

Research has highlighted that Kinship Care is a good option for children and young people who cannot remain in the care of their parents. The research also tells us that children who live with kinship carers experience less disruption and fewer moves, remain with their kinship carers longer and have positive wellbeing outcomes emotionally and in terms of their health and education.

The kinship care journey starts the day children are placed with kinship carers and some report that their experiences have been negative, which has shaped their view of social work services.

Key themes associated the kinship carers experience include the:

- Manner in which a child is placed with them.
- Delays in the completion of a kinship assessment.
- Lack of support (emotional, financial, and practical).
- Insufficient or inaccurate information and advice.
- Difficulties in managing family time.
- Difficulties in the management of the permanence plan for the child and their brothers, or sisters.

These issues may be compounded by the trauma related to the reasons necessitating the kinship arrangement or through the kinship carers own traumatic histories.

Kinship Team

In order to redress these issues, and recognise the value and experiences of kinship carers, South Ayrshire's Kinship Team was established in May 2022. The team consists of a Team Leader, and two Kinship Social Workers. The kinship team works directly with kinship carers and have been instrumental in supporting them to care of the children and young people they look after.

Over the past 18 months the kinship team have been involved in the development of the service and have made strides in various areas, which are highlighted below.

Kinship Care Practice Guidance

Prior to the establishment of the kinship team, the kinship guidance was outdated and did not give specific consideration to the regulations and schedules as outlined in the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 or the Children and Young Person's (Scotland) Act 2014

The kinship guidance was rewritten, and in doing so all associated paperwork was refreshed. The guidance was subsequently approved at the Social Work Governance Group in February 2022 and has been in use since this point.

To ensure the kinship guidance was effective and continued to take into account South Ayrshires ambitions, it was updated and presented again at the Social Work Governance Group in August 2023.

It is considered essential by the kinship team that the guidance and all associated paperwork continues to be updated and refreshed on a regular basis. The kinship guidance and suite of paperwork has been distributed to all locality teams within the partnership.

The implementation of the Kinship Care Practice Guidance ensures compliance with legislation, regulations, policy, and guidance. The kinship team provides advice to the children and families workforce, through one-to-one contact or attendance at team meetings, and is striving to embed good practice in kinship care within the organisational culture.

Where legacy issues have been identified the kinship team are completing kinship assessments/supplementary reports for consideration at the Kinship Screening Group and sensitively managing situations that could present reputational risk.

Training

To raise awareness of the Kinship Care Practice Guidance and role of the Kinship Team, online walkthroughs of the guidance and kinship financial assessments were undertaken. In addition, all locality teams have been individually visited by the kinship team and a training session devised for mandatory Permanence Training.

Training and awareness sessions will continue to be held as new workers join South Ayrshire. Refresher sessions will also be offered on an annual basis to all locality teams.

Carefirst

Prior to the establishment of the kinship team, Carefirst did not capture the details of approved kinship carers. Additionally, there were no activities set against the kinship carers or the children and young people for whom they provide care. This was of particular note for kinship carers who had a Residence or Kinship Care Order in respect of the children they cared for. Kinship carers were also not allocated to any team and to an extent were lost sight of.

As it stands all approved kinship carers now have a role recorded on Carefirst with their date of approval, this makes it easier to keep track of the number of approved kinship carers and provide support and assistance.

