

## **Kinship foster care in Northern Ireland**

The Department of Health here defines Kinship Care as “when a looked after child is placed by a HSC Trust with a relative, friend or other person with a prior connection to the child who is caring for the child full time. A person with a prior connection could be someone who knows the child in a professional capacity such as a childminder, a teacher or youth worker although these are not exclusive categories”.

The policy base for this arises from the 2006 “Care Matters- a Bridge to a Better Future Strategy” (DHSSPSNI) which was endorsed by the NI Executive in 2009. The kinship standards arose from the Action Plan which accompanied the Strategy and were developed to recognise “the unique role played by family and friends in the lives of children separated from parents”.

Since then, in Northern Ireland, we have seen a very significant increase in the numbers of children looked after by kinship foster carers with the most recent Department of Health figures showing;

- At 31 March 2018, 3,109 children were in care in Northern Ireland. This was the highest number recorded since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995;
- The majority of children in care in Northern Ireland had been looked after for less than three years, with just under a tenth looked after for ten years or longer;
- Four fifths of the children in care were in foster care placements (79%), 12% placed with parents, 5% in residential care and 4% in other placements. This was similar to previous years. Of those children placed in foster care, 44% were in kinship foster care ( ie 1080 children in kinship foster care compared to 1376 in non-relative foster care)

Our legislative base for kinship is set out in the instruments below:

- The Children (Leaving Care) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002
- The Arrangements for Placement of Children (General) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996
- The Foster Placement (Children) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996
- The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996
- Contact with Children Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996
- The Disqualification for Caring for Children Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996
- The Placement of Children with Parents etc. Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996
- The Refuges (Children's Homes and Foster Placements) Regulations (Northern Ireland)
- The Representations Procedure (Children) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996
- The Review of Children's Cases Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996
- The Children (Leaving Care) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005

- The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 - Guidance and Regulations - Volume Three - Family Placements and Private Fostering
- The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 - Guidance and Regulations - Volume Eight - Leaving and After Care

### **Minimum kinship care standards**

The Department has published minimum kinship care standards for Health and Social Care professionals to recognise the unique role played by family and friends carers in the lives of children separated from parents.

- [Minimum kinship care standards amended February 2014](#)

Below is link to a paper from the NI Dept of Health which provides a comprehensive series of data on children living permanently in households without a birth parent present and their primary carers from 2011 so the data would need to be updated

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/kinship-care-%E2%80%93-children-living-households-without-parent-present-northern-ireland-2011>