



**THE KCV LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF KINSHIP
CARE FAMILIES 2011-2020 AND BEYOND**

EIGHTH REPORT 2018



Kinship Carers Victoria is supported by the Victorian Government.

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Emerging Trends 2011–18

KCV believes that, where it is possible, remaining within their extended family is in the best interests of children and young people and that this provides the best outcomes for young adults transitioning out of care.

The KCV Longitudinal Study of Kinship Care Families supports the validity of this belief. The 2018 survey shows that for the most part, kinship care arrangements for the families in the study continue to be stable.

Outcomes for children and young people

Positive outcomes achieved for children and young people are the core business of kinship care, and this study continues to demonstrate that these are being achieved.

Carers report that the children and young people in their care are healthy and happy. While there are some cases where the children and young people are facing greater challenges than others, most carers report that those in their care are doing well, receiving the support they need, and progressing towards independence.

In the lead-up to the 2018 Victorian state election, both major parties pledged funding to extend financial support for families so that young people will be able to defer their transition away from out-of-home care until the age of 21. This will allow young people to remain in full-time study whilst limiting any additional financial pressure on themselves and their families.

Carer wellbeing

Throughout the eight years of the survey, one theme that has consistently arisen is that of carer wellbeing. It is an important yet often overlooked fact that carers cannot fulfil their role to the best of their ability if they themselves are facing challenges to their own mental or physical health. KCV is working to provide programs aimed at helping carers to focus on their own wellbeing.

Statutory and Non-statutory Carers

Five of the remaining 35 carers in this study are informal carers.

An emerging issue in 2018 has been the number of informal (non-statutory) carers contacting KCV in search of clarification about their place within the scheme of the support offered to kinship carers under the new model of support for kinship care launched in 2018.

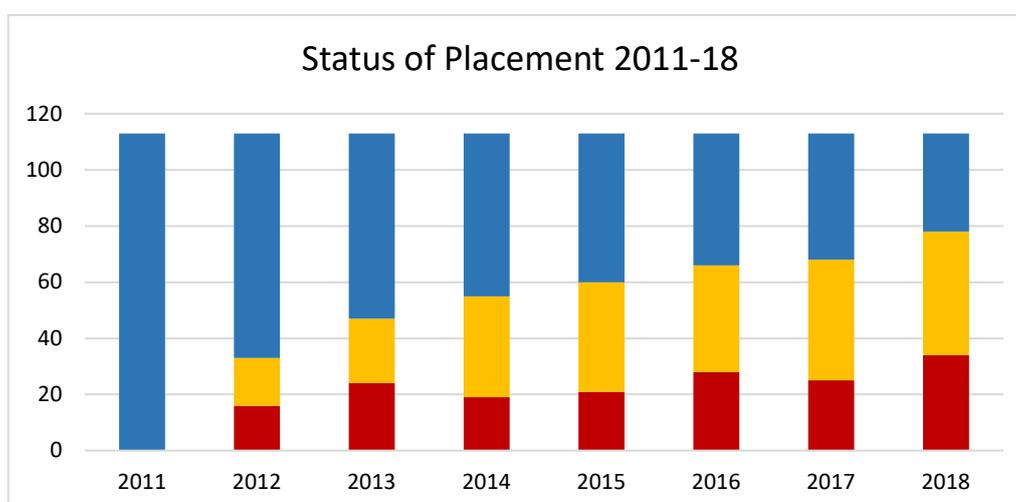
Under the new model, informal carers continue to be ineligible for much of the support offered to statutory carers, and in some cases have had services they were previously receiving cut off. However, the way in which the new model is being applied in local communities is allowing for varying levels of support for informal carers.

KCV continues to urge that the needs of informal carers be met through a range of pathways, including through local community groups, Victoria's family violence hubs and Centrelink payments.