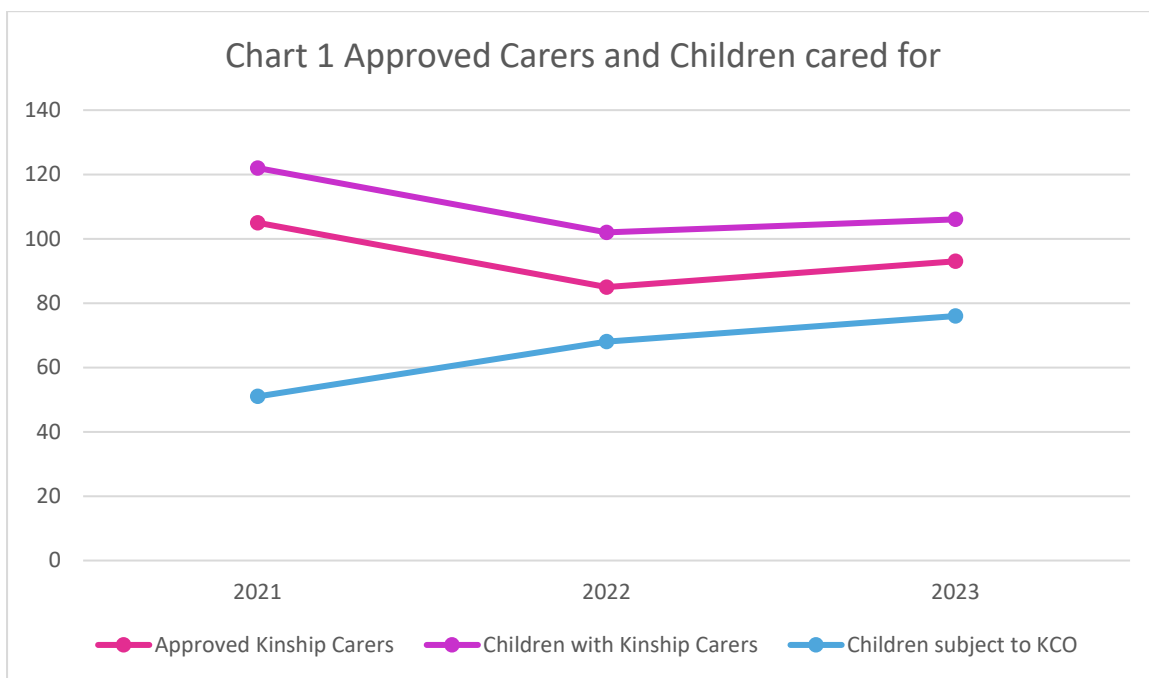
Activities have also been created on Carefirst for kinship assessments, kinship financial assessments, reviews, health checks and PVG checks. Additionally, the

finance team have also been notified of kinship allowance approvals through the use of the financial activities.

A kinship team basket has been created on Carefirst, which allows data tracking at a glance. Kinship carers open to the kinship team have been allocated to the team basket along with all associated activities and meetings.

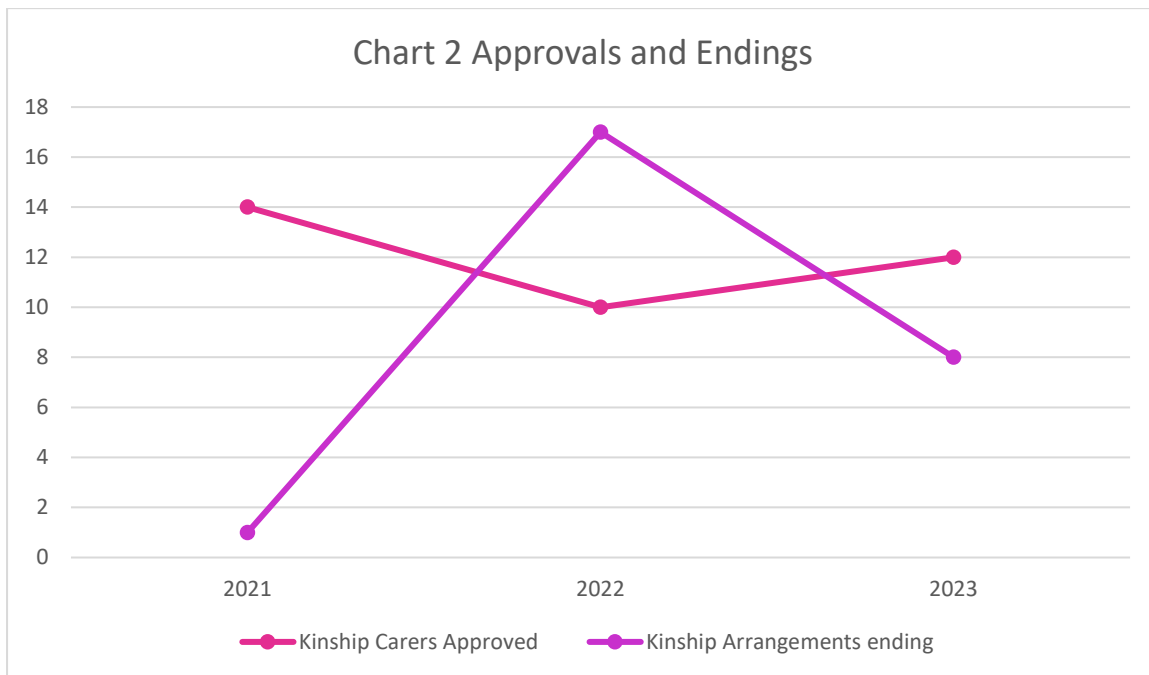
Regular business object reports have been set up. These reports track the number of kinship carers on Carefirst, their relationships with the child or young person they care for and to ensure the activities have been set up on Carefirst.

