

Kinship Care in Australia - what's happening?



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Kinship care – definitions



1. 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 (United Nations General Assembly, 2010).
2. Statutory relative/kinship care is where the caregiver is a relative (other than parents), considered to be family or a close friend, or is a member of the child or young person's community (in accordance with their culture) who is reimbursed by the state/territory for the care of the child (AIHW, 2018, p.78).

Aboriginal kinship care

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, a kinship carer may be another Indigenous person who is a member of their community, a compatible community, or from the same language group.

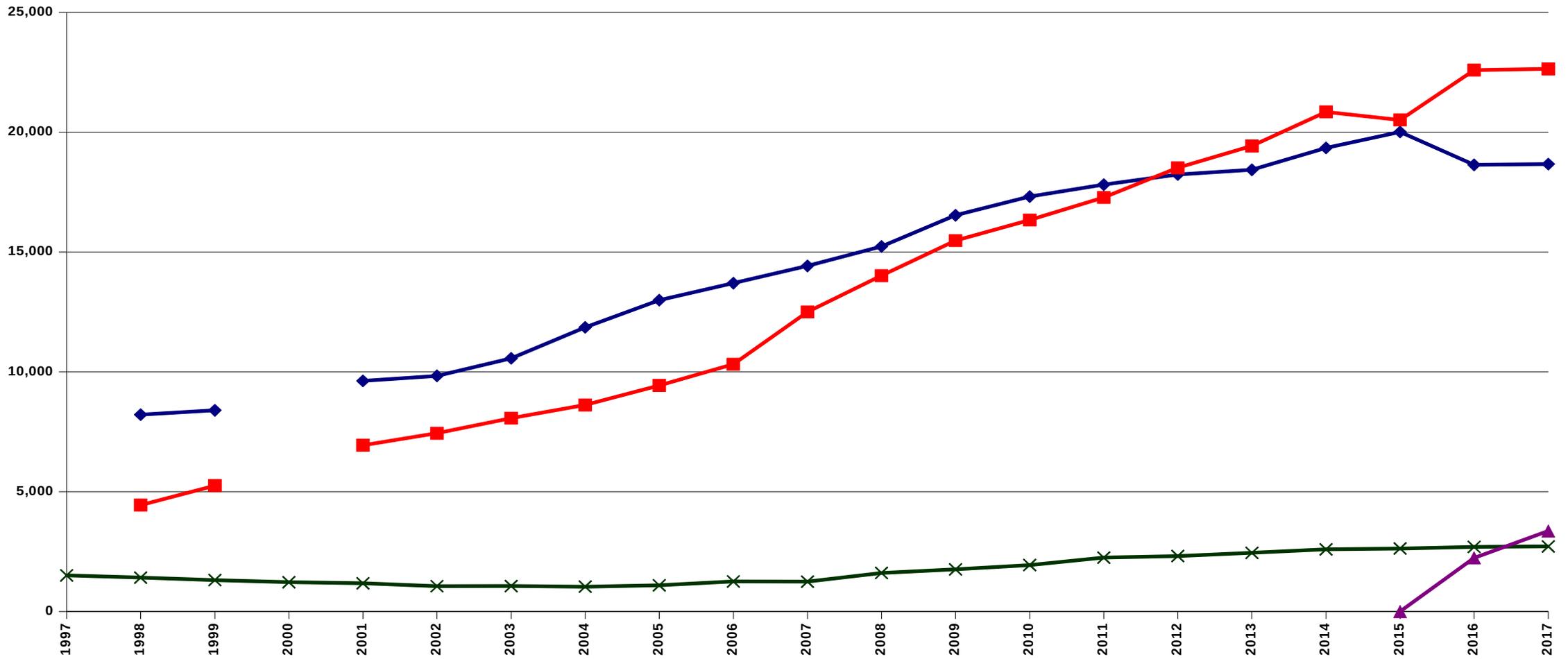


Identified benefits of kinship care

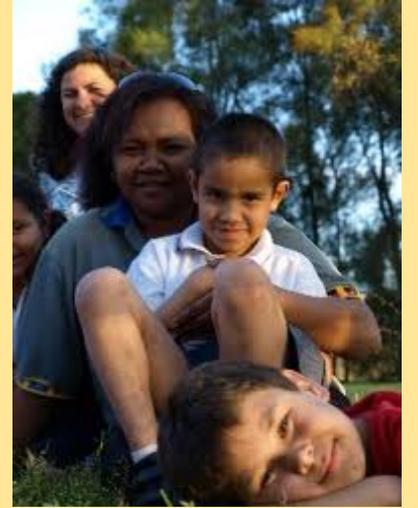
- Placements are more stable than foster care.
- More frequent contact with parents, siblings and wider family.
- At least as safe as foster care.
- Broadly children do as well as in foster care.
- Children generally appear to be happy with kinship care, seeing it as more natural. (*Nixon 2008*)



Children in Out of Home Care in Australia



Indigenous children in 'care'



- 17,664 indigenous children & 30,069 non-indigenous children in Out of Home Care, i.e. one-third (37%) are indigenous (AIHW, 2018).
- Care rate for indigenous children is **10.2 times** higher than for non-indigenous children.

