



# Covid-19 – Impact on kinship carers

Update: April 2020 – May 2020

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# Agenda impact of coronavirus on kinship care families

1. Update on kinship carers' coronavirus concerns
2. Feedback from services - key challenges, solutions and resource share
3. Update on Adoption Support Fund COVID-19 funding
4. Policy update – including Public Law Working Group, ASGLB blueprint
5. Review future meetings & AOB



# Consultation

- Data were collected prior to lockdown restrictions easing.
- Second survey of kinship carers – 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020 to 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020
- Observation of the North East England Kinship Carer Support Group Facilitator meeting (the facilitators either are or have been kinship carers)
- Identification of themes from monthly case discussions with project workers in both the south and north of England and advice line workers.



# Summary

- After the initial shock of lockdown, kinship carers' concerns are changing.
- Carers are under increased pressure due to the lockdown.
- Carers are experiencing a reduction in formal support.
- Social isolation meant informal support is now being done virtually.



# Increased pressure on kinship carers

- Last month the main concern from kinship carers was worry about catching the virus. This is less prevalent this month. Most likely because the threat of ill health is something the majority kinship carers cope with even in normal times.
- This month the main issue is the relentless nature of parenting children who have suffered trauma at the same time as experiencing a significant reduction in available support.



# Relentlessness of parenting as kinship carers during lockdown

- Some kinship carers are having to shield either themselves or their children. This means the children do not go to school. Others are choosing not to send children to school due to fears of catching the virus.
- Kinship carers have to entertain the children all day, every day, often in cramped conditions.
- Children with additional needs, such as ADHD or ASD, and challenging behaviours are especially difficult to entertain.



# Relentlessness of parenting as kinship carers during lockdown

- Kinship carers are struggling with home schooling, not knowing what to do. Many are worried about the consequences from school if they do not do a good enough job home schooling.
- We have seen an increase in requests for advice and support regarding child on carer violence. The advice carers are getting about this issue from local authorities appears to be a standard 'call the Police' response. They find this unhelpful.



# Children's mental health

- Carers are concerned about the impact of the pandemic and lockdown on their children's mental health. However, there are some positives consequences to the lockdown too.
- Some carers are reporting an increase in anxiety in the children.
- There appears to be a rise in child on carer violence which indicates there are wider issues for children's emotional wellbeing.
- Some children are becoming more isolated. For some this is challenging, they miss their friends and peer support.





# Children's mental health and vulnerabilities

- Kinship carers are concerned their are children spending more time online, both gaming and on social media. This is leading to some becoming more vulnerable to child sexual exploitation.
- Some kinship carers find the children's time online is the only respite they get. This possibly means they are not monitoring online use like they would normally do.
- For some children, not going to school has reduced stress.
- Some carers are reporting they are able to spend more quality time with their children which is helping their relationships.



# Death and ill health

- There are kinship carers dying due to coronavirus and some are losing partners or other family members.
- The children and their family will need support with this.
- There is also some evidence that kinship carers are becoming ill from other issues. This maybe related to the national concern of people not seeking medical advice due to fears of the coronavirus.



# Wider concerns

- Practical issues around shielding, getting shopping etc., children attending school.
- Continued financial concerns - Reduced income for some due to loss of work or furlough whilst expenses increase due to children being home.
- Contact – uncertainty about rights. How will this change once lockdown restrictions ease? Virtual contact can bring benefits and challenges.
- Court cases – many appear to be delayed but kinship carers do not feel informed or kept up-to-date.



# Impact on kinship carers

- The relentless nature of parenting as a kinship carer during this pandemic is physically and emotionally exhausting.
- Kinship carers are struggling with their own mental health issues.
- Kinship carers are worried about their own health.
- Kinship carers are worried about how they will continue to cope in their role.
- There is a lot of anxiety about the easing of lockdown, how this will be managed and the impact on the kinship carers. Especially in the context of how support has reduced. Kinship carers do not feel they are informed.



# Reduction of support

- Carers are reporting they need emotional support; someone to talk to; advice on parenting i.e. home schooling, entertaining children, managing behaviour, contact; advice how to get practical support; reassurance on easing of lockdown restrictions.
- Formal support from universal services and children's services has reduced.
- Many kinship carer lack trust they will be supported during any future changes.
- Therapeutic support either been postponed, cancelled or moved online. – There is very limited data on the impact of moving therapeutic support online in these circumstances.



# Reduction of support

- Informal support from friends and family is changing, it is moving online and physical support is not there.
- Peer support is also moving online and only some carers are engaging with it. One reason for this is carers are so busy parenting they do not have time to engage.
- Carers who do not have good internet or access to technology are especially isolated.



# Future

- The most pressing concern for the future appears to be anxiety about the easing of lockdown restrictions.
- Most kinship carers are worried about schools going back. What support will they get and what will be expected of them? Some carers do not want their children to go back until it is safe but are unsure of their rights.
- Early indications are the vagueness of the rules around easing of restrictions is increasing anxiety.

