**Children and Families Across Borders Response to The Independent Care Review’s Case for Change**

**Children and Families Across Borders (CFAB)**

CFAB is the UK member of the International Social Service (ISS) network, with partners in 130 countries. CFAB is the only non-government organisation (NGO) in the UK set up specifically to deal with child protection cases which involve the UK and one or more other countries. Through our inter-country social work team, we provide guidance and practical support on a range of complex international child protection issues. CFAB works with professionals from Local Authorities, the Courts, the police, NGOs and Central Government.

In addition to our specialist cross border work, we also provide training to social workers and other professional across the UK and around the world.

We look forward to engaging with the review over the coming months to ensure that international kinship care is recognised as a vital part of improving children’s access to a stable and loving home with their families and as a critical alternative to remaining in the care system.

**Important Points in the Review**

The Independent Review of Children's social care interim report: [The Case for Change](https://childrenssocialcare.independent-review.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/case-for-change.pdf) was released on the 17th of June 2021. The report rightly promotes the benefits of allowing the care of children to take place within the family and community and makes a case for the increased use of and support for kinship carers. Something that has a substantial impact on those who rely on CFAB’s services.

The report states that *"For many children living with extended family and friends will be the best option and provide a real sense of belonging. The majority of these children see their kinship carer (70%) or their carer's partner (14%) as the person or one of the people that they were closest to and confided in"*

Further benefits of kinship care that the report highlights are that “*for children placed with family or friends under Special Guardianship Order, risk of disruption to their placement was 5.7% over five years.”* And *"Educationally children in kinship placements do well with 37% achieving the national target of at least five grades of A\*-C at GCSE and 16% attending university in one study of young people who had lived in kinship care, in comparison to 6% for children in the care* system."

The report correctly identifies the need to expand and improve the practice and decision-making processes that would allow the increased placement of children into family care in England—identifying issues in regional variations and calling on children's social care to increase the number of children who can grow up in the care of their wider family and reap the benefits of growing up with a stronger sense of identity.

Furthermore, the report highlights the need for increased investment in the children's social care sector and recognises the challenging financial position it has been in over the past few years. Facilitating the care of a child within their family benefits the child and presents significant long-term cost savings for the state. In 2019 it was estimated that the cost of keeping a child in care for one year was £56,000[[1]](#footnote-1), and supporting families to care for children will provide an immediate saving to the state. The Case for Change highlights the report published by kinship, which estimated that for every 1000 children moved from local authority to kinship care, £40 million is saved in placement costs once Special Guardianship Order (SGO) allowances are factored in. Furthermore, children raised by the family are less likely to end up involved in the criminal justice system later in life and more likely to achieve in education. Therefore increasing the options for children to be cared for in the family allows more children to flourish and realise their potential, which facilitates their wellbeing in the early years and presents significant long term cost savings to the state.

The report highlights the need to support special guardians and kinship carers in England, and CFAB supports this commitment.

**Our Response**

A necessary part of ensuring that all children can maintain meaningful relationships with their families, and maximise the cost savings to the state, is the consideration and inclusion of family relationships that extend across borders. We believe that increasing the possibility and quality of kinship arrangements that extend across borders is not an extra consideration to what is called for in a Case for Change but a necessary part of any healthy functioning care system that values the importance of kinship carers. We therefore request the Panel consider the following solutions to facilitate greater use and support of kinship carers:

1. *Early identification of family members across borders*

Where possible, family members in other countries – including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - should be involved early on in any Child Protection investigation or Family Group conferences. Even if not in the same country, relatives can provide emotional support to the child and/or carer/guardian.

1. *Official guidance*

Many local authorities simply have no idea how to involve family members across national borders. Surprisingly, there is no guidance from the Department for Education or any other statutory organisation for them. The complexity of international placements need not contradict the benefits of allowing children to maintain close relationships with their extended families and the benefits of being looked after by a kinship carer. Good practice is outlined in the International Kinship Care Guide, produced by CFAB on behalf of the Cross Border Child Safeguarding Working Group.

1. *Training (for social workers)*

Although the UK has always been an ‘international’ country, this has increased exponentially in the last decade with an influx of immigrants both from Commonwealth nations and from the European Union. Social work degree courses struggle to cover the entirety of regional and international regulations and conventions which govern how social services should manage cases which cross borders. As such, social workers require training at regular intervals to keep up with new laws, to identify new partner agencies abroad and to maintain their knowledge of emerging risks for children in other countries (from issues as diverse as breast ironing to civil war).

1. *Training (for kinship carers)*

National and local governments should commit to creating parity between the support offered for Special Guardians in other countries with the offer available to Special Guardians in England. Support exists for a child transitioning from one home to another within England, and it exists for a child adopted from England to another country – but it does not exist for a child transitioning homes across national borders. Before a child is placed with family abroad using a Special Guardianship Order, there should also be an adequate special guardianship support plan in place[[2]](#footnote-2). This should include an offer of training before placement so Special Guardians can care for the child's welfare and developmental needs.

1. *Support*

The level of support offered to a child placed with a kinship carer should be based on the needs of the child – not on the type of order or location of the carer. It is worth considering that there are additional risks when the child is being placed across a border, such as an inability to test the placement, cultural differences around the management of trauma and mental health, which can only be addressed through placement support and monitoring. Furthermore, children placed with carers in other countries face potential cultural differences (and culture shock), special needs which may not be addressed through local services, different educational programmes and more. It is essential that approaches to mitigate these risks, such as through placement support and monitoring, be standardised across these cases.

1. *Research*

Local authorities record the number of Looked After Children placed overseas each year and local authorities report these outcomes to the Department for Education[[3]](#footnote-3). However, no one body – statutory or otherwise – publishes or analyses this data, including the courts, Cafcass, and the Department for Education. Having access to this data facilitates and enables further in-depth research to understand how many placements break down, what are consistent features in those placements that do break down, the viability of cross-border kinship, and the long-term impacts on the child.

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/jan/08/rise-in-children-taken-into-care#:~:text=It%20costs%20around%20%C2%A356k,after%20a%20child%20in%20care.&text=Stuart%20Gallimore%2C%20the%20president%20of,care%20system%20amid%20budget%20cuts>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Family Law Working Group - Family Justice Council, Recommendations to achieve best practice in the child protection and family justice systems: Special guardianship orders [Microsoft Word - 10 June 2020, final SGO report.docx (judiciary.uk)](https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PLWG-SGO-Final-Report-1.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Department for Education, Children looked after by local authorities in England 2020, [Department for Education (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/880472/CLA_SSDA903_2019-20_Guide_Version_1.3.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)