Dear (Politician)

I am writing to you to bring to your attention the important work of Kin Raising Kids (KRK), Tasmania. Having previously written to you as then Secretary of KRK, I would like to acknowledge your support for the changes to the ‘Carer Recognition Act 2023’ by including informal kinship carers of children under the age of 18. However, as you would appreciate, we still have a long way to go.

As the upcoming State election draws nearer, KRK seeks your support again, and urges you to advocate on behalf of the grandparents and kin who raise the grandchildren and the children for whom they care.

Kinship care is a type of care for a child or young person by a relative (such as a grandparent or someone they already know when the child or young person cannot live with their parents. It is the most usual form of out-of-home care in Australia, comprising 54% of children in out-of-home care in 2020. In 2020, grandparents were the most common kinship-carer relationship, although only four jurisdictions had data on the relationship of kinship carers.

Kinship care is understood to have several benefits for children and young people, including reducing trauma; improving wellbeing through increased stability and fewer school changes, increased permanency for children; and improved behavioral and mental health outcomes. Kinship care has also been described as attractive for governments as it is relatively cheaper to administer.

Kinship care can be arranged either formally or informally. Informal arrangements are made without a court order and in agreement with the child’s family, with the child’s parents retaining legal guardianship and parental responsibility. Formal arrangements follow a court order or child protection intervention with the carer having a formal carer status.

The reasons that relatives become primary carers for children vary. Research on grandparent carers discussed reasons birth parents may become unwilling or unable to raise their children, including death of parents, child abuse or neglect, substance abuse, imprisonment, work commitments, disability, and physical or mental illness. The responsibility for raising grandchildren can shift to grandparents quickly, for example, in a crisis situation, or over some time, with grandparents gradually becoming more involved.

**Background to Kin Raising Kids - Tasmania**

Kin Raising Kids (KRK) Tasmania Inc. is a charitable state-wide community organization formed in July 2017, whose membership consists of grandparents and kin with lived experience raising their grandchildren. They have experienced first-hand the challenges faced in navigating the child support and child protection system.

Many of these grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, are experiencing poverty, inequality, and injustice and KRK are dedicated to seeking significant improvement in how Kinship Carer families are treated by both the State and Commonwealth Government, throughout Tasmania.

https://www.examiner.com.au/story/5942525/government-called-to-supportgrandparents-caring-for-grandchildren/

The group is established, governed, and managed by kincarers for Kinship Carers. It recognised significant gaps in the ‘system.’ Many of us have experienced inequality and injustice and we are dedicated to striving for equality and transparency in the support of all kinship carer families throughout Tasmania and particularly for those ‘informal’ kinship carers so essential to raising children and young persons in our society. It is a not-for-profit organisation with committee representation from the State's North and South as well as the North-West Coast.

Our Mission Statement:

To encourage and support kinship carers, including grandparents raising grandchildren, who are the primary carers of diverse family and kin; and

To offer peer support, advocacy, information, and referral services to member kinship families throughout Tasmania. The group advocates systemically at all levels for Kin Carers.

Our Vision Statement:

To have every Tasmanian Child and Young Person living in safety within its biological family; and

To have an equal opportunity to develop to the best of their ability.

And Our Aspirations:

Kin Raising Kids Tasmania Inc. is working to have its vision realised by:

* Establishing a kinship care network across Tasmania.
* Representing the collective views of kinship carers, including grandparent kinship carers, in decision making.
* Raising public awareness of the pressures and advantages of kinship care.
* Referring kinship carers to a range of services relevant to their needs.
* Developing partnerships with other organisations and stakeholders to best support kinship carers.
* Represent and advocate for the best interests of kinship.

We understand the commitment of carers who, no matter what the hardships, are responsible in their roles and, given a choice, would do the same thing again. We acknowledge the importance of the link with the biological family and that care by members of their biological family provides the best outcomes for children in care. The focus always being on the child or young person.

