



10,000 voices

insight:

The views of children
and young people in
kinship foster care on
their well-being



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10,000 voices publication





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Introduction

The Bright Spots Programme began in 2013 intending to understand children and young people's views of their care experience. It is funded by the Hadley Trust and is a partnership between Professor Julie Selwyn (Rees Centre, Department of Education, University of Oxford) and Coram Voice (a children's rights charity).

Your Life, Your Care surveys

The Programme uses three online surveys to capture the views of looked after children (4-7 years and 8-10 years) and young people (11-18 years) on their well-being.¹ The questions that make up the *Your Life, Your Care* surveys were co-produced with 140 looked after children (Selwyn et al. 2017; Wood & Selwyn 2017). The areas that children identified have become the Programme's indicators of well-being (Figure 1). Theoretically, well-being is defined as, feeling good and functioning well at an individual and interpersonal level. Local authorities (LAs) who use the surveys are supported by Coram Voice to distribute the survey to their care population. To ensure that children and young people are given the opportunity to take part, an initial working group meeting is held with key staff (and in some cases young people) to consider how lesser-heard voices (e.g., young people placed out of the area, seeking asylum, in custody, or with disabilities) can be included. Professionals are encouraged to support young people who need help in completing the survey, but LAs are also advised to avoid using foster carers or social workers as many of the survey questions ask about those relationships. Twice weekly response rates are shared with the LA to make them aware of how effectively the survey is being distributed. Once the survey has closed and the results analysed each LA is provided with a bespoke report. Follow-up meetings to disseminate the findings and explore how they can inform services are held.

Your Life, Your Care is primarily an online survey although paper surveys are also available and used where no internet is available, or when the child/young person prefers this method. The surveys differ by age group: a) 4 - 7 years (16 questions), b) 8 -10/11 years in junior school (31 questions), and c) young people of secondary school age 11-18 years (46 questions). A core set of 16 questions appear in all three surveys. Children are usually asked to complete the online survey anonymously in school over two weeks and, where appropriate, with a trusted adult present. The trusted adult is usually the designated teacher, learning mentor or SENCO. The adult is asked to record exactly what the child says if the child is unable to complete the form. All the questions are optional to allow children to make their own decisions about which questions they answer and therefore the number of responses differs by question. More information on the surveys can be found at www.coramvoice.org.uk/brightspots.

¹ The surveys are often completed in school and therefore the primary/junior school survey for age 8-10yrs also includes some children who were 11yrs old.



Figure 1: *Your Life, Your Care* Bright Spots well-being indicators



Who responded?

This Insight paper focuses on the views of 1,216 children in kinship foster care drawn from those who responded (n= 9,472) to the Your Life, Your Care surveys collected between September 2016 and March 2021. The surveys had been distributed by 38 English local authorities to their looked after children and were completed by children in unrelated foster care (72%), residential care (8%), living with family or friends in kinship care (13%),² somewhere else such as independent living (5%) and living with parents (2%).

In this Insight paper, the responses from those in kinship care (n=1,216) are compared with the responses from those in unrelated foster care (n=4,259)³ and where possible with the responses of peers who answered similar questions in surveys of the general population.

The survey includes questions and also space for children and young people to write comments. Text comments were provided by over 700 children and young people in kinship foster care - 192 children (4-7yrs), 235 children (8-10yrs) and 290 young people (11-18yrs).

The *Your Life, Your Care* surveys do not identify the type of kinship arrangement. Some children may have been living in a kinship foster placement before a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement order was made. Others may have been living with relatives as a Regulation 24 carer (temporary) or be a short-term arrangement with reunification as the plan. Yet others may have been in a permanent long-term fostering arrangement. Neither is the carer's relationship to the child identified. We do not know if the carer was a grandparent, aunt/uncle, cousin, sibling, or friend. Changes were made to the surveys in 2018 with another placement option 'living with parents' added. About 2% identified as living with parents between 2018 -2020 and were excluded from the findings below. However, surveys completed before 2018 included this group in the 'living with family and friends' category.

Sex, age and ethnicity of children in kinship foster care

The survey was completed by 1,216 looked after children and young people who recorded that they were living with a relative or friend (Table 1). Children in primary/junior schools made up 58% of the sample and 42% came from young people aged 11-18yrs.

Table 1 Children and young people's sex by age group

Age	Boys	Girls	Prefer not to say	Total
4-7yrs	147 (47%)	165 (52%)	2 (<1%)	314
8-10yrs	199 (47%)	181 (52%)	6 (1%)	386
11-18yrs	248 (48%)	255 (49%)	13 (3%)	516
Total	594 (49%)	601 (49%)	21 (2%)	1,216 (100%)

Three-quarters (75%) of all the children and young people self-identified as White ethnicity and a quarter as Asian, Black, Mixed, or other ethnicities (Table 2). 25 children skipped this question.

² At the time of the surveys, the Department for Education reported that about 13% of children in care were in kinship foster placements. In 2022 the proportion in kinship foster care had increased to 27% of all foster placements.
<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2022>

³ Fisher's Exact and Chi-square tests of association and of homogeneity were used and post hoc z tests of two proportions (including a Bonferroni adjustment). To measure the strength of the association phi was used: small association (.10) moderate (.30), strong (.50)



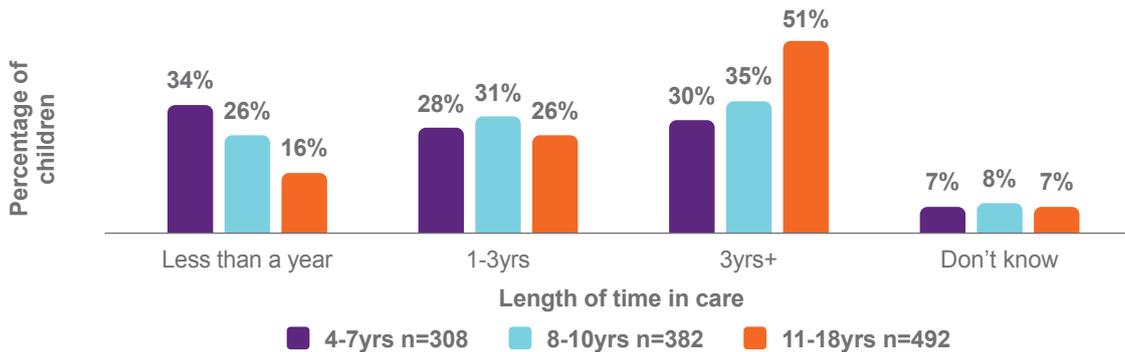
Table 2: Children and young people’s ethnicity by age group

Ethnicity	4-7 years		8-10 years		11-18 years		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
White	258	84%	272	73%	362	71%	892	75%
Mixed	24	8%	66	18%	98	19%	188	16%
Black	17	6%	24	6%	31	6%	72	6%
Asian	6	2%	11	3%	14	3%	31	3%
Other	-	-	1	<1%	7	1%	8	<1%
Total	305	100%	374	100%	512	100%	1,191	100%

Length of time in care and number of previous placements

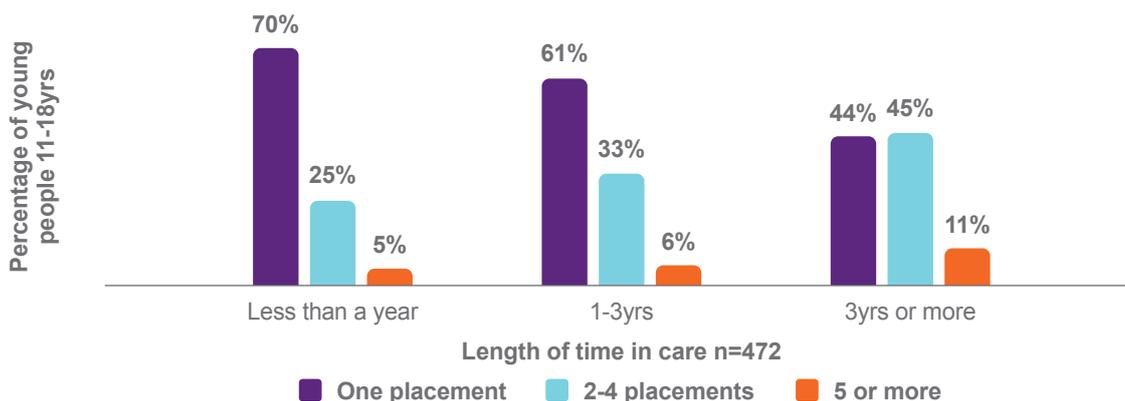
The majority (60%) of those in kinship foster care had been in care for less than three years (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Length of time in care by age



Only young people aged 11-18yrs were asked how many previous placements they had experienced. It was surprising that only half (50%) recorded just a single placement with their current carer, more than a third (35%) had been in 2-4 previous placements, and nearly one in ten (9%) had five or more placements. Thirty (6%) young people did not know how many placements they had had. Figure 3 shows that, as might be expected, those who had been in care for longer had experienced more placements.

