

**Kinship  
Carers**  
VICTORIA

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

**In 2011 KCV established a longitudinal study of 113 volunteer kinship carer families. Each year these families are asked about changes occurring in their lives and in the lives of the children and young people in their care**



Kinship Carers Victoria is supported by the Victorian Government.

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**KINSHIP CARERS VICTORIA  
LONGITUDINAL STUDY REPORT 2017**

**THE SEVENTH REPORT**



## Emerging circumstances 2011-17

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Throughout the length of the study, five circumstances have emerged to challenge KCV's thinking. Two of these are pressure points at either end of the kinship care continuum: the continually rising numbers of new children entering the study, and, at the opposite end of the spectrum, the continually rising number of children being reconciled with their parents. One circumstance is viewed as a worrying challenge and the other as an affirming outcome.

### **New children into the study**

Each year since 2011, one or more new children have joined already established kinship care families. In some cases this has had the effect of extending, for several years, the caring responsibilities of families who had almost come to the end of their kinship care journey.

### **Children reconciled with parents**

Since 2011, 28 children have been reconciled with one or both of their parents. This figure represents the children who have stayed in the reconciliation arrangement. Another category of children exists in which reconciliation has been attempted but has not worked, and the children have returned to their kinship placement. This currently affects three children across two families.

It is worth noting that the number of successful reconciliations between parents and children continues to increase, even after they have spent many years apart.

### **Shared caring**

In at least one case, the responsibility for care of the children has officially been returned to a parent, but the family still lives under the same roof as the kinship carer. KCV has also had reports of kinship carers continuing to provide occasional care for children after the children have reconciled with their parents.

It is also suspected that in those cases where a full reconciliation has not been successful, the attempt has nevertheless led to an increase in shared parenting between carer(s) and parent(s). KCV views this as a positive trend which will strengthen the families in question and be beneficial for the children.

### **Staying with biological family leads to positive outcomes**

Kinship care has led to positive outcomes for the vast majority of young people who have now turned 18 and officially left kinship care. For example, only three out of 38 young adults who had turned 18 by 2015 were struggling to participate in employment or further study.

Many young adults remain with their carers in the family home for several years after the kinship arrangement officially finishes, completing further study and transitioning into work. KCV often hears reports about young adults who were formerly in kinship care but who, after this transitional period, are now supporting themselves, living in their own homes and starting families of their own.

In 2017–18, KCV hopes to have the capacity to complete a census of all 196 of the children and young people who have been a part of this study to determine their current circumstances.

### **Carer deaths**

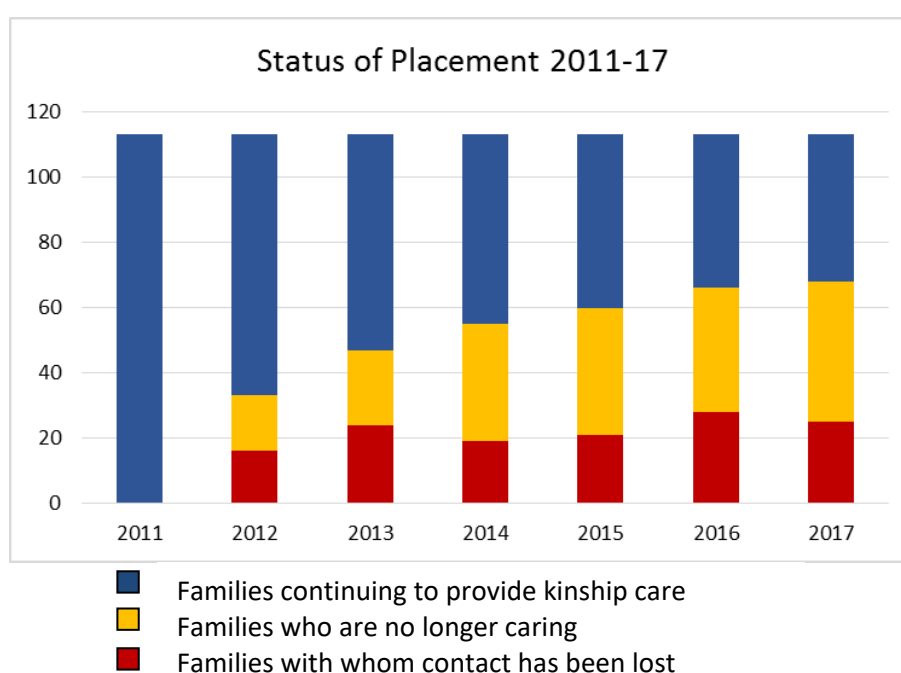
KCV notes the deaths of three carers since the 2016 survey, bringing the total number of carer deaths over the life of the study to seven. While this is a sad circumstance for the families, it is important to note that in most cases this has not had a major impact on the overall stability of the placements.



