

Andy Woodward, 65, from Chesterfield is raising his two teenage grandchildren with his wife and campaigning for better support for kinship families like his.

“My wife got a phone call from social services telling us that if we didn’t pick our granddaughters up from school that day, they would go into local authority care. We weren’t told why but, stunned into action and without further thought, my wife rushed from work to get to the school in time.

“The girls arrived straight from school so all they had were their backpacks and school uniforms. Social services offered us next to no support. We thought the girls would only be staying with us temporarily but that turned out not to be the case.

“We were approaching retirement and had already downsized in preparation, but those plans now went out the window. We had to sell our home, take out a mortgage and move to a larger property so that the girls could have their own rooms. I had to cancel plans for retirement and carry on working to provide for our newly expanded family. “

Support from Kinship

“My wife and I first went along to a Kinship peer support group with other kinship carers after seeing a poster locally. And we kept coming back because we were meeting people in similar circumstances to us.”

Andy and his wife have since gone on to run the local peer support group together.

“I learnt, through discussion with other members, that their experiences of being treated as kinship carers by the local authority were similar to ours – not good. We decided to address this together but found that the local authority was a little reluctant to engage. That's when we decided that campaigning at a national level was essential if we wanted things to change at a local level.”

Andy contacted Kinship to get involved in the charity’s campaigning and through group campaigns training and 1-2-1 support Andy built his campaigning confidence and felt empowered to do more.

“I loved being a part of Kinship’s #ValueOurLove trolley march through Westminster. Kinship carers from across the country were coming together to say, ‘we can’t pay with love’ and demand better financial support for kinship families.

“Being together with other kinship carers brought me a sense of camaraderie and collective strength. A feeling that together we could achieve so much more than on our own. Working together in that way also raised public awareness, which can only help.”

Andy admits at times campaigning proves challenging, but through support from the campaigns team, and having a connection with other kinship carer campaigners Andy has found a space for learnings and support to keep the momentum up.