Figure 3: Number of placements by the length of time in care



Children's feelings about where they lived

I love my nan and I never want to leave her side.

4-7yrs

Feeling safe and settled

Feeling safe at home, in their neighbourhoods, at school and online are all important for children's happiness.⁴ Children's right to life and protection from harm are fundamental rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁵ Children need to feel settled to develop a sense of belonging and feel secure. Yet, children in care have to deal with a great amount of change, not only as they come into care, but often whilst in care with changes in where they live, their schools and their social workers.⁶

All the children and young people were asked if they felt safe and settled where they lived, and whether they liked their bedrooms.

- ▶ Most of the children and young people (92%) reported that they 'always' felt safe in their homes and 83% 'always' felt settled: similar percentages as reported by those in unrelated foster care.
- ▶ Three young people (11-18yrs), one child aged 8-10yrs and eleven of those aged 4-7yrs in kinship care recorded 'hardly ever'/'never' feeling safe.

It was not possible to know from the survey why children felt unsafe, although there were text comments about sibling bullying and lacking trust in carers (see later section). However, the experience of trauma and previous moves are also likely to affect whether children feel safe. Young people's feelings of safety were associated with whether they felt settled.⁷ Children and young people wrote:

I feel unsafe as I live with my brothers. They have bad tempers, and they pull my hair. 4-7yrs

⁴ ONS (2020) Children's well-being indicator review, UK: 2020. Office for National Statistics. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrenswellbeingindicatorreviewuk2020/2020-09-02>

⁵ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child(1989) Adopted by General Assembly Resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989. Accessed at <https://www.unicef.org/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

⁶ Children's Commissioner (2020) Stability Index 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/cco-stability-index-2020.pdf>

⁷ $\chi^2=102.004$, $df=1$, $p<.001$ phi .45



I like being in care, it makes me feel safe. 8-10yrs

All carers should be reassessed because they can be abusive to children, and I think it should be easier to get hold of a social worker.

11-18yrs

I am more settled now I am living with a family friend rather than in foster care. 11-18yrs

Bedrooms

Children and young people who helped create the surveys felt that their bedroom was important, as it provided a safe place to sleep and keep personal possessions, offered some privacy in busy homes, and provided a space where children could stamp their own identities and style on their room through posters, toys etc.

Compared to children and young people in foster care there was a larger percentage of those in kinship care who disliked their bedrooms: 8% in kinship foster care v 5% in unrelated foster care.⁸



Dislike seemed to be because bedrooms were shared, and homes were overcrowded. For example, children and young people wrote:

I would like to have my own bedroom and wardrobe because my clothes get thrown out and my sister messes up the room. 8-10yrs

⁸ $\chi^2= 9.960, df1, p<.002$

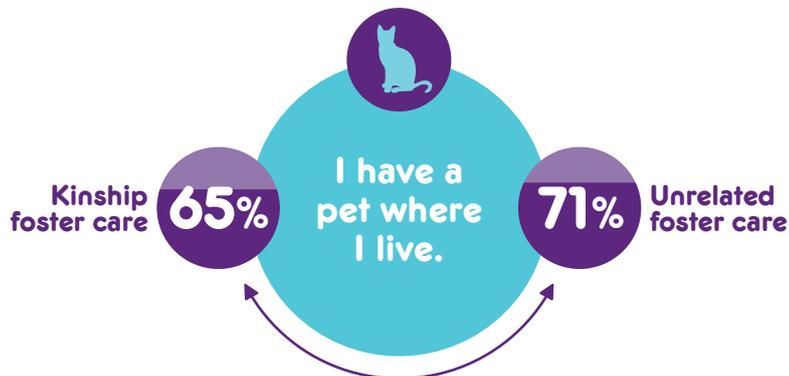
I'd like a bigger house as I don't have a bedroom and I have to share it with my nephews who are 8 and 5 so it is very overcrowded. 11-18yrs

I would like a house. There is not much space. I am sleeping in the living room and don't even have my own bedroom. 11-18yrs (actual age 13yrs)

Pets

Pets provide an opportunity to have some comfort and to build trust. Carers can use the experience of taking care of a pet to begin conversations about taking care of others and improving self-care. Children who helped developed the surveys described how they could speak in confidence to a pet and that pets were always happy to see them.⁹

Lack of space may also be why fewer children and young people (65%) in kinship foster care had a pet where they lived compared to 71% in unrelated foster care.¹⁰



⁹ Wood, M., & Selwyn, J. (2017). Looked after children and young people's views on what matters to their subjective well-being. *Adoption and Fostering*, 41(1), 20-34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308575916686034>

¹⁰ $\chi^2=13.444$, $df1$, $p<.002$



Relationships



Life is great with my granddad and grandmother. They're so kind, give us all the help we need and all the support we need. They're just really ace! I am so lucky to have someone like them in my life!!!

11-18yrs



The survey includes questions about children's relationships with their carers, their families, social workers, and friendships.

Relationship with carers

All age groups have a question that asks whether they trust their carers. In addition, children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) are asked about whether they feel carers notice their feelings and 11-18yrs are asked how often they confide in carers and whether they feel that they are trusted.

Trust

Having loving and caring relationships with primary caregivers is important for all children's healthy development, Children and young people in care need their caregivers to provide the same caring relationships.¹¹

Nearly all (98%) of the youngest children (4-7yrs) responded that they 'always/most of the time' trusted their carers, as did 89% of those aged 8-10yrs and 87% of 11-18yrs.



¹¹ University of Bristol & Coram Voice (2015) *Children and Young People's Views on Being in Care A Literature Review*. <https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Childrens-views-lit-review-FINAL-2.pdf>

Most young people (93%) also felt that the trust was reciprocal, and they were trusted by their carers. Children and young people in unrelated foster care gave similar responses about feeling trusted. Children in kinship care wrote:

I draw beautiful pictures for nan and grandad. They really take care of me a lot. They bring the chocolate circles upstairs. 4-7yrs

I love my auntie so much. She has good toys. I like living with her! 4-7yrs

Carers noticing feelings

Recovery from trauma and/or maltreatment is supported when carers can be mindful of how children are feeling.

A survey question asks children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) if they think that their carers notice how they are feeling. The majority (>90%) did feel that their carers were sensitive to their feelings with 6%-9% reporting that they 'hardly ever' or 'never' felt that their carers noticed. Feeling that carers did not recognise how young people were feeling was associated with a lack of trust in carers.¹²

Nanny and Grandad help me with my worries, and they know when I'm sad. 8-10yrs

I want people to listen to how I feel. 11-18yrs

Confiding

Positive and supportive relationships, particularly with friends and family, including having someone to talk to and rely on have been consistently stated as children's top priority to have a happy life.¹³ The Understanding Society survey asks young people in the general population aged 10-15yrs, 'How often do you talk to your parents about things that matter?' 71% of these 10-15 year olds reported talking to their mothers and/or fathers at least once a week.¹⁴

¹² $\chi^2 = 65.817$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$ phi.370

¹³ ONS (2018) Children's well-being measures. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/childrenswellbeingmeasures>

¹⁴ University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, NatCen Social Research, Kantar Public. (2020). Understanding Society: Waves 9, 2017-18 UK Data Service. SN: 6614, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-14>. n=2,610 Age range 10-15yrs



When asked, 'How often do you talk to the adults you live with about things that matter?' the majority of young people (71%) in kinship foster care confided regularly and at least weekly.