## The changing shape of the families 2011–2017

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
Number of families providing kinship care	113	80	66	58	53	47	45
Number of families no longer providing care	0	17	23	36	39	38	43
Number of families with whom contact is lost	0	16	24	19	21	28	25
<b>Total</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

By 2017, 40% (45 of the original 113) of families were still providing care. In 2017, between them they are caring for 69 children.

### New children into families

Since 2011, 13 different families have between them welcomed 19 new children into the study, with one of these children joining in 2017. Overall:

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

Given the young age of these children, as outlined below, many carers are extending their caring role by a good many years. In one case, a family who was expecting to end caring responsibilities with the 18th birthday of the last remaining child in their care has instead welcomed another child to their family in 2017. When the children were welcomed into the study:

- four were aged under one year old
- 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**

In 2017, 43 families are no longer providing kinship care; this figure includes five families who reported as no longer providing care in 2017. 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.

The reasons why the 2017 families are no longer providing are:

- four young people turned 18, and were therefore aged out of kinship care
  - two of these young people still live with their carer and are engaged in full-time study
  - one young person has gone interstate to seek their father
  - one young person's current location is unknown because since the last survey their carer has died
- one young person was placed with another relative after the death of a carer.

### **Families with whom contact has been lost**

By 2017, contact has been lost with 25 families during the study. This figure includes two families with whom contact was lost in 2017. Contact was re-established with six families who had been lost to the study in previous years. Contact was re-established with:

- three families after a one-year break
- two after two years
- one after four years.

The data provided by these returned carers has now been included in this year's study.



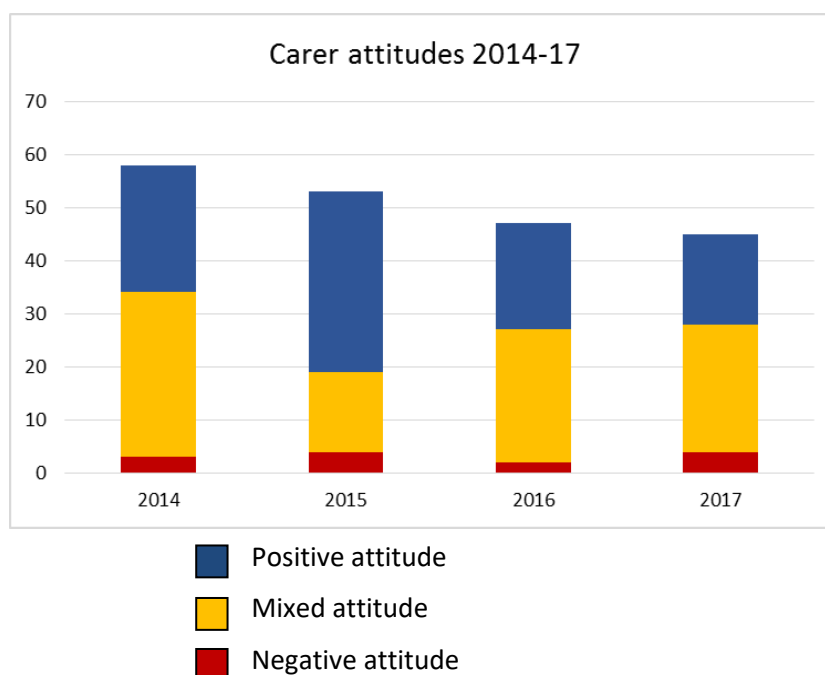
## The level of carer wellbeing 2014 -17

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 2017:

- 37.8% (17 of 45) of carers reported having overall positive feelings about their experience
- 53.3% (24 of 45) of carers reported having mixed feelings
- 8.9% (4 of 45) of carers reported having overall negative feelings.

