



# OUR LIVES OUR CARE

Looked after children's views on  
their well-being in 2017

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getting young voices heard

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And of course, a huge thank you to all the children and young people who took the time to complete the survey.

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# Introduction

In 2017, we published our first report on the subjective well-being of children who were looked after (Selwyn & Briheim-Crookall, 2017). That report contained analyses of the responses of 611 children and young people who had completed the 'Your Life, Your Care' survey in 2016. It examined children's responses to survey questions that asked about their subjective well-being and different areas of their lives – their relationships, rights, resilience, and recovery. Here we present findings from 2017, where 2,263 looked after children and young people from 16 local authorities completed the same survey.

## Subjective well-being

There is ongoing debate about the concept of well-being and how to measure it. Historically, there has been a dichotomy between subjective well-being and objective well-being. Objective measures of well-being involve the use of standardised questionnaires, quality of life indicators or factual measures (e.g. the percentage of children with 5 GCSEs). In contrast, subjective well-being focuses on how a person feels, thinks, and how they experience their life. The notion that well-being can be defined by just one measure has been challenged from many different quarters (e.g. Ryff, 1989; Fattore *et al.*, 2012). Instead, adult and child well-being are now viewed holistically and understood to be where a person is thriving across multiple domains of life (Adler & Seligman, 2016).

## Development of the 'Your Life, Your Care' surveys

The development of the surveys was influenced theoretically by Seligman's work on subjective well-being and his concept of flourishing: the areas of life that contribute to an adult or child feeling good and functioning effectively. Research has found that flourishing is related to good mental health and well-being (Huppert & So, 2013). Children who are looked after should be enabled to flourish in care. We also took a children's rights perspective believing that to understand subjective well-being we needed to understand the meaning children gave to their own lives and solicit their opinions, attitudes and perceptions on what mattered to them. Therefore, we worked with 140 looked after children and young people in focus groups asking, 'What makes a good life?' In addition, literature reviews of looked after young people's views on their care experiences were completed and an expert professional group also contributed (see Selwyn *et al.*, 2015 and Wood & Selwyn, 2017 for information on survey development).

The focus groups identified four key domains (relationships, rights, resilience and recovery) each containing different elements (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Bright Spots Well-Being Indicators



To these we added four well-being scales used by The Children's Society (2017) in their surveys of children in the general population, three of which are also reported by the Office of National Statistics (ONS). The three ONS questions are used in a large number of surveys providing comparative data on young people in the general population (ONS, 2017).

From the domains and indicators age appropriate subjective well-being surveys were developed with 16 questions for Reception and Key stage 1 (4-7yrs), 31 questions for Key Stage 2 (8-10yrs) and 46 questions for Key Stage 3, 4 and 5 (11-18yrs). In 2017, the surveys were distributed by 16 local

authorities to their looked after children and young people. They were completed mainly online, with paper copies for those who preferred. Depending on the local authority's preference and the child's age and capacity, surveys were completed privately, in school with a trusted adult, or before a review meeting with the independent reviewing officer. Data collection was also complemented by: participation workers visiting residential homes to support young people to complete the survey, copies of the survey being left at duty desks or contact centres, and a care-experienced apprentice supporting young people to complete the survey when waiting to see their social worker.

## Introduction

### Quality of the 2017 survey data

There are standards for measuring the statistical quality of surveys (the European Statistical System (ESS) Quality Dimensions, 2013). Below we set out how the 'Your Life, Your Care' surveys met those quality standards.

#### Accessibility and clarity

Each participating local authority was provided with detailed advice and guidance notes on how to run a successful survey. Templates for letters explaining the survey were provided for foster carers, teachers and social workers thus reducing the burden on the local authority. It was noticeable that the local authorities who had run the survey more than once had better return rates, found it easier to get 'buy in' from staff, and found the process much easier second time around. A cleaned and anonymised dataset was provided on request.

#### Accuracy and reliability

During the survey period, local authorities were given weekly updates on the number of returns by age group and type of placement. The information was used to boost return rates by targeting any groups where there were fewer responses than expected. Overall, the surveys achieved an average return rate of 34%. The survey data were not weighted, as the dataset reflected the gender and age of the national looked after children population. The reliability of the survey was high (Cronbach's Alpha of 0.82 (girls) and 0.77 (boys)).

A missing data analysis was completed on the dataset. Overall there was little missing data. Just two variables had more than 5% missing data a) *Do you trust your current social worker?* (5.9% missing) and b) *Is it easy to get in touch with your social worker?* (6.7% missing). Analysis found that data were not randomly missing but associated with being a boy and being of Asian or black ethnicity. Surprisingly, questions on feelings about contact with the birth family, which were expected to be the most sensitive, only had 3% (contact with mothers) and 4.7% (contact with fathers) missing.

#### Coherence and comparability

In this report comparisons are made within the sample (e.g. analyses by gender), between the responses of looked after children and children in the general population and between local authorities using the average response. In respect of national comparisons, there are no national data on the well-being of young children and therefore comparisons were only made with the responses of children in the general population older than 8 years of age (Box 1).

## Introduction

### Box 1. National surveys of children's well-being

#### The Children's Society 'Good Childhood Report'

[www.childrenssociety.org.uk/the-good-childhood-report-2017](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/the-good-childhood-report-2017)

The Children's Society has been running an online well-being survey since July 2010. Each wave has so far covered a representative sample of approximately 2,000 households, in England, Scotland and Wales. The survey includes quota sampling for age, gender and family socio-economic status. Waves 1 to 9 included children aged 8 to 15, while Wave 10 included children aged 10 to 17. Each wave of the survey has included a standard set of questions that make up The Good Childhood Index together with questions covering additional topics which have varied for each wave.

#### The Office of National Statistics (ONS)

[www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/childrenswellbeingmeasures](http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/childrenswellbeingmeasures)

The ONS collates evidence annually from government surveys and The Children's Society and Understanding Society surveys on 7 measures: personal well-being, our relationships, health, what we do, where we live, personal finance, and education and skills.

#### The Health Behaviour of School-aged Children study (HBSC) [www.hbsc.org/](http://www.hbsc.org/)

The HBSC collects data every four years on children aged 11yrs, 13yrs, and 15yrs. Information is collected on health and well-being, social environments and health behaviours.

#### The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)

[www.cls.ioe.ac.uk](http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk)

The MCS is a survey following the lives of around 19,000 children born in the UK in 2000/2001.

#### Children's Worlds survey ([www.isciweb.org](http://www.isciweb.org))

Children's Worlds is an international survey of children's well-being. The survey aims to collect representative data on children's lives and daily activities, their time use and on how they feel about and evaluate specific aspects of their lives. The survey in England covered a representative sample of over 3,000 children in school years 4, 6 and 8. An additional sample (provided by The Children's Society) of around 1,000 children in Year 10 completed the survey in 2014.

The Children's Society and the ONS use four well-being scales: overall satisfaction with life, happiness yesterday, life being worthwhile, and positivity about the future. Thresholds are used to show the proportion

of responses that fall above and below certain thresholds. We used the same thresholds for the same scales in our surveys: low 0-4, moderate 5-6, high 7-8 and very high 9-10.

## Introduction

### Relevance

All surveys need to be relevant and these surveys needed to be relevant to looked after children and to the local authority. The survey questions were designed with and by children and young people, were piloted with them and refined. Most of the text responses from children and young people in 2017 confirmed that the questions were relevant. Some children simply wrote "Thank you" in the final comment box. However, other children objected to the lack of an 'Always' response option. We have since responded to this criticism and included 'all or most' as an option in the latest version of the surveys. A few young people's comments suggested that they did not believe we would read all the comments or take them seriously. We have endeavoured to address all the children's comments through detailed feedback to the local authority and by asking local authorities to send the key findings to every looked after child and young person through specially designed children and young people's feedback sheets created for each area.

The survey results have provided useful information to local authorities, enabling them to use the findings in the policy making process and to identify sub groups within the looked after population where more interventions were needed. In some local authorities the survey has been run for two or three consecutive years enabling change over time to be reported.

### Timeliness and punctuality: the speed of returning the survey results to the local authority

It is important that children and local authorities receive timely results so that children feel their voice has been heard and local authorities can plan, using up-to-date results. To achieve a timely response, the surveys were analysed and detailed reports given to the local authority within three months of the survey closing. The reports were followed up by a meeting with the local authority to explore the findings and discuss next steps. The audience for these meetings varied but included senior management teams, frontline staff, corporate parenting boards and children in care councils. Summaries of the findings were produced with the children's views presented "You said" and the local authority encouraged to set out how they were responding "We will".



The following chapters set out the findings of the 2017 surveys beginning with information on the children and young people's demographics.



# Demographics

## Response rates, gender and age

Surveys were completed by 2,263 children and young people from 16 local authority areas.

Children and young people were usually asked to complete the on-line survey either by themselves or in school over a period of two-four weeks and, where appropriate, with a trusted adult present. The trusted adult was usually the designated teacher, learning

mentor or SENCO. All the questions were optional to allow children to make their own decisions about which questions they answered and therefore the number of responses differ by question. **The average survey return rate was 34%, with the return rates of individual local authorities varying between 21% and 60%.** The age and gender of the children (Table 1) reflected the proportion in the national looked after population (DfE, 2017).