- ▶ 71% of young people responded that they confided 'most days/more than once a week'; the same proportion as their peers in the general population¹⁵, and significantly more than 64% of young people in unrelated foster care.¹⁶



Relationship with carers

Family is important to all children but, unlike children living with their parents, those in care have contact/family time plans that set out who, where and how often children see their relatives or other important people in their lives. Looked after children and young people who helped create the surveys identified satisfaction with these arrangements as a key indicator of 'feeling good' about their relationships.

I see my mum once a week and my dad once a month, but I would rather see my dad more than my mum. 8-10yrs

Satisfaction with the frequency of seeing relatives

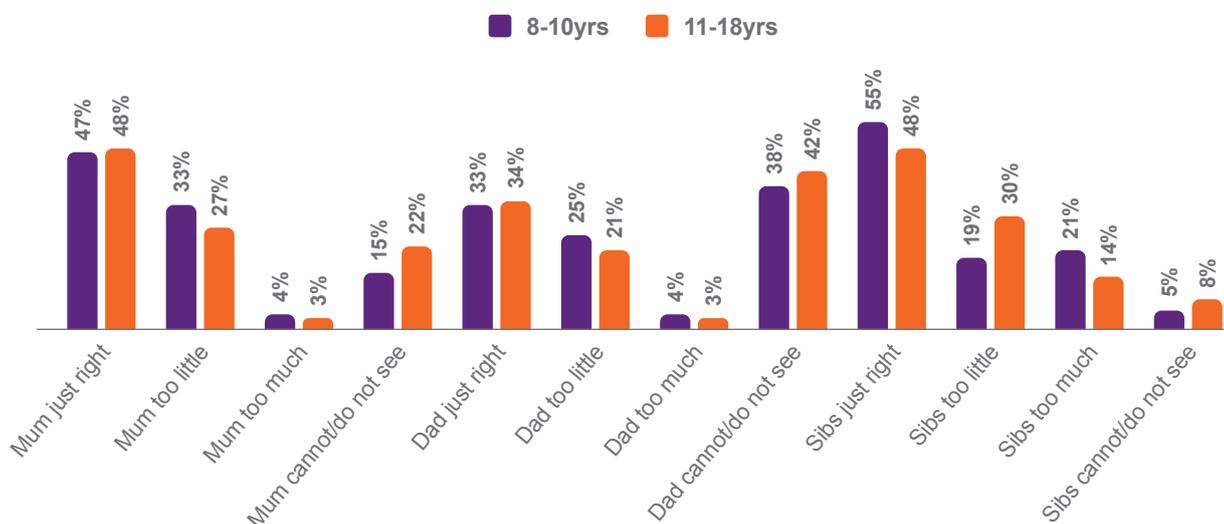
Children and young people aged 8-18yrs were asked whether they were happy with how often they saw their mum, dad, and siblings (Figure 4). Children aged 4-7yrs were not asked questions on contact, although some wrote about how much they missed their parents in response to the final question, 'Is there anything else you would like to say?' For example writing,

I feel sad about being at Nanny's house because I miss Daddy. 4-7yrs

¹⁵ Data used University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, NatCen Social Research, Kantar Public. (2020). *Understanding Society: Waves 9, 2017-18* UK Data Service. SN: 6614, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-14>.

¹⁶ $\chi^2= 5.035$, $df=1$, $p<.03$

Figure 4: Satisfaction with the frequency of family contact



In comparison with young people (11-18yrs) in unrelated foster care, a larger percentage of young people in kinship care reported feeling that their contact arrangements were 'just right' with their mothers, fathers and siblings. The difference was statistically significant for contact with mothers and fathers.¹⁷



There was also a small but significant difference¹⁸ in the proportions (4%) in kinship foster care feeling that they saw their mothers or fathers 'too much' compared with the 2% in unrelated foster care wanting less contact. For example, writing:

I really hate having to see Mum and I just pretend for her that I like it. 8-10yrs

¹⁷ The difference was statistically significant for mothers $\chi^2=37.869$, df_4 , $p<.001$ and fathers $\chi^2=40.118$, df_4 , $p<.001$

¹⁸ $\chi^2 = 7.004$ df_1 , $p<.01$



I don't want to see my parents until they stop taking drugs, but they come round to my house. 11-18yrs

- ▶ There were significantly more children (91%) and young people (87%) in kinship care having contact with at least one of their parents compared with children (87%) and young people (71%) in unrelated foster care.

Children and young people with no contact

- ▶ More than one in ten (13%) had no contact with either parent in comparison with 29% of young people (11-18yrs) in foster care.¹⁹
- ▶ About a third of children and young people in kinship care had no contact with their fathers and about one in five had no contact with their mothers.
- ▶ 9% of young people (11-16yrs) recorded that their fathers had passed away and 6% their mothers: a similar percentage as reported by those in unrelated foster care. In comparison, 1% of children in the general population experience the death of their mothers under the age of 16 years old.²⁰ There are no available statistics on the proportion of peers experiencing the death of fathers.



Comments on contact

When contact was going well, children and young people in kinship care wrote,

I have just the right amount of time. I FaceTime my mum and dad most nights. 8-10yrs

It is fun and makes me happy. 11-18yrs

¹⁹ $\chi^2 = 50.700$, $df1$, $p < .001$

²⁰ ONS (2019) Children aged under 16 years who have experienced the death of their mother. Office for National Statistics <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/childrenagedunder16yearswhohaveexperiencedthedeathoftheirmother>

Many comments were asking for more frequent contact with specific members of their family.

I want to see daddy 4 days a week. I do not want to see mummy. 8-10yrs

I would like to see my mum more often as I love her. 8-10yrs

Children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) in kinship foster care wrote about the reasons for the lack of contact. Children wrote that their parents did not turn up, while young people more frequently wrote that they had chosen not to see their parents, or they felt that their parents had made the decision not to have contact with them. They wrote:

My mummy doesn't come on time. I see one of my sisters on Saturdays. 8-10yrs

I choose not to speak to my father and don't want contact with either my mother or father. 11-18yrs

I have never had contact with my mother, as she has never bothered. 11-18yrs

Children and young people also wanted more information on their fathers, for example writing:

I want to see dad more. I have only seen him once when I went to the opticians. 8-10yrs

I would like to be able to see mum and would like to know who my father is. 11-18yrs

Children and young people wrote about seeing their siblings 'too much' because they lived with them, had to share bedrooms, or found them annoying:

I would change the fact that if you live with a younger sibling, they will talk for the both of you and you don't get much of a say. 11-18yrs

Young people who thought they saw other siblings 'too little' described changes in their parent's relationships such as separations and difficult stepfamily relationships making contact difficult. For example, there were comments that one side of their family prevented contact with the other. There were also comments that younger siblings had been adopted without either a contact plan in place or a very limited plan.



My siblings are adopted so I only see them once a year. 8-10yrs

I'm happy that I can see mum whenever. Don't see siblings on Dad's side. 8-10yrs

I don't see my sister anymore and haven't since 2018 and it was on her dad's terms. 11-18yrs

Friends

Friendships are important for all children and the capacity to make and sustain friendships is a protective factor. Friendships provide a source of comfort and support and are particularly important during adolescence. Conversely, a lack of friendships is associated with loneliness, social isolation, anxiety, and a myriad of adverse physical, psychological, social, and mental health outcomes during adolescence and adulthood.²¹

Most kinship children and young people (95%) had at least one good friend: a slightly larger percentage compared with those in unrelated foster care (92%) but a smaller percentage than children aged 10-15yrs (97.5%) in the general population.²²



Associated with a lack of friends were young people who felt they could not do the same as their peers,²³ had a poor relationship with their carers,²⁴ disliked school,²⁵ or did not take part in hobbies or activities outside school.²⁶

²¹ Holder, M. D., & Coleman, B. (2015) *Children's friendships and positive well-being*. In M. Demir (Ed.) *Friendship and happiness: Across the life-span and cultures*.(p. 81–97). Springer Science

²² University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, NatCen Social Research, Kantar Public. (2020). *Understanding Society: Waves 9, 2017-18 UK Data Service*. SN: 6614, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-14> n=2,764

²³ $\chi^2=47.995$, df1, $p<0.001$ phi .312

²⁴ Poor relationships - young people who lacked trust in their carer and felt mistrusted $\chi^2 =10.648$ df1, $p<.001$ phi .148

²⁵ $\chi^2 =5.935$, df1, $p<0.02$ phi .109

²⁶ 16% of those who did not take part in activities also did not have a good friend $\chi^2=10.157$, df1, $p<.001$ phi .144

I would like to meet others that have the same thing going on. I would like to keep a journal about what's going on and what's happened and about how I'm feeling. 8-10yrs

Everything is better. I have lots of friends. 8-10yrs

Having friends over. See my friends more and be treated like a 13-year-old and go out. 11-18yrs

Relationship with social workers

Being able to trust workers was one of the most important things identified by young people who helped develop the surveys. Young people stressed the importance of social workers taking the time to get to know them, so that young people felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings with their workers.²⁷

I would change the fact that if you live with a younger sibling, they will talk for the both of you and you don't get much of a say. 11-18yrs

Children and young people were asked several questions about their relationship with their social workers. All were asked if they knew who their social worker was and if they trusted them. Children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) were asked if they knew they could ask to speak to their workers in private. Only young people 11-18yrs were asked how many social workers they had had in the previous 12 months and whether they found it easy to get in touch with them.