The changing shape of the families 2011–2018

The KCV Longitudinal Study commenced with 113 carer families. Over the years these carer families have divided into three categories, as outlined in the table and graph below:

Status	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
The number of families providing kinship care	113	80	66	58	53	47	45	35
The number of families no longer caring	0	17	23	36	39	38	43	44
The number of families with whom contact is lost	0	16	24	19	21	28	25	34
Total	113							



Families continuing to provide kinship care

By 2018, 31% (35 of the original 113) families are still providing care. Between them they are caring for 54 children in 2018.

New children into the families

Since 2011, 14 different families have between them welcomed 20 new children into the study. In 2018, one carer reported that they were caring for an additional child. Overall:

- nine families have welcomed one new child
- four families have welcomed two
- one family has welcomed three children.

Given the young age of these children, as outlined below, many carers are extending their caring role by years:

- four children were aged under one year
- one was aged one
- one was aged three
- one was aged four
- one was aged five
- one was aged seven
- two were aged eight
- two were aged nine
- one was aged 11
- one was aged 12
- one was aged 13
- one was aged 14
- two were aged 16

Families no longer providing kinship care

By 2018, 44 families are no longer providing kinship care. This figure includes one family who reported that they were no longer caring for any children or young people as of 2018. The reason why this family has ceased all caring responsibilities in 2018 is because the two young people in their care have both turned 18 since the family was last surveyed.

In previous years, families have ceased to provide kinship care because:

- the young people in the family have turned 18
- the young people in the family have been reconciled with a parent
- the placement broke down and alternate accommodation was found for the child.

Families with whom contact has been lost

By 2018, contact has been lost with 34 families. This figure includes nine families with whom contact was lost in 2018. A family is deemed to be a 'lost contact' if phone numbers or email addresses are disconnected or disused, or if carers do not respond after repeated messages are left via telephone and/or email.

In past years contact with some families has been re-established, but this has not occurred in 2018.

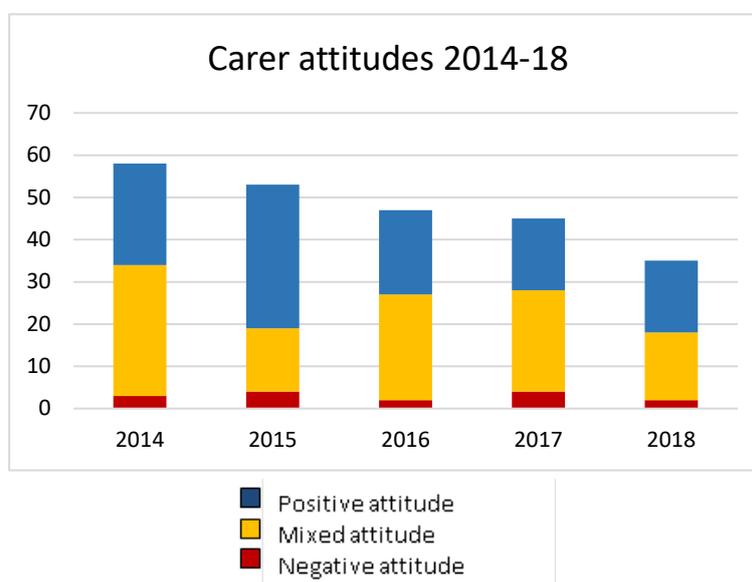
The level of carer wellbeing 2014–18

Since 2014, carers who are still providing care have been asked to self-assess their attitude to their circumstances over the previous 12 months. The results have been fairly consistent from year to year.

In 2018:

- 48.6% (17 of 35) of carers reported having 'positive' feelings overall about their experience
- 45.7% (16 of 35) of carers reported having 'mixed' feelings
- 5.7% (two of 35) of carers reported having 'negative' feelings overall.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Positive	24	34	20	17	17
Mixed	31	15	25	24	16
Negative	3	4	2	4	2
Number of carers still providing care	58	53	47	45	35



Positive attitudes

Carers who rated their experience as 'positive' over the previous 12 months reported that, overall, things were going well for themselves and their families. Positive circumstances in the lives of these families included:

- children and young people progressing well at school, and receiving support that will help them to progress in the future
- children and young people's mental and physical health issues being adequately addressed
- young people demonstrating signs of good social skills and taking steps towards independence
- carers feeling adequately supported, and noting that the children and young people in their care were adequately supported.