Trends and Statistics



Although the number of approved kinship carers since 2021 has fallen the majority of kinship arrangements ending have been due to the young person being cared for turning 18. Also, it should be noted that within each of the years detailed in Chart 1 the number of kinship carers has fluctuated throughout the course of the year, which is a result of new kinship carers being approved and other kinship arrangements ending. The numbers contained within the chart are the yearend numbers.

Chart 2 highlights the number of kinship approvals and endings within the same timeframes.



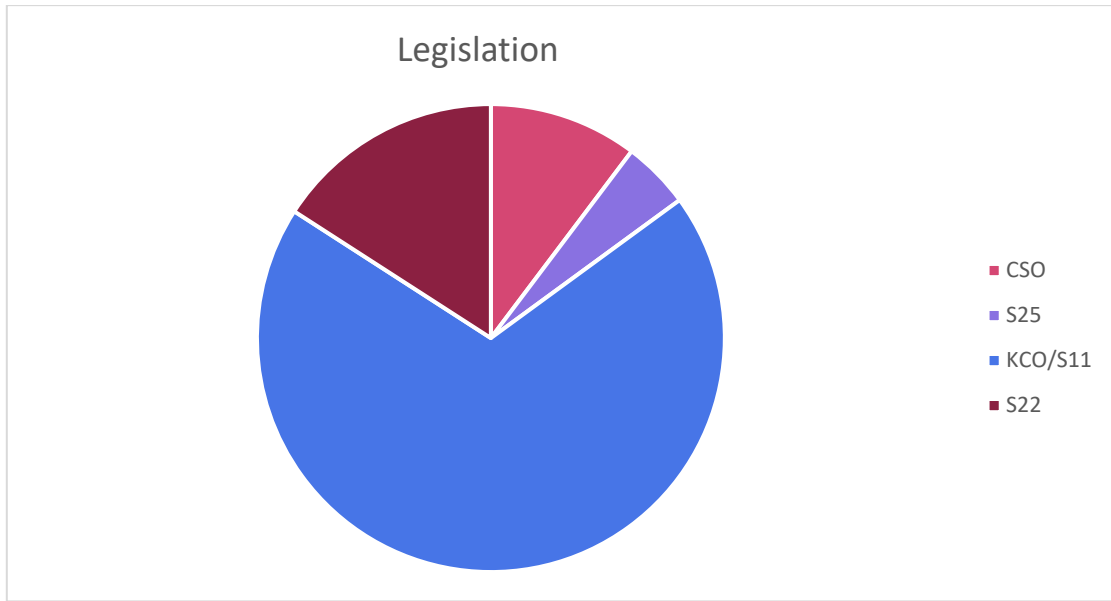
As aforementioned the kinship arrangements ending are largely as a result of young people reaching the age of 18. Additionally, some children and young people have returned to the care of their parents, and there have been a couple of occasions where kinship arrangements have broken down. Furthermore, it could be argued that the introduction of the kinship team led to increased scrutiny on kinship arrangements and through this the number of arrangements ending increased significantly in 2022.

It should also be noted that the number of children subject to Residence or Kinship Care Orders has steadily increased over the past couple of years, hence more children and young people have achieved permanence with their kinship carers.