Knowing social workers

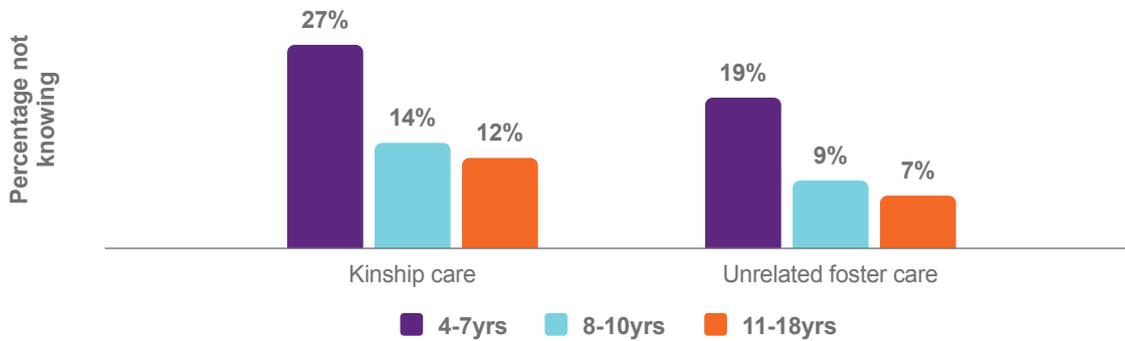
More than one in four kinship children (4-7yrs) and more than one in ten (8-10yrs and 11-18yrs) did not know who their social worker was. For every age group, fewer knew who their social worker was compared with those in unrelated foster care.²⁸

²⁷ Wood M. and Selwyn J. (2017) Looked after children and young people's views on what matters to their subjective well-being. *Adoption & Fostering* Vol. 41(1) 20–34 <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:7d9d9db9-8eb5-4ca4-a3fc-698d30fb4db4>

²⁸ $\chi^2 = 17.288$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$



Figure 5: The percentage of children and young people who did not know their social worker



Changes in social workers

Just like young people in unrelated foster care, during the year only a third (33%) of young people (11-18yrs) in kinship care had a single social worker, 36% had two workers and 28% had three or more. There was a slightly larger percentage (3%) of kinship young people (11-18yrs) who recorded that they had not had a social worker all year compared with 1% in foster care. Perhaps, young people were unaware of the identity of their workers because of the many changes or perhaps only a supervising social worker was visiting. Some comments from young people revealed that they thought the social worker who visited was there to support their relative and not them. One in seven (14%) reported that they 'hardly ever' or 'never' were able to contact their worker.

I don't feel like she's my social worker, as my Nan is the one who contacts her. 11-18yrs

I don't really know my social worker and I don't have her number. 11-18yrs

Of those who knew who their social worker was, the majority (86%) trusted them.

My social worker is so so so good. 11-18yrs

Some of the social workers can be so rude!! It needs to be sorted but my social worker [name]-she's amazing they should be more like her! 11-18yrs

But the detrimental effect of changes in social workers was mentioned.

I miss my last social worker. 4-7yrs

Right to speak to the social worker alone

Children and young people have a right to ask to speak to their social worker in private. Most (96%) of the young people (11-18yrs) were aware of the right but the percentage responding positively decreased for those aged 8-10yrs. Nearly one in six children (17%) were unaware, a similar response as provided by those living with unrelated foster carers.

Having a say



I feel that the things I say and tell my social worker never seem to be listened to and dealt with.

11-18yrs



Well-being and children's rights are closely linked. Participation rights are set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1991). All the UNCRC rights are interlinked but two articles emphasise participation rights. Article 12 is the right of children to have their views given due weight in all decisions that affect them depending on age and maturity and Article 13 is the right to information to inform those decisions. Having the relevant information is "a prerequisite for the effective realisation of the right to express views" (UN 2009, para 8.1). Participation is not only an entitlement but also is known to support good mental health and well-being. Young people who feel they can exert some control over a situation have fewer emotional problems and better self-regulation compared with peers who feel they have no say in decisions.²⁹

Feeling included in decisions

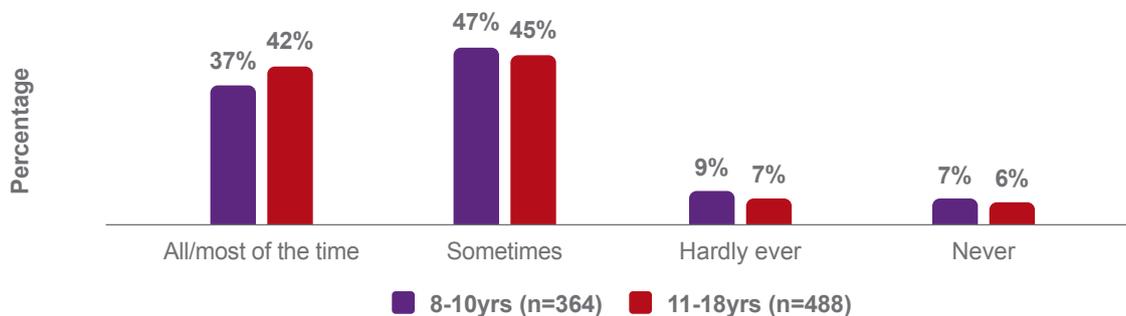
In our surveys, children aged 8-10yrs and young people aged 11-18yrs were asked if they felt included in the decisions that social workers made about their lives and space was also left for comments. They were also asked if they understood why they were in care. As would be expected more older young people (42%) aged 11-18yrs felt included 'most of the time' compared with children (37%) aged 8-10yrs (Figure 6). There were similar proportions reported by age for those in foster care.

- ▶ More than one in ten young people and one in six children aged 8-10yrs 'hardly ever' or 'never' felt included in social workers' decision-making about their lives.
- ▶ Just over half (52%) of children (4-7yrs), 36% of 8-10yrs and 20% of young people (11-18yrs) did not have a full understanding of why they were in care. Without information, it is difficult for participation rights to be met.

²⁹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) General comment No 12. The right of the child to be heard. Geneva United Nations. Caprara, G. V., Steca, P., Gerbino, M., Paciello, M., and Vecchio, G. M. (2006). Looking for adolescents' well-being: self-efficacy beliefs as determinants of positive thinking and happiness. *Epidemiol. Psychiatr. Sci.* 15, 30–43.



Figure 6: Feeling involved in decision-making



There were two main themes in the text comments from children and young people:

- wanting to be asked and included in decisions that were made about their lives and especially contact with their parents
- feeling that their views were not taken seriously.

