Report on the Survey for Kinship carers on Scottish Government proposals for the Children and Young People Bill

CHILDREN 1ST was commissioned in 2011 by the Scottish Government to develop and implement a national service for kinship carers and their families. The service aims to help kinship carers find their voice, providing emotional and practical support through a free and confidential helpline (ParentLine Scotland) and training, outreach and capacity building.

Part of our role is to engage with kinship carers on policy issues, and also children and young people who live in kinship care arrangements. To help inform the Scottish Government's development of proposals for a new children and young people bill, CHILDREN 1ST surveyed kinship carers on key proposals. This report highlights and explains the findings.

Methodology

The survey was conducted as a confidential questionnaire with an online and paper survey option. The survey was promoted via email to a wide range of kinship care contacts, including kinship carers and support groups. Paper copies of the survey were also sent to all kinship carers on our database (385), to kinship care support groups and a copy was given to every kinship carer who attended the Big Day Out in October.

Responses received were inputted into an online survey software tool to collate the findings and aid production of this report. Some questions were multiple-choice, some allowed multiple responses and some allowed space for participants to write longer more detailed responses. The questionnaire was designed in such a way as to gauge definite views on certain issues, whilst also allowing space for kinship carers to express more specific viewpoints and personal experiences. Allowing both types of responses is vital for fair and complete evaluation. The survey is attached at Appendix A.

While the questions were short, nearly all required significant explanation of the proposal for the bill. For this reason, and to ensure we had interpreted Scottish Government intentions appropriately, prior approval of the survey was sought from officials. However, doing this has the additional benefit of raising awareness of the proposed measures in the new bill among a key audience.

The percentage answers have either been rounded up or down for easier reading (therefore some may not total exactly 100%). As of 2nd November we had received 117 responses: 81 were fully completed and 36 were partially completed.

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Section 1 - Children's rights

The survey explained that children have rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and that the Scottish Government is responsible for making sure that children’s rights in relation to devolved matters, are respected. We explained that the Scottish Government wants to do more to promote children’s rights and ensure that public sector agencies monitor and report on what they are doing to promote these rights.

We posed a set of attitudinal statements and asked respondents to indicate which one they agreed with:

- The Scottish Government should be doing more to promote children’s rights – 48% of respondents agreed with this
- It’s not enough to promote children’s rights – all laws and polices which affect children should comply with their rights – 52% agreed with this
- This is not something the Scottish Government should be doing – 3% agreed with this
- Don’t know – 3% agreed with this

While a significant number of respondents agreed with the Scottish Government’s proposed way forward on children’s rights within the bill, it is worth noting that a majority supported a stronger approach being taken.

Section 2 - Early learning and childcare

This section explained that the Scottish Government wants to give every three and four year old child and every looked after two year old 600 hours of early learning/childcare per year. An overwhelming majority – 85% - of kinship carers think this is a good idea, with only 7% considering it a bad idea. Some of the reasons for this included -

- “Good only if the funding is not coming from an existing budget”
- “Children should be supported more in the home”
- “I can see benefits for children aged 3+ but at the age of two, early attachments are fragile and 600 hours is very significant in an infant’s life. This would support vulnerable Mother’s however, I do not believe it would support the child themselves.”

We then asked the kinship carers to reflect on children they care for or know and asked if they thought more time in nursery or childcare would be good, bad or make no difference. Nearly two thirds (64%) thought it would be good for their children with 36% saying it would make no difference, as kinship care children need other support and activities.
The survey also asked if participants thought that all two year olds in kinship care should receive an early learning or childcare place. The majority of 83% said yes, leaving 17% saying no, indicating strong support for extension of this measure beyond looked after two year olds.

We asked kinship carers about the types of service that parents and carers should be able to access from within the 600 hours, allowing them to choose up to three options. The three preferred options were pre-school nursery place, playgroups/parent and toddler groups and family support sessions, with therapy sessions for children close behind in 4th place.

Other options that were slightly less popular were: Activities to help parenting skills (23%); College or university childcare (14%); Workplace crèche (20%) and Library activities (4%).