Table 1:

The gender and age of children and young people completing the survey (n=2,263)

Age Group	Boys	Girls	Prefer not to say	Total
11-18yrs	698	587	20	1305 (58%)
8-10yrs	310	269	14	593 (26%)
4-7yrs	195	168	2	365 (16%)
Total	1,203 (53%)	1,024 (45%)	36 (2%)	2,263 (100%)

## Demographics

### Ethnicity

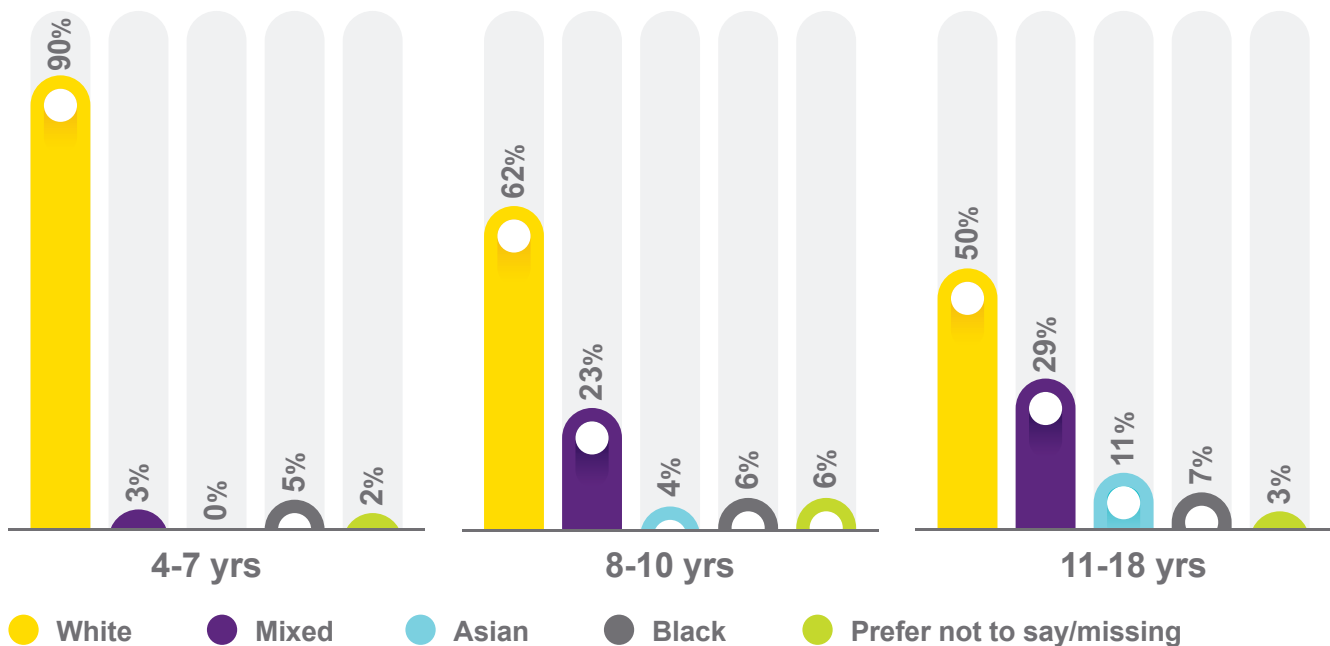
The majority (59%) of children and young people who completed the survey were white, but minority ethnic children were over-represented: 37% of the sample were of minority ethnicity in comparison with 25% of the national care population (DfE, 2017).

The difference was most noticeable in the mixed ethnicity group: 23% in the sample compared with 9% in the care population. There are three possible explanations for the over-representation. First, children and young people who completed the survey self-defined their own ethnicity and their view of ethnicity may be different from that of adults. Second, nearly a third of the sample children came from local authorities with minority ethnic children making up

more than half of their care populations. But even in local authorities where the vast majority of their care population was white, there still tended to be an over-representation of minority ethnic children in the survey responses. Third, the largest number of responses were from young people aged 11-18yrs and this was also the age group with the largest proportion (50%) of minority ethnic children (Figure 2).

We did not ask young people if they were child migrants/asylum seekers, as during the pilot stage the question was found to be too sensitive. Young people were worried about which agencies might have access to the information and that deterred them from completing the survey. However, 33 (2.4%) text responses from young people indicated that they were not living in the country of their birth and were seeking asylum.

Figure 2: The ethnicity and age of children and young people



## Demographics

### Current placement

The majority (70%) of children and young people were living in foster care, 18% were in kinship care or living with parents, 8% were in residential care and 4% were living elsewhere such as in a hostel, semi-independent living or in mother and baby homes.<sup>1</sup>

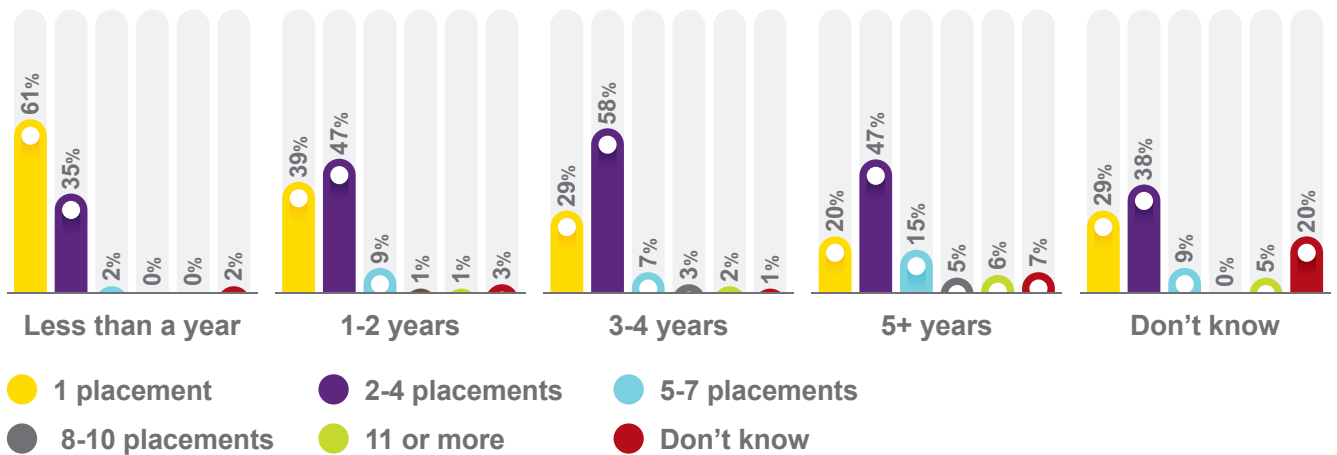
### Length of time in care and number of placements

Young people (11-18yrs) were asked how long they had been in care and the number of placements they had experienced (Figure 3). Some young people (4%) responded that they did not know the length of time they had been in care or the number of placements they had experienced. Seventeen percent were new entrants and

had been looked after for less than a year, 48% had been looked after between 1 and 4 years, whilst 31% had been in care for five years or more. Twenty percent of those who had been looked after for 5 years or more had only had one placement: a similar proportion (17%) is reported in the national looked after statistics for those in care for five years or more (DfE, 2017).

Overall, the sample was representative of the looked after population by age, gender, placement type, length of time in care and number of moves in care. However, minority ethnic children were over-represented. We will now turn to how children and young people responded to questions on their relationships.

Figure 3: Length of time in care by number of placements for young people aged 11-18yrs (n=1,282)



<sup>1</sup> We are not able to directly compare the children's types of placements with the national statistics, as we did not expect children to know whether their kinship carer was a formal or informal foster carer. The national figures show that 74% of looked after children were in foster care (including kinship foster care), 6% with parents and 11% in residential (DfE, 2017).

# Relationships

## Relationship with carers

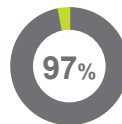


All the children and young people were asked whether they trusted their carers.

Some children and young people wrote additional text comments about feeling they belonged in their foster family, felt that they were treated the same as the foster carer's own children and had good food. Others complained that older carers did not understand children and that having an older carer drew attention to their status as a looked after child. A few emphasised that they wanted to go home but most of the comments were in praise of their carers. Children and young people wrote:



94% of young people (11-18yrs) trusted their carer and only 6% did not



97% of children (8-10yrs and 4-7yrs) trusted their carer and only 3% did not

I feel like I have a proper family who care about me and value my opinions. They remember my birthday and the things I don't like. I'm never fed things I don't like, and my foster mum goes out of her way to make my favourite dishes. I feel loved and cared for. I love them like my real parents and siblings.  
(11-18yrs)

I do not like being in care I want everything to change. I want to go back to my grandma and dad. All of this stuff is stressing me out. I used to be a lot happier in school, now I cannot concentrate on my learning and my social worker does not come to see me. It has been over a month now and I really want to go back to dad and grandma. (11-18yrs)

I love my [foster]family. I don't ever want to speak to my mum and dad because I don't trust them. I always get help with my homework. (8-10yrs)

I am very HAPPY and I love my carers.  
(4-7yrs)



## Relationships

### Relationship with social workers



Young people (11-18yrs) were asked how many social workers they had had in the previous twelve months. Younger children were not asked, because of concerns about their ability to recall the information accurately.

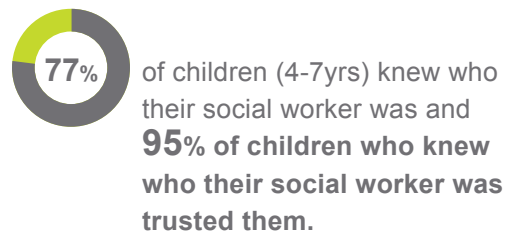
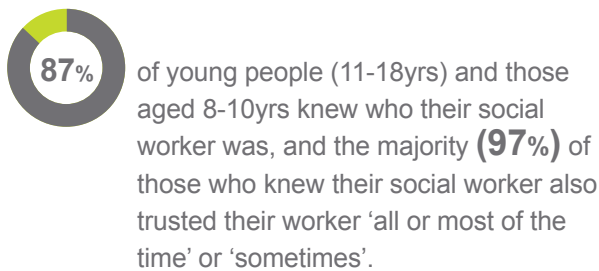
It was not surprising to find a statistically significant association with lack of trust and having had three or more social workers.<sup>2</sup> Young people wrote about their dislike of the frequent changes of social worker:



I think that social workers shouldn't move around as much because they just get to know your life story and you have to try to trust them but how can you trust them when you don't even know them or have hardly ever met them? (11-18yrs)

Have had 4 social workers in 7 months. (11-18yrs)

Young people and children were asked if they knew who their **current** social worker was and if they trusted their worker.



<sup>2</sup> $\chi^2(3, n=1,214) = 11.18, p=.011, \text{Cramer's } V=.096$



## Relationships

Young people and children wrote about their social workers:

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

The last social worker did not do her job properly and I was taunted in school about my age. I am younger than my age assessment. (11-18yrs)

Mummy says SW is not here to be your friend, she is here to take you. (4-7yrs)

## Pets



In the UK, between 64% and 67% of children live in a household with a pet (Westgarth *et al.*, 2010). The non-judgemental support gained from pets has been shown to reduce stress (Sobo *et al.*, 2006) and it is argued that pets encourage more pro-social behaviour and the development of empathy (McCardle *et al.*, 2011). Although there is academic debate about the physical and psychological benefits of pet ownership, children and young people in the focus groups (who worked on the development of the survey questions) emphasised the importance of pets in their lives. In our survey, most children and young

people were living in a household with pets (Table 2). Younger children were more likely to have a pet, as were those living outside London. In one London borough 25% of young people were living in a household with a pet in comparison to 68% of young people living in another city.

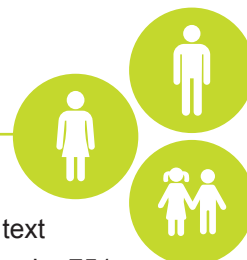
Some younger children in text responses wrote that they wished for a pet or, when writing about contact, included their pets left behind with their families as those they wished to see more of.

