



Month of Action: June 2012

Local Action Guide

## Support Children in Kinship Care

Make the most of the longest days of the year by getting involved in the month of action being organised by Grandparents Plus. We want everyone to join forces to campaign for better services and support for children being raised by family and friends carers, while also raising awareness of the huge contribution kinship carers are making.

This Local Action Guide is designed for kinship carers (family and friends carers) and their friends and supporters, especially support group coordinators, to help you raise awareness and campaign for more support for kinship carers.

Whether it's by talking to a politician, organising a photo opportunity at a support group meeting or writing to your local newspaper, it would be great if everyone could get involved with at least one action. Everything you do will help put a spotlight on the issue of kinship care and create pressure on the government to provide better support.

### **What's in this guide:**

1. Aims of the Month of Action
2. Organise a teddy bears' picnic or another photo opportunity
3. Getting covered by local newspapers
4. Generate email messages to your council – a quick and easy action
5. Meet with your MP or Councillor
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7. Facts on kinship care
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### 1. Aims of the month of action:

- Promote support and recognition of family and friends carers at a local level and the needs of the children they care for.
- Provide opportunities for kinship carers and their children to meet others.
- Make sure MPs, councils, schools and other service providers recognise the needs of children in family and friends care and their families.

### 1. Organise a teddy bears' picnic or another photo opportunity for your local newspaper or for our website

A teddy bears' picnic would be a great way of raising awareness about the issue of kinship care. You could organise this very easily at your next support group meeting by bringing in a table cloth, some teddy bears and some tea cups – highlighting the message “Support Children in Kinship Care.”

You could also invite your local MP or Councillor responsible for children's services to have their photo taken at the picnic.



**Please let us know what you are planning so that we can help you to get good photos and get media coverage – 020 8981 8001 or email [peter.hulme@grandparentsplus.org.uk](mailto:peter.hulme@grandparentsplus.org.uk)**

### Other ideas for photo opportunities

- Collect together the same amount of teddy bears as there are children in kinship care in your council area (we can tell you how many). For most areas this would be around 1,000. It doesn't have to be exact. A large pile, or a shopping trolley, of teddy bears would make the point.
- Have a photo taken with your MP or Councillor outside the town hall or at another local landmark.
- Bake a cake with a message on it.
- Hold up cardboard letters to spell out the message “Support Children in Kinship Care”.
- Hold up a poster or collage made by children, eg cut out hands made into a shape.

#### **Tips for getting good photos**

- Fill the frame with people – avoid long shots where you struggle to make out faces of bears or people!
- Use the flash with anti-redeye setting.
- Make sure everyone is facing the camera and smiling.
- Make sure the slogan “Support Children in Kinship Care” is clearly visible.
- Make sure you get agreement from everyone in the photo, especially the carers or parents of any children.
- Try taking picture from a different angle eg shooting upwards from the floor or standing on a chair and shooting down.
- Try and avoid formal groups.

- A candle-lit vigil.
- A photograph with a local celebrity / sports star etc.

### **Make a bear for kinship care**

You might like to make a “Kinship Bear” for a local teddy bears’ picnic, or to bring to our celebration day. Many network members have already started knitting and we hope to use the bears to represent children in kinship care. We plan to bring the bears together for a picnic of family and friends carers and their children on 30 June 2012 at Gulliver’s Land in Milton Keynes. Alternatively you could make a fabric bear or bring along your own favourite bear

There’s a knitting pattern on the back page of this guide.

## **2. Getting covered by your local newspaper**

Coverage in your local newspaper is a great way of raising awareness about kinship care and putting pressure on local politicians. If you are holding an event or photo opportunity let us know and we can help write a press release to get it covered by your local newspaper.

You can also write a **letter to your local newspaper**. The letter should be short and to the point, highlighting the massive contribution made by family and friends carers and the support you would like from the government. You could have it signed by kinship carers in your area. You could also ask to put an article in a council or school newsletter or put information on their website.

To find out the contact details of your local newspaper give us a call or visit:

[www.mediauk.com/newspapers](http://www.mediauk.com/newspapers)

We have drafted a template letter that you could send or adapt which is available on:

[www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/month-of-action](http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/month-of-action)

## **3. Generate emails to your local Councillor – a quick and easy action**

By sending emails to our local Councillors we can show how many people are concerned by this issue. Local councils have been required by law to have published a policy on how they will treat family and friends carers since September 2011. Many councils have still not done it! Please go to our e-action part of the website [www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/councils-action](http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/councils-action) and enter your postcode to send an email to the local Councillor with responsibility for children’s services. Encourage other kinship carers, friends, relatives and colleagues to do the same!