What we don't know



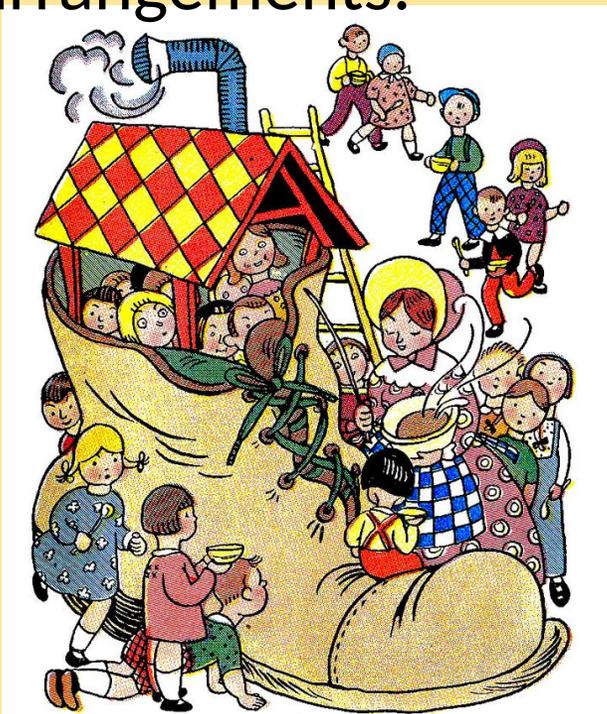
- Numbers of children in informal kinship care arrangements (estimate of maybe 4 times as many – far more than in foster care).
- Little information about informal kinship carers.
- The relationship between children and their kin carers.
- Little information about kinship carers other than grandparents.
- Not a lot about kinship care in Australia.

The well of unmet need

- Financial hardship.
- High levels of physical and mental health issues.
- Many difficulties with parental contact arrangements.
- Expensive and protracted legal contests over care arrangements.
- Myriad unmet support needs including:
 - Respite care
 - Emotional support
 - Help for children with emotional & behavioural issues.

(Kiraly, 2015, Review of kinship carer surveys)

All the hardships are magnified in the case of Aboriginal kinship care families.



The well of unmet need



Blimey, I would need a bigger box to type it all in. ('With Family', UK)

I am very hurt by this kinship arrangement. I put in 100% and get nothing back. Nobody is there for me and to support me. ('Family Links', Victoria, Australia)

The Inquiries



Recommendations of 2014 Senate Inquiry into Grandparent Care



Given its remit, this Inquiry paid little attention to the experiences and needs of kinship carers other than grandparents.

- services can be enhanced by DSS and DHS to initiate a comprehensive review of support provided to grandparents raising grandchildren.
- DHS to review the number and geographical allocation of grandparent advisor positions...if required, increasing the number of grandparent advisors employed under the Grandparent Advisor Program.
- Investigate how access to and the availability of professional counselling needed for grandparent-headed families.

Recommendations of 2014 Senate Inquiry into Grandparent Care



- Include a question in the Census commencing in 2016, to identify those households in which kinship carers have primary responsibility for children, and the carer's relationship to that child.
- Begin compilation of a longitudinal dataset for grandparent-headed families, with a view to identifying relevant support and service needs, including for ATSI grandparent carers.
- Make available ongoing support groups, better information about services, mental health services, legal assistance, disability services and a recognised Commonwealth Informal Relative Caregiver's Statutory Declaration to promote recognition of this group of carers.

Recommendations of 2014 Senate Inquiry into Grandparent Care (3)



- Through COAG, convene a national forum specifically for grandparent carers & their local support groups, non-government organisations & representatives from the Commonwealth, State & Territory governments, and that this forum investigate a means of recognising the role and contribution of grandparent carers throughout Australia.
- States and Territories to consider reviewing the rates of financial assistance paid to grandparents as out-of-home carers, with particular consideration to addressing the disparity in financial support between foster carers and grandparent carers.

Recommendations - Royal Commission 2017 (1)



- Kinship carers' inclusion on a State & Territory carer register.
- Improved kinship carer authorisation processes: references, risk management plans.
- Develop a specific model of assessment tailored to kinship care.
- Annual kinship carer reviews including private interviews with children.

