

Key Findings and
Recommendations

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

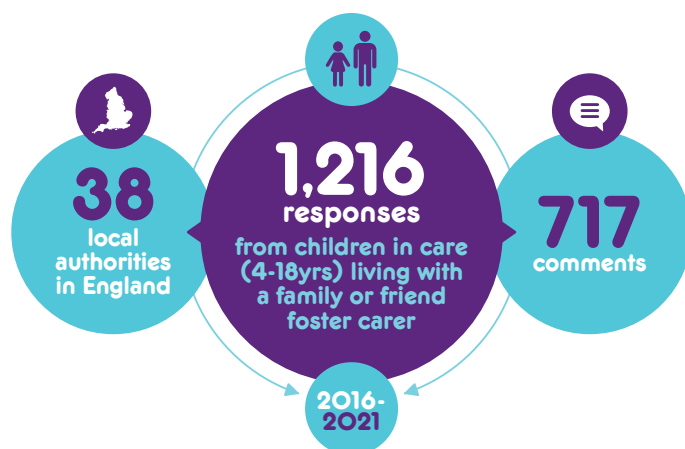
Introduction

The Bright Spots Programme is all about changing the culture of children's services and bringing children's voices to the heart of social work practice. 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). The Programme began in 2013 to understand children and young people's experience of care and what made life good.

The programme uses three online *Your Life, Your Care* surveys to capture the views of looked after children (age 4-7 years and 8-10 years) and young people (11-18 years) on their well-being.¹ The questions that make up the survey were co-produced with 140 looked after children. The important areas the children identified became the Programme's indicators of well-being. By 2021 over 10,000 voices from children in care had been gathered through the surveys.

The children completing the surveys between 2016 and 2021 were living in a range of placements including 1,216 children and young people looked after by relatives or friends in foster care. These arrangements are commonly termed 'formal kinship care'. The surveys did not identify the relationship of the child to their carer, just that they were living with a relative or friend. Throughout this report and for ease of reading, they will be referred to as children in kinship care. It should be noted that the children in formal kinship care make up only about 5% of all the children who are growing up with relatives or friends in England.²

This insight paper gives an overview of the views of children in formal kinship care and compares their experience to the 4,259 children in unrelated foster care who completed the surveys in the same period from 38 English local authorities. Where possible, it also compares their experience to peers in the general population.



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.

² Nandy S, Selwyn J, Farmer E, Vaisey P. Spotlight on Kinship Care: Using Census microdata to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK at the turn of the Twentieth century. Bristol: University of Bristol, 2011.

Which children in kinship foster care completed the surveys?



- ▶ 58% of the children were aged 4-10yrs and 42% were aged 11-18yrs.
- ▶ Nearly equal numbers were boys (594) and girls (601).
- ▶ Three-quarters self-identified as White and a quarter as Asian, Black, Mixed or of Other ethnicities.
- ▶ The majority (60%) had been in care for less than three years.
- ▶ Half of the young people 11-18yrs had had more than one placement and nearly 1 in 10 young people had experienced four or more placements before moving in with their kinship carer.

Feelings about carers and home



Relationships with carers were generally very good.

I love my nan and I never want to leave her side. 4-7yrs

- ▶ Nearly all (98%) of the youngest children (4-7yrs), 89% of 8-10yrs, and 87% of 11-18yrs trusted their carers 'always/most of the time'.

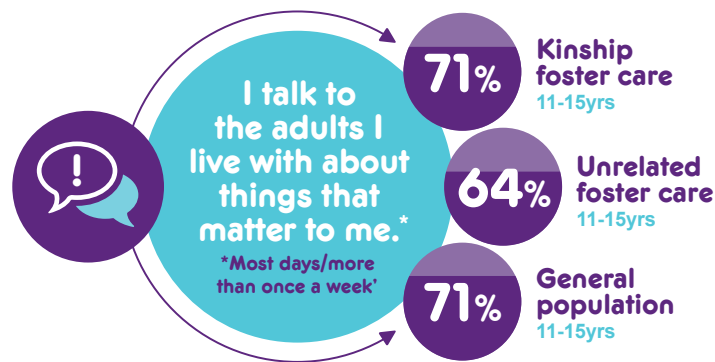
I draw beautiful pictures for nan and grandad. They really take care of me a lot. They bring the chocolate circles upstairs. 4-7yrs

- ▶ The majority of children (94%) and young people (91%) felt that their carers were sensitive to their feelings. Young people who felt their carers did not notice their feelings more frequently lacked trust in their carers.