#### 4. Meeting with your local Councillor or MP

If you meet with a local Councillor or MP the best way to make an impression is to tell them your story, the challenges you have faced as a family and friends carer, and what local or central government could do to help. Your case will also be strengthened by mentioning some of the “Key Facts on Kinship Care” below.

**How to meet with your MP:** MPs are usually in their constituencies on Fridays or at weekends. They should hold regular local ‘surgeries’ when they meet constituents in their office. The best way to arrange a meeting is by calling their constituency office or their office in parliament. You can get contact details by entering your postcode here: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com> or by calling us on 020 8981 8001

**How to meet with your councillor:** The best councillor to meet with would be the lead member of cabinet with responsibility for children’s services. You can find out who this is by visiting: [www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/councillors-action](http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/councillors-action) and entering your postcode. You can then call your local council and ask to speak to them.

#### 5. What you could ask for from your local Councillors and MPs

Here are some suggestions of what you could ask for when you meet with local politicians:

- a. Local councils should meet their legal obligations towards children in family and friends care which should be laid out in a clear Family and Friends Care Policy published by each council. This should include:
  - Financial support for family and friends carers, which should be assessed in a fair and transparent way.
  - Practical support for children in family and friends care including access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, educational support and support in managing contact with birth parents.
  - Better practical support for family and friends carers including clear information about the implications of different legal orders and the support to which they are entitled, access to peer-support groups, respite care and support in finding suitable housing and paying legal fees if required.
- b. National government should better support family and friends carers through:
  - Introduction of a national allowance for kinship carers and paid leave for kinship carers when they take on care of a child (equivalent to adoption leave).
  - A clear legal requirement for local councils to provide support to all children in family and friends care that would prevent children needlessly going into local authority care. This should be enforced by national government.

## **6. Key Facts on Kinship Care**

When you meet with politicians it's always useful to have some key facts to help support your case:

- There are around 200,000 family and friends carers in the UK.
- Two thirds of family and friends carers are struggling on very low incomes and 57% give up work or reduce their hours when a child moves in.
- 48% of family and friends carers are caring for a child with a disability or special educational needs.
- 77% of family and friends carers say they didn't understand the legal options available to them when a child first came to live with them.

## **7. Hold a stall at another organisation's offices or event: eg at a school fair, at a community festival, library, children's centre etc.**

This could be a good way of raising awareness about family and friends carers in your community. You could give out information about sources of information for family and friends carers. You could ask an MP or Councillor to visit the stall and have their photograph taken. You could also organise a display in a library or children's centre.

**Please let us know what you are planning so that we can help to get media coverage. Call 020 8981 8001 or email [peter.hulme@grandparentsplus.org.uk](mailto:peter.hulme@grandparentsplus.org.uk)**

# “Kinship Bear”: Knitting pattern

- Use needles that give you a very firm gauge (3.25mm) so that the filling doesn't show through the fabric.

## **Legs, Body and Head:** Make 1

- Beginning at the top of the head, cast on 40sts and knit 32 rows.
- Place a coloured thread in the middle (approximately) of the last row to show where the neck is.
- Knit a further 34 rows (total 66 rows)
- Put a coloured thread at each end of the last row to show where the body stops and the legs start.
- Next row: Knit 20, turn  
Knit a further 39 rows on these 20 sts. Cast off.
- With right side facing, re-join yarn to the other 20sts and knit 40 rows. Cast off

## **Arms:** Make 2

Cast on 20sts and knit 40 rows. Cast off

## **Making Up:**

- Fold the body in half and sew the back seam from the cast on edge to the row where you placed markers for the top of the legs.
- Refold the body so that the seam you just sewed runs down the centre of the back and sew the inside leg and foot seams.
- Stuff your teddy lightly and sew the top of the head closed, rounding the corners very slightly.
- Sew across the corners of your teddy's head so that the corner points form ears. If you want your ears to stand out like those in the picture, gather around the bottom of each ear and pull slightly.
- Gather around the neck on the row where you placed the marker for the neck.
- Fold the arm pieces in half and sew the side and one end closed. Stuff very lightly, sew the remaining side closed and sew the arm to the body, just below the neck.
- Embroider face.

Finished  
product:

