



Open Letter to Josh MacAlister MP, Minister for Children and Families 12 October 2025

Re: The urgent need to restore the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF)

Adoptive, kinship and special guardianship families across England continue to feel the significant impact of the cuts made to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund in April this year.

The 60% reduction from £7,500 to £3,000 per child (with removal of specialist assessment and reduction of the fair access limit), together with the removal of match funding for children with the most complex needs, has caused immediate and lasting harm. These changes were introduced without consultation, warning or evidence base. They have destabilised families, interrupted therapy and undermined the progress many children were making.

The truth about our children's needs

Our children have lived through trauma, neglect, abuse and separation. Around 80% of adopted children, and many living under kinship care and special guardianship arrangements, live with developmental trauma. This leaves children's brains wired for survival, it affects how they regulate emotions, form attachments and learn.

Nearly one in four adopted children have self-harmed or attempted suicide. Three quarters experience serious mental health difficulties. Over a quarter of care experienced children are affected by neurodevelopmental conditions such as Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Over three quarters are exposed to alcohol in utero. These are not stories of rescue or happy endings; they are stories of children carrying the impact of significant early-life trauma, with needs that no parent, however loving, can hope to meet without specialist therapeutic support.

As trauma specialists such as Dr Bruce Perry have shown, therapy is not a luxury. It supports the development of new neural pathways that make safety, regulation and connection possible. Therapy must be continuous, relational and specialist. When it is interrupted, progress can quickly unravel.

Despite these facts and figures, despite what is known about neuroscience, despite what experts and those with lived experience say, the government continues to push a false narrative. One that suggests love, permanence and a parenting course is enough for a child to heal from unimaginable early life trauma. Enough to allow a child to thrive when far too often that simply isn't the case and they know it.

Government recruitment campaigns also rest heavily on the idea that love and permanence are enough. They suggest if support is required it will be readily available, but everyone knows this simply isn't true. The government fails adopted and kinship children and their families in the process. At a time when there are over 3,000 children with a plan for adoption but only half as many families approved as 'ready to adopt', the government must do better. The cuts to the ASGSF have destabilised an already fragile system. This lack of support has left children's lives hanging in the balance. Funding the ASGSF properly could begin to restore confidence in a system that is in desperate need. This is an urgent problem that must be addressed immediately.

Adoptive and Kinship children deserve the opportunity to heal, thrive and fulfil their potential

What families are experiencing

Our national survey assessing the impact of the cuts to the ASGSF on 469 adoptive and kinship families, representing 777 children, found that:

- 98% say the new fund no longer meets their child's needs
- 69% have had therapy reduced or stopped altogether
- 34% saw therapy end suddenly, triggering crisis and regression
- 36% forced to make the impossible and unethical choice of assessment or therapy

Families told us of children losing hard-won trust in their therapists, of violent outbursts returning, of self-harm and exclusion from school, and of feeling abandoned once again by a system that promised to stand with them.

Specialist therapeutic providers, many of whom answered the government's call a decade ago to expand trauma services, are now struggling to remain viable. Their loss would represent not just a financial waste, but a depletion of expertise built over years, leaving children without the specialist help they need.

A false economy

The ASGSF currently costs around £50 million a year, less than a rounding error in the Department's budget. When a child re-enters the care system, local authorities pay an average of £317,000 per child per year in residential care. By contrast, prior to the cuts, the fair access limit allowed for specialist assessment and trauma-informed therapy up to a cost of £7,500 per child per year.

In other words, the cost of one child re-entering care could fund therapy for more than forty children, therapy that could keep them safe and stable at home.

The Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA) estimates that every successful adoption generates £1.3 million in societal value, while the Local Government Association (LGA) has warned that councils are overspending on placements by hundreds of millions.

Adoption and kinship poverty is also very real. Recent Kinship research shows that 45% of kinship carers lose employment when taking responsibility for a child. The Adoption UK Barometer showed that 84% of adoptive parents have changed their job, reduced their hours of work or stopped working in order to better meet their child's needs.

Investing in therapy helps to keep families together. It remains one of the clearest examples of Invest to Save: early interventions saving both money and lives. Adoption and kinship care together save the state over £8.5 billion each year. Failing to maintain that investment risks far higher costs later, both human and financial.



Working together for change

Ahead of the November Budget, we are asking the government to take a forward-looking approach:

1. Reversal of all cuts made to the per child limits. Funding levels should be in line with need and evidence base, however as a minimum the previous Fair Access Limit should be reinstated, adjusted for inflation.
2. Reinstatement of the separate specialist assessment funding pot.
3. Reinstatement of match funding for children with the most complex needs.
4. Protect and extend the fund to include kinship and special guardianship families on equal terms.
5. Guarantee long-term stability through a permanent, ring-fenced ASGSF.
6. Undertake a fully independent review and consultation involving families, clinicians and the sector.

Co-production and transparency

Future reform must be based on evidence, lived experience and partnership. Families, practitioners and providers must be involved from the outset. Public engagement is welcome, but it is not the same as genuine co-production. Working together will lead to smarter, more sustainable policy and prevent further harm.

Our message

Love exists in abundance in our homes and our families, but love alone cannot repair the harm of early trauma. Our children need the right expertise around them to grow, learn and belong.

We are asking government to join us in creating a future where that support is not a privilege but a guarantee, a system built on partnership, evidence and understanding.

Action Against ASGSF Changes Campaign Group

Clare Solomons, adoptive parent and campaigner

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