

HOW HUMAN RIGHTS APPLY TO KINSHIP CARE IN LIVERPOOL – THE VIEWS OF PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract

In this article, the views of professionals in Liverpool were examined on how and whether human rights apply to the area of kinship care. Kinship carers take on the care of children of others in their family or friends group, usually at a time of great crisis. Yet they are frequently left by the state without financial or other support, in spite of being much more likely than the general population to live in poverty and ill-health. It was found during this empirical research project that professionals generally believed that human rights are important for kinship care. The rights most frequently mentioned related to: 1) fairness and equality; 2) working together and being heard; 3) information and access to justice; 4) children's rights and the right to family life; and 5) the right to an adequate standard of living. Human rights can help authorities and local groups work together. There is a lot of common ground between the goals of local authorities and those of kinship-care representatives, such as when it comes to changes in law and policy at a national level to improve the status of, and services for, kinship carers. Recommendations are made in this article, for example the introduction of a kinship-care allowance, automatic access to free legal aid for kinship carers, and more kinship-care advocacy campaigns with human rights at their core.

Introduction

Kinship carers – family or friends who take on the care of children who cannot be cared for by their parents – are the unsung heroes of the child-care system in England and Wales. The 2011 census indicates that at that time in England 152,910 children were living in kinship care. It has been found that there are equal or better outcomes for children in kinship as opposed to 'stranger' care. (Wellard *et al.*, 2017) Yet they are frequently left by the state without financial or other support, in spite of being much more likely than the general population to live in poverty and ill-health (Grandparents Plus, 2014; Munro and Gilligan, 2013).

Rules around status and entitlements are complex and unclear, and kinship carers often cannot access legal advice. The rights framework can help hidden groups like kinship carers. It can: 1)