Table 2: The presence of pets in placements

	Yes	No	Don't like pets
11-18yrs (n=1,295)	766 (59%)	491 (38%)	38 (3%)
8-10yrs (n= 587)	416 (71%)	162 (28%)	9 (1%)

## Relationships

### Contact with family members



Young people and children (11-18yrs and 8-10yrs) were asked whether they were content with the frequency of contact that was taking place with their mother, father and siblings (Table 3). The youngest children (4-7yrs) were not asked questions about birth family contact, as it was thought that children might become distressed or anxious. It was surprising to find that 340 (28%) young people (11-18yrs) and 75 (13%) children (8-10yrs) had no contact with either parent.

The option of providing additional text responses on contact was taken up by 751 young people and 206 children (8-10yrs). A few children took the opportunity to write about contact with other relatives. For example, writing:

I don't get to see my great-grandmother anymore and I miss her. (8-10yrs)

I want to see my nan and grandad and cousins also auntie and uncles. (8-10yrs)

Table 3: Satisfaction with the frequency of contact with family members

Child's age	Family member	Too much	Just right	Too little	Can't or don't want to see
11-18yrs	Mother (n=1,266)	28 (2%)	487 (38.5%)	321 (25.5%)	430 (34%)
	Father (n=1,244)	17 (1%)	304 (24%)	220 (18%)	703 (57%)
	Siblings <sup>3</sup> (n=1,160)	69 (6%)	443 (38%)	384 (33%)	264 (23%)
8-10yrs	Mother (n=576)	17 (3%)	263 (46%)	188 (33%)	108 (19%)
	Father (n=568)	13 (2%)	173 (30%)	130 (23%)	252 (44%)
	Siblings <sup>3</sup> (n=547)	87 (16%)	287 (52%)	118 (22%)	55 (10%)

<sup>3</sup> 104 young people (11-18yrs) and 26 children (8-10yrs) had no siblings

## Relationships

The majority of comments from younger children were about their contact with parents, whilst the majority of comments from those aged 11-18yrs were about sibling contact. Comments were mainly about the frequency of contact, the arrangements and environment in which contact took place and the quality of contact. There were also many comments about needing more information on why contact decisions had been made, "*Why do people not tell me the whole truth?*" (8-10yrs), and wanting to know the identity of one of their parents.

### Arrangements and environment for parental contact

Young people and children complained that contact centres were sparse, boring with little to do, and some did not like having to travel there. They also complained that contact was arranged to suit the working hours of contact staff rather than the needs of children and their families. Children also wanted more privacy and to spend time alone with their parents. They wrote:

I don't like the place me and my mum have contact. It is too small and there is not much to do.  
(11-18yrs)

It's all so false and can't happen at weekends ... How stupid is that! I am told the contact team doesn't work at weekends. If that's their job they should work when I can have contact not just business hours. (11-18yrs)

I would like to see my mum without anyone being there because I feel like I can't say... "I love you" to my mum.  
(8-10yrs)

### Frequency of contact with parents

Some young people wanted social workers to make more effort to arrange contact believing that "no-one tries to make it happen", but most of the teenagers wrote that it was their choice if contact was not occurring. For example, writing:

I hate my mum.  
(8-10yrs)

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

I will not see my mum and I am not pressurised into seeing her unlike the last time I was in care. I find that being listened to... is very good. It makes me feel significant. (11-18yrs)





## Relationships

Between a fifth (18%) and a third (33%) of children and young people wanted **more contact** with a parent. Some children requested that contact was longer or more frequent.

Although the youngest children (4-7yrs) were not asked about contact, they often wrote a comment about contact when responding to a question 'Is there anything else you would like to say?' Many of the youngest children wrote that they missed their mothers and wanted to see more of them but some of the youngest ones also wanted their carers to be present too.

A few young people and children recorded that they were having **too much contact**. Importantly, this group of children wrote that they felt that their parents treated them differently to their siblings. The children felt they were treated differently during contact or because their siblings were still living at home. Research on child development is finding that parental differential treatment is associated with greater conflict among siblings and, for the less favoured child, poorer adjustment (Feinberg *et al.*, 2012).

Young people whose parents lived in another country reported that they had very little contact with parents or siblings. While some young people were able to Skype or FaceTime with relatives, other young people complained that they were only allowed one 10-minute phone call a month. Some did not know where their families were and were hopeful that the Red Cross would find their families soon.

The time I see them is too short. It's only about 2-3 hours every three months. (11-18yrs)

When I see my Mummy, I feel really happy. Sometimes I miss my carers when they aren't there. I love contact. (4-7yrs)

I see my mum once a month and that is too much for me. It upsets me that she spends more time with my brother than me. (11-18yrs)

It would be nice to see mum and dad more often and do fun things with them. ... But I'm not sure Mummy and Daddy can do more often. They are very busy, but my brothers and sisters live at home and see them lots and lots. I don't know why it's different for me. It just is. (8-10yrs)

I don't know how to contact my brother in [country]. I would love to see him, as he is the only sibling I have – our parents are dead. (11-18yrs)

I am happy at home, but I worry about my family in [country] and I also worry about my appeal to stay in UK. I don't sleep well. (11-18yrs)

I have no idea whether family are alive or dead. (11-18yrs)

## Relationships

### Quality of contact with parents



Some young people wanted the quality of contact to improve. They wrote about their concerns that their parents could not keep to the arrangements and let them down.

Contact is always cancelled and haven't seen my sister or brother for over a year I feel uncertain about seeing my mum ...sometimes she embarrasses me. (8-10yrs)

I know it is down to my mum ... she needs to make more effort. (11-18yrs)

### Contact with siblings



The majority of text comments from young people (11-18yrs) were about wanting more contact with siblings. Some young people complained that their parents were stopping them from seeing a sibling, especially when those siblings were half-siblings and lived with their father's new family or siblings lived at home.

My mum refuses to allow me to see my brothers because she is angry with me about an issue. (11-18yrs)

Some younger children believed that foster carers were preventing contact with siblings. A few children wrote about how "lucky" they were to be in the same placement as their siblings or wrote about the support they received from them. Many of the comments were about children and young people being able to see some siblings but not others. For example, because the youngest had been adopted, the distance between their respective placements or their large family size making contact difficult.

We are a family of 11. (11-18yrs)

I am not able to see my younger brother or sister (adopted). This makes me sad. (8-10yrs)

I see [xx] and [xx] because I live with them, but I don't see my brother at all because he is in a Care Home. (11-18yrs)



## Relationships

Sixteen percent of the younger children (8-10yrs) recorded that they had too much contact with siblings. We do not know why the younger children felt this way but wondered if it was because they were siblings who were in the same placement and their sibling relationships were conflictual with many negative interactions. Text comments that support this suggestion were for example:

My brother lives with me, so I see them every day and sometimes they get on my nerves. (11-18yrs)

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

## Friendships



Friendships are important for all children and the capacity to make and sustain friendships is protective. Friendships provide a source of comfort and support. A lack of friendships in childhood and adolescence is associated with loneliness, social isolation, anxiety and a myriad of adverse physical, psychological, social and mental health outcomes (Hawkey *et al.*, 2010; Criss *et al.*, 2002). However, maltreated children often struggle to make and maintain friendships, as they often demonstrate fewer pro-social behaviours and have lower self-esteem (Maguire *et al.*, 2015).

In our survey most of the children and young people stated that they had at least one good friend but 189 (8%) children and young people did not (Table 4). One in ten adolescents (11-18yrs) answered that they did not have a good friend; far more than the general population comparison where 3% of 14yr olds report not having a good friend (Millennium Cohort Study, 2015).

Table 4: **Having a good friend**

Age group	Has at least one good friend	Does not have one good friend
11-18yrs	1156 (90%)	131 (10%)
8-10yrs	538 (93%)	40 (7%)
4-7yrs	337 (95%)	18 (5%)

## Relationships

Children and young people wrote that changes of placement and school negatively affected friendships. Children and young people wrote:

I sometimes  
feel lonely.  
(11-18yrs)

I have so many foster carers, I move nearly every week. It is not fair. I can't see my friends at school or go to clubs because the school is too far away. I have to get up early in the morning to go to school and it is dark when I come home so I can't play out. It is boring. I don't like school because people can be mean. I can't play with friends as they won't let me, as I don't do the clubs any more. (8-10yrs)

I don't trust  
anyone except my  
friends. I can only  
trust friends and now  
you move me.  
(8-10yrs)

**Good and supportive relationships are central to well-being and in the next section we will consider how children thought those relationships supported and built their resilience.**



# Building resilience

## Having a reliable trusted adult



Research on resilience has consistently demonstrated that having a trusting relationship with one key adult is strongly associated with healthy development and recovery after experiencing adversity (Masten 2015). The availability of one key adult has been shown to be the turning point in many looked after young people's lives (Gilligan 2009). Children and young people (8-10yrs and 11-18yrs) were asked, "Do you have an adult who you trust, who helps you and sticks by you no matter what?"



92% of young people (11-18yrs) responded that they had such a person in their lives



96% of children (8-10yrs) reported they had a trusted adult

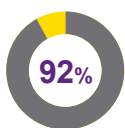
There is little comparative data, as most children in the general population rely on their parents. The Children's Society survey (2016) asked how happy children were with their family on a zero to ten scale: 1.9% reported low happiness. An ONS 2016 survey of young people (16-24yrs) found that 96% reported they had someone to rely on.

I think everyone should have a person they could talk to without being scared. ... Kids in care shouldn't be scared of trusting someone. It's a major key for their future. (11-18yrs)

## Having fun: Taking part in activities and hobbies



Children and young people were asked about the opportunities they had in care.



92% of young people (11-18yrs) recorded that they participated in hobbies and activities outside school



97% of children (8-10yrs and 4-7yrs) answered that they had fun at the weekend

**Building resilience**

Many children and young people wrote that they thought they were given more opportunities in care than they had previously experienced:

Being in care has massively improved my life, as I was given a second chance and an opportunity to grab life and live a better life. (11-18yrs)

I have had a lot more experiences than I would have had if I wasn't in care (11-18yrs)

**Exploring the natural world**



Exposure to the natural environment can reduce stress and aggressive behaviour in children and adults (Capaldi *et al.*, 2015). In our survey, children and young people (8-10yrs and 11-18yrs) were asked if they were given opportunities to explore the natural world, such as visiting parks, beaches or forests. Most were given such opportunities, with 18% of young people (11-18yrs) and 3% of children (8-10yrs) not having these experiences.