She [social worker] just tells me! 8-10yrs

Sometimes they need to include me more - don't just listen to my point of view and go off and do something completely different. 11-18yrs

My social worker always goes to my Auntie before talking to me. 11-18yrs

Feel like I'm of an age where I could get told what's going on a bit more. 11-18yrs

Understanding the reasons for being in care

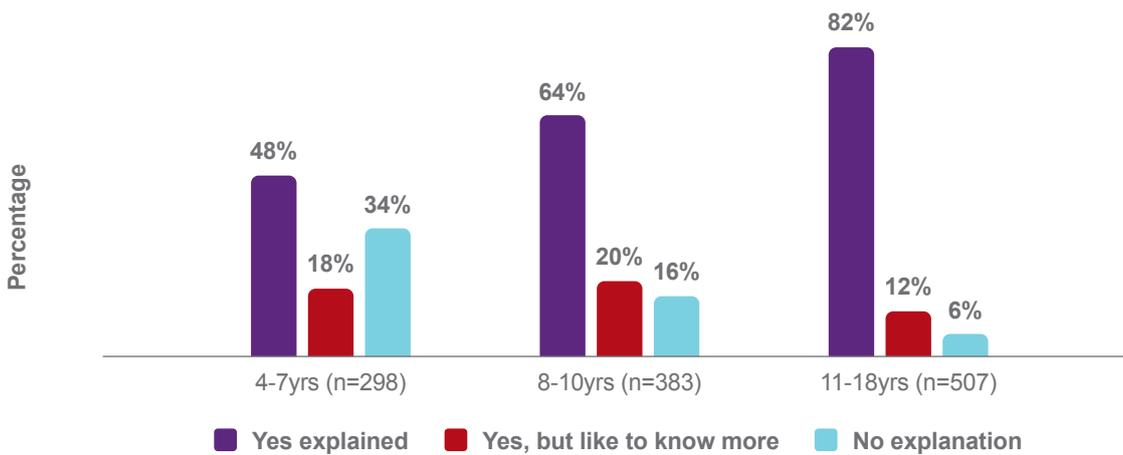
I should be told everything about what they know because I have the right to know. 11-18yrs

Our previous analysis³⁰ highlighted the importance of having a good understanding of the reasons for being in care and the association with better well-being. Without a good understanding of why they are looked after, it is difficult for children and young people to participate in decisions about their care or to feel settled.

³⁰ Staines J and Selwyn J (2020) "I wish someone would explain why I am in care": The impact of children and young people's lack of understanding of why they are in out-of-home care on their well-being and felt security. *Child & Family Social Work*. 25, 97-106.

All the children and young people were asked if an adult had explained why they were in care. Less than half (48%) of the youngest children felt they understood as much as they wanted to (Figure 7). While understanding did increase with age, about one in five young people (11-18yrs) were dissatisfied with the information they had been given. The distribution of responses was similar to those in unrelated foster care.

Figure 7: Children and young people’s understanding of why they were in care



Young people wrote:

I would like the social worker to talk to me more specifically about the length of time I will be in care. Nobody has ever told me. 11-18yrs

I don't think I've ever had a good enough explanation from social workers about why I am in care. It took my nan to explain to me which I feel is poor. 11-18yrs



Opportunities

I like where I live because I get to play outside, and I get to go to the park.

4-7yrs

Children and young people were asked about the opportunities they had outside school to play or take part in activities and visit green/natural spaces. Young people (11-18yrs) were also asked if they had access to the internet at home, were able to do the same sorts of things as their friends and were able to learn/practise life skills such as cooking and washing. The majority of young people (11-18yrs)

- ▶ could connect to the internet from home (95%),
- ▶ took part in activities and hobbies outside school (91%),
- ▶ had spent time outdoors in green spaces in the past week (89%),
- ▶ were able to do the same things as their friends (89%) and
- ▶ were given opportunities (87%) to learn life skills such as cooking and washing clothes.

Although there was little difference between the proportions of young people in kinship and unrelated foster care feeling that they were given opportunities, it was only kinship young people who wrote about the lack of money in their kinship families:

There is not a lot of money to go on holidays ... I would really like to have a bike so I can go to places and see my town. 11-18yrs

The prospect of funding being taken away from grandparents is worrying, as it would mean [young person] would have to leave his current school.

11-18yrs survey completed by an adult helping the young person to express his wishes

Younger children were asked if they had fun at the weekends and opportunities to be outdoors,

- ▶ 98% of those aged 4-7yrs and those aged 8-10yrs did have fun at the weekends 'most of the time' or 'sometimes,'
- ▶ 86% of children (8-10yrs) had been outdoors in the natural environment at least once during the week.

In response to a question asking what would make care better, a couple of children (8-10yrs) wrote about wanting to be more active for example:

Going out and doing things at the weekend a lot more instead of staying home all the time. 8-10yrs

Education

All the children and young people were asked if they liked school; a question that is also asked in general population surveys of young people aged 11-15yrs. Children 8-10yrs and young people (11-15yrs) were asked about bullying and whether they felt their carers were interested in what they did at school. Their responses were similar to those cared for in unrelated foster care. There were very few written comments about schools. The few provided either asked for a change of school because of bullying or a school closer to where they lived because of long car journeys.

Liking school

Liking school has been identified as a protective factor against bullying, risk-taking and substance misuse. Students who dislike school or who do not feel connected to it are more likely to fail academically, leave education early, and have mental health problems.³¹

The vast majority of children did like school: 95% of 4-7yrs, 88% of 8-10yrs and 81% of those aged 11-15yrs. A larger proportion (81%) of young people liked school 'a lot' / 'a bit' compared with 70% of their peers of the same age in the general population.³²



³¹ Inchley, J. et al (2020) *Spotlight on adolescent health and well-being: findings from the 2017/2018 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey in Europe and Canada*, World Health Organisation <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/332104>

³² http://www.hbsc.org/publications/datavisualisations/school_experiences.html



Bullying

Kinship young people reported being afraid to go to school because of bullying more frequently than those in unrelated foster care. The difference was statistically significant.³³

More than one in four children (27%) aged 8-10yrs recorded that they were 'always' or 'sometimes' afraid to go to school because of bullying. About one in four (28%) of young people (11-15yrs) in kinship carer reported fear of bullying in comparison with one in five (20%) in unrelated foster care and one in six (17%) of their peers (age 10-15yrs) in the general population.³⁴



If children and young people indicated that they were fearful of bullying, a follow-up question asked if they felt they got support from an adult: 91% of children and 78% of young people responded that they were supported. In response to a question about what would make care better, there were a few requests to change schools because of bullying.

Move school because of bullying. 11-18yrs

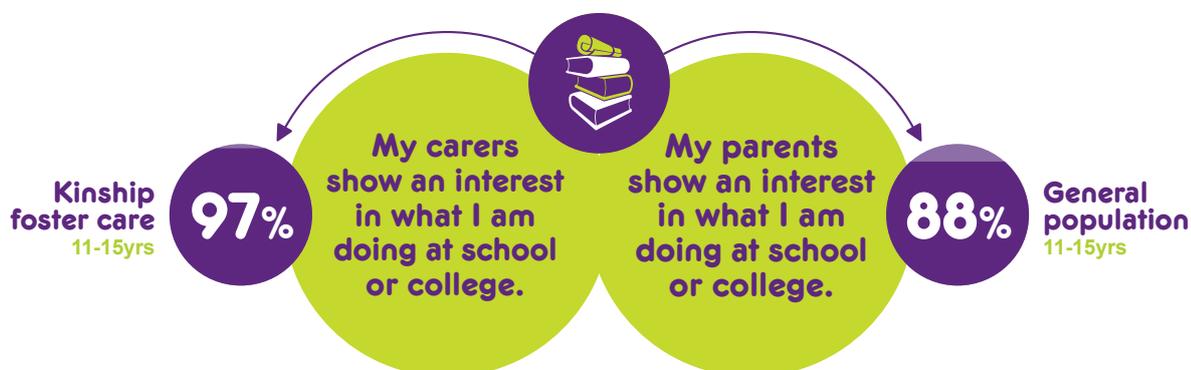
Carers' interest in education

Children and young people were asked if their carers were interested in what they did at school. Only 3% of kinship children and young people (11-15yrs) felt that their carers were 'hardly ever'/'never' interested and a similar response to those in unrelated foster care. Most (97%) responded 'always' or 'sometimes': a larger proportion than 88% of their peers (11-15yrs) report in the general population.³⁵

³³ $\chi^2 = 5.745$, $df = 1$, $p < .017$, $\phi = 0.062$

³⁴ DfE (2018) *Bullying in England April 2013 to March 2018: Analysis on 10-15 year olds from the Crime Survey for England and Wales* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bullying-in-england-april-2013-to-march-2018>. The question given to peers is slightly different, asking if the young person has been afraid or upset by bullying in the previous year.

