



Achieving national recognition and support for all kinship care families – both informal and formal

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Kin Raising Kids Tasmania
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What is kinship care?

Family-based care within the child's extended family or with close friends of the family known to the child, whether formal or informal in nature.

Guidelines for the Alternative care of Children (UN, 2010 p.6).



An inclusive approach



- Grandparents
- Other relatives
- Family friends or 'connected persons'

and:

- Informal and formal care
- Indigenous and non-Indigenous

and:

- All Australian jurisdictions

Identified benefits of kinship care

A literature review by Nixon (2008) found that:

- 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**.

Also...

- Greater chance of **family support into adulthood**.
- Platform for **educational remediation?**



Profile of kinship carers

Compared to foster carers, kinship carers are:

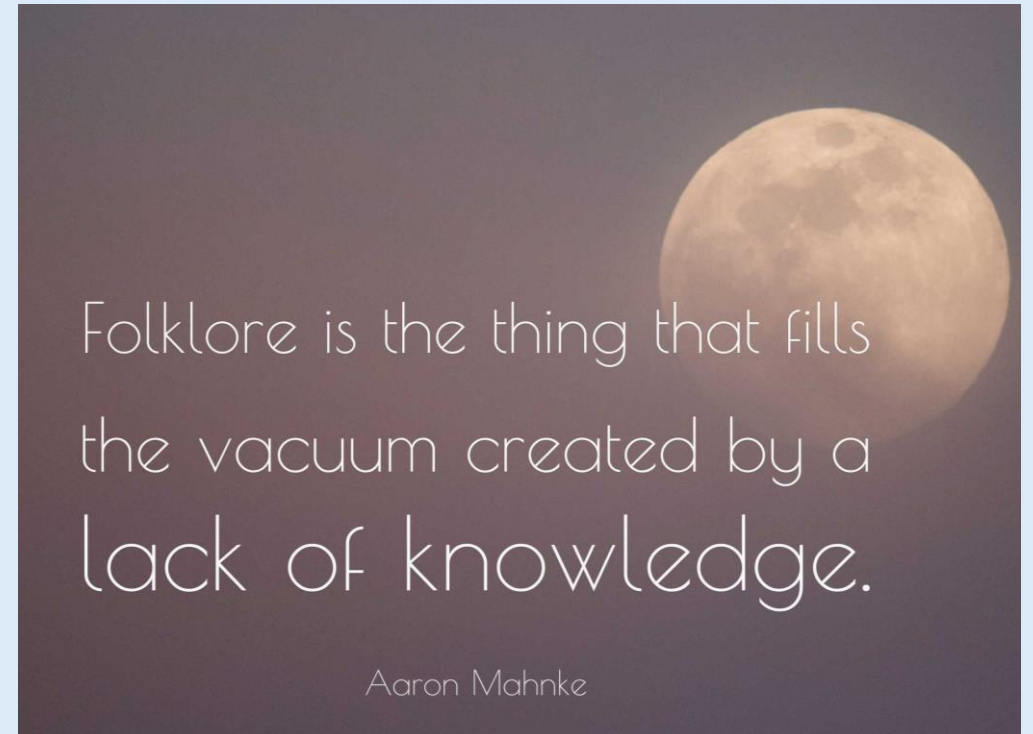
- Older, poorer, in poorer health, more often single.
- Caring for more children.
- Closer to parents who may have neglected or abused the children; many difficulties with these relationships.
- More likely to have trauma histories of their own.
- *Informal carers are even poorer: no financial support.*

Indigenous kinship carers over-represented due to historical dispossession, persecution & forced removal of children.

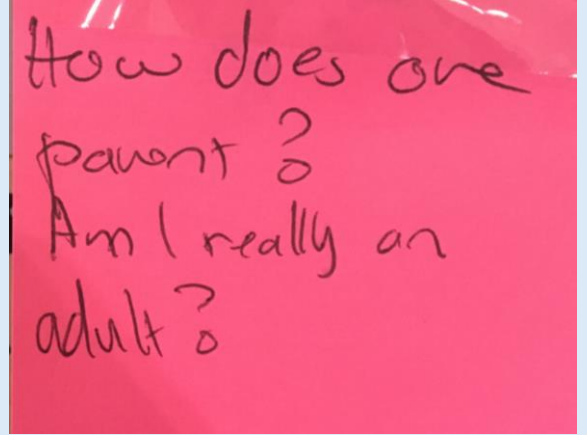


Myths about kinship care

- Most kinship care arrangements are made by Child Protection services, so it's a State/Territory responsibility.
- Most kinship carers are grandparents.
- Kinship families are just like normal families.
- Kinship families should be able to manage any issues themselves or with the help of universal services.



Let's not forget the other 50%...



➤ Family members

- Aunts and uncles
- Older sisters and brothers
- Children's cousins, parents' cousins
- Ex-wife's ex-husband's ex-wife...

➤ The 'family friends'

- Friends of the parents
- Parents of friends of the children
- Neighbours
- Teachers, youth workers.....

