



Special Guardians’ March 2026 Newsletter

Hello Everyone

This newsletter has 2 main contributors: Kinship, with links and details of different training courses and workshops, and the Shropshire Family Information Service with details of free resources and activities across the county.

Changes to the SGO Team – At the end of March, Jane will be retiring. She wanted to say how much she has loved being part of the SGO support Team and will miss her colleagues and all the amazing families she has had the pleasure of getting to know over the last 4 years. The team will be joined by a new member of staff, Hannah, in May. I am sure she will contribute to a future newsletter to introduce herself to you all.

Other news

Come and chat – Louise Bowen from the SGO support Team will be at the Bridgenorth Early Help hub on 17th March 1pm-3pm. The hub meets in the library on Listley Street, Bridgnorth, so why not pop in to say hello?

Shropshire Kinship Peer Support Group

In Shropshire, there are around 700 Kinship Carers, and there is a friendly and supportive Shropshire Kinship Care support group that meets regularly – face-to-face and on-line. The group is a place where Kinship Carers can meet, share, support each other and get practical advice on all aspects of being a Kinship Carer and also access to information and support through the Kinship national charity.

Being a Kinship Carer is a wonderful “gift” and hugely positive “lifeline” to a child. But it is challenging and demanding. But with Shropshire Kinship Care group, you aren’t alone. Why not get in touch for an initial chat? No commitment required. Email Peter Thompson, Shropshire’s group leader (and a Kinship Carer): shropshirekinship@gmx.com or call on 07541 485 475, any time. We’d love to hear from you



We are Kinship

The leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. We're here for kinship carers – friends or family who step up to raise a child when their parents aren't able to.

Let's commit to change for kinship families.

[Get support and advice](#)

This month we're celebrating **International Women's Day** – a time to celebrate the achievements of women. To mark the day, we want to spotlight one of our incredible staff members, Emma, who has been a kinship carer to her family friend's grandson for six years, since he was a newborn. Emma reflects on the power of empowering other kinship carers.

We are also soon approaching **Mother's Day** – a day that can be challenging for some kinship families navigating complex relationships and tough conversations. Emma shares why Mother's Day is a day for all kinship carers to be recognised for the love you give your children every single day of their lives. **You can read her story coming up later.**

Also below you can find this month's highlights of [workshops](#), [masterclasses](#) and [roadshows](#) available to book. Providing practical support and tailored advice on a range of topics, our events give you the opportunity to meet other kinship carers. You can book directly on the links below.

And finally, we are sharing an update on the **financial allowances pilot** for kinship carers announced last week. We know this will be raising questions and concerns for many of you, with the vast majority of kinship carers not benefitting from these pilots. You can find more information below to help guide you.

Join our free online workshops

We have a whole calendar of [free online workshops](#) for kinship carers covering a wide range of topics.

Our online workshops are supportive spaces where you can connect with other kinship carers.

Last few spaces remaining on the below workshops

Understanding fetal alcohol syndrome disorder (FASD)

Thursday 12 March, 10am to 12pm – [book here](#)

Understanding how to keep children in kinship care safe online

Thursday 12 March, 7pm to 9pm – [book here](#)

Supporting your kinship child at school

Monday 16 March, 11am to 12:30pm – [book here](#)

Financial support for kinship families

Tuesday 17 March, 10am to 12pm – [book here](#)

Overview of the EHCP and SEND process

Thursday 19 March, 10am to 11:30am – [book here](#)

Raising children with diverse ethnic heritage and cultural identity

Tuesday 24 March, 10am to 12pm – [book here](#)

Working with your local authority children's services

Tuesday 24 March, 10am to 12pm – [book here](#)

[Find the right online workshop for you](#)

Join our masterclasses

Our [free expert-led masterclasses](#) are one-off online sessions covering a topic in detail. Each masterclass covers a subject that kinship carers have told us they want to gain a deeper understanding of.

Aggressive or violent behaviour from your kinship child

Raising a child in kinship care can be deeply rewarding, but it can also feel frightening, exhausting and isolating when behaviour becomes aggressive or violent.

This masterclass, led by Al Coates MBE, will cover the causes of aggressive or violent behaviour in children, and explore ways to keep you and your family safe.

Wednesday 25 March, 10:30am to 12pm - [book here](#)

[Join our masterclasses](#)

Financial allowances pilot for kinship carers

Last Friday we shared with you details of the government's long-awaited [financial allowances pilot](#) for kinship carers in England. We know that this has brought a lot of **mixed feelings among the kinship carer community** – and we know the vast majority of kinship families will not benefit at this stage.

