



The KCV  
longitudinal study  
of kinship care  
families, 2011 and  
beyond

## **The Ninth Report**

## Summary

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 2019 survey shows that kinship care arrangements for the families in the study continue to be stable.

### Outcomes for children and young people

Kinship carers continue to report positive outcomes for the children and young people in their care, particularly as they transition into adulthood. The children and young people in the study are continuing to reach the usual milestones of growing up, in spite of challenges, and remain engaged in education as they approach the age of 18 and beyond.

### Carer wellbeing

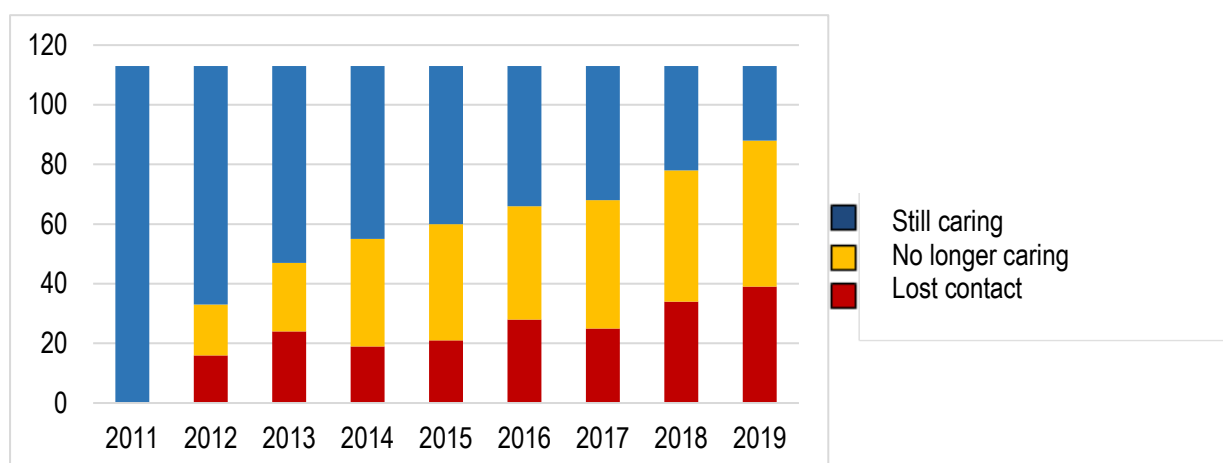
For the first time in the life of this study, no carers have reported having overall negative feelings towards their experiences over the previous year.

This does not mean that the carers are not facing challenges, but that they are for the most part feeling supported to face these challenges as they arise.

## The changing shape of the families

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	2019
Families providing care	113	80	66	58	53	47	45	35	25
Families no longer caring	0	17	23	36	39	38	43	44	49
Families with whom contact is lost	0	16	24	19	21	28	25	34	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>113</b>



## Families continuing to provide kinship care

**In the past 12 months, the number of kinship care families known to still be caring has reduced by 10.**

This leaves 25 of the original 113 surveyed families who are still known to be providing care. Between them they are caring for 37 children at the time of the 2019 survey.

Based on prior data, it is believed that 32 of the 39 *lost contact* families<sup>1</sup> continue to provide kinship care for approximately 43 children and young people.

## New children into the families

**No carers have reported that they are caring for additional children in 2019.**

However, since 2011, 14 families have, between them, welcomed 20 new children into the study:

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

## Families no longer providing kinship care

**In the twelve months prior to the 2019 survey, five families ceased caring for any children or young people.**

In all of these cases, the reason for the end to caring responsibilities is that the young people have turned 18 since the last survey.

Across the study since its commencement, 49 families are no longer caring for children or young people 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/ren.

## Families with whom contact has been lost

**During the 2019 survey period contact was not able to be made with five families, previously contactable.**

It is not easy to assess the status of the placements of these five families:

- Two 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 three cases carers who were previously responsive to requests proved uncontactable during the survey period. In past surveys each of these had reported facing challenges, but had given no cause to suspect that the placement was under pressure.