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

- ▶ The majority (71%) of young people (11-15yrs) talked to their carers about things that mattered at least weekly: the same proportion as their peers (71%) in the general population and significantly more than the 64% in unrelated foster care.



- ▶ 92% of children and young people in kinship care 'always' felt safe in their homes and 83% felt 'always/most of the time' settled.

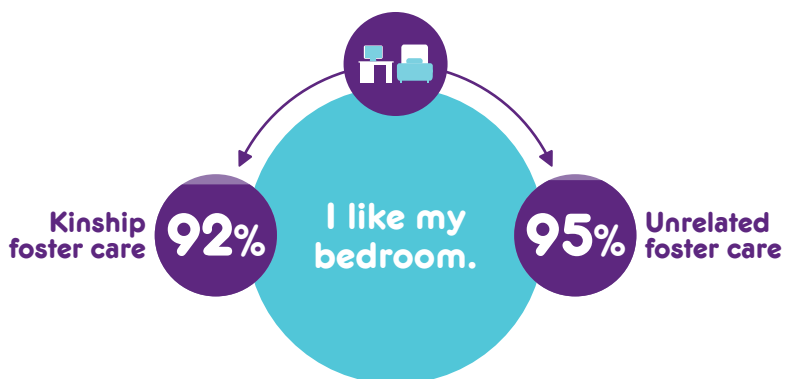
I am more settled now I am living with a family friend rather than in foster care. 11-18yrs

- ▶ Some of the children who did not feel safe provided written comments about sibling bullying or not trusting their carer.

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

- ▶ Compared to the 5% in unrelated foster care significantly more of those in kinship foster care (8%) disliked their bedrooms.

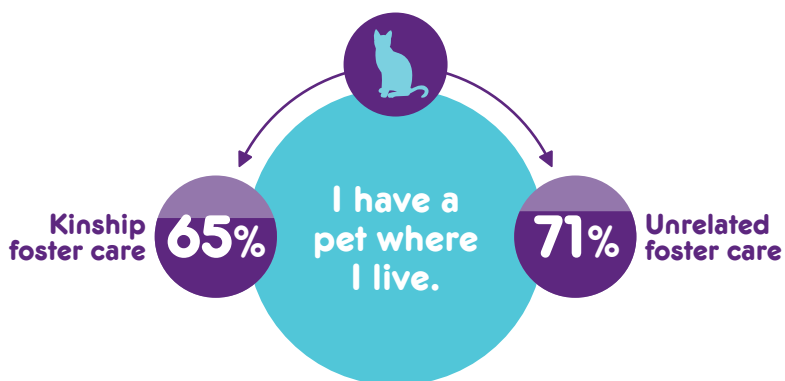
I would like to have my own bedroom and wardrobe because my clothes get thrown out and my sister messes up the room. 8-10yrs



- ▶ There were many comments from kinship young people about having to share bedrooms and homes being overcrowded.

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

- ▶ Lack of space may also have been a reason why fewer kinship children (65%) lived with a pet compared with 71% in unrelated foster care.