	2014	2015	2016	2017
Positive	24	34	20	17
Mixed	31	15	25	24
Negative	3	4	2	4
Total number of carers still providing care	<b>58</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>45</b>



### 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 because the:

- children and young people were doing well at school and in employment (both those children and young people still in the kinship care arrangement, and those who had left)
- children and young people's mental and physical health issues were being adequately addressed.

It is important to note that these carers still reported mental and physical health issues for the children and young people in their care, but 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 mental health included:

- autism
- ADHD
- ODD
- PTSD and trauma-related behaviours
- insufficient access to counselling services
- difficulties settling into school or transitioning to new schools.

Over half of carers in this category (15 of 24) cited health issues for themselves and their partners, including:

- cancer
- heart conditions
- arthritis
- diabetes
- the death of a partner.

## Negative feelings

Carers who rated their overall experience over the past 12 months as 'negative' cited reasons for this including a combination of:

- mental and physical health issues for children/young people, carers, and extended family members
- difficulty with custody agreements
- ongoing concerns for some issues children/young people who left the kinship arrangement have encountered, including teen pregnancy and drug use
- financial issues.

In 2017, 31% (14 of 45) of carers reported that they had no concerns. However, when examining each of these cases, KCV discovered that 11 of these carers were still facing challenges, such as:

- trauma and mental health issues for a child still receiving treatment
- difficult interactions with a child's parent(s)
- concerns for the welfare of young people who had left the kinship carer's responsibility
- the introduction of new children into the kinship arrangement
- the recent death of a carer's partner
- financial pressures, including the recent redundancy of one carer.

## Death of carers

Since 2011, seven carers have died, with two of these deaths occurring since the 2016 survey. Three of these seven were single carers, while four were partnered. 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 it was known that the 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.



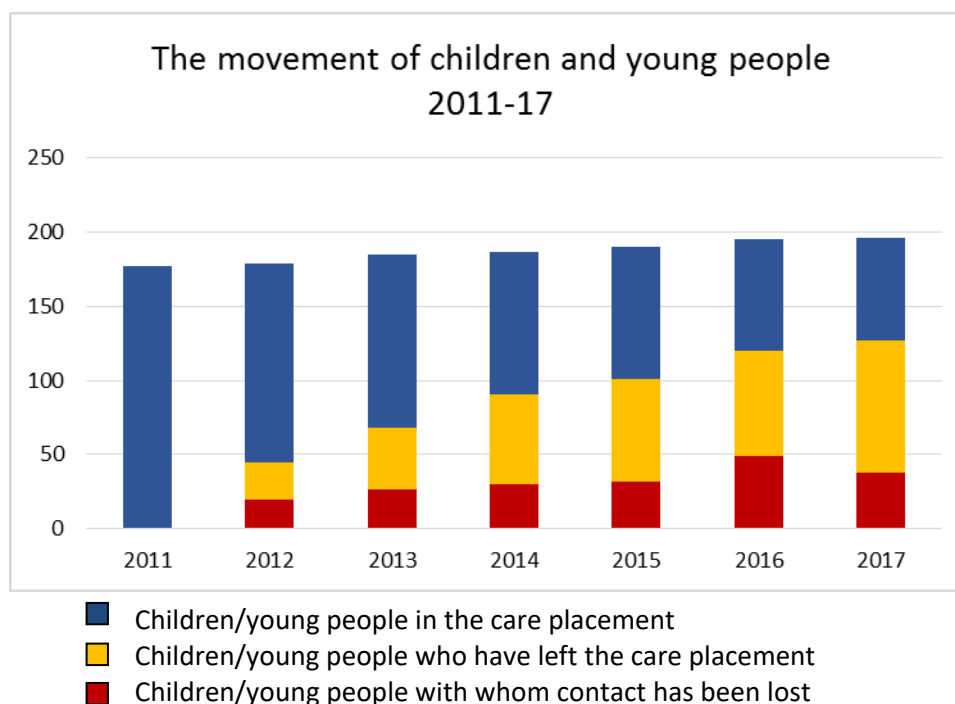
## The movement of children and young people 2011–2017

The KCV Longitudinal Study began with 177 children in the study, and this number has increased to 196. Over the years of the study these children have been divided into three categories, as outlined in the table and graph below.