These findings indicate strong support for traditional options for early learning, but also suggest a need for flexibility around children’s needs and also an appetite for more work and education-oriented childcare.

**Section 3 - Services for Children and GIRFEC**

We explained the Scottish Government’s concept of a child’s wellbeing as SHANARRI – safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible and included.

Most participants (70%) had not heard of this definition of wellbeing, however 94% thought it was a good way to describe a child’s wellbeing. Given that kinship carers are highly likely to have had involvement with social work services and indeed, multi-agency involvement in their lives, we found the lack of recognition for SHANARRI surprising. It perhaps indicates that there is a need to raise awareness of it among key audiences and stakeholders.
What is reassuring is the very high level of support for this definition of well-being, though we also asked participants for other ways to define/describe a child’s wellbeing. Over a third of respondents thought other things should be included and most of the additional suggestions can be summarised as being loved, happiness and being heard/listened to.

“A sense of being loved and wanted”

“Belonging to a nurturing family”

“Happy and heard”

“happy and loved and settled”

The survey then explained the Scottish Government's plan to make sure that every child has a Named Person and what this means. 90% of respondents thought every child in Scotland should have a named person, and after being asked to reflect on their own situation, 78% thought that having a named person would have helped them and their family, with only 13% saying a named person would not have helped them and 11% not knowing.

We then asked who the participants thought should be the named person for children at each age and stage in their lives.

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<tr>
<th>Babies under 1 year old</th>
<th>GP</th>
<th>Health visitor</th>
<th>Social Worker</th>
<th>Parent/Carer</th>
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<tr>
<th>1-3 years olds</th>
<th>GP</th>
<th>Health visitor</th>
<th>Social Worker</th>
<th>Parent/Carer</th>
<th>Public Health nurse</th>
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<tr>
<th>3-5 year olds</th>
<th>GP</th>
<th>Health visitor</th>
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<th>Child carer</th>
<th>Nursery teacher</th>
<th>Public Health Nurse</th>
<th>Family support worker</th>
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<tr>
<th>Children at primary school</th>
<th>GP</th>
<th>Head teacher</th>
<th>Social Worker</th>
<th>Class Teacher</th>
<th>Learning Support Teacher</th>
<th>Child Carer</th>
<th>Family Support Worker</th>
<th>Parent/Carer</th>
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<td>28%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Children in senior school</th>
<th>Head Teacher</th>
<th>Subject Teacher</th>
<th>Guidance Teacher</th>
<th>Youth Worker</th>
<th>Social Worker</th>
<th>Family support worker</th>
<th>Personal support teacher</th>
<th>Parent/Carer</th>
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The findings suggest overwhelming support at all ages and stages for universal services’ role in providing named persons, with health predominant in a child’s early years and education predominant at school age. However, consistently, a significant minority of respondents also flagged up the role of parents and carers as “named person” in their children’s lives. Moreover, the wide range of responses suggest that rather than a fixed approach to who should be a child’s named person at any age and stage, there needs to be flexibility so that the individual needs and interests and children can be matched to the most appropriate person to be the family’s main point of contact.

Finally, we asked a question about families’ involvement in service design, planning and delivery, with a near unanimous 98% suggesting involving children, young people and families in such activity in their area was a good idea.

Section 4 – Family decision making

CHILDREN 1ST has been a pioneer of the use of family group conferencing (FGC) in Scotland since 1998. We believe that FGCs are a valuable tool to engage and involve families in decision making, with children’s interests and needs at the heart of the process. They are particularly relevant where children are at risk of moving into care or being accommodated, allowing a supported space for families to come together, with some involvement from professionals, to consider the child’s needs and interests and plan for the child’s future care, whilst also allowing the child to have his/her voice heard and views listened to. Our experience of FGCs tells us that they are a particularly useful tool in planning kinship care arrangements, so CHILDREN 1ST was interested in eliciting kinship carers’ views on them.

While we added these questions into the survey for our own use, we did so with prior knowledge of officials, so consider it worthwhile sharing the findings with the Scottish Government.

When asked if they had had an FGC or similar family meeting before a child was placed in their care, 39% confirmed this and 66% of those who had an FGC indicating that it helped decide who should look after their child.