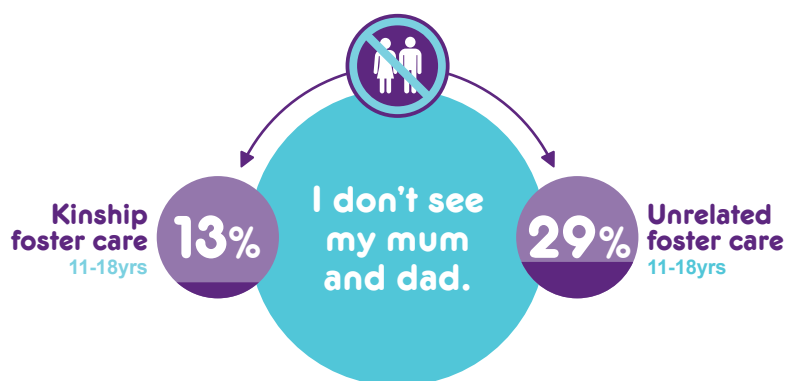
Contact with family members



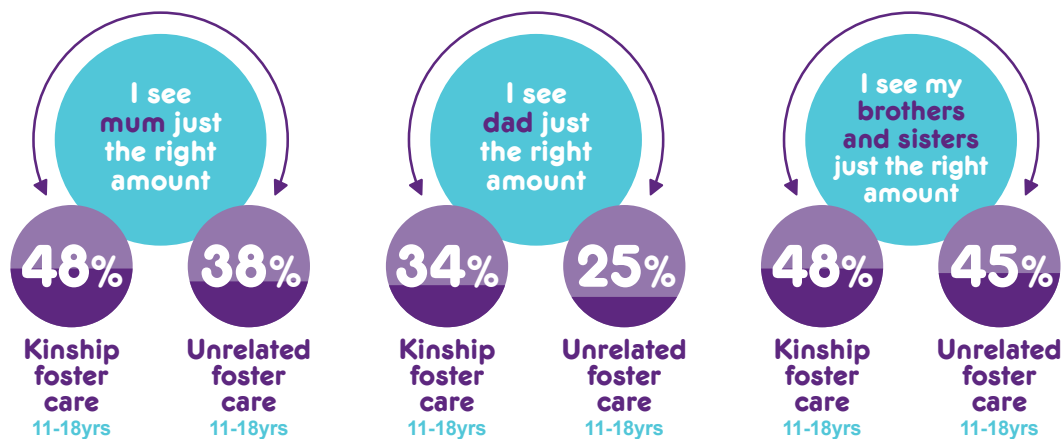
There were significantly more children (91%) and young people (87%) in kinship care having contact with at least one of their parents compared with children (87%) and young people (71%) in unrelated foster care.

Children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) were asked if they were happy with how often they saw their parents and brothers and sisters.

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

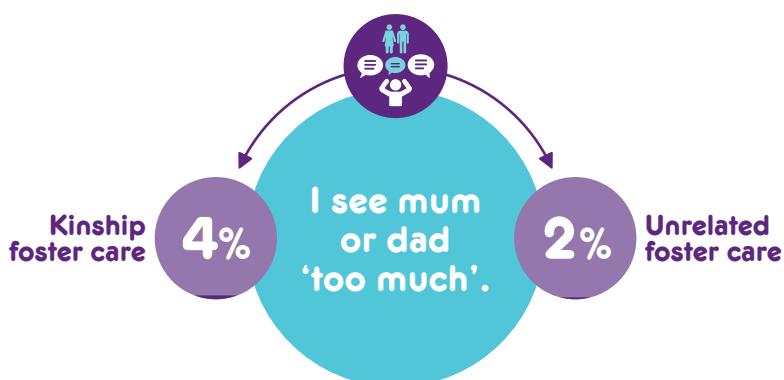


- ▶ Young people (11-18yrs) in kinship care more frequently reported feeling that their contact arrangements were 'just right' with their mothers and fathers compared with those in unrelated foster care.



- ▶ There was a slightly larger percentage in kinship feeling that they saw their mothers or fathers ‘too much’: 4% in kinship v 2% in foster care.

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



- ▶ About a third of children and young people (8-18yrs) in kinship care had no contact with their fathers and one in five had no contact with their mothers.
- ▶ About a quarter felt they saw their fathers ‘too little’, about a third saw their mothers ‘too little’ and 19% of age 8-10yrs and 30% of 11-18yrs felt they saw their siblings ‘too little’. Just like children in other types of placements, there were many comments from those in kinship care asking for more frequent contact with specific family members and wanting more information about their fathers.³

I want to see Daddy 4 days a week. I do not want to see Mummy. 8-10yrs

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

- ▶ The reasons children and young people gave for lack of contact included parents failing to turn up for contact, that they had chosen not to see their parents or that their parents had chosen not to see them.
- ▶ 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.

³ Lewis, S. et al., 2021 *Staying Connected: children and young people's views of their contact arrangements*. Rees Centre/Coram Voice <https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/2309-Staying-connected-Research-Report-0522.pdf>

- ▶ Those who felt they saw their brothers and sisters ‘too little’ or had no contact gave two main reasons in their comments: younger siblings being adopted or one side of the family preventing contact with the other, especially when there were complex step-family relationships.