### Children/young people in the care placement

By 2017, 69 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 five and six 'Level of carer wellbeing', which explains the connection between carer attitudes and the wellbeing of the children and young people in their care.

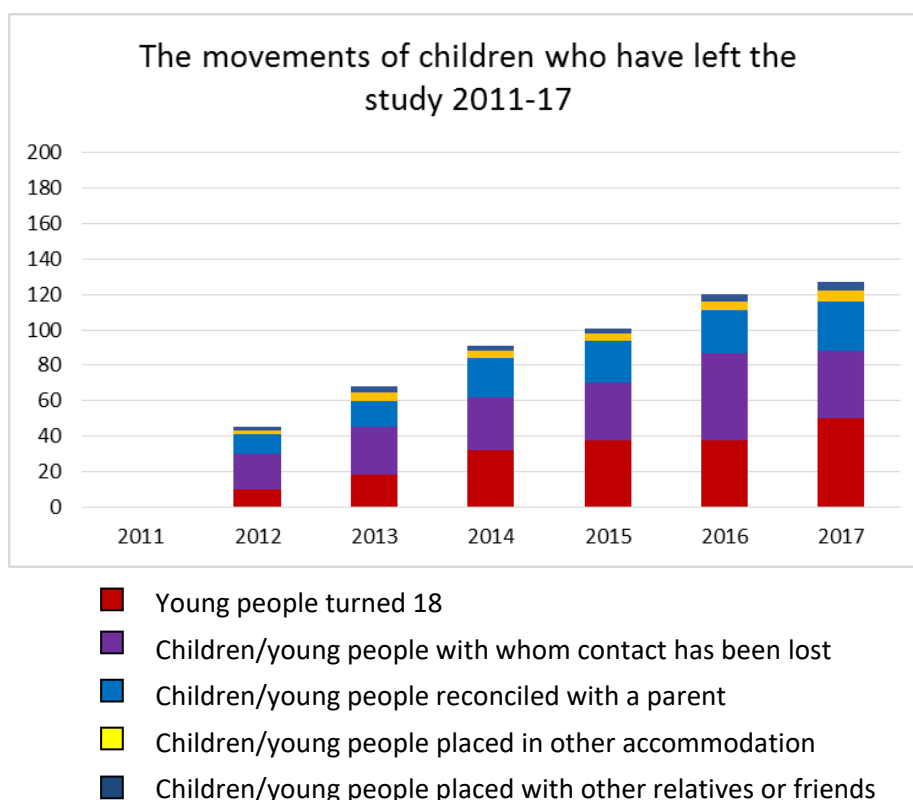
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Children/young people in the care placement	177	134	117	96	89	75	69
Children/young people who have left the care placement		25	41	61	69	71	89
Children/young people with whom contact has been lost		20	27	30	32	49	38
	177	179	185	187	190	195	196



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

Since 2011, 127 children/young people have moved out of the placement and/or the study for the following reasons:

- 39.4% (50 of 127) have turned 18
- 29.9% (38 of 127) are with whom contact has been lost
- 22.1% (28 of 127) have been reconciled with a parent
- 4.7% (6 of 127) have been placed in other accommodation, such as foster care, residential care, a boarding school
- 3.9% (5 of 127) have been placed with other relatives or family friends.



## Young people turning 18

Since 2011, 50 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, either having 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 emotional disabilities, or a combination of both, young people have been unsuccessful in attempts to enter the workforce.

Five young people have turned 18 since the 2016 survey. Of these five, carers reported that:

- two are still completing high school
- one is enrolled in further education
- one has moved interstate
- one is in circumstances that are unknown.



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

By 2017, the whereabouts of 38 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:

- 10 have turned 18 since contact has been lost
- three are likely to turn 18 within the next 12 months
- 20 are in their tweens or teens
- five are under 10.

## **Children/young people reconciled with a parent**

By 2017, 28 children/young people have been reconciled with parents during the course of the study. Four of these 28 were reconciled in 2017.

Thirteen of these children returned to their father and 14 to their mother, while one returned to both parents together. Of the 28:

- 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 13 years
- one child returned after 14 years
- one child returned after 16 years.

Twenty-five of these children/young people reconciled with parents after two or more years in the kinship placement.

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, one of these six did so in 2017. 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, one of these five did so in 2017. Of the five:

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