General population comparisons using different age bands are quite similar, with 11% of young people (13-15yrs) and 10% of children (6-12 yrs) reporting that they had not visited the natural environment in the previous year (Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment, 2015). Children in our survey wrote:

I enjoy the beach and can't wait to go with my carers. (8-10yrs)

[What would improve care?] TO GO TO THE BEACH AND GO EXPLORING. (8-10yrs)

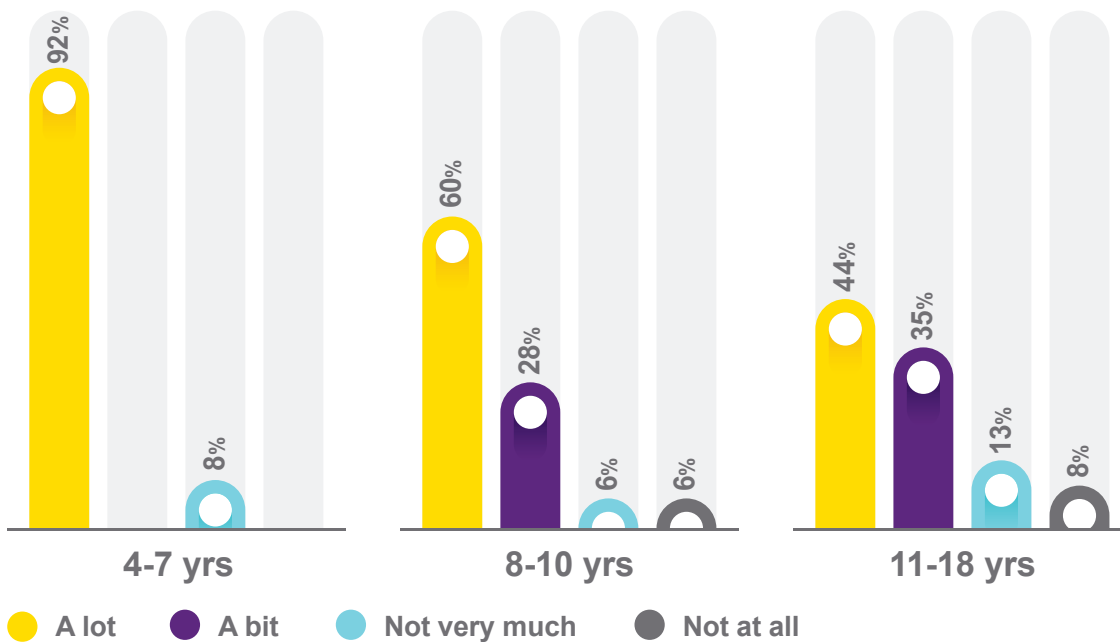


Building resilience

Liking school



Figure 4: Liking school (n=2,214)



All the children and young people were asked if they liked school. The youngest children were the most positive about school with 92% stating that they liked school 'a lot'. (Figure 4)

The same question has been asked in a national survey (The Health Behaviour of School-aged Children (HBSC)) completed in schools where 80% of young people (11-15yrs) liked school and 20% did not.

In our survey there was a very similar response from those aged 11-18yrs: 79% liked school and 21% did not (Brooks *et al.*, 2015). Unlike the HBSC results, our survey found that 46% boys reported liking school 'a lot' in comparison with 33% of boys in the general population. Young people wrote about the opportunities being in care brought and specifically the benefits of being in education:

So many good things for me. I am now going to college and my English is improving very fast. I look to the future with confidence.  
(11-18yrs)

Being in care is the best thing that has happened to me. So many amazing opportunities have opened ... like my attendance is significantly improved and I have so much support around me. I am very happy. (11-18yrs)



## Building resilience

Not all the young people felt at ease in school and some wrote about their educational difficulties such as finding school boring, teachers lacking sensitivity, or their placements being a long way away from their school. Children wrote:

Sometimes people shout at home. Make me have more fun in school. We only do work, and I get really angry and bang my head on the walls, table anything. (8-10yrs)

It's difficult when teachers bring family up. (11-18yrs)

I would like to be in a foster home nearer school as it takes an hour in the taxi to get to school. (8-10yrs)

And surprisingly one child wrote:

I want to do more spelling homework. (4-7yrs)

## Support for learning

Overall, a large proportion (95%) of children and young people (8-18yrs) thought that their carers showed an interest in their education. In comparison, the HBSC

survey (11-15yrs) reported that 90% of children in England felt that their parents were interested in what happened at school.



## Learning life skills

Young people were asked if they were given opportunities to practice life skills such as going to the bank, cooking and washing clothes. The majority (88%) thought they were given such opportunities but more than one in ten (12%) thought they were being inadequately prepared.

We don't do that [learning life skills]. It's staff that do it for us. (11-18yrs)



Overall, most children and young people thought they were supported by caring adults and provided with opportunities to develop through education and access to activities and play. The next section will consider whether children and young people felt that some of their other rights were being met.





# Rights

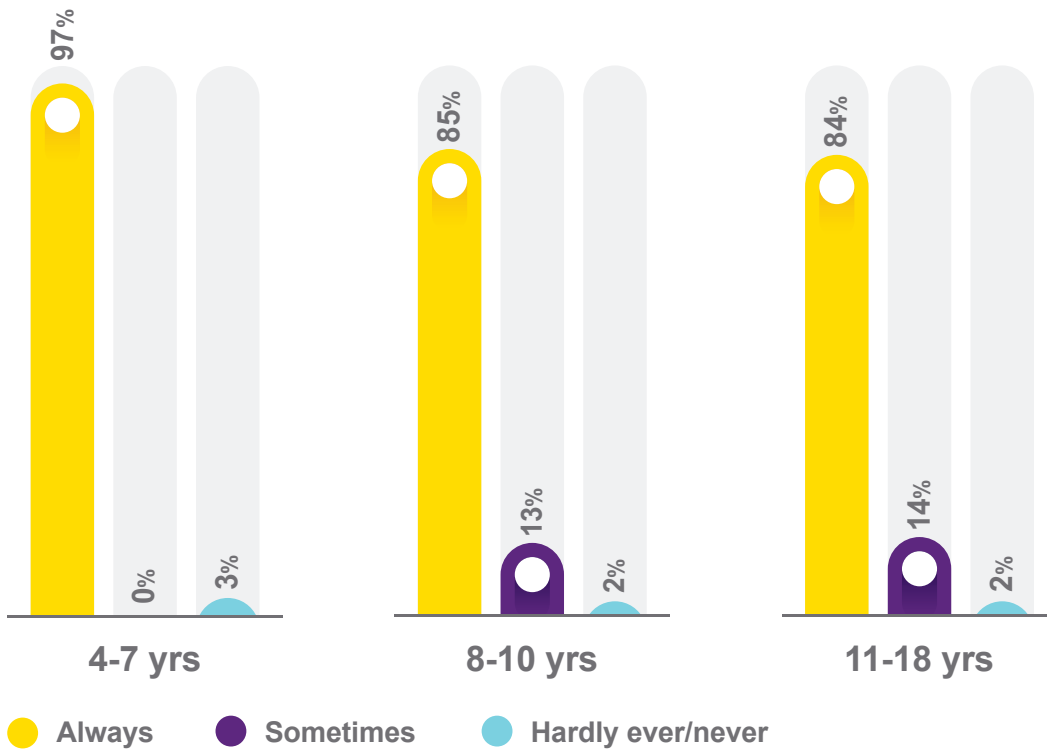
## Feeling safe



Children's right to life and protection from harm are set out in Article 6 and Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC, 1991). In our survey children and young people were asked if they felt safe where they lived. Children (4-7yrs) were given two options 'Mostly yes' and 'Mostly no' whereas children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) could respond 'Always', 'Sometimes', 'Hardly ever' or

'Never'. The vast majority of children and young people did feel safe in their placements (Figure 5). In fact, there was a larger proportion of looked after children who 'always' felt safe in comparison with children in the general population. The Children's World Survey (Rees *et al.*, 2014) reported that only 75% of children in England (8-14yrs) felt 'totally safe' at home.

Figure 5: **Feeling safe in placements**



## Rights

Some children and young people wrote comments comparing how they had felt living with their parents and how they now felt in care:

Being in care is the best thing that has happened to me because now I feel safe. I don't have to worry about being hurt or anything like that. (11-18yrs)

I prefer being in care because I wasn't safe at home with my mum. (11-18yrs)

Other young people wrote about their confused and ambivalent feelings around feeling safe. For example, one young person wrote:

I feel guilty for feeling happy and safe in care. I have so much anger towards my nan, grandad and mum, I hate it. I now know what a normal family do, say and treat each other. I love it here! (11-18yrs)

I don't feel safe in my care home as she shouts at me, but she takes me out a lot. More than mummy and daddy did. (4-7yrs)

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)

And others who felt safe were worried that future moves were going to make them feel less secure writing:

Do I really have to move school because I want to stay in this school because I feel safe? (8-10yrs)

The survey asks about how children feel and 308 (14%) children and young people did not 'always' feel safe in their placements. Twenty-two young people and children recorded that they 'never' felt safe in their placement. The way children felt may reflect previous traumatic experiences, as well as their present situation. There was no statistical difference in feelings of safety by type of placement; those living with relatives were just as likely to record that they did or did not feel safe as those living in foster care. Children and young people who did not feel safe mentioned experiences in previous placements or currently having carers who shouted:

## Rights

One child wrote about not feeling safe because of the terrorist attacks.

The reason I don't feel safe is because of the terrorist attacks and I only feel safe when I am with my parents or at school. (8-10yrs)

This child also wrote about the social worker not listening and not acknowledging her feelings. Recent research has confirmed that children can be

negatively affected by watching images on television. A study (Holmes *et al.*, 2007) of the impact on London children of watching the television reports of the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attack found that some children continued to have symptoms of post-traumatic stress six months later. It is important that social workers and carers listen to children's concerns and acknowledge that they can be distressed whether or not they witnessed an event.