³⁵ Brooks, F. et. al (2020), *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC): World Health Organization Collaborative Cross National Study: Findings from the 2018 HBSC study for England*. vol. MCC0544/DS/01-20, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield. <http://hbscengland.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/HBSC-England-National-Report-2020.pdf>



Being trusted in school

Children who helped develop the surveys told us how important it was for them to be trusted by teachers in school. They complained that they were never 'chosen' to show visitors around the school or carry a message for a staff member.

In the survey those aged 8-10yrs were asked if they got a chance to help the teacher: 17% of kinship foster children responded negatively. Not being given those opportunities was statistically associated with disliking school.³⁶

³⁶ $\chi^2 = 11.863$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$ phi.181



Stigma



I don't like people saying I'm in care, as I count it as just living with grandparents.

11-18yrs



Children in care often experience stigma and they worry about being labelled or judged if their care background is known.³⁷

Fewer (8%) young people (11-18yrs) in kinship foster care felt that adults did things that made them feel embarrassed compared with those in unrelated foster care (12%).



However, the question provoked the strongest comments from those in kinship care and many were angry that were referred to as 'looked after children' when living with relatives. They wrote:

I would like people to stop saying I'm in care because I am living with my nan and my grandad. Are they strangers that have offered to look after me? They are family so I would highly recommend people saying, "I live with my nan and my grandad" not "You are in care" BECAUSE IT VEXES ME! 11-18yrs

Just like those in unrelated foster care, there were also complaints of meetings and visits that did not respect young people's privacy and which identified young people as being in care.

Lots of visits to the house, people wearing badges. Friends ask why I'm with a social worker and I find it hard to explain. 11-18yrs

³⁶ Selwyn, J et al (2015) *Children's Views on Being in Care: A literature review* Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies/Coram Voice
Baker, C. (2017) *Care leavers views on their transition to adulthood: A rapid review of the evidence.* Coram Voice

Some kinship carers seemed to have little delegated authority, as children and young people complained about not being able to have sleepovers without completed police checks and wrote:

I just want to be able to sleep at a friend's house without having police checks. 8-10yrs

Simple things like not being able to book a holiday without the social worker's approval makes me not feel like a regular family. 11-18yrs



Well-being



My life is getting better because of my sister and brother-in-law.

11-18yrs



Trusted adults

Research on the recovery of children who experienced traumatic events has highlighted the protective role of a trusted adult.³⁸ Having a trusted adult is also the most important single factor to prevent children from (re)abuse. The children and young people who helped co-produce the Your Life, Your Care surveys thought that having a trusted adult was very important for their well-being. They described a trusted adult as someone dependable, reliable, and who would not give up on them.

The majority (97%) of kinship children aged 8-10yrs and young people (95%) felt they had a trusted adult in their lives: a statistically significantly larger proportion than reported by those aged 11-18yrs in unrelated foster care (92%).³⁹

Life getting better

It has made my life a lot better since being in care and I've changed a lot for the better in care. 11-18yrs

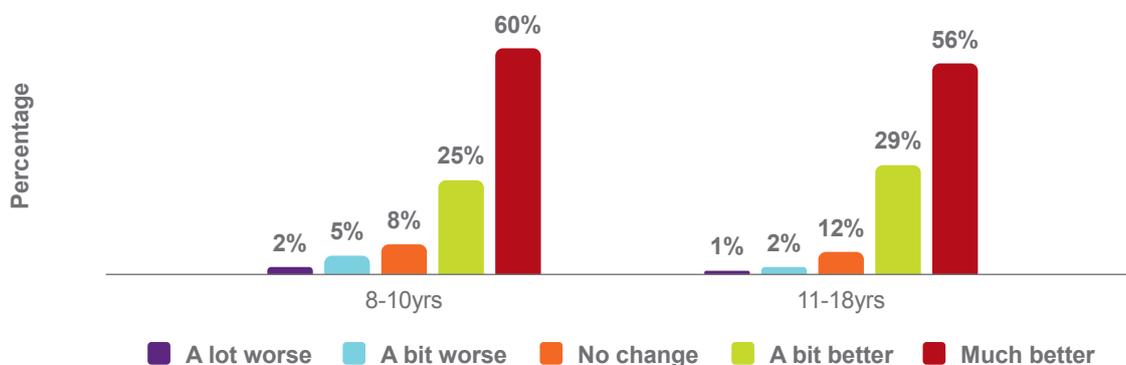
I am happier and having a better life now. 11-18yrs

About 84% of children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) felt their lives were getting better (Figure 8).

³⁸ Pringle, J., Whitehead, R., Milne, D. et al. (2019) The relationship between a trusted adult and adolescent outcomes: http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2325/the-relationship-between-a-trusted-adult-and-adolescent-health-outcomes_6588.pdf

³⁹ $\chi^2 = 4.400$ df1, $p < .034$

Figure 8: Is life improving?



Although few reported that their lives were not getting better, slightly more than one in ten (11%) reported that they felt pessimistic about their futures.

Worries

Children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) were asked if they worried about their feelings or behaviour and if they did worry whether they were being supported. More than half (55%) worried 'all /most of the time' or 'sometimes': 90% of children and 77% of young people felt supported. Children and young people wrote about their fears of their carers dying, the lack of mental health services and being separated from siblings.

I don't understand why my mum can't keep me safe. I think my Grandmother will die soon because she is old. I miss them. 8-10yrs

Make therapy and mental health help more readily available. I've been told I'm on the list for therapy. I've also been told it's unlikely I will ever get seen so I have to figure something out on my own. 11-18yrs

I feel upset most of the time because my brother is the only one who doesn't live with us, and I was the closest one to him. 11-18yrs

Happiness with appearance

Associated with young people worrying were their negative feelings about how they looked.⁴⁰ Overall, and similar to those in unrelated foster care, 16% of young people felt unhappy with their appearance in comparison with 14% in the general population.⁴¹ More girls (24%) felt unhappy with their appearance in comparison with boys (7%)⁴²: a similar sex difference as reported in the looked after and general populations.

⁴⁰ $\chi^2=14.231$, $df1$, $p<.001$ phi $-.260$

⁴¹ The Children's Society (2021) 'The Good Childhood Report', London, The Children's Society.

⁴² $\chi^2= 10.803$, $df1$, $p<.001$ phi $.230$



Children and young people with low well-being

Age 4-7yrs

The children's responses were examined across the whole survey. Five children (2%) aged 4-7yrs gave negative answers to many questions.

- ▶ These children did not feel safe or settled where they were living.
- ▶ Three of the five felt they didn't have fun at the weekends, 'never' trusted their carers and felt their carers didn't notice how they were feeling.
- ▶ Two of the five did not have a good friend.

The children commented:

I just want someone to look after me properly. Properly means look after me more. 4-7yrs

It's really hard. 4-7yrs

I want to live at Mummy's house. 4-7yrs

Age 8-10yrs

In the same way, the responses to all the questions were considered for children aged 8-10yrs. Seven children (2%) gave many negative answers.

- ▶ These children worried about their feelings or behaviour 'all the time' and were also afraid of school because of bullying 'all the time'.
- ▶ Six of the seven did not know who their social worker was, did not know they could speak privately with their social worker, and did not feel included in decisions about their lives.
- ▶ Two of the seven felt they did not have a trusted adult in their lives, mistrusted their carers, and did not have a good friend.