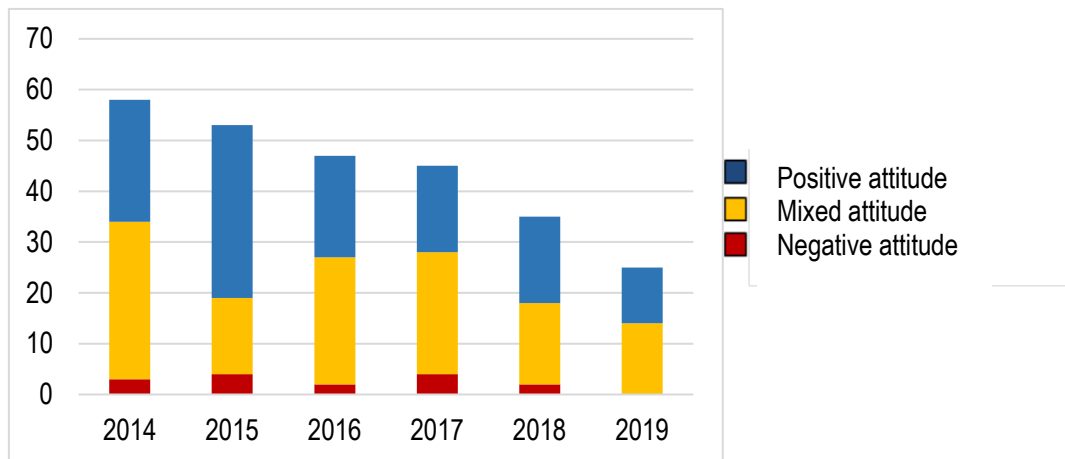
## The level of carer wellbeing

**When asked to define their attitude to their role over the previous 12 months, in 2019 for the first time, no carers reported having 'negative' feelings overall. However:**

- 44% (11 of 25) reported having 'positive' feelings overall about their experience
- 56% (14 of 25) reported having 'mixed' feelings

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Positive</b>	This question was not asked in these years			24	34	20	17	17	11
<b>Mixed</b>				31	15	25	24	16	14
<b>Negative</b>				3	4	2	4	2	0
<b>Number of carers still providing care</b>				58	53	47	45	35	25

<sup>1</sup> Across the life of the study contact has been lost with 39 families. 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 2019.



## Negative feelings

**In 2019 no carers reported having overall negative feelings towards their experiences. This is the first time in the life of the study that this has occurred.**

## Positive attitudes

**In 2019 11 carers reported positive attitudes.**

They reported circumstances such as:

- NDIS supports working well
- Children and young people showing improved health outcomes, and receiving adequate therapies
- Improved family financial and housing circumstances
- Children and young people succeeding in education and sports
- Carers having recently retired from the workplace

Whilst many of these carers have reported ongoing challenges for the children and young people in their care, they nevertheless were feeling positive about the way the children and young people were progressing.

## Mixed feelings

**In 2019, the most frequently recurring issue cited by carers who rated their experience as 'mixed' over the previous 12 months was the health and wellbeing of the children/young people in care.**

Factors affecting the 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

## Death and ill health of carers

**No carer deaths were reported in the 2019 survey.**

However, several carers did report experiencing medical issues, including hip replacements, heart disease, back pain, arthritis, minor surgery, difficulty sleeping and stress related ailments. A number of carers reported variations on the theme of 'not getting any younger'.

Since 2011, seven carers have died: three were single carers, while four had partners. Two carers' deaths occurred after the children had left care. The remaining deaths affected the placements in the following ways:

- two of these deaths ended the care arrangement – the sole carer's death had been anticipated and plans for the child's continuing care had been made in advance
- three of these deaths left the remaining partner to care for children.

## Pressing concerns

When asked to identify the most pressing issues they were currently facing:

- Fifteen carers listed one pressing concern
- Two carers listed two pressing concerns.
- Eight carers reported no pressing concerns.