Of the 61% who had not had an FGC or similar, 62% suggested such a meeting would have been helpful to their family when deciding where their child should live.

Turning again to all respondents, an overwhelming majority of 93% considered that all local authorities should at least have to offer an FGC to families where the child can no longer stay with their parents.

Section 5 - Looked after children

We explained the Bill proposes to make local authorities have a duty to provide help for young people who have been looked after, up until they are 25 years of age. An
overwhelming majority of 96% thought this was a good idea, with only 3% thinking it wouldn't make a difference, and the rest didn’t know.

Section 6 - Kinship Care

This formed the main part of the survey and we outlined and explained the proposed kinship care order, its components and intent before asking participants for their views.

A significant majority of participants considered the kinship care order to be a good idea, with only a tiny minority thinking it a bad idea. Some – 10% - felt it would make no difference, but perhaps the most interesting finding is that over a quarter felt they could not take a view on it without knowing more about it. We note that there is a key role for CHILDREN 1ST here as providers of the national kinship care service and will discuss with the Scottish Government how they want to take forward providing information about the bill proposals specific to kinship carers to address this.

We also asked respondents if a kinship care order was available, would they apply for one; 60% said they would. A third of respondents said they would not and were asked to explain why not.

For some it was because they already had a residence order in place, while others felt that they were not seeking permanence in their family’s arrangement. For others, the age of their child was a factor, in that their child was approaching late teens, while others wanted to wait and see what the order actually does and looks like. Cost and other financial considerations were also cited by some. A full list of all the reasons given is provided at Appendix B.
We then asked whom this kinship care order should be available to, and 86% said it should be available to all kinship care families, with the rest saying that only some families should be able to apply for one. Reasons for the latter included the need to consider individual circumstances:

“Those on low income”

“Where parents are not in contact”

Because we know from our contact with kinship carers that financial issues, particularly around the kinship allowance, remain problematic for many, we wanted to use the survey to identify views on a range of linked issues. Thus, we asked respondents if there should be a national kinship care allowance with the same amount paid per child: 95% said yes.

We also asked about the practice conducted by some local authorities of deducting the value of child benefit from the kinship care allowance: 89% of respondents considered that local authorities should stop this deduction.

A huge majority of respondents (97%) also wanted the Scottish Government to set out in the bill what support kinship carers and children in kinship care should receive from local authorities.

The survey also asked kinship carers what other changes they would like to see made to the law for kinship care families. Many used this as an opportunity to tell us about the most important and pressing issues for their families. Taking these views into account is vitally important and will help identity key issues and points of concern connected with the Children and Young People’s Bill that should be explored further. The key themes emerging are highlighted here but the full range of responses is also provided at Appendix C.

1. Fair financial support for kinship care families

This was overwhelmingly the main issue identified by kinship carers, with a call for adequate and fair financial support for all kinship care families, so that they might adequately support their child or children no matter where they live in Scotland. Some expressed that funding should be “universal”, “automatic” and also in line with what foster carers receive. Interestingly, those who linked kinship care support with foster care were not just referring to financial support but support more generally.

“Kinship carers should be paid the same as foster carers, we are doing the same job but we are still going out to work and the children are not being given the time that they need”

“Kinship care allowance should not be means tested; other benefits should not be affected if you accept the allowance”
2. More practical support for children and young people

Many expressed concern that their children needed more support emotionally, such as counselling/therapy and more help practically through their school years. Some also expressed schools needed a better understanding of issues children and young people in kinship care face.

“I think that all children who are removed from their parents should be given some form of counselling and not just left until they get older and develop behavioural problems- which is when the carers have to then seek help”

“More assistance and support at school, children in kinship care require more nurturing and extra help with learning. My worry is my grandchild will go to secondary school with not enough tools to help him fit in”

Others expressed a wish for more help with after school care, and the need for other activities to be available for their children. Some also highlighted the need to provide appropriate throughcare and aftercare for young people moving on from kinship care to independent living.

3. Child centred focus

Generally, all respondents put children at the centre of their views but some made specific reference to the importance of listening to the child’s views and recognizing that the child’s views should be paramount.