## Free from bullying

There is evidence (e.g. [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying_factsheet.pdf)) that bullying can have a very serious impact on children's well-being leading to truancy, depression and suicide. In our survey, children were asked if they were afraid of going to school because of fear of bullying. There were no statistical gender differences in the reporting of bullying, but children aged 8-10yrs (30%) were more fearful than the older young people (20%) of going to school because of bullying. Although the question in our survey is not identical to national surveys, it appears that looked after children



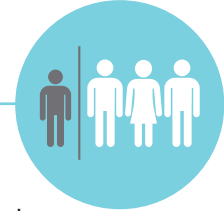
and young people are reporting more bullying: 70% of 8-10yrs and 80% of 11-18yrs of looked after children stated they were 'hardly ever' or 'never' afraid of bullying compared to 88% of children (10-15yrs) in the general population not expressing fear of bullying (ONS 2016). Of those who reported being afraid to go to school, the majority (79%) reported that they got support from someone to help with bullying. Young people's comments on bullying focused on how being in care made them "different" and being different could make them the target of bullies. They wrote:

Sometimes it's hard as you are a care kid and sometimes gets bullied. I tell staff or my carers who sort it out for me. Being in care has taught me a lot about how to behave and the ways family are. (11-18yrs)

Being in care is a struggle because you can get bullied or picked on for being special and this can bring my mood down and others too which means this also impacts on their lives because they might be scared to go to school/college and be afraid that they will get singled out from all the others because they are in care and are different from everyone else. (11-18yrs)

## Rights

### Feeling different



In our survey, the 11-18yrs age group were asked, "If adults did things that made them feel embarrassed about being in care." Most young people (87%) did not experience adults as drawing negative attention to their care status. Some young people wrote about feeling different at school parents' evenings with other children

asking if their carers were their parents. Other young people disliked social workers or contact workers picking them up wearing their council ID badges or talking about the young person's background where others could hear. Young people wrote comments about feeling different:

Things like having a sleepover has to be a massive process and there has to be a screening on friends' house/ parents etc. (11-18yrs)

They (carers) always introduce me as a "foster kid." (11-18yrs)

If I have to go to the doctors or dentists, I have to explain that I am a child in care. (11-18yrs)

I want to be normal. I don't want to have a social worker or meetings. (8-10yrs)

### Knowing identity of social worker



All the children and young people (4-18yrs) were asked if they knew their current social worker's identity (Table 5). It was surprising how many children did not

know who their social worker was. Nearly one in four (23%) of 4-7yrs old did not know or were unsure.

Table 5: Children and young people's awareness of their social worker's identity (n=2,224)

Age group	Know social worker	Don't know	Total
11-18yrs	1,127 (87%)	163 (13%)	1,290
8-10yrs	508 (87%)	78 (13%)	586
4-7yrs	267 (77%)	81 (23%)	348
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,902 (85%)</b>	<b>332 (15%)</b>	<b>2,224</b>

## Rights

Getting in touch with their social worker was difficult for about 15% of young people and some wrote about their need to see their social worker:

Need to see social worker. I have not seen her for 3 or 4 months.  
(11-18yrs)

Pleaaaaase let me have a new social worker.  
(11-18yrs)

Children and young people aged 8-18yrs were asked whether they knew they could speak to their social worker on their own. The majority did know they had this right, but 15% of children (8-10yrs) and 4% of young people (11-18yrs) did not know they were able to do this.

I don't want to ask to see my social worker alone as I am scared my foster carer will think I am telling lies about her. (8-10yrs)

I would like to know who my social worker is and to have one that stays with us. I would like more help to see my dad.  
(8-10yrs)



## Rights

### Feeling involved in decision-making

Research on well-being and mental health suggests that children and young people who feel they have some control over their lives do better educationally, are less prone to depression and anxiety, and have greater resilience in the face of adversity (The Children's Society, 2015). Article 12 and 13 of the UNCRC also state that it is a child's right to have information and to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. In our survey, children and young people (8-10yrs and 11-18yrs) were asked if they felt involved in decisions that social workers were making about their lives. Most did feel included in social work decision-making but 15% of 11-18yrs and 19% of those aged 8-10yrs did not feel listened to and included.



Everyone says things are in my "best interests" but they don't know how I feel. (11-18yrs)

Sometimes I feel like a prisoner. (11-18yrs)

[What would make care better?]  
To be listened to by my social worker and that she doesn't walk out on me when I am trying to tell her how I feel. (8-10yrs)

I had no say when I was moved and never been told the reason why. I feel empty all the time. (11-18yrs)

My social worker always includes me in decisions. (11-18yrs)

**Article 39 of the UNCRC states that children have a right to help if they have experienced harm. The next section considers children and young people's views on whether they felt they were enabled to recover from earlier trauma.**



# Recovery

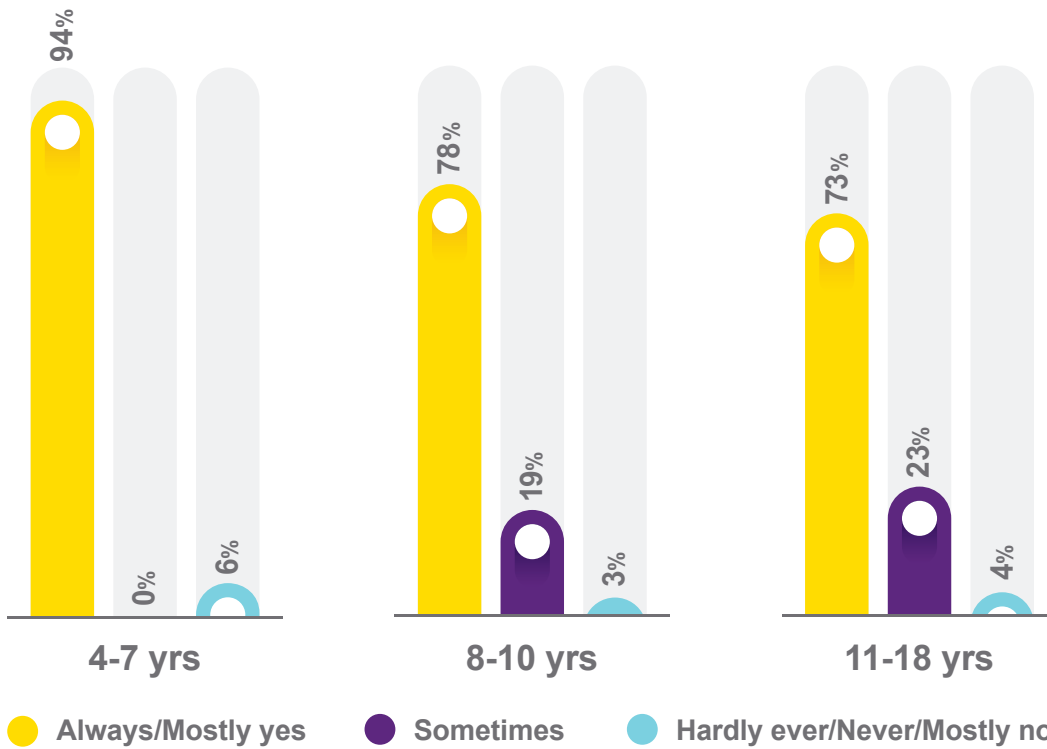
## Feeling settled



Children and young people were asked if they felt settled and felt they belonged in their placements. The majority were settled (Figure 6) but young people

(11-18yrs) who had been in multiple placements were more likely to record that they 'hardly ever' or 'never' felt settled.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 6: Children and young people's view on whether they felt settled where they lived



<sup>4</sup>  $\chi^2 (5, n=1,283) = 19.62, p = .001, \text{Cramer's } V = .124$



## Recovery

Children who were not settled wrote about the impact of changing placements, and some young people commented on how being moved around made them feel that they had little control over their lives.

I just keep being moved around. I have moved I think 7 times in the last 6 months. This makes me confused and scared. It has been dark and scary when I move, and I am told where [I am going], as we drive. I never meet the people beforehand and my things take time to catch up with me. (8-10yrs)

It has been scary, but my foster carer has been very kind to me. It is difficult not having Mummy to talk to when I am scared. I now live in a different place and go to a different school, I don't know anyone. I am told that everyone will do what is best for me, but I don't think they know what that is yet. The social worker says they still have to work that out. I have been told I will not live with my foster carer for a long time, this is where I am while they make their minds up. That is why I don't feel settled. (4-7yrs)

I do not enjoy my placement and the fact that I have been moved to Wales. I feel like I'm too far away from my friends and family. I have no sense of home as I was brought up in [area] and now feel out of place in Wales. (11-18yrs)

Being moved around is horrible, being with foster carers that I hated. Being told what to do by someone you don't know and the lack of control over your own life. (11-18yrs)

However, moves could also be positive as in this example:

I am really happy with my carers now but when I first went into care, I was really sad because the carer was mean to me. She always told me I was a naughty girl and I didn't like it, but then my school and social worker got me moved and it was really, really good. (4-7yrs)



## Recovery

### Liking bedrooms



Over 90% of children and young people liked their bedrooms. Some of the children commented that

they did not like their bedroom because they had to share with a sibling.

### Having sensitive carers



Children and young people were asked if they felt their carers noticed how they were feeling. The majority (92% of 11-18yrs, 93% of 8-10yrs and 89% of 4-7yrs) thought their carers did notice how they

were feeling 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'. A few young people felt they were not understood by their carers or wanted more from their carers writing:

I like living in my house, but I want more hugs. (4-7yrs)

Foster parents need to remember that we have several things going through our minds that is unimaginable, as well as the everyday struggles of growing up. (11-18yrs)

### Being trusted



Trust was one of the words used most frequently by children in the focus groups that informed the development of our survey. Being able to trust the adults in their lives and in turn being trusted by them was very important for children and young people. Being trusted also implies that young people are given roles other than that of 'a looked after child'. Young people were asked if they were given opportunities to show they could be trusted at home or school. The majority (94%) did think they were given opportunities with 6% feeling they were 'hardly ever' or 'never' trusted.

Children (8-10yrs) were asked if they were given opportunities to help the teacher, as our focus groups said that looked after children were less likely to be given trusted tasks such as showing visitors round the school or carry a message for a teacher. In our survey 16% of children felt they were not given such opportunities.

## Recovery

### Doing similar things to friends



Most (84%) young people (11-18yrs) felt they were given the opportunity to do similar things as their friends but 16% felt they were unable to. Contacting friends online is the way most teenagers communicate but 14% of young people recorded that they 'hardly ever' or 'never' had access to a computer/tablet outside school. In comparison only 4% of young people (10-15yrs) in

the general population did not have access to a computer at home (The Children's Society, 2014). Boys in our survey were slightly more likely to report lack of access. Both boys and girls who did not have access to a computer or tablet outside school were also more likely to report the lack of a good friend.<sup>5</sup> A young person wrote:

They don't let u on the internet or go and see your friends. (11-18yrs)

### Worries



Children and young people were asked if they ever worried about their feelings or behaviour. The majority (60%) answered that they were worrying 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'. One in ten children (8-10yrs)

and 22% of young people (11-18yrs) thought they were not getting any or had insufficient help. Children and young people wrote about their worries:

I don't know why I feel like this. (4-7yrs)

Have more help on what I find hard because I don't get a lot of help (at home and at school). (8-10yrs)

I keep having different people to live with and I get frustrated. People then think I am bad. I don't understand why things are so complicated and why I haven't got a forever home like kids at school. Why am I different? Why am I moved about so much? (8-10yrs)

I would like to relax more. (8-10yrs)

My anger because I would like to get better and be kind to other people. (8-10yrs)

<sup>5</sup>χ<sup>2</sup> (1, n=1,268) =14.287, p<.003 φ .106.