Seven local authority areas in England have been selected to take part. They are: **Bexley, Bolton, Newcastle, North East Lincolnshire, Medway, Thurrock and Wiltshire.**

With a £126 million investment, these seven local authority areas will be testing how to improve support for kinship carers and family networks.

We know lots of you will have questions. We have created a Q&A with more information on our website.

[Read our Q&A to learn more](#)

In the coming days we will be launching a new campaign action to support you to share your views with the Children's Minister.

Together we will keep pressing the government to make sure every kinship family receives the financial support they urgently need.

Meet kinship carer Emma

After working with children and families for many years in the West Midlands, when Emma became a kinship carer to her family friend's grandson, she was forced to give up a career she loved, as well as say no to a job promotion and a pay rise. She had to do this so she could have the time she needed to settle and bond with her kinship child who had had a traumatic start to life.

After finding Kinship and getting the help she needed, Emma now supports kinship carers at Kinship as a Connected Family Worker which includes running a peer support group.

“Everything stopped when I became a kinship carer. My social life, my family life, my work and my independence. I needed to devote all my time towards keeping him safe because he was so dysregulated and needed me. I struggled to go outside as I was too anxious to ever leave him and so I became very isolated. The beginning was one of the most difficult periods of my life. I thought I was prepared for it but I wasn’t at all. I felt such relief after I was granted the SGO when he was 16 months old. **I knew finally he would be able to stay with me forever.**

“In 2024 I went to a Kinship support group. To begin with I was very guarded, but I quickly realised how special the group was. **I could feel the trust, safety and respect.** This is something I try to replicate today in my own group to create a safe, supportive and non-judgemental space where kinship carers can be together. I spend hours talking one on one with kinship carers, supporting them by attending court proceedings and school meetings or just being able to chat through some difficult family situations because I know what they’re going through.

“I advocate for them, support them to build resilience to cope with the challenges they face and encourage them to meet other kinship carers so they feel less isolated. **It’s the best feeling in the world when they tell me that they now have the confidence to go to school or court appointments by themselves.** I want to get them to a place where they feel empowered enough to say: ‘Emma, I don’t actually need you now.’

“I really love my job and I am in awe of the kinship carers that I meet every single day. There will of course be some bad days but I always remind them they should feel immensely proud of their journey. They are making an incredible difference to the lives of their children.

“My little one has always called me mummy. **Mother’s Day is soon approaching and I know it brings up a lot of emotions for kinship carers.** It can be quite triggering and sometimes you might feel a bit excluded especially if you do have contact with the birth parents on the day. So you have to be kind to yourself. You have to hold onto the knowledge that you are their parent every single day giving them all the love they need. You don’t need the title. **It’s important to really notice the small wins and know that your kinship child wouldn’t be where they are without you.”**



If you need some support and advice this Mother's Day, please take a look at these online advice guides which might be helpful:

[About life story work](#)

[Managing emotional and mental health needs in kinship families](#)

[Supporting children and young people with trauma](#)

[Using stories to discuss emotions and identity in your kinship family](#)

We hope Emma's story and our range of support will support you and your kinship family this month.

Shropshire Family Information Service

We thought we would bring you information that focuses on free things for this newsletter.

Remember, we cover everything and anything to do with family life, so if you have a question, chances are we'll be able to help, or if we can't, we'll point you in the direction of someone who can. Find us on Facebook, Instagram or X.

Call 01743 254400 or email ShropshireFIS@shropshire.gov.uk

Shropshire e-library

Did you know Shropshire Library's e-library lets you read or listen to thousands of adults and kids books and magazines without leaving the house?

E-books and audio books

Cloud Library has thousands of e-books and audio books, which can be accessed on Android, Apple or Kindle devices. Just download the relevant app and login in with your library id and pin number (forgot your PIN? You can reset it here [Prices and PINS | Shropshire Council](#)). For younger readers there is a kid's mode to make the app even easier to use.

E-newspapers and magazines

This service is provided by [PressReader](#) and gives access to over 7000 newspapers and magazines, including most of the UK national papers. So whether you are looking for recipe inspiration, fitness or fashion advice, or the latest news, save money and see if PressReader stock the publication you want.

To access this service you will need to click 'sign in' then select 'Library or Group' sign in, choose Shropshire Libraries from the list, and then enter your library card number and [PIN](#).

Free access expires every 30 days but can be refreshed simply by logging out and then in again.

[Find out more](#)



Fun for free

At your library

Libraries are so much more than books, long gone are the days where you were expected to talk in a whisper. Shropshire's libraries are warm, welcoming, community spaces. You'll find loads of free activities on offer for all the family including things like:

- Rhyme and story time sessions for 0-5 year olds
- Stay and play sessions for pre-schoolers
- Baby Sensory sessions
- Lego and Duplo clubs
- Board game clubs
- Creative writing, art and crafts
- Jigsaw libraries
- Free school holiday activities

You can find out what is going on at your local library on the library events page [Library events | Shropshire Council](#) Some libraries also have social media pages where they advertise events and activities.