It is important to note that many of these carers have reported ongoing challenges for the children and young people in their care, including ongoing mental, physical and developmental difficulties. Nevertheless, they were feeling positive about the way the children and young people's lives were progressing overall.

Mixed feelings

A recurring theme cited by carers who rated their experience as 'mixed' over the previous 12 months was the mental health of the children or young people in their care. Factors affecting the mental health of the children and young people included:

- autism
- ADHD
- ODD
- PTSD and trauma-related behaviours
- developmental delays, including foetal drug and alcohol syndromes
- complex family relationships

Furthermore, carers cited challenges of their own as cause for concern:

- difficulty accessing services
- carer mental or physical health
- financial concerns
- moving house

Negative feelings

The two carers who reported an overall 'negative' experience over the past 12 months had very specific reasons for doing so.

- In one case a child was experiencing severe mental health issues leading to 'wild behaviour'.
- In one case, the carer held concerns for a young person who was no longer in her care. This carer felt that the young person might not be in a safe place in their current situation.

Pressing concerns

Carers were asked what they felt were the most pressing issues they were currently facing. Eighteen carers listed one pressing concern, while three carers listed multiple pressing concerns. A summary of their responses is outlined in the table below.

Of those 14 carers who listed that they had no pressing concerns at this time, further analysis of the survey responses found that seven families were experiencing some level of concern:

- three were dealing with minor health concerns for themselves or their partners
- two admitted that the past year or so had been ‘challenging’
- one had concerns about the child’s schooling
- one held concerns for the wellbeing of a child who had left her care.

Death and ill health of carers

Since 2011, seven carers have died. Three of these seven were single carers, while four had partners. The deaths of these carers affected the stability of the placements in the following ways:

- two of these deaths ended the care arrangement – in both of these cases the sole carer’s death had been anticipated and plans for the child’s continuing care had been made in advance
- two carers’ deaths occurred after the children had already left the care arrangement
- in three cases, the remaining partner continued to care for children after the death of their partner.

Fortunately, no carer deaths were reported in the 2018 survey, however several carers did report experiencing serious medical issues, including aneurisms, cancer, pneumonia, knee surgery and eye surgery. A number of carers also reported variations on the theme of ‘feeling over-stretched’, ‘feeling tired’, and ‘feeling old’.

Type of care arrangement

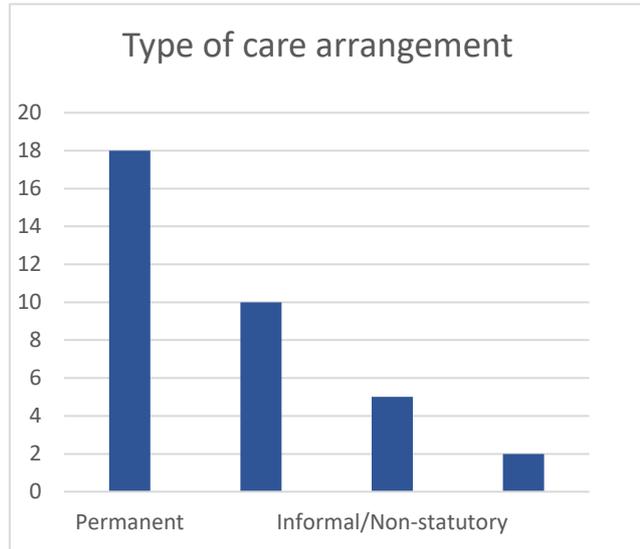
In the past year, KCV has received a number of calls from informal carers asking for advice after being denied access to support groups and other services. This is in part due to recent changes to kinship care funding under the new model of kinship care.