## Recovery

### Feelings about appearance



The Good Childhood reports undertaken by The Children's Society (2017) have highlighted the strong association between having low well-being and unhappiness with personal appearance. In the general population being unhappy with appearance showed the most difference by gender, with girls being unhappier with their appearance than boys. Other research has also highlighted the link, particularly amongst teenage girls, between poor body image and low self-esteem, depression, eating disorders and self-harm (Cash & Smolak, 2011). We might expect looked after children to report even higher rates of

dissatisfaction with appearance, as the impact of trauma and abuse can have a detrimental effect on self-image (Treuer *et al.*, 2005).

Our survey found slightly more looked after young people (13%) were unhappy with their appearance compared to young people in the general population, where 10% of 10-17yrs old were unhappy (The Children's Society, 2017). There was also a statistically significant difference between boys and girls, with 19% of girls being unhappy with their appearance in comparison with 7% of the boys.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>  $\chi^2(1, n=1,254) = 42.762, p < .000 \phi .185.$

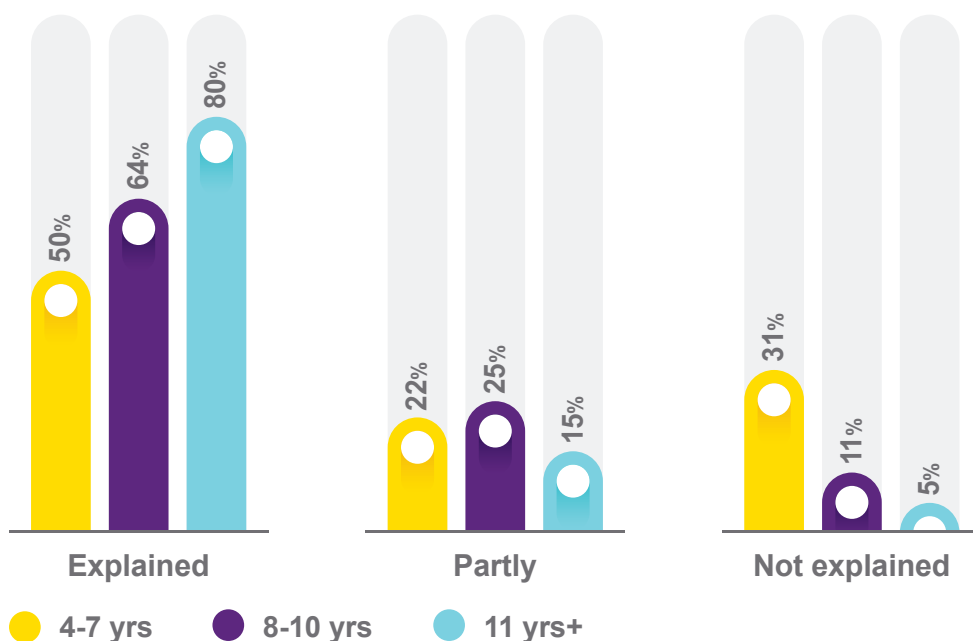
Recovery

Understanding the reasons for being looked after



In our survey, children and young people were asked if an adult had explained why they were in care (Figure 7). The majority of children did understand why they were in care but the proportion of children who were unclear or confused was greatest in the youngest age groups. Nearly a third (31%) of the youngest children (4-7yrs) reported that they had not had any explanation as to why they were in care.

Figure 7: Children and young people's understanding of why they are in care



Children and young people wrote about wanting to have more information:

I want to know a lot more stuff about my family - more photos. (11-18yrs)

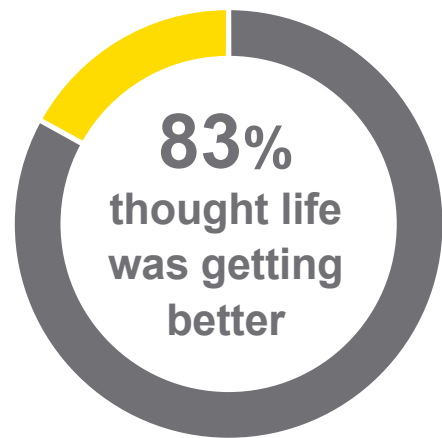
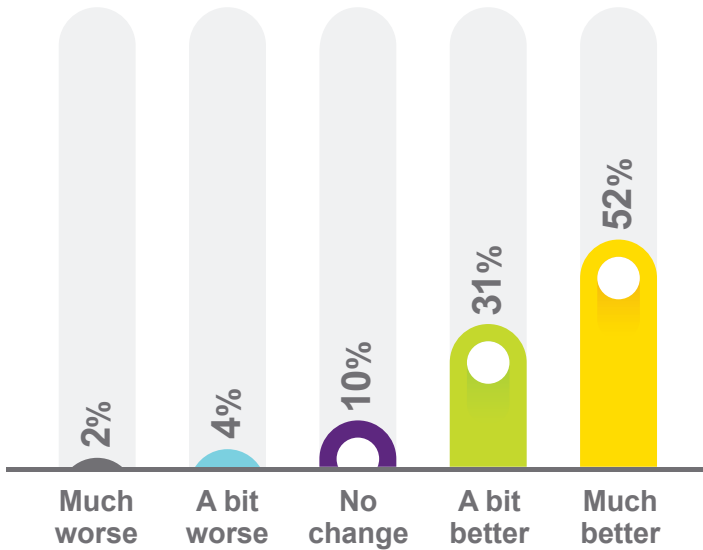
I would like to know more about my birth parents. (8-10yrs)

# Well-being

## Feeling that life is getting better

Young people were asked if their lives were getting better. The majority (83%) thought that life was better with just 6% feeling that life was getting worse (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Is life getting better?



Young people's text comments revealed the way they were feeling about their lives. Most young people were positive, as in these examples:

I think people should see care as being positive. It's the people who I am related to who have let me down. I understand that there must be reasons for the times when social workers have not been there, or decisions have been made. I want to make the most of life when I have control myself. (11-18yrs)

It's difficult, conflicting, stressful, upsetting, hard and at times draining but it also has its happy, fun and bright moments too when people pull together to support one another. It's helped managing anger, helped me to be more organised and mature. Being in care has given me positive opportunities. A place to feel safe. (11-18yrs)

It has changed how I am for the better. For example, it has helped my attitude and control of my anger. (11-18yrs)

## Well-being

A few young people were far less positive and wrote:

Sometimes it has been okay. Some people have worked really hard to get things for me and get me what I want. I was grateful for that. But I think I came into care too late. Things were already pretty awful and being in care didn't make that better. I think it is down to me, my character and how I am. I have never been able to make the most of opportunities given to me. I always sabotage things, mix with the wrong people and such like. I am thick. I don't know what my future will be like, prison I would think and then on benefits. I can't see me ever being able to turn things around and have a family. (11-18yrs)

It is okay. The foster carer is nice, but I feel my life is on hold, as I know I will be going back home at some point and then I don't know how it will be as I have younger siblings: probably will need to help look after them. I know I do not do well at school and I don't concentrate, and I cause disruption in the class. I find school very boring and I don't want to go most of the time. I do go but it is a waste of time. I won't get qualifications and my life will just continue to be a mess. (11-18yrs)

## Being in care

Young people and children were asked, "What would make care better?" and could write their responses in a text box. Some young people wrote that they just wanted to thank their carers and social worker and that there was nothing that could be improved. Food was important for some: "Have hot school dinners whenever I want" (8-10yrs), or "more cake" or "not having to eat avocados and courgettes", (8-10yrs) whereas others wanted more individual attention from carers.

The majority of comments were about wanting more contact with family members and having fewer changes in their lives.

I would like some days out with just me and my carer. I would like to spend more time with both of my carers - just me and them. (8-10yrs)



## Well-being

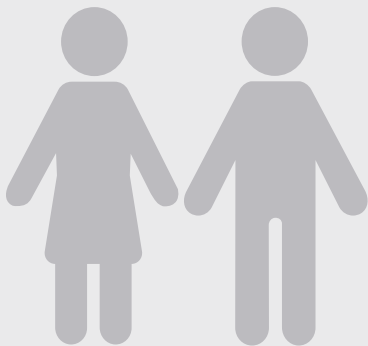
### What would make care better?

#### 8-10yrs

See my mum and dad more.

I want to live with my dad.

To know that adults will listen to me, especially when I am worried.



#### 11-18yrs

There is too much uncertainty. Too many meetings, too many silly questions and foster carers get fed up really quickly, and we have to move on. It is normal acting out; I am the same as everyone else, I get angry at times SOOOOO!

People need to listen more e.g. social workers, also to be given a chance to prove yourself!

There should be more support groups for younger children who are finding it hard to be in care. This will let them have someone to talk to about things.



No-one sticks around and there is so many changes all the time I have not gotten the opportunity to settle. No-one really listens.

Well-being

The four well-being scales

The survey for young people (11-18yrs) included four well-being scales that are also used as measures of the general population's well-being. The four (0-10) scales ask about: overall life satisfaction, how happy you felt yesterday, whether the things you do in life are worthwhile, and feelings of positivity about the future. Looked after young people's scores were placed into the thresholds of low (0-4), moderate

(5-6), high (7-8) and very high (9-10). The majority of young people had moderate to high well-being on all four scales (Figure 9), with 23% having a low score on at least one of the four scales.

The ONS published results (Figure 10) for young people in the general population provides a comparison on three of the scales, although the age range (10-15yrs) slightly differs from our sample (11-18yrs).