It is important to connect with kinship carers throughout Tasmania via as many services as possible. Much of our focus has been developing contacts with numerous government agencies, politicians, service providers, and particularly those we may potentially partner with. We also want to develop confidence with the many kinship carers, both those who are supported financially and those receiving extraordinarily little, from all around this wonderful State of Tasmania. This task is not easy considering the disillusion and hurt being experienced by many Kinship Carers because of unfulfilled past government promises and let downs, despite numerous enquiries, which are still unresolved.

Kin Raising Kids Tasmania (KRK) has been extremely appreciative of the work done by the previous Minister for Child Safety, Roger Jaensch, for the work done on instigating a review into ‘informal kinship care’ which was carried out by a Mr. Frank Ogle in late 2020. His report concluded with 8 recommendations which were accepted by the Department of Communities and became government policy following the 2021 State Government elections. Informal-Kinship-Care-Review-Recommendations-CT-Response-web.pdf (communities.tas.gov.au) KRK sought an opportunity to have some input into the implementation of these recommendations and has in fact been involved in discussions through the Dept. with Mission Australia in relation to developing a ‘liaison and support service’ on the NW coast (Recommendation 1). The other seven recommendations, we understand, have been dispersed within the Dept. and we are very hopeful they are not just being swallowed up in the system.

The ‘liaison and support service’ appeared to have been very short lived and one is still not sure if it exists even.

In an article published in the Advocate newspaper on Monday 12th February 2024, “the children’s minister said his government provided $2.25 million over four years to implement the Informal Kinship Care Review (2021) recommendations and ensure better support”. KRK have not seen any of this, believing it is being spent on, or outsourced to, NGOs. Why? In our experience, NGOs need to make a profit to exist, and some of these in the Child Safety sector are huge multi-national companies who thrive on exploiting those in our society who are disadvantaged or vulnerable.

Money was also applied for ‘training’ offered by FKAT (Foster Carer Association of Tasmania), who have had discussions with KRK some time ago on suggested training needs, but not implemented by them. KRK believes that the training delivered to date has been ineffectual.

KRK questions the $2.25 million expenditure, particularly when we have not seen much in the way of positive progress on the implementation of the ‘Ogle Review’ recommendations.

**Questions being asked:**

*Recommendations 1 & 2 Included a government position based in the Southern ARL to progress these recommendations and a Northwest Liaison Officer attached to the ARL. We feel both positions have been ineffectual and there has been no change in delivery of services or support because of the extra funding. Kinship carers are allocated workers as before through the ARL or sent flyers on services delivered by other agencies.*

*The children we care for are still on wait lists for mental ill health or trauma counseling. Many kinship carers still do not know the program exists. There has been no improved delivery of training or collaboration with carers around their needs. The Community Kinship Governance Group has now had 3 meetings since the funding has been allocated. The terms of Reference for this group do not address all the intricacies of Recommendations 1, 2, 3,4 and 6. We tried to raise some of these intricacies in meeting 2, unfortunately, the funded services said it was outside of their funding scope. There has been no change in government policy options or reviews we are aware of except the one, Kin Raising Kids instigated to include informal kinship carers in the Carer Recognition act 2023. Our awareness is there are still only 2 groups in the south and one in the north as there was before the extra funding. The group in the Northwest has not increased in numbers and the program which are being delivered by Baptcare and Mission Australia are not sustainable.*

*The evidence is* *clear, the implementation by Communities Tasmania and DECYP of the recommendations has been a failure.*

*The standout of the failure of the project is for the government to fund Carers Tas to conduct another research project into* ***“The Experience and Needs of Informal Kinship Carers Across Tasmania.”*** *We have met with Christine from Carers Tas, who is completing the research to start the process, as Carers Tas is not aware of the kinship care networks across Tasmania.*

 *We would like an update from DECYP and Communities Tasmania on any policy changes or reviews, increase in brokerage, awareness, coverage of the newly funded programs the government agreed to deliver.*

 *Is the government preparing a submission to the standing committee on social policy and legal affairs, inquiry into the recognition of unpaid carers?*

This work is ongoing, and KRK would welcome support available to see these recommendations implemented appropriately.

It is understood through discussions with several politicians leading up to the previous state elections that all were supportive of the implementation of the recommendations.