- May or may not know the children's history
- May feel out of place in a grandparents support group.
- May not know the children's history
- Unclear identity: are you foster carers?
- Different perspective on children's family relationships.

Informal kinship care in Australia



Two main avenues of entry:

- Family-led arrangements.
- Via child protection – care arrangements ‘peripheral’ to the judicial system. *Such children receive no further attention or support.*

No requirement for registration of informal arrangements (unlike UK).

Most research, policy and support is focused on formal kinship care.

Prevalence of informal kinship care

- UK: over 90% of kinship care arrangements informal (Selwyn & Nandy 2011).
- USA: 95% of kinship care arrangements informal (Annie E Casey Foundation 2012).
- Australia: No suitable question to explore exact numbers of children in informal kinship care or their relationship to their kin carers.

Our best estimate: In 2011, at least 82% of kinship care households were providing care on an informal basis, *i.e.* at least 56,000 2-generational kin care households with **upwards of 100,000 children**. (Kiraly, Humphreys & Hoadley, 2020).

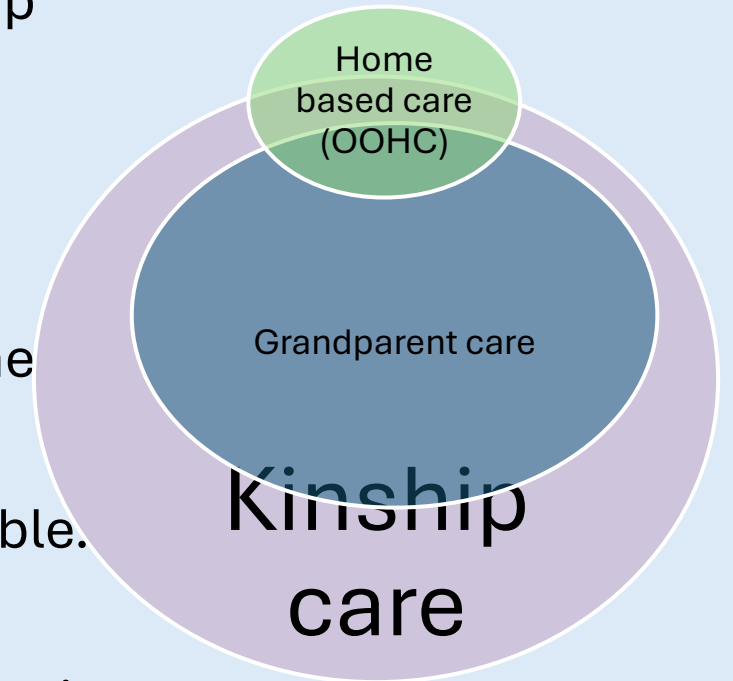
With population increase in the last 13 years, numbers will be higher again.

This is a huge, hidden group.



Attention to informal kinship care is fragmented

- Most focus of service and advocacy on formal (statutory) kinship care arrangements.
- Specific advocacy by Indigenous organisations
- Little advocacy specifically for informal kinship care families.
- Small groups of mixed formal/informal kinship carers around the country.
- Grandparent groups predominate; others are 'add-ons' or invisible.
- Some people in the community understand the notion of 'grandparent care', but few are familiar with the term 'kinship care'.



Poverty

The predominant issue in every study of informal kinship care.

Australian kinship care families are keenly affected...First Nations kinship care families even more so.

THE POOR RELATIONSHIPS?

CHILDREN & INFORMAL KINSHIP CARERS
SPEAK OUT

Julie Selwyn • Elaine Farmer • Sarah Meakings • Paula Vaisey



Lack of recognition

Informal kinship carers are excluded from supports available to:

- Statutory kinship carers (State/Territory child protection)
- Foster carers
- Parents (e.g. parental leave)
- Adoptive parents
- 'Carers' as defined by Federal legislation.



Commonwealth Carer Recognition Act 2010



A carer is an individual who provides personal care, support and assistance to another individual who needs it, because that other individual:

- a) has a disability; or
- b) has a medical condition (including a terminal or chronic illness); or
- c) is frail and aged; or
- d) has a mental illness.

Tasmanian Carer Recognition Act 2023

Carer means a person who provides unpaid care and support to a family member, or friend, who –

(a) has disability; or

(b) has mental ill health; or

(c) has a chronic or life-limiting condition; or

(d) has alcohol or other drug dependence; or

(e) is frail or aged; or

(f) is a child, if the person is an informal kinship carer of the child.



**...and
what to do
about it?**



Kinship Alliance Australia



Vision

A country that provides financial & professional support to all children in kinship care & their caregivers as needed to ensure they can thrive & achieve their life goals.

Mission

Kinship Alliance Australia aims to raise awareness & advocate for policy changes that recognise & address the needs of all kinship carers and the children in their care.

State/Territory matters specific to formal kinship care are beyond the remit of the Alliance.



Objectives



1. Act as a national voice for organisations supporting kinship care families to advocate for better recognition and support.
2. Promote legislative and policy changes to support kinship carers in obtaining necessary documentation and financial and social service assistance.
3. In recognition of the poverty-related challenges faced by informal kinship care families, accord priority to raising awareness of their pressing need.