Issue	Respondents
None listed	14
Concerns about family relationships, including relationship with the child’s other relatives, the child’s parents and the carer’s partner	5
Educational concerns	5
Services and support (including NDIS)	5
Carer health and wellbeing	3
Financial concerns	3
The child’s mental health	2
Moving house	2
Birth certificates	1
The child’s impending transition into adulthood	1

In light of these changes, the status of the care arrangement of those carers in the study who are still caring was updated. The results are:

Permanent care – 18
Statutory care – 10
Informal care – five
Combination – two

Two carers reported that they are caring for multiple children under a combination of care arrangements. In one case, a carer has three children in statutory care and two on permanent care orders. Another carer has permanent care for one child and informal care for another. In both these cases, the children came into the care arrangement at different times – both of these families welcomed new children to their care after the beginning of the longitudinal study.



Training

In light of the increased number of kinship carer training programs recently made available through Carer KaFE, carers surveyed were asked to indicate whether they had attended any kinship carer training. The responses are:

- 17 had attended training
- 11 had not attended training
- seven could not remember



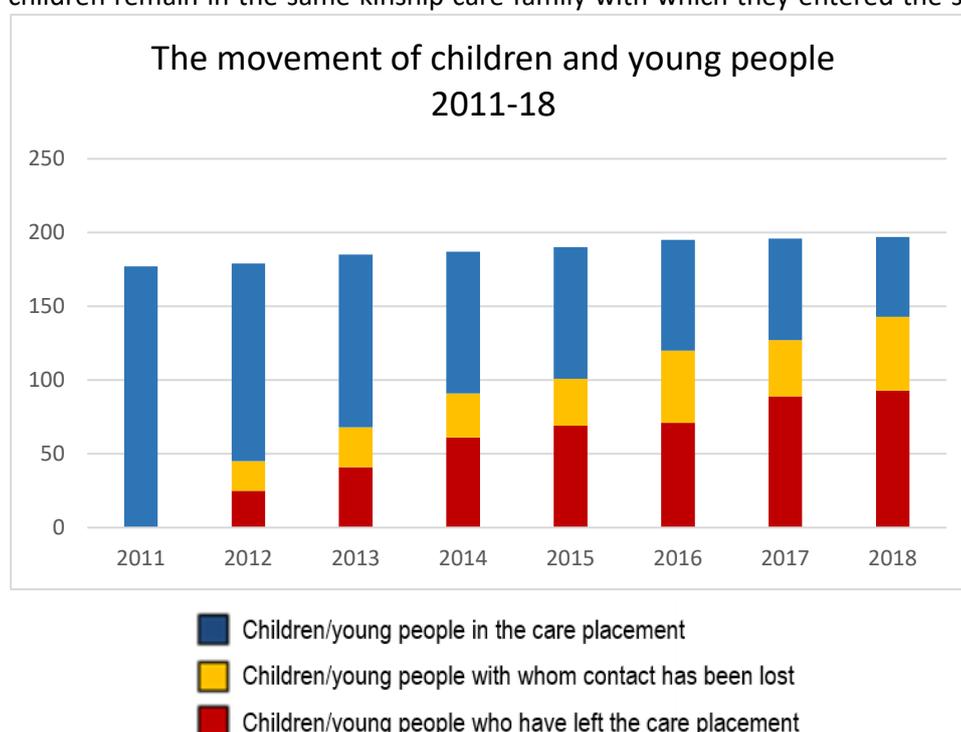
The movement of children and young people 2011–2018

The KCV Longitudinal Study began with 177 children in the study, and over its course this number has increased to 197. Over the years of the study these children have been divided into three categories, as outlined in the table and graph below.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Children/young people in the care placement	177	134	117	96	89	75	69	54
Children/young people who have left the care placement	0	25	41	61	69	71	89 ¹	93
Children/young people with whom contact has been lost	0	20	27	30	32	49	38	50
	177	179	185	187	190	195	196	197