However, despite several enquiries, KRK has been unsuccessful in getting an audience to discuss these with the present Minister. **There have been four Ministers since the release of the Frank Ogle report, plus a number of changes** **with and within Departments.**

One can understand the bureaucratic confusion brought about when one requests an update on progress of the implementation of the recommendations.

**Federal and National issues:**

The goal of Kin Raising Kids ultimately, is for the Federal Government to oversee the provision of equal payments and services to all children not living with their parents for whatever reason: substance addiction, mental health issues, abuse and neglect of children, incarceration, death, inability to cope due to youth etc. No child living in these tragic circumstances, and already traumatised through no fault of their own, should have to also endure poverty, lack of opportunity to reach their full potential and the ensuing humiliation and stigmatisation that this brings. These children have already suffered enough in their short lives and our governments must make decisions to enable them to have at least the same level of funding and support services as provided to foster carers.

Even though Child Safety is the responsibility of State Governments, many of the legal issues or concerns are Federally controlled, see those referred to in the ‘Ogle Review’ recommendations.

To this end, KRK have been working with other State organizations to unite much of the disparity between them.

On the 19th of October 2023, a delegation with representation from most states and coordinated by Dr. Meredith Kiraly, a well-respected researcher at the University of Melbourne and has a passion for righting the wrongs being experienced by kinship carers, met with the Parliamentary Friends of Grandparents/Kinship Carers in Canberra. Note the accepted name change, now including Kinship.

The group included 6 grandparent/kinship carers from 5 States and the ACT: four grandparents, an aunt, and an uncle. All are informal carers except one who after some time was successful in obtaining a care allowance from her State. As well, we had Jo Sadler, CEO of Wanslea in Perth, an organization that runs the *Grandcare* program for informal grandparent carers; Jo Roff, Executive Manager IFYS Queensland, a longtime supporter and advocate for kinship carers; Mike Feszczak, CEO of Grandcarers SA, a program for informal grandparent/kinship carers across South Australia; and Meredith Kiraly herself.

The meeting's aim was to have grandparents/kinship carers tell them what it is like to raise kin children and to leave the Parliamentarians expecting improvement in the federal support system. A smaller follow-up meeting in the next couple of months is proposed.

KRK’s disappointment was that the five Tasmanian Senators who assured us they wanted to be involved and supportive, and were in Canberra at the time, **did not attend the get together.**

**Kin Raising Kids Tasmania’s:**

**NEEDS AND WANTS:**

All carers should to be treated with equity and without discrimination.

2014 Senate Inquiry recommendations included simplifying the out of home

care system and greater focus on the UN Rights of the Child which is often

overlooked.

Avoid where possible children becoming Wards of the State. It creates a fear

factor (stolen generation) and also reduces associated legal costs.

Presently, there are some 2500+ grandparents caring for grandchildren and educating them in Tasmania.

Extraordinarily little is being done to assist these carers, particularly if they are deemed ‘informal,’ who are largely dependent upon Social Security payments for their own living expenses but who cannot qualify for any other assistance.

If nothing gets done, then more state services are consumed than at present as these carers have in real terms no resources at all. The costs of managing the welfare of these children would be around $20,000 per child if the state had to take control and resource this need for replacement parents.

Legal issues alone would also have a large cost impact upon the budget.

There is a disparity between the States in systems and payments to all carers. This needs correcting.

The best interests of the child in care need to be considered particularly in relation to 'permanency' and 'consistency'.

Every additional placement and change in case management for the child may contribute to additional trauma.

Appoint a full-time officer in the Department of Education or Department of Premier and Cabinet, specifically dealing with Grandparents caring for grandchildren. *This is currently being piloted in the NW.*

The next Census should specifically identify kincare families, it will not identify them all, but it will be a much better indication of numbers that what we currently have.

**Educational:**

Differences in school subsidies.

Many kin carers receive no resourcing or support.

Kinship Carers receive a 100% rebate of State School fees, and the Government seeks a similar concession for Private schools, for a 100% remission of fees for kinship carers.

That the Department create and deliver a training program for Kinship Carers, so that they are better able to deliver their daily parenting roles.