A summary of the responses to this question is outlined in the table below which provides data on the number of times each issue was listed by carers:

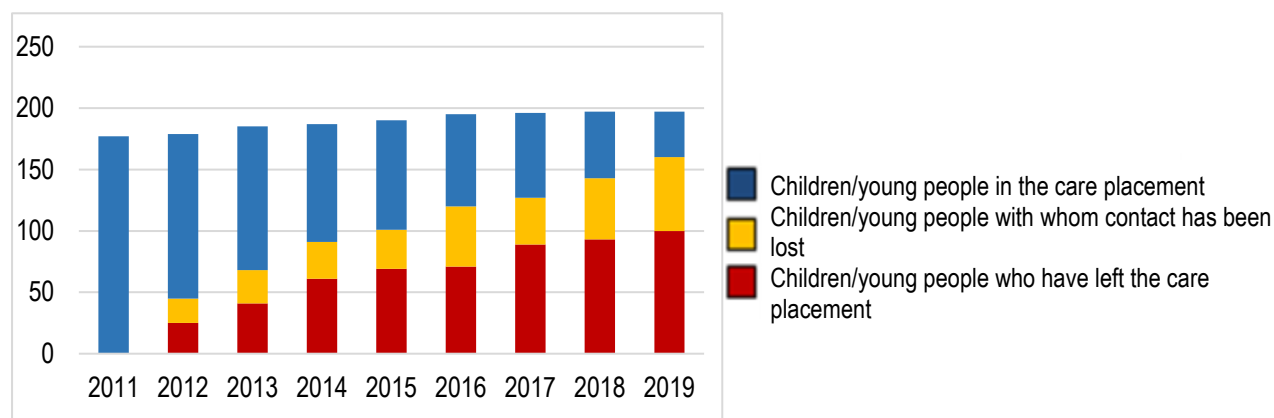
### Issue

8	None listed
4	The child's mental health/caring for young people who have experienced trauma
3	Educational concerns
3	Financial concerns
2	Concerns about family relationships, including relationship with the child's other relatives, the child's parents and the carer's partner
2	Contact with the courts
1	Housing
1	Health and wellbeing
1	Concerns for young people who have left the carer's home
1	Raising a teenager
1	Caring for other (elderly) members of extended family

## The movement of children and young people

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

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Children/young people in the placement	177	134	117	96	89	75	69	54	37
Children/young people who have left the placement	0	25	41	61	69	71	89 <sup>2</sup>	93	100
Children/young people with whom contact has been lost	0	20	27	30	32	49	38	50	60
	<b>177</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>197</b>



<sup>2</sup> 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 turned 18 in 2019.

## Children/young people in the care placement

The 37 children in the care of the families contacted in 2019, remain in the same kinship care family with which they entered the study.

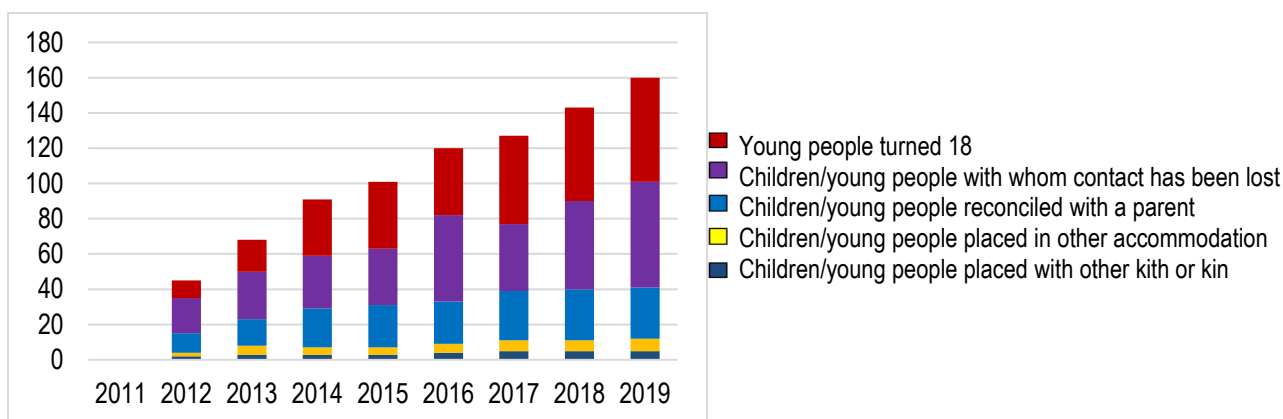
Based on prior data, it is probable that 32 of the 39 *lost contact* families continue to provide kinship care for approximately 43 children and young people.