Figure 9: The well-being of looked after young people aged 11-18yrs (n=1,271)

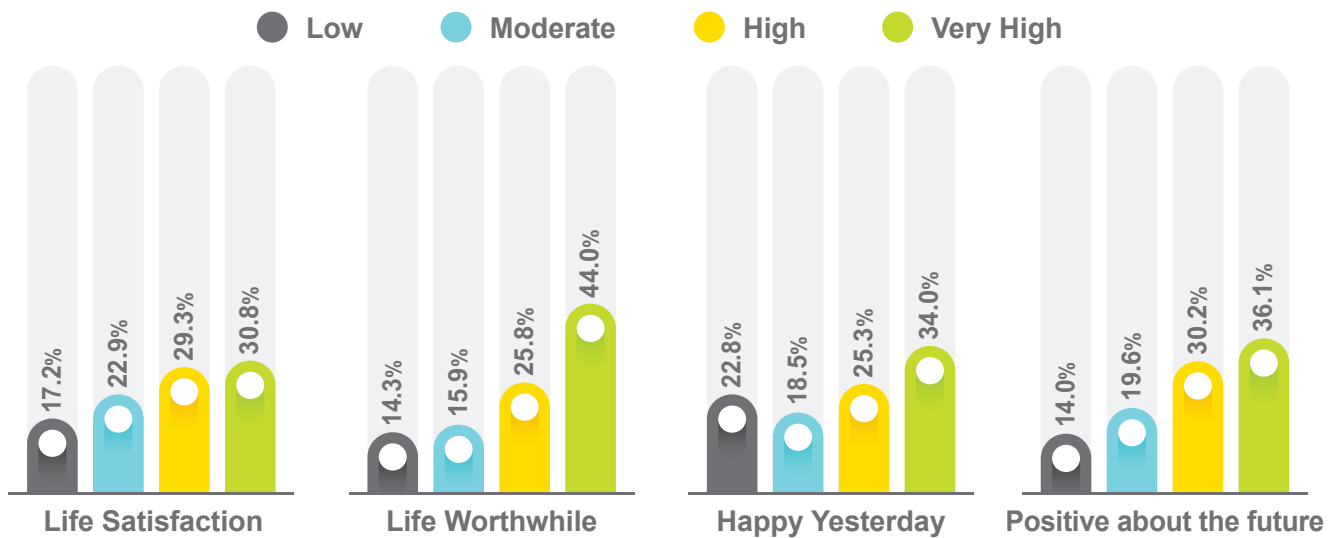
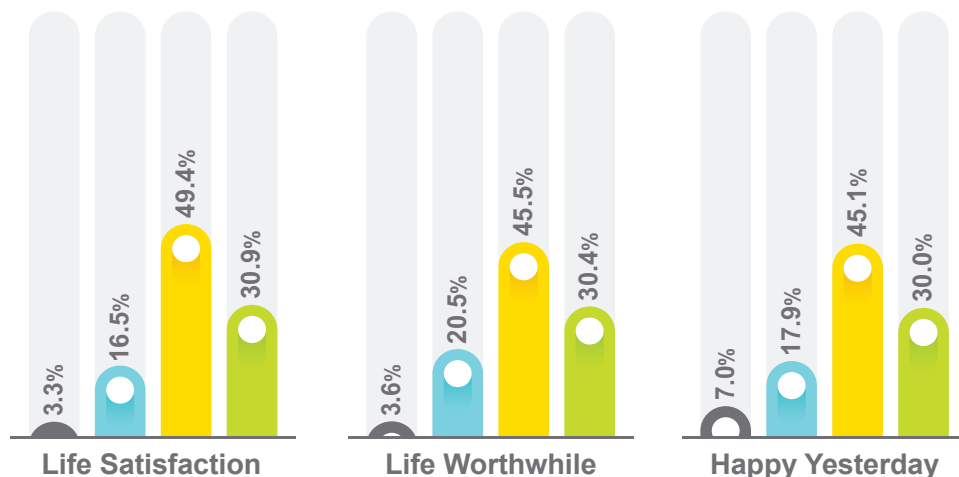


Figure 10: Young people in the general population aged 10-15yrs (n=1,566) ONS data equally weighted by age and gender





## Well-being

Although the majority of looked after young people had moderate levels of well-being, there was a larger proportion of looked after young people at both the lowest end of the scale and at the very high end on the scales compared with their peers in the

general population. The differences can be clearly seen (Table 7) using data that was supplied by The Children's Society<sup>7</sup> on an age range (10-17yrs) that more closely matches the survey sample.

Table 7: Comparing well-being scores of young people (11-18yrs) who are looked after and young people (11-17yrs) in the general population: the means and percentages with very high or low scores

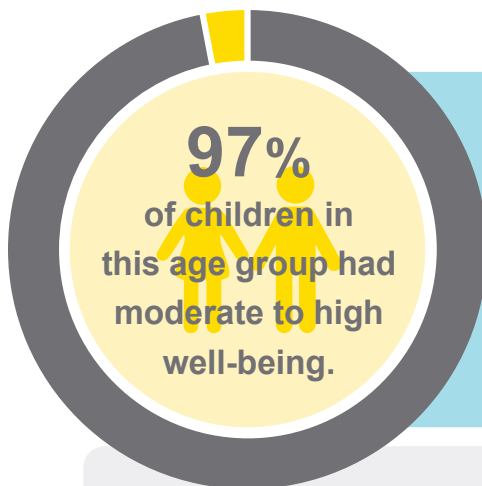
		Mean (out of 10)	% with low scores	% with very high scores
Positivity about the future	The Good Childhood Report 2017	6.8	7%	19%
	Your Life, Your Care	7.2	14%	36%
Satisfaction with life as a whole	The Good Childhood Report 2017	7.5	5%	27%
	Your Life, Your Care	6.9	17%	31%
Happy yesterday	The Good Childhood Report 2017	7.3	8%	26%
	Your Life, Your Care	6.7	22%	34%
Feel life is worthwhile	The Good Childhood Report 2017	7.5	6%	29%
	Your Life, Your Care	7.4	14%	44%

The majority of all the children and young people had moderate to high well-being. In the next section, we will take a closer look at the characteristics of the children and young people who had low well-being.

<sup>7</sup>Data provided for this comparison by Alexandra Turner and Larissa Pople using The Children's Society household surveys (The Good Childhood Report 2017).

Well-being

4-7yrs age group



Twenty-five children recorded that they were unhappy the previous day, but on closer examination of all their survey responses, only eleven of these children (six girls and five boys) had negative responses on other questions. Their overall profile suggested that these 11 children had low well-being.



**9 of the 11 children** with low well-being recorded that they did not feel that anyone had explained why they were in care and seven of these children also did not know whom their social worker was.

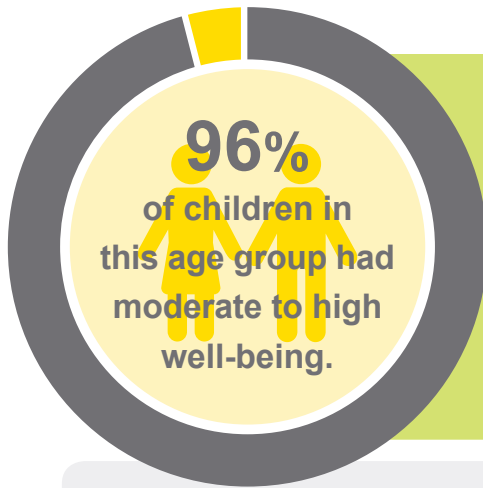
3 children were very unsettled in their placements, not trusting their carers and not believing their carers noticed how they were feeling.

2 children did not have a good friend.

4-7yrs 

## Well-being

### 8-10yrs age group



Forty-five children recorded that they were unhappy the previous day, of whom twenty also rated their lives as getting 'a bit' or 'a lot' worse. Twenty-one children (4%) gave negative responses to at least three survey questions and that group of children were categorised as having low well-being. This group of children appeared to be quite isolated and to have unsatisfactory contact arrangements (reporting too little or too much).

Children with low well-being tended to record negative responses to many different questions. They recorded that they:

Did not feel safe or settled in their placements.

Did not have a trusted adult in their lives.

Did not feel included in decision-making.

Did not trust their social worker.

Did not have a good friend.

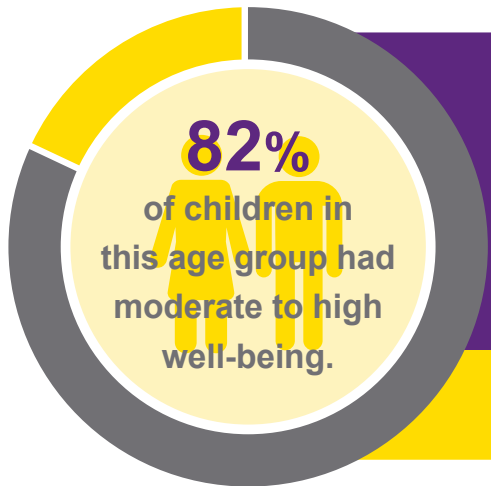
There was also a very small sub group of children (n=4) with low well-being who reported feeling very safe and settled in their placements, but who disliked school and were afraid to go to school because of bullying.

8-10yrs



Well-being

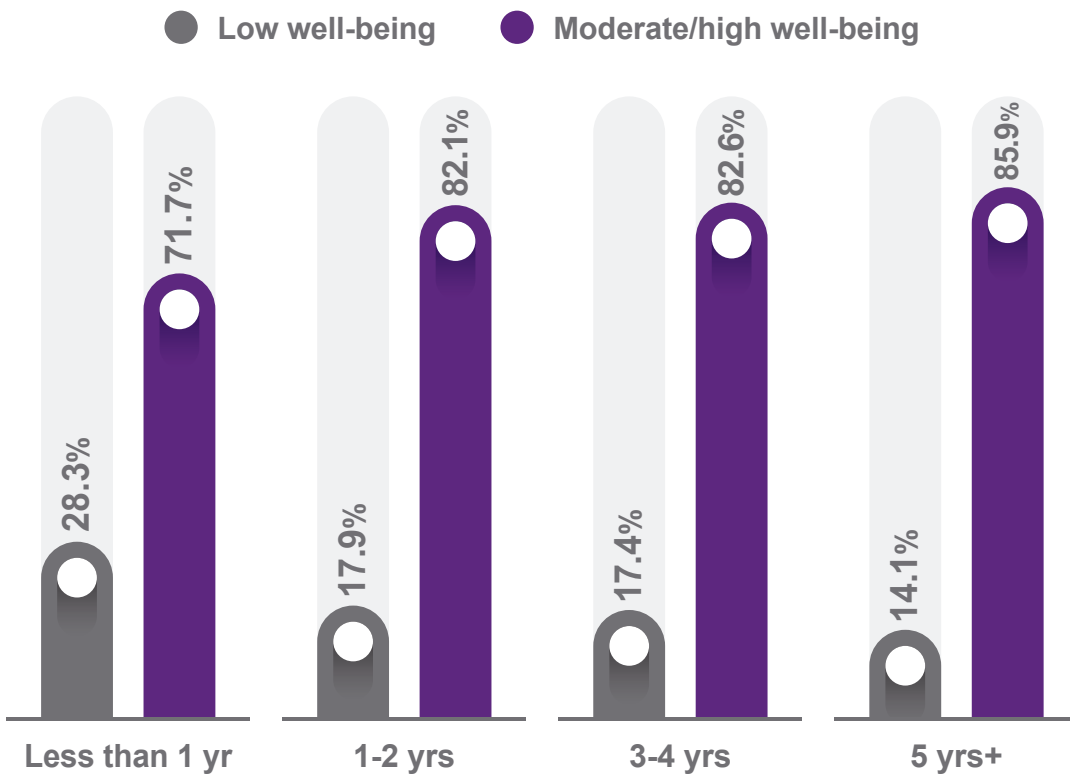
11-18yrs age group



Young people (11-18yrs) were the only age group to be asked all four well-being questions that are used by The Children's Society (2017) with the general population. The four questions, on 0-10 scales, ask about life satisfaction, happiness yesterday, life being worthwhile and positivity about the future. Young people who scored low on two or more of the four scales (n=227) were categorised as having low well-being.