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

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

Relationships with social workers



- ▶ More than 1 in 4 young children (4-7yrs) and 1 in 10 of those aged 8-18yrs did not know who their social worker was

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

- ▶ For each age group, those in unrelated foster care more frequently recorded that they knew who their social worker was.



- ▶ Just like those in unrelated foster care, only a third of young people (11-18yrs) had a single worker during the year, 36% had two workers and 28% had three or more social workers. Some of the comments left by young people revealed that they thought the social worker was for their relatives and not for them.

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

- ▶ There was a slightly larger percentage (3%) in kinship care who reported not having a social worker at all during the year in comparison with 1% in unrelated foster care.



- ▶ One in seven in kinship care reported that they could 'hardly ever/never' contact their worker.
- ▶ Of those who knew their worker, about 86% trusted their worker.

My social worker is so so so good. 4-7yrs

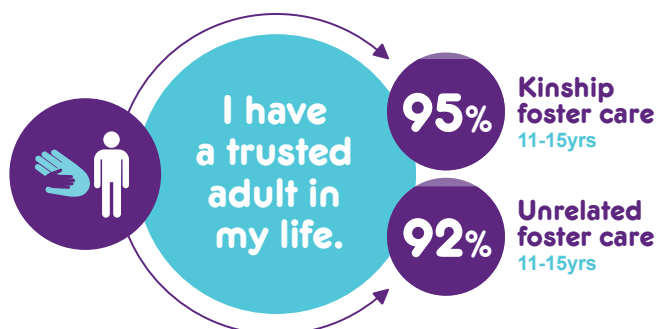
I have enjoyed working with my social workers and I am so grateful for all support whilst I've been in care. 11-18yrs

- ▶ About one in six kinship children (8-10yrs) did not know they had a right to ask to speak to their social worker in private.

A trusted adult



- ▶ 95% of those in kinship care felt that they had a trusted adult in their lives: a statistically larger percentage compared with the 92% in foster care.



Friendships



- ▶ Most kinship children and young people (95%) had at least one good friend: a slightly larger percentage than those in unrelated foster care (92%) but not as high as in the general population (97.5%).⁴

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

- ▶ For young people (11-18yrs) who did not have a good friend, there was a statistical association with disliking school, feeling they couldn't do the same things as peers, having a poor relationship with their carer, and not taking part in hobbies/activities outside school.

⁴ 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

Having a say and participation



In the surveys, children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) are asked if they felt included in the decisions that social workers made about their lives.

I feel included at home in decision-making and in my life. 11-18yrs

- ▶ As would be expected feelings of inclusion increased with age. More (42%) of the older young people (11-18yrs) felt included 'all or most of the time' compared with 37% of children aged 8-10yrs.

The social and my family will never lie to me about what's going on. 11-18yrs

- ▶ More than one in ten young people and one in six children 'hardly ever/never' felt included: similar proportions compared with the responses from those in unrelated foster care.

I feel that the things I say and tell my social worker never seem to be listened to and dealt with. 11-18yrs

- ▶ To be able to fully contribute, children and young people require adequate information but 52% of children (4-7yrs), 36% aged 8-10yrs and 18% of young people (11-18yrs) did not have a full understanding of why they were in care. We expected children and young people living in kinship care to have a better understanding of the reasons why they were looked after compared with those in unrelated foster care. That was not the case: the percentage lacking understanding was very similar to that reported by those in foster care.

Being more included in the decisions and knowing what exactly is going on. 11-18yrs

- ▶ Children and young people wrote that they wanted to be really listened to, for their views to be taken seriously and to be included more in decisions and plans for their futures especially as they got older.

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

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

I would like to be included more in what happens with contact with my family and about my future. 11-18yrs