Recommendations - Royal Commission 2017 (2)



- Resources re child sexual abuse prevention tailored for kinship carers.
- Training about trauma-informed care & care of children with harmful sexual behaviours.
- Equal financial support to foster carers.
- Additional supports needed by children in kinship care identified & funded.
- Additional casework support for children's family contact arrangements.

Recommendations - Senate Inquiry into Out of Home Care 2015 (1)

- AIHW work on data about the relationship between children and their kinship carers.
- Provide community visitors to all out of home care placements.
- Greater attention to children in international kinship care arrangements.
- Improved implementation of the ACCP.
- Streamlining assessment process for ATSI kinship carers, implementing the Winangay kinship resources to improve carer/CP relationships.



Recommendations - Senate Inquiry into Out of Home Care (2)

COAG to include in the Third Action Plan of the National Framework a project to develop and implement nationally consistent financial and practical (including training and caseworker) support for statutory and informal relative/kinship carers. This should include:

- Establishment of a national peak body for relative/kinship carers.
- Accreditation and training of relative/kinship carers.
- Increasing allowances available to relative/kinship carers.
- Evaluation and development of nationally consistent best practice models of supporting relative/kinship care.



Opportunities



The Australian Children's Commissioners

Megan Mitchell – a strong advocate for children in kinship care.

Children's Commissions in each State & have an interest in kinship care:

- WA planned inquiry into kinship care – deferred through lack of funding.
- Victoria – 2018-9 inquiry into OHC with a specific focus on kinship care.
- Tasmania – Discussion paper on family based care.
- South Australia – particular interest in kinship care.
- Queensland – 2017 Review foster care & kinship care.



National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020

Care (i.e. out of home care) one of the Framework's five themes.

Federal Department of Social Services beginning to consider what policy or mechanism may succeed the National Framework in the context of related strategies, reforms and key priorities agreed by government and the non-government sector.

Families Australia heavily involved with the development of the National Framework and its possible successor.



Commonwealth Ministers joint Communiqué 1 June 2018



The Hon Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Social Services

The Hon Jane Prentice MP

Assistant Minister for Social Services and Disability Services

The Hon Dr David Gillespie MP, Asst Minister for Children & Families

...acknowledged the voluntary nature of caring for children in out-of-home care and agreed to undertake further work to better support carers. In particular they agreed to drive reform efforts through the *Fourth Action Plan of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*.

The ACWA advocacy project Kinship Care: Making It a National



Financially supported by the Sidney Myer Fund.

- Starting here - more papers on kinship care than ever in one conference.
- National kinship care data collection - Commonwealth, States & Territories.
- *National Kinship Care Forum 23 August 2018*, hosted by the National Children's Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission.
- Special Kinship Care Issue (or two) of *developing practice*.
- Submission to *ABS Review of 2021 Census Topics*, June 2018.
- Proposal to bring British trainer to Australia, 2019 - shortlisted for funding.

The way forward – what's needed? (1)

1. Greater recognition of all children in kinship care by the Commonwealth, and a clear and considered policy regarding support for children in kinship care & their carers.
2. Full implementation by States and Territories of policy providing equity of support for children in foster care and kinship care.



The way forward – what's needed? (2)

3. Data systems that can provide information about:
 - No. of Australian children in kinship care.
 - Who children in kinship care are living with.
4. A funded Australian research agenda going forward.
5. Ongoing advocacy: a national kinship care association?

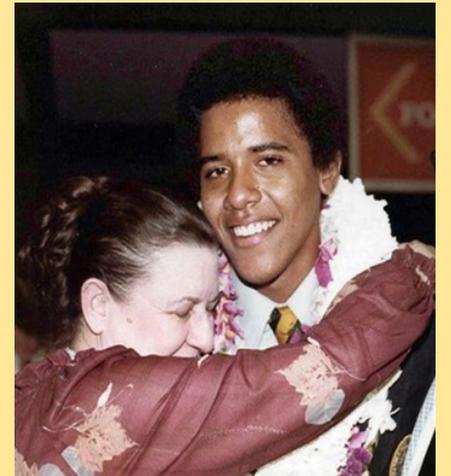


So, where to from here?

Continued advocacy is needed to bring about real improvements in the identification, recognition and support of all children in kinship care both informal and formal.

ACWA is making a significant contribution to building the groundswell. How to keep it up?

Your ideas are welcome....Contact Wendy Foote at ACWA, or myself on mkiraly@unimelb.edu.au



Take the ACWA Kinship Care Advocacy Survey on the ACWA website.