Children with low well-being when asked, 'Is there anything else you would like to say?' wrote:

I personally, think there should be no such thing as social care. 8-10yrs

To let Mum see us a bit more. To be able to let my feelings out. 8-10yrs

To be in care sooner. 8-10yrs

I would like a better social worker. I would like Nana to get more money for me. 8-10yrs

Young people 11-18yrs

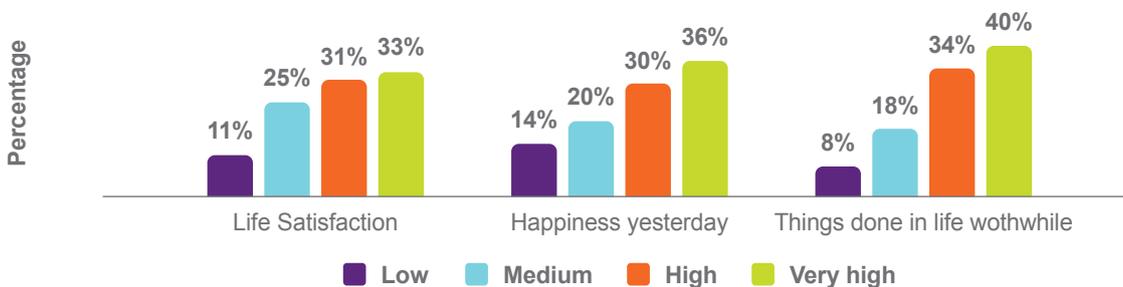
The Children’s Society has been collecting and reporting on young people’s well-being since 2005. Their findings on young people aged 10-15yrs are incorporated into the Office for National Statistics (ONS) dataset on the well-being of the child population.⁴³

Our survey for young people (11-18yrs) includes three questions that are also reported by the ONS concerning the well-being of children in the general population. The questions all use 0-10 scales with zero being the lowest point and ask:

- a) Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- b) How happy did you feel yesterday?
- c) Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

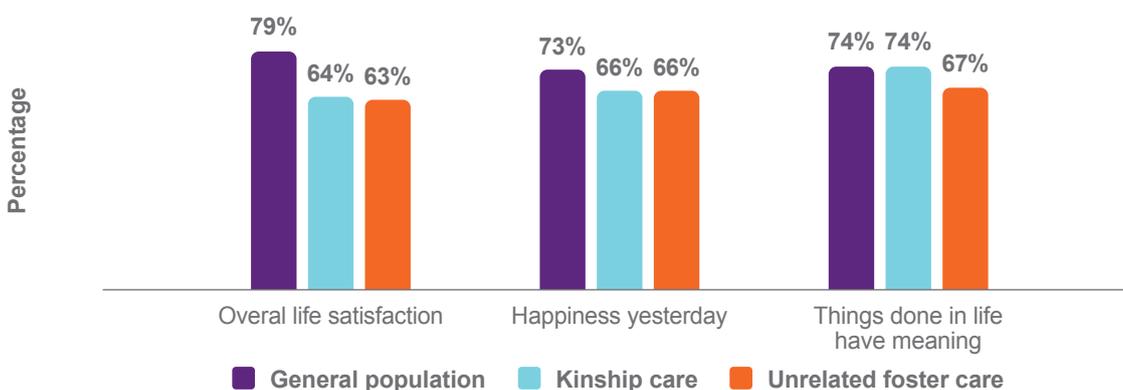
The ONS categorises the responses as 0-4 low, 5-6 medium, 7-8 high and 9-10 very high. Figure 9 shows that the majority of young people in kinship care rated themselves as ‘high’ or ‘very high’ on each of the scales.

Figure 9: Young people’s self-ratings on the ONS well-being scales ages 11-18yrs



To compare kinship young people with the available data from their peers in the general population, those aged 11-15yrs were selected.⁴⁴

Figure 10: Self-ratings of 7-10 (high and very high) on the ONS personal well-being scales



⁴³ ONS (2018) Children’s well-being measures. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/childrenswellbeingmeasures>

⁴⁴ Ibid

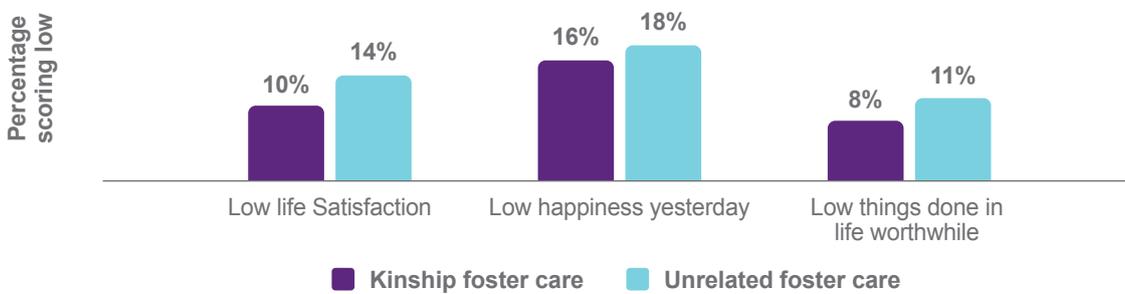


The responses of those in unrelated foster care were similar to those in kinship foster care. Importantly, however, on the scale of feeling that things done in life were worthwhile, the same percentage (74%) in kinship care rated themselves highly as did their peers in the general population and significantly more than young people (67%) in foster care.⁴⁵

Self-ratings of 0-4 on the ONS personal well-being scales

At the bottom end of each of the three scales, there were fewer young people in kinship foster care rating themselves as 'low' compared with those in unrelated foster care (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Low ratings (0-4) on the ONS well-being scales: young people (11-15yrs) in kinship and unrelated foster care



To consider which of the young people might have low well-being, those who had rated themselves low (0-4) on any two of four scales (life satisfaction, happiness yesterday, things done in life have meaning, positivity about the future) were selected.

While the majority of young people (89%) rated themselves as having moderate to high well-being, just over one in ten young people (11%) in kinship care rated themselves as 'low' on two or more of the scales suggesting they had low well-being.

Fewer young people rated themselves as 'low' on two or more scales compared with those in unrelated foster care (11% in kinship care compared with 14% in foster care).



⁴⁵ $\chi^2 = 7.565, df1, p < .02$

Unlike previous statistical regression models produced for the whole sample⁴⁶, where there were many indicators associated with low well-being there were only three⁴⁷ that were predictive of low well-being for young people in kinship care (Figure 11). The odds of low well-being were increased by:

- ▶ 12 times for young people who did not like their appearance compared with those who did
- ▶ 7 times for young people who did not feel settled compared with those who felt settled
- ▶ 2 times for young people who did not talk to their carers regularly compared with those who did.

Table 12: Regression model of low well-being for young people 11-18yrs

Indicator	Responses	Odds ratio Exp (b)	Sig
Happiness with appearance	Moderate to high happiness (Ref) Low happiness with appearance	11.69	.001
Feeling settled in placement	Always/most of the time (Reference category) Sometimes/Hardly ever/Never	6.69	.001
Talking with carers about things that matter	At least weekly (Ref) Hardly ever/never	2.20	.100

Nearly twice as many girls had low well-being compared with boys. Being female and happiness with appearance were correlated.⁴⁸ Young people with low well-being wrote:

It's awful. You feel isolated from others just because you don't live with your parents, or because you can't do the same things, quite frankly it all seems very unfair from my perspective. It's also frustrating, being constantly monitored, and not having a say in one's own life. It's also a lot more difficult to talk to people and adults being in care, especially adults in authority, like doctors. 11-18yrs

It's pretty miserable experience honestly, not much you can do about it. 11-18yrs

⁴⁶ Selwyn, J & Briheim-Crookall, L (2022) 10,000 Voices: the views of children in care on their well-being, Coram Voice and Rees Centre, University of Oxford. <https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/10091/>

⁴⁷ The binary logistic regression model was statistically significant $\chi^2 = 73.097$ df 3 $p < .001$.

⁴⁸ $p < .001$ $f_{pb} .268$



Suggestions for improving their care experience

Young people were also asked 'What would make care better?' Some responded that nothing needed to change and that they were very happy. There were many requests "to be listened to" and "not be in care" and for less frequent changes of social workers. They were also individual responses such as: "If I could change my name", "more board games", and "teachers' attitudes so they understood how my past affects me."

While many were clear that they wanted to remain with their carers, others wanted to return to their parents, for contact to increase and some wanted siblings to join them.