“That the child needs are genuinely paramount importance”

4. Social work

Some participants told us that they would like social workers to have a greater understanding of specific needs of children and young people in kinship care. Another comment was that they would like their child to have more time spent with their social worker and they would like more support and help form them. Another viewpoint reiterated the importance of social workers taking the child’s view as paramount importance.
Conclusions

When we set out to engage kinship carers on the bill proposals, we were unsure how many would respond, particularly with the short timescales involved. While 117 responses can only be considered a snapshot rather than a fully representative sample, the findings will help to give a strong impression – from a key audience – of general and specific views about what is being proposed for the bill, and indeed, what is not. The fact that most respondents took time to give their views and opinions in the open-ended questions shows that most want to be engaged in the bill process and in the development of solutions to some of the issues which impact on their lives. CHILDREN 1ST will ensure as part of our remit in the national kinship care service that this happens.

On the whole, respondents were very positive about most proposals in the Bill, however there were some reservations about some measures, with many calling for more clarity.

In general, the Scottish Government can be satisfied that the proposed measures meet the aspirations of a key audience of stakeholders: many of the proposals will, after all, impact either generally or specifically on kinship carers’ lives and more especially, on the lives of the children they care for.

It is worth noting that kinship carers would like to see a stronger commitment to children’s rights put into legislation and while hugely supportive of the idea of guaranteed early learning/childcare provision, they also want real flexibility on what the 600 hours can provide for theirs, and other children, as well as the provision being extended to all two year olds in kinship care.

They also highlighted the role for parents/carers as named persons in a child’s life, as well as a more individualised approach to who named persons should be. The low level of awareness of SHANARRI indicates a need to promote the wellbeing indicators and concept with some urgency.

Moreover, there was strong support for families being involved in decision making about services generally and specifically when decisions were being made about the future care arrangements of children.

Generally, kinship carers are warmly supportive of the proposal to create a new kinship care order but it is clear that the need to address the perceived iniquities surrounding financial support have not gone away. There is also a need to clarify what the order will achieve for kinship care families and to raise awareness about the proposal. Perhaps, most importantly, once the order is created and implemented, there will be an immediate need to inform kinship care families of its existence and how they, and the children they care for, might benefit from obtaining one.

We hope the Scottish Government finds this report and its findings and conclusions helpful and constructive to the process of finalising the proposals for the children and young people bill. We are happy to discuss the findings in more detail and also, engage with kinship care families again, during the bill process, if this would be appropriate.
PARENTLINE SURVEY FOR PARENTS AND CARERS ON PROPOSALS FOR A NEW CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BILL

1. Demographics

The survey was conducted in September and October 2012 to gain an insight into the views of parents and carers on the Scottish Government’s proposals for a new Bill which aims to create new laws in Scotland to help improve the lives of children and young people. The survey questions were all pre-determined and prepared in consultation with Scottish Government officials.

A total of 82 callers to ParentLine Scotland agreed to take part in the survey, of which 81% were parents, 15% were kinship carers, 9% were grandparents and 2% were step parents. The make up of families of callers participating in the survey is detailed in the tables below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children in the family (percentage of survey participants)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3 or more</th>
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<td>43</td>
<td>32</td>
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<th>Age of children in family (percentage of survey participants)</th>
<th>under 1</th>
<th>1 to 3</th>
<th>3 to 5</th>
<th>6 to 8</th>
<th>9 to 12</th>
<th>12 to 16</th>
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<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
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2. Rights

The ParentLine volunteers explained to callers that Scotland’s approach to children’s rights is based on an international agreement called the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention), which is currently implemented in Scotland through a group of independent experts, rather than being entrenched in the Scottish legal system. When asked whether Scots Law should be changed to require Scottish Ministers to take appropriate steps to further the rights set out in the Convention, 82% of those who completed this question agreed that it should.

In addition 90% believe that the Scottish Government should be required by law to improve awareness and understanding of children’s rights and the Convention across Scotland and that public bodies, such as councils and health boards, should be required by law to publish reports on what they are doing to improve the lives of children and young people.