As is stands there are only 16 children and young people looked after by virtue of a Compulsory Supervision Order, or under a section 25 arrangement with approved kinship carers.

This is detailed in **Chart 3**

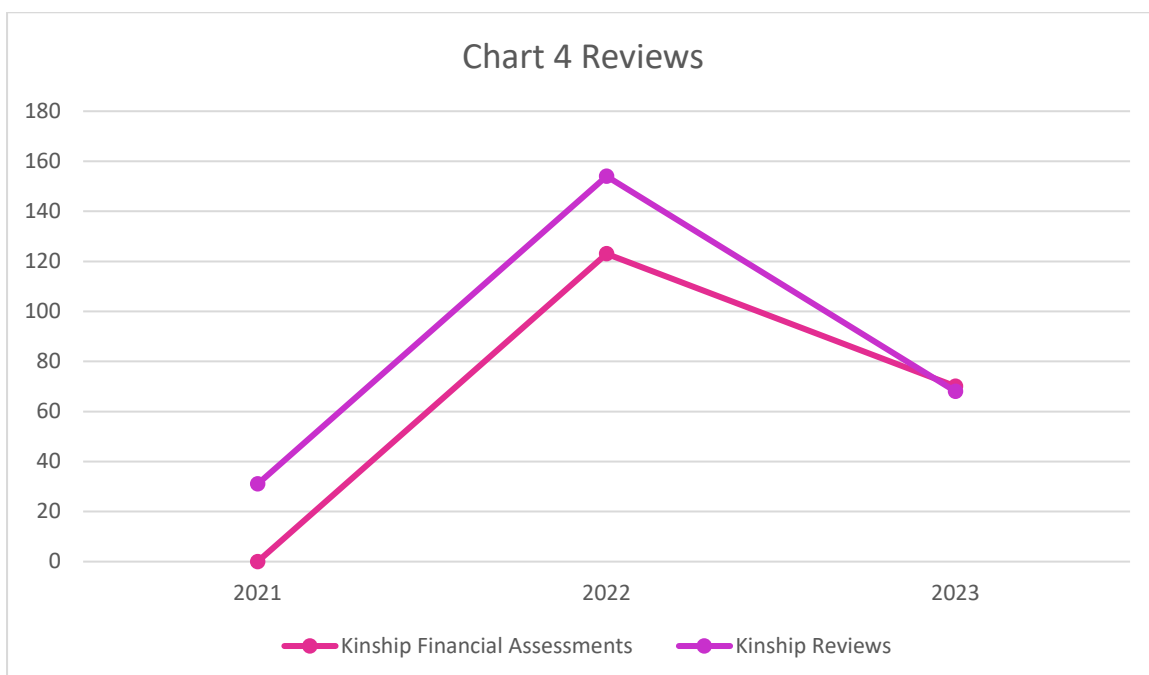
Overview of the Kinship Team



Kinship Reviews

Prior to the establishment of the kinship team kinship financial assessments and kinship reviews were rarely undertaken. The failure to complete these annual reviews led to overpayments, underpayments, a general lack of scrutiny on the circumstances and an overall lack of support to the kinship carers. This has been corrected and now an annual financial review is completed with all kinship carers.

These reviews have ensured payments are accurate and that the kinship carers have had the opportunity to discuss any difficulties or issues they are facing and be provided with proportionate advice, support, and guidance.



All kinship carers have received been financially reviewed since May 2022, many have been reviewed twice and some more often due to a change in circumstances. The reviews take place across the space of the financial year; hence some scheduled reviews are still due to take place.

Kinship Support Groups

In order to gauge the interest within South Ayrshire's kinship population for support groups, the kinship team conducted a kinship carer survey. A paper copy of the kinship carer survey was posted out to all our kinship carers, along with a QR code to complete the survey online. We received 16 responses.

One of the questions was: Would you be interested in attending support groups for kinship carers?

9 of the respondents answered "no" and 7 of the respondents answered "yes".