Appropriate training should be ongoing and compulsory for all carers and can be tied to payments. This training should be undertaken not in a classroom type environment, but rather associated with support group gatherings by appropriate professionals.

That each child in care be assessed for the once only provision of an appropriate device, computer, or tablet, to assist with the education needs of the student.

All needy children in care should be able to access ‘The Smith Family’ services, or similar, to help with their education.

Tutoring services made available to assist with educational needs, including homework support, as carers are often IT illiterate or not up with current curriculum.

**Financial:**

Some carers still only receiving $28/ fortnight.

Some carers receive Family Tax A & B supplements others do not.

Provide priority upgrades for Kinship Carers with Public Housing so that the housing is suitable. For example, a 2-bedroom unit may need to be swapped for a 3-bedroom home.

Refitting a home to cope with this is also a task not readily understood. The fact is that their accommodation may be entirely unsuitable, being say a 2-bedroom unit when they have to suddenly care for 2-4 children.

That registered Kinship Carers in this scheme, who have no other income apart from an age pension, receive a rebate on the Aurora power bills of 25%, and those remaining kinship carers receive a 10% rebate. The aim here is to keep the children warm in winter, thereby reducing medical needs.

That registered Kinship Carers in the scheme, that have no other income apart from an age pension, receive assistance (say 25%) to install an appropriate internet connection (Wi-Fi) and those remaining kinship carers receive reduced assistance (say 10%). The aim here is to keep the children connected, to benefit with IT educational needs.

That the Grandparent carers receive an annual grant on the 1st of December each year of $500 per family to assist with Christmas, particularly food and payable by direct deposit not coupons.

Extend foster care allowances to grandparents and kinship carers who are raising children without orders from a court exercising family law jurisdiction or care and protection jurisdiction.

Develop pathways for Kinship Carers and/or Grandparents to formalize legally their decision to provide long term care to their grandchildren. This may require a change to the Adoption Act to enable a new class of formal adoption and protection to be put in place.

**Grace Card concept:**

Preference for a voucher-based system specifically for those in care.

Annual holiday or tourist vouchers focused on the kids in care.

These people are provided with a 50% discount for motor vehicle registrations, whilst they are caring for the grandchildren. This will assist getting children to the Doctor or various medical appointments, to school and the Child Health Nurse.

That automatic registration for the Tasmanian Seniors Card be made,

Notwithstanding, some grandparents may be under the minimum age, to assist with the provision of services.

That each local Government authority is asked to provide a remission of Council rates of 25% for each identified property privately owned and supporting children being fully cared for by kinship carers.

That Taswater be asked to provide a larger allowance of water allowable within the general water rate of 2,500 litres per week per family.

A ‘Companion Card’ benefit for one carer to accompany the child in care to a function.

**Legal:**

Legal issues that exist for informal kin carers, need addressing. Informal carers are legally unable to authorise medical procedures, enrol children at schools, obtain identification needs such as Medicare cards, open bank accounts, obtain passports etc. This could be done simply by accepting an appropriately worded statutory declaration.

Recognition by both the State and Commonwealth Governments of full-time informal kinship carers. Precedence already established in countries such as NZ. A model was trialled by a previous Labor government, but not endorsed by the incoming Tasmanian Liberal Government. This concept should be reinvestigated and adopted or legalised using a stat/dec concept.

Provide Legal Aid to Kinship, including Grandparent and Kith carers and waive the present means test, as it is unfair.

 Adequate resourcing of grandparents/kin carers is required.

Seeking greater transparency of decisions and consistency of responses, towards kin carers, by Government agencies especially the child protection system.

Seeking clarification as to why there are so many variations of kin care. e.g. Siblings with one carer are formal and informal.

Formal assessment of Kinship care placements and case management is generated to keep track of needs of the kinship carers and the children registered in the scheme.

Carers are unable to access current mental status of parents prior to access visits.

There is a need to establish an appeal system for carers who feel they have been unfairly treated by the system.

**Medical:**

There is a need to address the need of children more adequately in the informal care of their grandparents or kin.

Kinship care families need trauma support and other services relating to children with special needs.

Adequate access to health care for this cohort of children who often require additional specialised care.