Opportunities



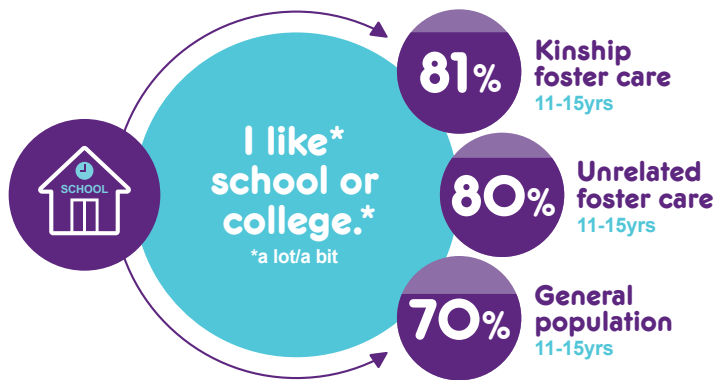
- ▶ Nearly all the children aged 4-10yrs (98%) had fun at the weekends and most (86%) spent time outdoors at least weekly e.g. in the park or at the beach.
- ▶ The majority (95%) of young people (11-18yrs) could connect to the internet from home, took part in activities and hobbies outside school (91%), went outdoors in green spaces at least once a week (89%), were able to do the same things as their friends (89%) and were given opportunities (87%) to learn life skills.
- ▶ The proportion feeling that they had those opportunities was similar to the proportions in unrelated foster care, although unlike in unrelated foster care there were written comments 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

Liking school



- ▶ 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 those aged 11-15yrs liked school 'a lot' / 'a bit' compared with 70% of their peers of the same age in the general population.⁵



- ▶ Children (8-10yrs) who did not like school more frequently reported that they were not given opportunities in school to help (e.g., showing visitors around or taking messages) compared with those who did like school.

Bullying



- ▶ More than one in 4 children (8-10yrs) and one in 4 young people (11-15yrs) felt afraid to go to school 'always' or 'sometimes' because of bullying compared with 1 in 5 young people in unrelated foster care and 1 in 6 of their peers (10-15yrs) in the general population.⁶

⁵ 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>

⁶ 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.

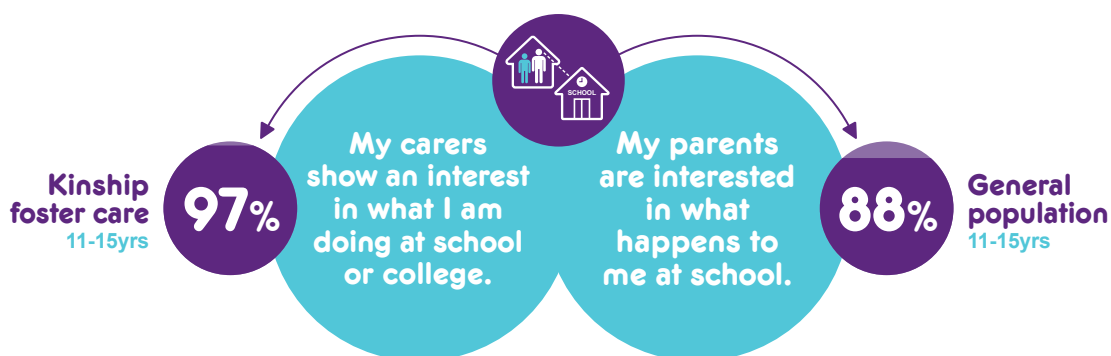


- ▶ When asked if they felt they were being supported to stop the bullying the majority of kinship children (91%) and young people (78%) felt they had support.

Carers' interest in education

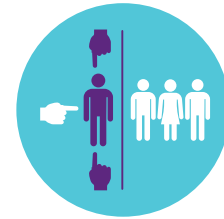


- ▶ 97% of those aged 11-15yrs in kinship and unrelated foster care felt their carers were interested in what they did at school: a larger percentage than their peers (88%) reported in the general population.⁷



⁷ Brooks, F. et al. (2020) *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC): World Health Organization Collaborative Cross National Study. HBSC England National Report*, University of Herfordshire <http://hbscengland.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/HBSC-England-National-Report-2020.pdf>

Stigma



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



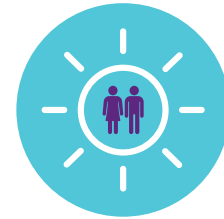
- ▶ However, many young people expressed anger that they were classified as 'looked after' when they were living with relatives, objected to their relatives being unable to make decisions and disliked the meetings/ reviews especially if that meant they were taken out of class to attend.