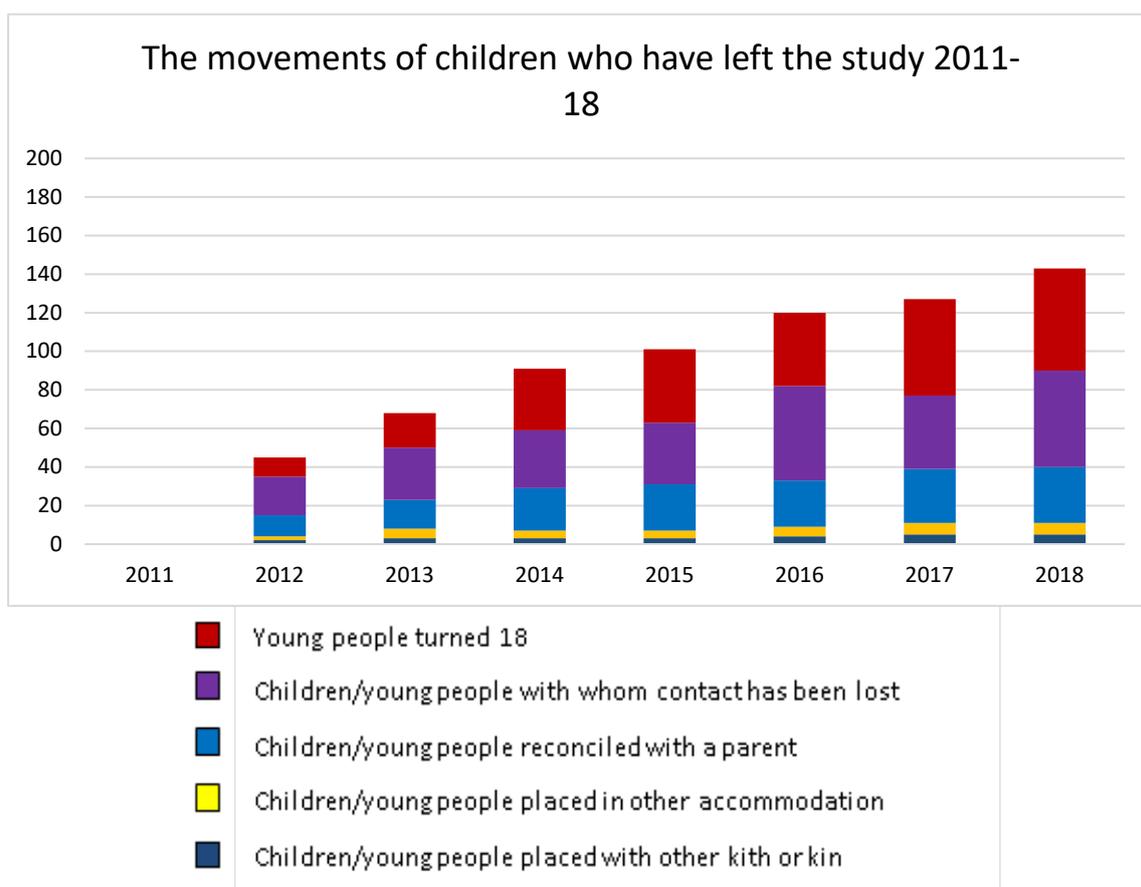
Children/young people in the care placement

In 2018, 54 children remain in the same kinship care family with which they entered the study. For



more information about the current circumstances of these children, please see the information on pages six and seven 'Level of carer wellbeing', which explains the connection between carer attitudes and the wellbeing of the children and young people in their care.

¹ Due to a miscommunication with a carer, one young person was mistakenly listed in the 2017 survey report as having turned 18, when they had not. This young person is likely to turn 18 in the next 12 months.



In 2018, a further five young people transitioned out of kinship care.

- One young person was reconciled with a parent (their mother). The carer in this case holds some concerns for the future wellbeing of the child.

Four young people turned 18. No concerns are held for these young people, who are all engaged in further study or work and doing well.