Objectives *cont'd*



4. Collaborate with relevant stakeholders to implement recommendations that relate to kinship care generally from the 2014 *Senate Inquiry into Grandparents raising Grandchildren* and the 2015 *Senate Inquiry into Out of Home Care*.
5. Seek funding to establish a National Kinship Care Organisation to sustain advocacy to improve the life circumstances of kinship care families.



Priority actions



1. Organise awareness campaigns to highlight the contributions and challenges faced by kinship care families.
2. Engage in lobbying efforts with Federal authorities to amend existing legislation and enact new laws that recognise and support kinship carers and children in their care.
3. Collaborate with the *Parliamentary Friends of Grandparent and Kinship Carers* to facilitate communication between MPs, grandparent/kinship carers and children and young people in their care, in order to promote legislative and policy change.



Priority actions *continued*



4. Make submissions to relevant government inquiries and invitations for feedback, including State/Territory Inquiries that have potential spin-off benefits for kinship care families nationally.
5. Seek funding to support the costs of advocacy activities.
6. Other actions as decided from time to time.



Parliamentary Friends of Grandparent & Kinship Carers

- A special interest group intended to provide a non-partisan forum for MPs to meet and interact with grandparent and other kinship carers on matters relating to their care of children.
- Three Co-Convenors:
 - Hon. Tracey Roberts (Labor, lead Convenor)
 - Senator Dean Smith (Liberal)
 - Senator Dorinda Cox (Greens).
- Regular meetings with us.
- Carers from different States & Territories sometimes attend.



Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) Trust New Zealand

- GRG conducted 2 large surveys of grandparent and other kinship carers in 2005 & 2009: demonstrated to government that formal and informal kinship care families had similar characteristics and needs as each other.
- 2009: The Unsupported Child's Benefit was raised to parity with the national Foster Care Allowance.
- NZ is the only country in the world to provide support to children in kinship care based on need rather than legal status.





Visit by Kinship Care expert Kate Bundle

Kate Bundle was CEO *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren* when improvement to financial support of all children in kinship care was achieved. Her visit to Australia 23-29 June included:

- Adelaide: presentation to the members of *Kinship Alliance Australia*, including Frank Tyers from Tasmania, meetings with politicians and other organisations.
- Canberra: presentation to Members of Parliament sponsored by the Parliamentary Friends.
- Melbourne: Workshop hosted by the Mirabel Foundation, including a large contingent of Tasmanians!
- Brisbane: Workshop hosted by PeakCare.



Legislative initiatives



1. Advocate for amendments to Commonwealth, State and Territory Carer Recognition Acts, as necessary to promote equitable recognition and adequate support of all Australian kinship care families.
2. Advocate for renaming of the *Foster Child Health Care Card* to reflect its eligibility criteria that actually include children in informal & formal kinship care.
3. Advocate for the establishment of a Commonwealth *Informal Relative Caregiver Statutory Declaration*.

Legislative initiatives *continued*



4. Lobby for a review of the Double Orphan Pension and for the institution of an Unsupported Child's Benefit, considering the New Zealand model.
5. Encourage the revisitation and implementation of other relevant recommendations from the 2014 and 2015 Senate Inquiries.
6. Other legislative initiatives as decided from time to time.



ABS Review of Census Topics



2023/4 modifications to Household and Family data collection

Household and family relationships	Update the question design to collect more diverse family structures and update to gender-inclusive language.
Marital status	Update to collect de facto relationship status in this topic (in addition to the Household and family relationship topic).
Persons temporarily absent on Census night	Asking questions on new Census topics will be considered once the topics recommended to Government are determined.

Next Review of Census Topics is due in 2028.

Membership of the Alliance



- Open to organisations, formally recognised carer groups (funded and unfunded) and individuals who are committed to advocating for the recognition & support of all kinship care families, both informal & formal.
- Members may be invited to partner in representations to Federal Parliament, participate in submissions to relevant Inquiries and Reviews and other activities.
- Kin Raising Kids Tasmania is a member. We welcome membership from other Tasmanian individuals and organisations.



Governance



Kinship Alliance Australia operates under the auspices of Grandcarers SA <https://grandcarers.au/>

Inaugural Directors

Mr Mike Feszczak, CEO of Grandcarers SA

Dr Meredith Kiraly, kinship care authority/pro bono consultant.

Funding

Primary functions currently unfunded.

Small grants associated with specific activities.



A national network of kinship care advocates

Raising awareness and advocating for policy change that recognise and address the needs of all kinship carers and the children in their care

KA logo2

Building the network



And now what? Grant-seeking



- Operating on donated time isn't sustainable.
- Small philanthropic grants have supported Kate Bundle's visit, travel to Parliament, network building etc.
- Seeking a medium size grant and, in due course, 3-year philanthropic funding to establish a National Kinship Care Organisation to carry work forward.
- Longer-term aspiration: Ongoing Commonwealth government funding for the National Kinship Care Organisation.



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Questions? Suggestions? Comments?

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