- [Shropshire Libraries on Facebook](#)
- [Albrighton Library on Facebook](#)
- [Bridgnorth Library on Facebook](#)
- [Church Stretton Library on Facebook](#)
- [Ellesmere library on Facebook](#)
- [Ludlow Library on Facebook](#)
- [Market Drayton Library on Facebook](#)
- [Oswestry Library on Facebook](#)
- [Pontesbury Library on Facebook](#)
- [Shrewsbury Library on Facebook](#)
- [Whitchurch Library on Facebook](#)

Watch plays at the library

Did you know you can watch recordings of [National Theatre](#) productions at the library, completely free of charge?

Use the library PCs or connect to their wi-fi, and there's a collection of 20 to choose from - including Shakespeare; Wuthering Heights; and the 2022 adaptation of Philip Pullman's 'The Book of Dust'. Each comes with a learning pack, so it's great for theatre-lovers, teachers, and students alike! [Find out more here.](#)

Play Ground Buddy app

This is a fantastic free app which helps you discover new playgrounds. It will show you where they are on a map and what facilities they offer. You can also keep track of the playgrounds you have visited, give them reviews and improve listings by adding photos and info. There must be hundreds of playgrounds across the county, why not challenge your family to visit every playground in your area this month? You can find out more and download the app here [Playground Buddy - Helping Families Find Playgrounds](#)



Food banks to community food shares

Food Banks

If you are struggling to buy food you may be able to get emergency food through a food bank. To use a food bank you may need a referral. There are many people who can make a referral for you including health professionals, advice workers, housing associations and Shropshire Council. You can find your local food bank and further information here on the [Shropshire Larder website](#).

Food Shares and Community Kitchens

Food shares and Community kitchens redistribute surplus food on a 'pay as you feel' basis - meaning you pay as much as you can or are willing to spend. These are often **open to everyone** and are aimed at stopping food waste. Local projects include:

- [Shrewsbury Food Hub](#)
- [Osnosh Community Kitchen - Oswestry](#)
- [Ludlow Foodbank Open Table Events](#)
- [Ludlow Hands Together Community Fridge](#)
- [Highley Community Project](#)
- [Telford Community Grocery Store](#)

Community Meals

There are several organisations where you can go for a light bite or meal, including:

- [Grace Church Shrewsbury](#)
- [Osnosh Community Kitchen Oswestry](#)
- [Cosy Cafe Albrighton](#)
- [Mayfair Centre Church Stretton](#)



Free fitness

Feel fit for free

If one of your new year's resolutions is to move more, then these free fitness recommendations may come in handy!

Junior Parkrun

Junior Parkrun is a fun, friendly and FREE weekly 2k event for 4-14 year olds. Our closest ones are:

- Shrewsbury (Quarry Park)
- Telford (Town Park)
- Hafan Yr Afon, Newtown
- Wyre Forest, Bewdley
- Queens Park, Crewe

They happen at 9am every Sunday. The emphasis is on having fun so you can complete the course however you want, run, walk, hop, skip, it's all good! It's a great way to get out in the fresh air, move your body and make new friends. Find out more here: [junior events | parkrun UK](#)

You are also welcome to complete the 5k Parkrun as a family, these are held on Saturday mornings you can find your local event here: [events | parkrun UK](#)

Couch to Fitness Programme with Our Parks

Get active from the comfort of your own home with Couch to Fitness by Our Parks. Bit by bit you'll feel fitter, when you stick to their free online fitness programme. It's amazing what a difference it can make! They have lots of different options as part of the programme including:

- Prenatal and postnatal programmes
- Family Fit
- Dance workouts
- Bitesize workouts

Find out more here: [Couch to Fitness | Couch to Fitness](#)

Virtual Village Hall

Brought to you by the charity, Royal Voluntary Service, the Virtual Village Hall is a free, online activity hub and community. It's designed to help people stay physically and mentally active, socially connected and having fun, as well as supporting them to better manage their health, including long-term health conditions.

From Art to Zumba, there are 12-15 free live sessions every week and a library of 2,200 free sessions to choose from, all led by expert tutors and presenters, including some well-known faces. It's free to join and take part with no sign in or subscription required.

They have some fantastic exercise classes including Street dance, HIIT workouts, Pilates and Yoga. You can see all the activities on offer here: [Online Activity Sessions | Virtual Village Hall | Royal Voluntary Service](#)

NHS Healthier Families

The NHS Healthier Families website has lots of ideas for games and activities, with your favourite Disney and Marvel heroes, that will keep your kids moving. The website also has advice on healthy eating, recipe ideas and lunchbox inspiration. You can visit the website here: [Healthier Families - Home - NHS](#)



Free health and wellbeing courses

Online courses

Make 2026 to be the year you feel more in tune with your family with these free online learning pathways from Togetherness.

