grandparent care households.
- Attention through the COAG process of ways to recognise the role and contribution of grandparent carers through an ongoing national forum including all stakeholders.
- Making available ongoing support groups, better information about services, mental health services, legal assistance, disability services and a recognised Commonwealth Informal Relative Caregiver's Statutory Declaration to promote recognition of this group of carers.

Given its remit, this Inquiry paid little attention to the experiences and needs of kinship carers other than grandparents.



Royal Commission 2017 – Recommendations

- Kinship carers' inclusion on a State & Territory carer register.
- Improved kinship carer authorisation processes including references and risk management plans.
- Annual kinship carer reviews including private interviews with children.
- Develop a specific model of assessment tailored to kinship care.
- Resources re child sexual abuse prevention tailored for kinship carers.
- Training about trauma-informed care and care of children with harmful sexual behaviours.
- Equal financial support to foster carers.
- Additional supports needed by children in kinship care identified & funded.
- Additional casework support for children's family contact arrangements.



Senate Inquiry into Out of Home Care 2015

– Recommendations (1)

- AIHW work on data about the relationship between children and their kinship carers.
- Provide community visitors to all out of home care placements.
- Greater attention to children in international kinship care arrangements.
- Improved implementation of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.
- Streamlining assessment process for ATSI kinship carers, implementing the Winangay kinship resources to improve relationships between carers and child protection.



Senate Inquiry into Out of Home Care – Recommendations (2)

COAG to include in the Third Action Plan of the National Framework a project to develop and implement nationally consistent financial and practical (including training and caseworker) support for statutory and informal relative/kinship carers. This should include:

- Establishment of a national peak body for relative/kinship carers
- Accreditation and training of relative/kinship carers
- Increasing allowances available to relative/kinship carers
- Evaluation and development of nationally consistent best practice models of supporting relative/kinship care.



Opportunities



Awareness-raising activities 2019

ACWA project *Kinship Care: Making it a National Issue*

- Two special issues of *Developing Practice*
- National survey of support to kinship carers across jurisdictions.

Kinship care week

- Beginning in Victoria 8-15 September 2019 (Foster Care Week)
- Aiming for nationwide, possibly separate from foster care week.



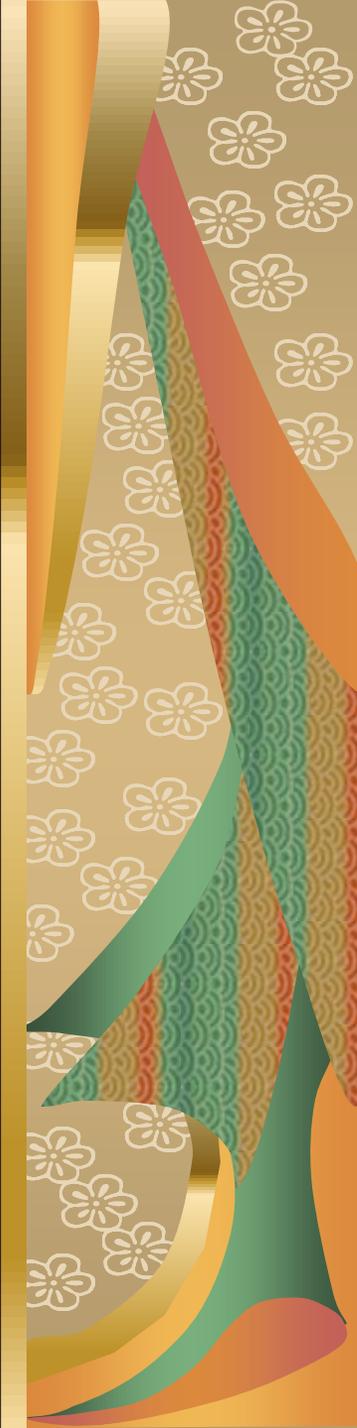
'Flower Drop' Parliament House Canberra 31 May 2018

A deputation from Australian Grandparent/Kinship Carers placed flowers on the lawns outside Parliament House to represent children and their carers and draw attention to their unmet needs.

They met with:

-  The Hon Linda Burney
-  Senator Dean Smith
-  Senator Derryn Hinch
-  Policy Advisor to the Hon Bill Shorten.

Do we need more such action?



The Children's Commissioners

The National Children's Commissioner and Children's Commissioners in each State and Territory have an interest in kinship care

- WA proposed an inquiry into kinship care – deferred through lack of funding
- Victoria – 2019 inquiry into out of home care with specific focus on kinship care
- Tasmania – Discussion paper on family based care
- South Australia – particular interest in kinship care.



National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 – successor Plan



Care (i.e. out of home care) was one of the Framework's five themes.

The Commonwealth Department of Social Services has commenced consultations regarding a successor Plan to succeed the National Framework in terms of key priorities agreed by government and the non-government sector and related reforms and strategies.

Peak body Families Australia are involved with this process and are inviting people to register for the consultation process.



The way forward – what's needed? (1)

1. Greater recognition of all children in kinship care by the Commonwealth, and a clear and considered policy regarding support for all children in kinship care & their carers.
2. Full implementation by States and Territories of policy providing equity of support for children in foster care and kinship care across the country.



The way forward – what's needed? (2)

3. Data systems that can provide information about:
 - No. of Australian children in kinship care.
 - Who children in kinship care are living with.
4. A funded Australian research agenda going forward.
5. Ongoing advocacy: do we need a national kinship care association?



Today's challenge

How can we pursue advocacy towards some of these aims?