In response to the survey results, 4 events were held in Ayr, Troon and Maybole, one of which was an evening event. Unfortunately, no one attended. A coffee morning was thereafter organised which two kinship carers attended. Their feedback was very positive, and they have since linked in directly with the kinship team for support.

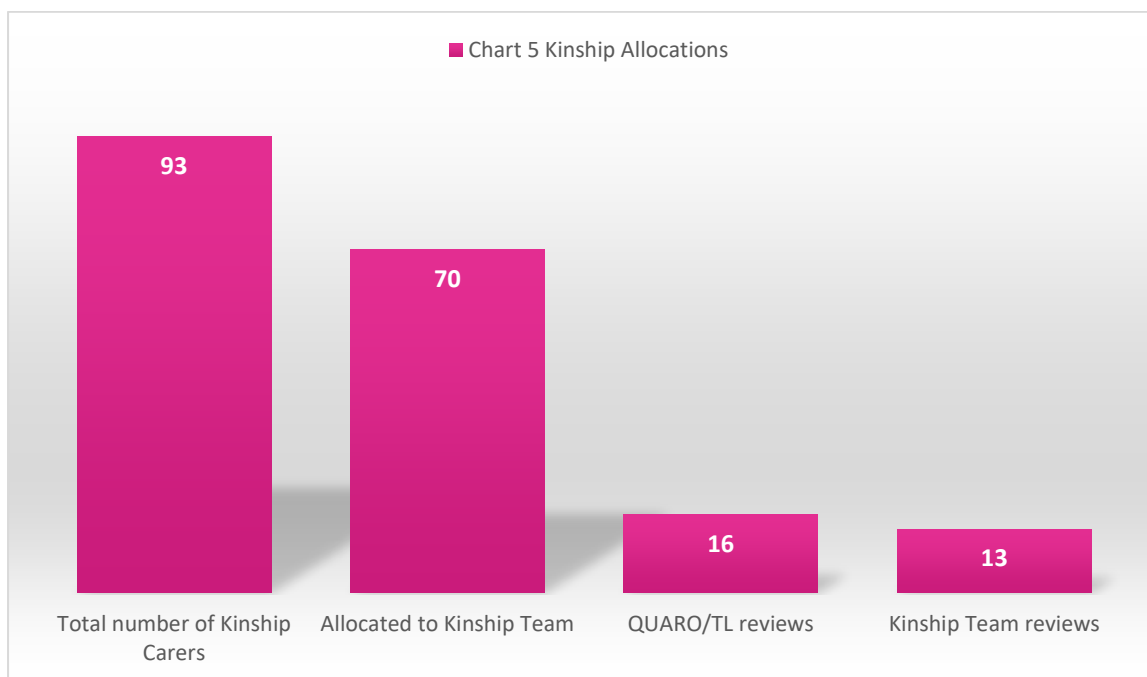
Although positive relationships have been achieved through one-to-one interactions between the kinship social workers and our kinship carers this has not translated into good attendance levels at group events. This has been explored with kinship carers during visits, the reflections being that the groups are not for everyone, the busy lives of our kinship carers make attending groups unmanageable for some, and others do not feel comfortable accessing a group support operated directly by social work services. This feedback has been taken on board and the kinship team have explored working in partnership with Thriving Communities to develop a different approach to support groups. As such a proposition has been sent to Thriving Communities and it's expected that this will be presented at their Team Leaders meeting in early 2024.

Direct Support

Since the formation of the kinship team kinship carers have access to dedicated workers with specialist knowledge, who can offer *them* personalised support when they need it, through a relationship-based approach. The workers have supported kinship carers directly in several areas including, support with finance, housing, legal issues, with bursary and charity applications and within children's meetings, team around the child meetings and continuing care. This is of particular importance as the majority of these kinship carers hold Residence of Kinship Care Orders in respect of the children they care for, and previous to the establishment of the kinship team they would not have had any opportunities to access this support.

Since the formation of the kinship team, the number of kinship carers allocated has steadily increased, as has the responsibility for reviews.

Chart 5 highlights the current position regarding the allocation of Kinship Carers and reviews.



Indirect support

The kinship team have been producing and circulating a quarterly newsletter for kinship carers. The feedback from kinship carers has been positive and the newsletter has been well received.