## Children/young people who have left the care placement

In 2019 seven young people transitioned out of kinship care: Six turned 18 and are engaged in further study or work and doing well, while one moved away from their kinship family into an alternate arrangement.

Since 2011, 160 children/young people have moved out of the placement or the study for the following reasons:

- 37.5% (60 of 160) with whom contact has been lost
- 36.9% (59 of 160) have turned 18
- 18.1% (29 of 160) have been reconciled with a parent
- 4.4% (seven of 160) have been placed in other accommodation; e.g. foster/ residential care, boarding school
- 3.1% (five of 160) have been placed with other relatives or family friends.



## Young people turning 18

Six young people turned 18 since the 2018 survey. Of these six, carers reported that:

- two are pursuing further education, with one studying marketing at university, and one doing an electrical pre-apprenticeship.
- four are still in secondary school. Of these:
  - one is in year 11
  - two are in year 12 – one doing VCE and one doing VCAL
  - one is known to have trouble engaging with school.

Since 2011, 59 of the young people in the study have turned 18. 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.

## Children/young people reconciled with a parent

No children were reconciled with parents in the 2019 survey.

However, across the study 29 children/young people have been reconciled with parents. Thirteen of these children returned to their father and 15 to their mother, while one returned to both parents together.

Twenty-six of these children/young people were reconciled with parents after two or more years in the placement, some as many as 16 years later.

## Children/young people with whom contact has been lost

**In the 2019 survey period contact could not be made with five kinship care families, raising 10 children between them.**

This means that at 2019, the whereabouts of 60 children and young people are unknown to KCV, as contact has been lost with their carers. Based on data provided in past surveys, it is presumed that:

- 30 are in their pre-teen or teenage years
- 19 have turned 18 since contact has been lost
- 06 are likely to turn 18 within the next 12 months
- 05 are under 10.

## Children/young people placed in other accommodation

**In 2019, one young person left their kinship care family for other accommodation.**

Since 2011, seven children or young people have left their original kinship care placement for another form of accommodation. Of the seven:

- three left for foster care. One of these has since turned 18
- one was sent to boarding school has since turned 18
- one was sent to residential care, and is likely to turn 18 in the next 12 months
- two moved into accommodation with a partner, even though they were not yet 18.

## Children/young people placed with other relatives or family friends

**In 2019, no carers reported children leaving their care to live with other kith or kin.**

Since 2011, five children or young people have left their original kinship care placement to live with another relative or family friend. Of the five:

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

## Contact with parents

**In the 2019 survey, carers were asked whether the children in their care have contact with their parents:**

- **08 reported that there was contact between the children/young people in their care and their parents.**
- **17 reported that there was no contact**

Four carers reported that the children had contact with their parent – monthly or more often. Two of these carers reported that the children also had contact with their parent by phone or facetime several times per week. Four carers reported that the contact with parents was less predictable, using terms like, “sporadic” or “rare”.

Of the 8 families who have contact with one or both of their parents, most see them in a neutral location, 2 at the carer’s house and 2 at the parent/s’ house.

Of those that reported no contact between the children/young people and their parents, few gave reasons, but the reasons stated included:

- The parent/s have passed away
- The parent is unsafe to be around
- The child chose not to associate with the parents after being let down by them in the past.

Not all the carers answered questions about who facilitates and pays expenses for the visits, but those who did reported that they both facilitated and paid for the expenses of the visits.