I want to stay with my nan. 11-18yrs

Having my Mum visit. I would be able to see that she is alright. 11-18yrs

I live with my grandparents, but I would want to live with my mum. 11-18yrs

Some wrote about wanting more social work support for themselves, "for my social worker to listen to me and help with my problems" ... "changing my attitude towards my Nan and Grandad." Others wanted more help for their carers, including being rehoused and more financial and emotional support:

More help for my auntie and uncle because they sometimes get stressed and that can sometimes affect how we feel, but I still love living with my auntie and uncle.. 11-18yrs

For [relative] not to work so she could be there for us all of the time and have time to care for us properly. 11-18yrs

Getting my aunt, a larger house so I can have my own room. 11-18yrs

Better managers in the council who think about the kids and share the money out with all of them, and don't give some more than others. 11-18yrs

A bigger bed, a new mum, a new phone, a home, baccy, more support dealing with my mum. 11-18yrs

Summary

Currently, over a quarter of children in foster care (27%)⁴⁹ live with a relative or friend. Overall, in comparison with those in unrelated foster care, children and young people in kinship care reported that on many well-being indicators they were doing better or at least as well as those in unrelated foster care and, on some indicators the same or better than their peers in the general population.

Our evidence suggests that this can be a positive arrangement for the children that experience it and could provide opportunities to maintain contacts with important support networks, including birth families and friends. There were larger proportions in kinship care compared with those in unrelated foster care having contact with family members and who felt their contact arrangements were 'just right'. They also reported more positively on confiding in carers regularly, feeling they had a trusted adult in their lives and that things done in life were worthwhile. A slightly higher proportion reported that they had a good friend, compared with those in unrelated foster care. Perhaps living with relatives allowed them to stay closer to their existing support networks or something about the arrangement normalised and facilitated other relationships.

The majority of young people in kinship care rated themselves as having moderate to high well-being. About one in nine young people (11-18yrs) rated themselves as having low well-being in comparison with one in seven in unrelated foster care.

The kinship young people also reported more positively that the things they did in life were worthwhile. Having a sense of purpose and meaning in life is an important indicator of positive functioning and a protective factor against risky behaviours and poor psychological health among adolescents.^{50 51} It develops during adolescence as young people make sense of the world, their experiences and themselves and identify their own goals and beliefs. Perhaps young people in kinship care gave higher ratings than those in unrelated foster because their carers were more able to support young people with this key developmental task of identity formation compared with those in unrelated foster care. In comparison with peers of the same age in the general population, there was a larger percentage of those in kinship care who liked school 'a lot/a bit' and who felt their carers were interested in what they did at school. Young people in kinship talked to their carers about things that mattered just as regularly as peers growing up with parents.

However, one in four reported being afraid to go to school because of bullying in comparison with one in six of their peers. In comparison with foster care, there were larger proportions in kinship care who disliked their bedrooms and there were complaints of overcrowding. Fewer had opportunities to have a pet. While there were examples of very good relationships with social workers, relationships with social workers were complicated. Some felt the worker was only visiting to support their carer, and some did not know they had a social worker. As reported for all children in care, those in kinship care also did not know their right to speak to their social worker in private and many did not feel included in decision-making or know why they were in care.

⁴⁶ DFE (2022) Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting Year 2022
<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2022>
Overall 15% of all children looked after are living with foster carers who are relatives or friends.

⁵⁰ Brassai, L., Piko, B. F., & Steger, M. F. (2011). Meaning in life: Is it a protective factor for adolescents' psychological health? *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 18(1), 44–5

⁵¹ Krok, D. (2018) When is Meaning in Life Most Beneficial to Young People? Styles of Meaning in Life and Well-Being Among Late Adolescents. *J Adult Dev* 25, 96–106



The well-being of children in kinship foster care compared with children in unrelated foster care

Indicator	Age range	Kinship care	Unrelated foster care
I have a trusted adult	11-18yrs	95%	92%
I have a good friend	4-18yrs	95%	92%
I like my bedroom	4-18yrs	92%	95%
I have contact with at least one parent	11-18yrs	87%	71%
I know my social worker	4-18yrs	87%	92%
The things I do in life are worthwhile (rating of 7 or more out of 10)	11-15yrs	74%	67%
I talk to my carers about things that matter most days/more than once a week	11-16yrs	71%	64%
There is a pet where I live	8-18yrs	65%	71%
I see mum just the right amount	11-18yrs	48%	38%
I see my brothers and sisters just the right amount	11-18yrs	48%	45%
I see dad just the right amount	11-18yrs	34%	25%
I am afraid to go to school because of the bullying	11-15yrs	28%	20%
Overall low well-being	11-18yrs	11%	14%
Adults do things that make me embarrassed about being in care	11-18yrs	8%	12%
I see my mother/father 'too much'	11-18yrs	4%	2%
I don't have a social worker	4-18yrs	3%	1%

Recommendations

The findings show that the majority of children and young people in kinship foster care are generally very happy and have loving and trusting relationships with their carers. The findings support current guidance to give preference to suitable placements with family and friends.⁵²

However, there were a few areas where children's lives could be improved. Most of the improvements could be achieved by professionals, especially social workers, taking more time to listen and responding to children's views and concerns.

Practice recommendations for social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), and the virtual school

Having a social worker

Some children and young people did not know who their social worker was or thought the social worker was there to support their carer and not them. Looked after children in kinship foster care should have regular visits from a social worker and the opportunity to speak privately to their worker. Every child should know who their worker is, how to contact them and know how frequently they will be visited.

Bedrooms

Some young people disliked sharing a bedroom. Housing is a particular issue for kinship carers, as many are grandparents and are unable to move or alter their accommodation. Given the limitations, social workers should talk with children and young people about their concerns to consider whether there are any creative solutions. For example, whether there are ways to increase storage space e.g., bed base with drawers. Social workers should ensure that funding is provided so that every child has their own bed.

Contact plans

Contact for children in kinship care need careful planning. More children in kinship foster care felt unsafe during contact than those in unrelated foster care. Research⁵³ has highlighted how contact can be particularly difficult for kinship carers to manage. Plans should be regularly reviewed *with* children and young people and revisited during care reviews by the IRO. Plans that were appropriate at the start of the placement may need adjusting and young people may want the arrangements changed. Workers should continually listen to and involve children and young people in decisions about the arrangements to see and keep in touch with family and others who are important to them. They should also make sure that children and young people know where to turn if they are unhappy with how often they are seeing key people in their lives. This may include speaking to social workers, accessing advocacy and complaints processes. All children and young people should feel safe during contact and whenever possible have contact with the people they identify as important in their lives.

⁵² The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-care-planning-placement-and-case-review>

⁵³ Iyer P., Boddy J., Hammelsbeck R., and Lynch-Huggins S. (2020) *Contact following placement in care, adoption, or special guardianship: implications for children and young people's well-being*. <https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/resource/contact-well-being>



Understanding the reasons for kinship care

Ensure children and young people have an age-appropriate understanding of why they are living with a kinship carer. Social workers should not assume that the carer(s) have explained, as the circumstances that led to care may be difficult to acknowledge or they may feel some responsibility. Some kinship children may also choose not to question their carers or their parents (if having contact), as they wish to avoid upsetting the adults. Professionals should ask children and check whether their understanding is accurate. Carers would also benefit from advice on how to talk sensitively to children about their past and their parents' problems.

Contingency planning

Some children were also anxious about the future and were concerned that their carer might die soon leaving them alone. Social workers should work with the kinship carer(s) and the family network to create a plan for the child's care in case the kinship carer became unable to continue care. Children and young people should be reassured that the adults have planned and will keep them safe.

Bullying

There is a common assumption that kinship care is perceived by children as less stigmatising than other forms of substitute care. Yet over a quarter of the kinship children and young people in this study felt afraid to go to school because of bullying. The virtual school should work with schools so that children and staff become more aware of the needs of children in different types of substitute care.

Finance

Support kinship carers with income maximisation and ensure they receive all the benefits and allowances they are entitled to including access to free school meals and the holiday activity/food programme.⁵⁴

Policy recommendation

The Independent Care Review and many organisations have called for greater support for and use of kinship care but the focus has been on kinship care outside the care system. Greater understanding is needed of the ways kinship and unrelated foster care differ so that policy can be developed to ensure kinship foster carers and children are better supported. Children's social care policy could be developed to create greater equity between the different types of placement. For example, is there a need for settling in allowances as can be paid in adoptive placements for bedding/clothes etc? Is there local authority variation in the allowances paid to kinship foster carers and do they receive different amounts compared with unrelated carers? To develop policy there is a need for more information on local authority variation, the factors that lead to a choice of kinship foster care rather than a Special Guardianship order and children and young people's views on their care.

⁵⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>



bright spots

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