Develop a program of respite services for Kinship Carers, like that which currently exists within the Dept. of Health, so that this becomes available with the provision of private carer's when respite is requested.

Extend the medical ‘Blue Book’ used to record the early years of child development including inoculations etc., to also report assessments and referrals to the likes of pediatricians or educational experts for future needs of each child. Link this book to the ‘National Health Register’ to enable GP’s and other Medical Practitioners to access information readily without the need for the carrier of the blue book (deemed to be the responsible person/guardian), from having to regularly explain to locum practitioners the details around each and every appointment.

Assist ongoing support groups with better information and access to services, mental health services, legal assistance, disability services and others. Establish a national peak body for kinship carers

**Conclusion:**

As commented on earlier, KRK believe the whole issue of Out of Home Care (OOHC) should be controlled Nationally by making it a platform immediately above Child Safety Services which are currently State controlled.

This would help with consistency across all States. Presently some only recognise Grandparents raising Grandchildren and not Kin or Kith Carers, whilst others acknowledge differing sequences, and this can be further complicated with the numerous types of guardianship and whether they are formal or informal.

Unfortunately, this option is still a long way from being implemented.

New Zealand were able to devise a system back in 1964. Their system provides support for anyone caring for children who are not biologically their own.

Impact on present Government services in Tasmania:

Should support for kinship carers not be forth coming for the care they are providing currently to some 4,000 children, then the liability will revert in any case. Wouldn’t it be better to manage the impact with minor expenditure supporting kinship and/or grandparent carers?

The costs of doing nothing may rise to millions of dollars if state care becomes a mandated default.

By supporting kinship carers, the government is making sure that the welfare of the children is maintained by those that love the children and have only their welfare in their hearts.

KRK would welcome bilateral support for the implementation of those recommendations recently adopted by the Liberal Government out of the review into ‘Informal Kinship Care.’

Providing childcare subsidies for working kinship carers.

A couple of links that may be of assistance to some are:

Emergency Relief https://www.assistancetas.com.au

Find Help Tas Home - Find Help Tas

**Additionally:**

The need to address the adequacy of support to this important cohort is not only critical to the well-being of the children they have taken into their homes, but also important to the health and welfare of these grandparents. At present both the children and the grand carers are falling between the gaps regarding support and services.

• This group of grandparent led families are an integral part of the social structure and contribute to overall national wellbeing and that families are complex with diverse needs

• There is a need to recognize that every family has its own history and culture, including their ethnic culture and that the cultures of Australia's Indigenous peoples are especially vulnerable.

• Kinship care families have particular needs that are not adequately supported

• Our society must have an equitable welfare system that ensures families have access to the necessities of life in order for children to reach their full potential.

• Welfare measures should support families without stigmatizing them and empower them to better their circumstances.

• That access to the legal system is a right that should be extended to all.

• Reducing red tape so that accessing necessary support is made more accessible.

• Implementing the recommendations in the Australian Senate report that focused on grandparents raising grandchildren (2014) https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\_Business/Committees/Senate/Community\_Affairs/Grandparent\_Carers/Report

Our organization fully supports the recommendations made in this report from the Senate Committee. It is apparent this State has not fulfilled requests from that report pertaining to it.

It is important to note that this issue does not only affect Tasmanian grandparent kin carers. It affects this group of carers across Australia. This issue has been ignored and overlooked by successive governments for far too many years.

This road grandparents are on is long, hard, tough, bumpy, painful, soul-destroying, and exhausting, but much love, determination and courage is given by grandparents to raise healthy and happy grandchildren. This caring role has been pushed upon them by the inability of their own children to care for and take responsibility for their children. Grandparent carers need moral support, emotional support, and financial support from everyone in the community to raise these grandchildren, so they are not a burden on the taxpayer but become role models in society in their adult lives. (Quote from Committee Hansard - Mrs. Sharyne De Young, Secretary, Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren WA (Inc.), Committee Hansard, Perth, 6 August 2014, p. 31.)

I can provide more information on this important issue if needed. Additionally, I am also willing to meet with you to discuss it in detail.

Seeking your support on this particularly important matter and looking forward to your response

Gratefully yours.

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