Expertly designed by NHS professionals they will help you to become a more confident parent by learning about child brain development, behaviour that challenges, communication and your own wellbeing needs, because parenting is a journey that is always changing!

The pathways are broken down into bite-size learning that can be completed at your own pace. Pathways include:

- Understanding your baby
- Understanding your child: from toddler to teenager
- Understanding your child with additional needs
- Moving up to secondary school for children with additional needs
- Understanding your child's feelings
- Understanding your child's mental health and wellbeing
- Understanding your teenager's brain
- Understanding your relationships
- Understanding your own trauma

Shropshire residents can use the access code **DARWIN18** to get the pathways for free. Find out more and sign up here: [Online Learning](#)

Local groups

We also have local in-person groups running for the following learning pathways, where you will be able to get expert advice from our Parenting Team and meet other parents.

- Understanding your child: from toddler to teenager
- Understanding your child with additional needs

To find out more about local groups please contact the parenting team via email parenting.team@shropshire.gov.uk or call [01743 250950](tel:01743250950)



Repair Cafes

Have you heard of repair cafes? They were originally set up in the Netherlands in 2009 with the aim of helping people fix items for free to avoid waste and to build a sense of community. These are the repair cafes in Shropshire:

- [Walter's Workshop](#), Bishop's Castle, Fridays
- [Midweek Mend](#), Oswestry, Wednesdays
- [Ellesmere Repair Cafe](#), First Saturday of the month
- [Clothes Swap and Stitch](#), Oswestry, First Saturday of the month
- [Church Stretton Repair Cafe](#), Second Saturday of the month
- [Oswestry and Borders Repair Cafe](#), Second Saturday of the month
- [Shrewsbury Repair Cafe](#), Third Saturday of the month
- [Broseley Repair Cafe](#), Fourth Saturday of the month
- [Telford Repair Cafe](#), Last Saturday of the month
- [Pontesbury Repair Cafe](#), Second Saturday every two months
- [Bayston Hill Repair Cafe](#), Third Saturday every two months
- [Newport Repair Cafe](#), First Saturday, quarterly
- [Ludlow Repair Cafe](#), Fourth Saturday, quarterly
- [Wem Repair Cafe](#), transitioning to a regular event in 2026
- [Bridgnorth Repair Cafe](#), first event on 7th February

There are over 1619 across the world, in 33 countries!

Shropshire repair cafes are run by the community for the community. Skilled menders and talented amateurs give their time and expertise for free to help people fix items that might have otherwise been thrown away. Depending on who is there and what skills they have, they will attempt to fix everything from hairdryers to bikes to jewellery.



Free advice and support

Free support

Best Start in Life

The government have launched a brand new website for families. Best Start in Life brings together trusted information and support from pregnancy through your child's early years and beyond. It has loads of really useful info including:

- Childcare and Early Years Education support
- Free breakfast clubs and wraparound childcare
- Childcare support eligibility checker
- Week-by-week guide to pregnancy
- Breastfeeding help and support
- Introducing solid foods
- Baby and toddler teeth care
- Learning to talk
- School readiness

You can also [sign up to received personalised weekly emails](#) tailored to your stage of pregnancy or your child's age - with expert advice on baby care, childcare support and getting your little one ready for school.

[Best Start in Life website](#)

Coffee and Chat - Early Help support

You can get free Information, advice and support on all aspects of family life, at our Family Drop-Ins and Stay and Plays. You can chat, have a cuppa and see how we can help you with:

- Family life
- Parenting support
- Domestic abuse support
- Money worries
- Housing support
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

- and much more

To find your local drop in please visit the Family Information Directory

Coffee and chat sessions

Drop in and chat to a Health Visitor

Did you know Shropshire Health Visiting Service run free drop-in clinics in Shrewsbury, Market Drayton, Oswestry, Ludlow, Bridgnorth and Highley?

Health Visitors can help families with children aged 0-5 years old. They can offer information, advice and support on a range of topics, including:

- Infant feeding and breastfeeding advice
- Child development
- Emotional health and wellbeing
- Parenting and local support groups
- Behaviour
- Sleep

If you would like support but are unable to get to a session, you can also get help by calling 0333 358 3654 or texting the team on 07520 635212.

Drop in and chat sessions

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with the team if you need any further advice or support at this time. Please email SGO.duty@shropshire.gov.uk and a member of the team will be in touch.

Best wishes

Amy, Jane and Louise