With a view to communicating more efficiently and effectively with the kinship carer population the kinship team have been progressing with the implementation of a text messaging service. All consents and DPIA's in respect of this have been achieved and consent from kinship carers is being sought.

In addition, the kinship team have produced information leaflets in relation to kinship assessments, kinship allowances and Kinship Care Orders. It is anticipated these leaflets will be shared with prospective and approved kinship carers to support their understanding of the process.

Monitoring outcomes

In terms of monitoring the success of our kinship arrangements, the kinship team has started to track the destinations of young people and whether they plan to remain at home, at the point the local authority's agreement with their kinship carer ends. Despite the cessation of kinship allowance post 18, which can create financial pressures for low-income households, our young people are choosing and being supported to stay at home, and positive destinations are being achieved. Most notably, the vast majority of young people have transitioned to college, with some transitioning to university or commencing full-time employment.

Case Studies

Case Study 1

In August of 2022, approved Kinship Carer BR's wife sadly died. BR is 64 and looks after his 4-year-old step grandson JR. In a state of shock and unsure about what this meant for JR, BR and his stepdaughters contacted the Kinship Team for advice. It transpired that the Kinship Care Order had only named BR's wife. The allocated Kinship Social Worker helped the family through their grief, providing emotional and practical support, whilst continuing to assess the family's situation and empowering them to identify their own plan. The family felt that BR, with his family network, should continue to care for JR and was assured by the additional support of the Kinship Team. The allocated Kinship Social Worker has been there as BR journeys through his grief and grows in confidence as a lone Kinship Carer, including bringing him together with a Kinship Carer who went through a similar experience. BR continues to receive one-to-one support, including information and guidance that assisted him in gaining a Kinship Care Order through the Court.

Case Study 2

On carrying out annual kinship financial review for kinship carer LC and visiting her at home, the allocated kinship worker learned that LC was experiencing personal hardship, including a recent separation which resulted in her and her granddaughter having to vacate their furnished private let. LC had been in contact with housing and was being re-housed however, she was extremely worried about how she would afford to furnish her new tenancy and advised not knowing who to contact for support. LC also indicated that she suffered from agoraphobia which was exacerbating her worries.

LC's granddaughter was receiving support from Belmont Families First school project and therefore with the kinship carers permission the kinship worker contacted the Belmont Family First team and collaboratively supported LC to apply for grants for essential furnishings and white goods. This not only ensured that the kinship carer and young person's practical needs were met but it enabled the foundations of a trusting relationship to be built as the kinship carer has since reached out to the kinship team for advice and support.

Case Study 3

In November of 2022, the Kinship Team were contacted by LC and AC, grandparents, who were previously assessed and approved as South Ayrshire Kinship Carers for their granddaughters EJ and AJ and had gained Kinship Care Orders in respect of them. LC and AC advised that in May 2021 following a rehabilitation plan EJ and AJ were reunified with their mother who lived in another local authority.

LC and AC reported that EJ had returned to their care and requested support from the Kinship Team. The situation was complex, as the Kinship Care Orders remained in place having never been discharged by the Court and despite social work services in the other local authority not being involved, the Kinship Assessment completed by the assessing Kinship Social Worker highlighted significant wellbeing concerns in respect of EJ in the care of her mother. The Kinship Assessment involved liaison with the National Kinship Care Consultant, education, and social work services in the other local authority, as well as education services in South Ayrshire, and the family (child, parents, grandparents, which included visiting EJ's father at HMP Kilmarnock).

Furthermore, advice and guidance were provided to LC and AC to help them support EJ with her mental health difficulties and to support them gain access to appropriate services for her.

In March of 2023, LC and AC were re-approved as Kinship Carers for EJ. Not only was this deemed to be in EJ's best interest, with her grandparents assessed as able to meet her holistic needs, but also in accordance with section 71 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and section 4 of the Kinship Care Assistance (Scotland) Order 2016.

LC and AC are managing well in caring for EJ, though are assured that support is readily available to them from the Kinship Team and have built up a good relationship with their Kinship Social Worker.