I don't like people saying I'm in care, as I count it as just living with grandparents. 11-18yrs

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

A bit embarrassing when you get taken out of a lesson and my friends ask me questions. 11-18yrs

The well-being of children in kinship foster care



- ▶ About 84% of kinship children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) felt their lives were getting better with just over one in ten (11%) young people feeling pessimistic about their futures.
- ▶ More than half (55%) of children and young people (8-18yrs) reported worrying 'all the time' or 'sometimes' about their feelings or behaviour: a very similar response to those in unrelated foster care. However, while children and young people in all different types of placements wrote about the lack of mental health services, it was only the younger children in kinship care who wrote about worrying that elderly relatives might die leaving them alone.
- ▶ Nearly a quarter (24%) of girls aged 11-18yrs felt very unhappy with their appearance: a similar proportion as reported by girls in unrelated foster care. Being unhappy with appearance was associated with frequent worrying.

Age 4-10yrs

To evaluate children's overall well-being all the questions and the responses of children aged 4-7yrs and 8-10yrs were examined to identify those who had given many negative responses.

- ▶ A total of 12 children (five children aged 4-7yrs and 7 children aged 8-10yrs) gave many negative responses that suggested they had low well-being: 2% of all the kinship children aged 4-10yrs who had completed the surveys.
- ▶ These children did not feel safe or settled where they were living, did not know who their social worker was, lacked trust in carers, were fearful of bullying and worried 'all the time'.

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

- ▶ Four of the 12 children did not have a good friend.
- ▶ Their responses when asked 'Is there anything else you would like to say?' included comments about missing their mothers, not wanting to be in care and wanting more support for themselves and carers.

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

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

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

Age 11-18yrs

The survey for young people (11-18yrs) includes three questions that ask about life satisfaction, happiness yesterday, and feeling that things done in life are worthwhile. The three questions use a scale of 0-10 and are also asked of young people in the general population. The scale responses are categorised by the Office for National Statistics as 0-4 (low), 5-6 (moderate), 7-8 (high) and 9-10 (very high).

- ▶ In our survey, the majority (89%) of young people in kinship care gave ratings of moderate to very high on these scales.
- ▶ On overall life satisfaction, 64% of young people in kinship care gave a rating of between 7-10 (high/very high) similar to those in unrelated foster care but lower than peers (79%) in the general population
- ▶ Similarly, on felt happiness the previous day 66% in kinship rated themselves as high or very high as did those in unrelated foster care and lower than 73% of peers.⁸
- ▶ Importantly, however, on the scale 'feeling that things done in life were worthwhile', the same percentage (74%) in kinship care rated themselves as highly as their peers in the general population and significantly more than young people (67%) in unrelated foster care.

To consider which of the kinship young people (11-18yrs) might have low well-being, those who had rated themselves low (0-4) on any two of the four scales (life satisfaction, happiness yesterday, things done in life have meaning, positivity about their futures) were selected.

- ▶ 11% of kinship young people gave low ratings suggesting that they had low well-being compared with 14% in unrelated foster care.

⁸ ONS (2018) Children's well-being measures. Office for National Statistics
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/childrenswellbeingmeasures>

- ▶ At the other end of the scale (ratings of 9-10) the proportions of kinship and fostered young people rating themselves as 'very high' were similar.

For those in kinship care the odds of low well-being increased:

- ▶ 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 talked at least weekly about things that mattered.

Nearly twice as many girls had low well-being compared with boys but being female and happiness with appearance were correlated.

A young person with low ratings on the scales 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

What could make care better?

There is a final survey question asking young people, 'What would make care better?'

- ▶ Many written comments indicated that young people were very happy and that nothing needed to change but also many requests to be listened to and "not be in care" and for less frequent changes of the social worker.

For my social worker to listen to me and help with my problems. 11-18yrs

- ▶ Many were clear that they wanted to remain with their carers but others wanted to return to their parents or for contact to increase.

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 wanted siblings to join them while many others wanted a bedroom to themselves.

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

- ▶ Some young people wrote about wanting more social work support while others wanted more help for their carers, including being rehoused and more financial and emotional support:

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

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

Summary

Currently, just over a quarter of children in foster care (27%)⁹ 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 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 experience for children and can 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 adolescent psychological health.^{10 11} 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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

¹¹ 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

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.

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.¹²

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 plans for children in kinship care need careful planning. More children in kinship foster care felt unsafe during contact than those in unrelated foster care. Research¹³ has also 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.

¹² 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>

¹³ 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 carers 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 contingency 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.¹⁴

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. For example, 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.

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>



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