In 2018, GPV/KCV lost contact with the movements of 12 children and young people, who were in the care of nine kinship care families.

Children/young people who have left the care placement

Since 2011, 143 children/young people have moved out of the placement and/or the study for the following reasons:

- 37.1% (53 of 143) have turned 18
- 34.9% (50 of 143) are with whom contact has been lost
- 20.3% (29 of 143) have been reconciled with a parent
- 4.2% (six of 143) have been placed in other accommodation; e.g. foster care, residential care, boarding school
- 3.5% (five of 143) have been placed with other relatives or family friends.

Young people turning 18

Since 2011, 53 of the young people in the study have turned 18.

It is known that the majority of the young people who have turned 18 over the course of the study are now in the workforce, having either entered employment straight from high school, or after having completed further study.

There are only a few cases where KCV has been informed that due to physical or cognitive disabilities, mental health issues or a combination of these, young people have been unsuccessful in their attempts to enter the workforce.

Four young people turned 18 since the 2017 survey. Of these four, carers reported that:

- two are pursuing further education, with one aiming to become a surgeon, and one doing an apprenticeship course as a bricklayer
- two are looking for work, one as a dental nurse.

It is anticipated that seven young people remaining in the survey will turn 18 in the next 12 months.

Children/young people with whom contact has been lost

By 2018, the whereabouts of 50 children and young people are unknown to KCV, as contact has been lost with their carers. Based on data provided to KCV in past surveys, it is presumed that:

- 13 have turned 18 since contact has been lost
- two are likely to turn 18 within the next 12 months
- 32 are in their tweens or teens
- four are under 10.

Of the nine carers with whom contact was lost in 2018, it is presumed that most of these placements are likely to have remained stable. Five of these are carers who have a history of being difficult to contact during the survey period, but when last surveyed had not reported any circumstances likely to destabilise the placement. In one further case, a carer's phone number was disconnected, but previous survey responses have indicated no cause for concern.

There may be some cause for concern in three cases.

- In one case, a carer lost their partner just prior to the 2017 survey and has become difficult to contact since that time.
- In two cases, the carers have previously reported a history of mental and/or physical ill health for both themselves and the children.

Children/young people reconciled with a parent

By 2018, 29 children/young people have been reconciled with parents during the course of the study. One of these 29 was reconciled in 2018.

Thirteen of these children returned to their father and 15 to their mother, while one returned to both parents together. Of the 29:

- three children returned after one year
- four children returned after two years
- one child returned after three years
- one child returned after four years
- five children returned after five years
- one child returned after six years
- four children returned after seven years
- three children returned after eight years
- three children returned after nine years
- one child returned after 12 years
- one child returned after 13 years
- one child returned after 14 years
- one child returned after 16 years.

Twenty-six of these children/young people were reconciled with parents after two or more years in the kinship placement. The young person who returned to their mother in 2018 did so by choice, after 12 years in a kinship care family.

A majority of kinship carers find it difficult to give up the children in their care and are often emotionally affected for some time after doing so. In a couple of cases, grandparents have been particularly affected, as after reconciliation between children and parents has taken place the grandparents have been denied access to the children they once raised. For these reasons it is often difficult to come to an accurate assessment of the success or otherwise of a particular reconciliation;

however, most carers in the study have recognised that it is in the best interests of the children that reconciliation be attempted.

Children/young people placed in other accommodation

Since 2011, six children or young people have left their original kinship care placement for another form of accommodation, although none of these occurred in 2018. Of the six:

- two children/young people left the kinship care family for foster care. One has since turned 18
- one young person who was sent to boarding school has since turned 18
- one young person who had violence and anger issues was sent to residential care
- two young people moved into accommodation with a partner, even though they were not yet 18.

Children/young people placed with other relatives or family friends

Since 2011, five children or young people have left their original kinship care placement to live with another relative or family friend, although none of these occurred in 2018. Of the five:

- three moved to live with uncles
- one moved to live with an aunt
- one moved to live with a godparent.