



Kinship Connected

West Yorkshire

Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, Wakefield

Quarter 1 Review, 10 January 2019

Grandparents Plus project workers, Marnie Freeman-Hacker and Rachael Sherrington, came into post on Tuesday 2nd October 2018 to provide support to special guardians across the five local authorities covered by One Adoption West Yorkshire. Kinship Connected has been commissioned for 18 months in West Yorkshire from October 2018 to March 2020.

In quarter 1, Rachael has been supporting special guardians in Bradford, Calderdale and Kirklees; Marnie in Leeds and Wakefield. Marnie has had a period of sick leave during this quarter and is currently working on a phased return. To provide cover during this period, Lucy Owens has been providing temporary support in Leeds and Wakefield during Marnie's absence.

Support provided to date:

Local authority	Target no. of special guardians to support	No. of referrals	Initial visit complete	Initial visit booked	Support groups attended
Bradford	32	4	3	1	2
Calderdale	10	2	0	2	1
Kirklees	20	6	5	1	2 booked for Jan
Leeds	40	2	2	0	Booked for Jan
Wakefield	18	3	2	1	No current group
TOTAL	120	17	12	5	1

In the first three months of the programme, seventeen special guardians have been referred to the service by the local authorities. Intensive one-to-one support has commenced with thirteen of these special guardians and initial visits booked or in the process of being booked with the remainder.

In addition to these referrals, the project workers have received an additional three referrals for kinship carers not eligible for the kinship connected service and these kinship carers have been linked in with Grandparents Plus national services, including the advice service, Someone Like Me and registered on our Kinship Care Network.

Key themes arising from the support provided

Contact with family members is often problematic, with special guardians finding it difficult to balance the needs of the child with those of the parents, who can be demanding and sometimes unreasonable. This can lead to a breakdown in family relations. Some family members are reportedly commenting that the special guardians have broken the family apart, or have stolen the children.

Special guardians have advised that **schools** often lack understanding of the needs of the children living in the care. Schools may not recognise that because a child has been placed with family that they have experienced trauma and need extra support. Families are struggling to get an acknowledgement that extra support is required, and often children are being punished repeatedly for behaviour that should not be unexpected for a child in their situation and with their experiences. The project workers are organising meetings with the relevant Virtual School Heads to discuss how to address this.

Special guardians can struggle to manage the **children's behaviour**, particularly as they approach teenage years. Despite attending courses, they struggle with every day parenting and can be at a loss as to how to manage this behaviour. Many feel their parenting skills are being questioned, rather than additional support being provided to the child displaying the behaviour. With long waiting lists for services such as CAMHS, families have described feeling stuck in limbo and without a diagnosis many resources are not available to them, eg EHCPs.

Finances are a big area of concern for Special guardians. Many have re-mortgaged their homes, delayed retirement and still have to borrow money from friends and family to make ends meet. Not many complain about the allowances they receive from the Local Authority however, despite still worrying about money. Many are not aware of their entitlements, for example some have been unaware that they can apply for DLA if they are caring for a young person who requires more than the expected level of care. Several special guardians in Bradford have to remind their children to do things that would usually be expected of a child their age eg. eat, bathe, get dressed, help cross roads, remind them to go to the toilet, wipe their bums, they wet the bed at 9 or 10. Project workers are supporting them, alongside the Social workers, to apply for DLA and carers allowance.

Mental health – during meetings with the project workers, many special guardians are in tears at this first visit. They describe feeling tired, exhausted, alone, misunderstood and isolated. Many don't want to be a burden because they believe that because they are family it is their duty to care for the children, no matter how hard and no matter the consequences for themselves. Many report seeing GPs for depression and anxiety. They say that someone just listening to them eases their worries and makes them feel heard and appreciated.

Support Groups

The project workers have visited three support groups in the first quarter, in Bradford and Calderdale, and are booked to attend groups in Leeds and Kirklees in January.

In the local authority areas where there are no support groups at present, the project workers have identified potential locations and are working with the social work teams and local special guardians to identify venues.

Key Achievements

1. A new support group is running in Kirklees. This new group in Dewsbury Moor is running in a local Sure Start Centre. The space has been provided to Grandparents Plus free of charge following a meeting between the centre, the project worker and a Special Guardian who lives in the local area.
2. A second new support group is taking place in Bradford. This new group is in the Keighley area, and is also in a local Sure Start Centre. The Centre has kindly offered one of their rooms free of charge and we hope they can continue to do so if the group proves successful.
3. Good progress continues to be made in terms of support group development. Visits to existing groups are ongoing and the project workers are working closely with the local authority teams and special guardians to identify areas that would benefit from a group and potential venues. By using the postcodes of those families with Special Guardianship Orders areas with a higher concentration of SGO families have been identified enabling the group locations to be targeted appropriately.
4. The Grandparents Plus Professionals Group is to take place on 30th January 2019. This has been arranged in partnership with Bradford Council.
5. Engagement events are to take place in the early part of 2019 with each of the five Local Authorities.