Those who had been in care for two or more years had higher well-being than new entrants (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Length of time in care and well-being: young people 11-18yrs



11-18yrs



## Well-being

To examine which responses were most strongly associated with low well-being a range of statistical tests were used. In comparison with young people

who had moderate/high well-being, young people with low well-being were:



 11-18yrs

## Well-being

### Variation by local authority

There was variation (range 8%-31%) in the proportion of looked after young people (11-18yrs) with low well-being in the 16 local authorities. Examining differences by local authority there were also statistically significant differences on the following:

- **Length of time in care.** The percentage of young people who had been in care for less than a year ranged between 8% and 27% in the 16 different areas.<sup>8</sup> Local authorities who had a larger proportion of young people who had been in care for less than a year also had higher proportions with low well-being.

- **The number of social workers in the last 12 months.** The percentage of young people who had been allocated one social worker in the last year varied by local authority (range 17% - 53% of young people with one social worker).<sup>9</sup>
- **Number of placements.** The number of placements young people had experienced varied by local authority and by length of time in care. In one local authority, after three or more years in care, over 41% of young people had experienced 5+ placements. In comparison, over the same time period, in another local authority only 11% of young people had experienced 5+ placements.
- It was unsurprising to find that trust in carers<sup>10</sup> and in social workers<sup>11</sup> also varied by local authority area.

### Variation by ethnicity

There was a larger proportion of black and mixed ethnicity young people with low well-being (Table 8). Although minority ethnic children were over-represented in the survey, when examining low well-being by ethnicity the numbers get very small for analysis and therefore results must be seen as exploratory.

Examining the responses to individual questions, there was no clear pattern by the young person's ethnicity. Although, in comparison with young people of other ethnicities, a larger proportion of the mixed ethnicity group had experienced five or more foster placements, disliked school, did not understand why they were in care and were the least positive about their future.

Table 8: Ethnicity and well-being: looked after young people 11-18yrs

Well-being	Asian		Black		Mixed		White		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	23	17.2%	18	21.7%	83	24%	92	14.9%	216	18.3%
High/moderate	111	82.8%	65	78.3%	263	76%	524	85.1%	963	81.7%

<sup>8</sup>  $\chi^2$  (60, n=1,290) = 109.615, p < .001, Cramer's V=.146

<sup>9</sup>  $\chi^2$  (30, n=1,267) = 57.158, p = .002, Cramer's V=.150. For the chi-square test to be valid those who had no social workers were removed from the analysis.

<sup>10</sup>  $\chi^2$  (15, n=1,283) = 27.521, p = .025, Cramer's V=.147

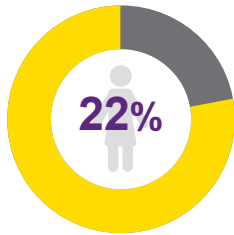
<sup>11</sup>  $\chi^2$  (15, n=1,228) = 25.671, p = .042, Cramer's V=.145.



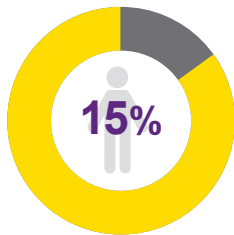
## Well-being

### Variation by gender

There were more girls



than boys



with low well-being  
with some variation  
in the factors predicting  
their well-being.

Happiness with appearance was the most important factor for boys and girls but was especially significant for girls. In addition, for girls, being given opportunities to be trusted, liking their bedrooms, doing the same things as their friends, having a trusted adult in their lives, not being frightened to go to school because of bullying, and feeling safe predicted better well-being. Whereas for boys being given opportunities to be trusted, doing the same things as their friends, and liking school were the most important factors predicting well-being.

11-18yrs

# Discussion

**The Your Life, Your Care survey gives a unique insight into the lives of children in care in England. It is the only survey of its kind, specifically developed for and with looked after children themselves to capture positive affect (NCB, 2017). It helps professionals and decision-makers understand the experiences of children in care so that they can focus their work on what matters most to children. Each local authority we worked with were given detailed reports of how their children felt about their lives to inform their policies and practice. This report summarised the findings from children in all participating local authorities to give an emergent insight into the subjective well-being of looked after children across the country.**

Findings from the 2017 survey replicated those reported in the 2016 report. Just as in 2016, 83% of young people thought that their lives were improving, and children and young people wrote about the opportunities that care had brought. Most children and young people recorded that being in care had given them a second chance and they expressed their gratitude to their social workers and carers. It is important to highlight that being looked after provides most children and young people with a good standard of care, safety, and support.

## Children and young people's concerns

Many of the same concerns that were highlighted by children and young people in the 2016 report were also replicated in 2017. Children and young people continued to express concern that they did not have a good understanding of why they were in care, did not always feel included in decision-making and not all children felt safe and settled in their placements. There were many complaints about the frequent changes of social worker and lack of certainty about plans for their future. Some of the younger children in particular were unsettled because they knew their

current placement was temporary but were waiting for plans to be decided or adopters found. Several of the young children wrote about how coming into care or moving placement was “scary.” It's important that professionals keep in mind how children might be feeling and do everything they can to reduce children's stress.

Children also highlighted the importance of their home environment. Some compared the warmth they were experiencing in their placements to their experiences within their families. Some children wrote about how they did not like “loud voices” or “shouting” - for most children this was not present in their placement but a few of the younger children wrote that they were frightened by foster carers who shouted. The training of foster carers should include much more on therapeutic parenting and the development of skills in reflective functioning. Carers need the capacity to reflect on how their behaviour might be perceived by children who have been maltreated and put themselves in the child's shoes. Carers need to develop their curiosity as to why children might be behaving as they do.





## Discussion

The quality and frequency of contact with parents and/or siblings was not the right amount for between 25%-35% of the sample. Contact plans need to be regularly reviewed, as do the arrangements (e.g. independent visitors) for the 28% of young people (11-18yrs) and the 13% of 8-10yrs old who had no contact with either parent.

### Ethnicity

With the larger 2017 sample it has also been possible to examine some of the differences in responses by the child's ethnicity. It was clear from the text responses that some asylum-seeking young people were desperate to have contact with relatives to reassure themselves that family members were alive and to let them know that they too were well. There seemed to be a difference in support by local authority area, with one area only allowing a very brief phone call every month whereas other local authorities seemed to be taking a more proactive role in helping young people maintain contact. However, most of those young people expressed gratitude at the help and support they were receiving. It was mixed ethnicity young people that were more likely to have lower well-being. A finding that needs further research.

### Siblings

We were surprised by the proportion of children aged 8-10 years who reported that they were having too much contact with siblings. We have wondered if the negative response might be due to sibling conflict for those in the same foster placement. Sibling conflict is at its peak during middle childhood and normally reduces during adolescence. Whilst sibling conflict is common and normative, it is also important to recognise that when sibling relationships do not also include intimacy, love, and warmth, the conflict can be harmful. Sibling bullying is the most frequent

form of bullying but often goes unrecognised or is minimised, although the detrimental effects on children's development are well known (Wolke *et al.*, 2015; Perkins & Stoll 2016). Therefore, if children are expressing dislike or fear of a sibling, social workers might need to consider interventions that enable siblings to learn the skills that are necessary for normal sibling relationships.

### Well-being

Overall the majority of children and young people had moderate to high subjective well-being. Their subjective well-being was similar to young people in the general population. The longer children and young people had spent being looked after the more likely they were to have moderate to high well-being. However, about one in six looked after young people had low well-being and our findings provide local authorities with information on policy and practice areas that need to be targeted to improve well-being. Local authorities who distributed the survey made, "We will" pledges to their looked after children. Our next report will follow up those pledges and consider the effectiveness of changes to local authority policies and practice.

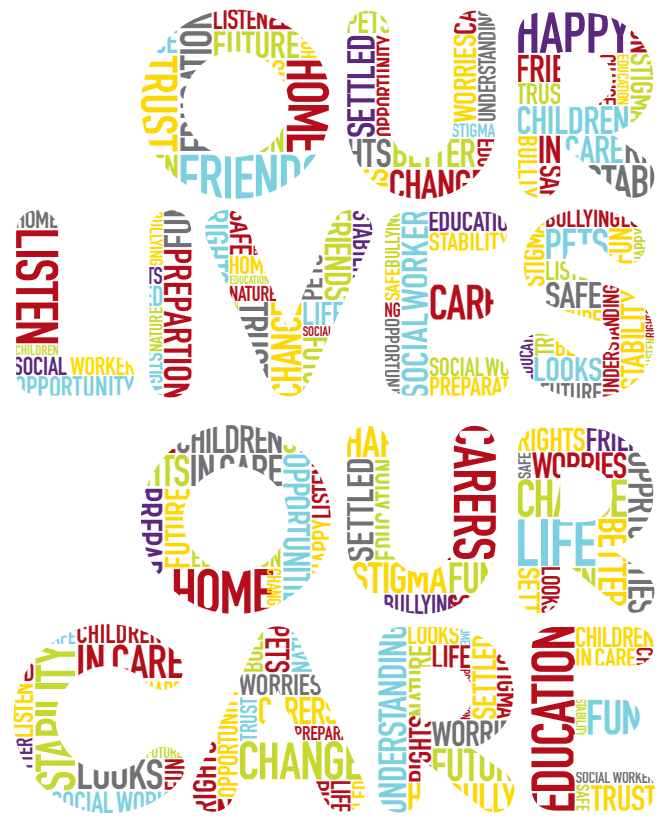
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- focus on what children and young people say about their lives and what is important to them.
- ensure the views and experiences of children influence service development & strategic thinking
- share good practice - encouraging learning and development together with other local authorities.

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