

Here is a paper written by Vicki about her experiences as a kinship carer



Being a kinship carer is one of the most important and challenging roles you'll ever take on in your life - yet it's the one choice you make without much time for due consideration.

Re-parenting a traumatised child is a whole different ball game to when you raised your own children. The complexities of the change in family dynamics mixed with the ripples and undertones (which are sometimes more like riding the rapids in a storm) of the hurting and confused wider family and friends can cause rifts which we battle to repair and rebuild.

The support network that we always relied upon is now far too fragile and you're afraid to approach and ask for help. It feels like no-one outside your immediate family really "gets" what you're going through. Even those you love cannot fathom your whole world has changed and your focus has been shifted. You have to leave work and you mourn the sense of loss... of colleagues, of the sense of purpose and accomplishment, and of course the income.

Friends who have walked with you for many years may drift away as you are once again tied to a life of early nights, school days, and not enough spare time or money to do the things you'd previously enjoyed.

Being thrust into this life of dealing with the authorities and feeling like you're in a world you don't understand. You don't know which questions to ask, or even what answer you would want! You lose control of your own life and feel as though you stumble from one issue to the next, just hoping you can keep your head above water all the while trying to maintain a smile and a sense of calm at home to keep everything stable.

Finding a Kinship Care Support group rarely seems to happen for people in the early stages of their kinship journey. Oh, for the promotion of groups so that people can benefit from that support when they need it most! To walk into a room of people who have walked in your shoes is the most amazing blessing. To find a group of people who understand your situation and the relief at feeling understood and being able to talk openly and honestly about struggles and fears is amazing. It's as if you didn't realise how hard you were finding everything until you're able to share and offload.

The wide range of knowledge and experience within the group is incredible and this is where people will often get the best advice and support – advice that no one in a position of authority has deemed worthy of sharing with you. Advice that can make a huge impact on you and the life of those around you. Sometimes, advice which is now too late, as ill-advised decisions were made in the very early, turbulent days that cannot be undone.

New friendships are formed, and as you learn and grow through training and group discussions, you find things which you thought you'd lost. A sense of pride for all that you've achieved and the strength, not just to get through life, but to power on.

- To do your best for family, to build them and yourself up
- To find purpose and joy again
- To be empowered to take control of your future