When asked whether all laws made in Scotland and all services for children should comply with children’s rights, 89% of respondents agreed that it should, whilst 6% disagreed and 5% didn’t know.

After explaining to callers the role of Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People (the Commissioner), they were asked whether they believed that the Commissioner should have the authority to carry out an investigation on
behalf of individual children or young people who have concerns that their rights aren’t being respected. 91% of callers who responded to this question said the Commissioner should be able to do so, whilst 5% said they should not and 4% didn’t know. Furthermore, 87% of respondents thought that children and their families should be able to take agencies such as councils and health boards to court to have their rights respected. 10% thought that this was not a good idea.

3. Services and Planning

It was explained to participants that the Scottish Government is proposing to introduce a ‘Named Person’ for every child who would be a single point of contact for a child or parent or carer if they would like information or advice about a child’s welfare. Other professionals would be expected to contact a child’s Named Person if they had any concerns about that child’s wellbeing.

We asked whether the callers thought that every child in Scotland should be given a Named Person until they are 18 years old: 71% agreed that they should with 55% of them considering that the Named Person should be the parent or carer and 16% that it should be another family member. From the list presented to participants, 14% considered that a social worker or family support worker should fulfil the role, 9% considered that a GP would be the most appropriate Named Person, and 8% believed it should be a class or head teacher.

More than a quarter (27%) of participants did not think a Named Person should be appointed to every child. The reasons given included that it wouldn’t be necessary for every child and that the need for a Named Person should be assessed on an individual needs basis; others believed that it would be too complicated if parents were separated and there was a general concern over who would have the authority to decide who the Named Person would be.

The ParentLine volunteers then described to callers that where children and young people, especially vulnerable children, come into contact with many different professionals, services and agencies, children can often end up with a number of different plans for them, for example, from teachers, health visitors, social workers etc. As a result there are often numerous different pieces of information about a child held in different plans by different people. We asked callers whether they believed that having one single Child’s Plan, rather than lots of different plans, would help to improve the wellbeing of the child. A resounding 94% of the 79 callers who considered this, agreed that it would help improve the wellbeing of the child if they had one single Child’s Plan.

Of those who did not agree, some argued that more detail is better, another suggested that because each agency has a different role it is better if there is a portfolio of opportunity, others believe that the parent should be in control of any such plans and some suggested that if this was implemented it should only be for vulnerable children.
4. Early Learning and Childcare

Over three quarters (77%) of callers who responded to this section agreed that the number of hours of funded early learning and childcare for all 3 and 4 year olds should be increased from 475 hours to 600 hours a year and that these should be provided in a more flexible way.

However, reflecting the make-up of families of participants, only 18% of these respondents presently use any form of childcare with the majority using grandparents and private nursery or other private arrangements and a few using pre school nursery (with one caller commenting that they had to top up the pre school nursery with private care).

45% of 69 respondents reported that based on their current or past experience, they found it difficult to find suitable childcare during the holidays, particularly school summer holidays.

5. Looked after Children

As CHILDREN 1ST has conducted a separate survey specifically for kinship carers we asked only the non kinship care callers their views on the proposals of the Government to recognise and strengthen the parenting role of kinship carers in law. Of the 51 people who responded to this question, 90% agreed that it was a good idea to introduce a new kinship care order into law. 4% didn’t know and 6% did not think it was a good idea but gave no specific reasons why.

80% of the 50 callers who completed this section of the survey believe that young people leaving care should be able to request assistance from their council up to the age of 25, rather than to the age of 21 as it currently stands.

6. What else should be in the Bill?

At the end of the survey, ParentLine calltakers asked participants to consider whether there was anything else that a Bill for Children and Young People should be changing or doing that doesn’t happen already. Some suggested that the bill should focus on ensuring that the emotional needs of children and young people are taken into account and children’s views are properly listened to.

One caller believed that free school meals should be implemented for all children to help create a culture of staying at school at lunchtime. A few callers suggested that more rights and support is required for grandparents and for fathers and a general clarity on benefits that should be consistently and equally applied across the country.

For more information about the survey findings or about CHILDREN 1ST, please contact the policy team at policy@children1st.org.uk or on 0131 446 3979.