



# **Your Life, Your Care:** *survey of the views of looked after children and young people aged 4-18yrs in Cardiff*

*April 2018*

*Professor Julie Selwyn and Jon Symonds  
University of Bristol*

# About this research

## Bright Spots

This research is part of the Bright Spots programme: a partnership between the University of Bristol and Coram Voice.

The programme aims to:

- improve the care experience for all looked after children;
- give children a voice on their own well-being; and
- highlight the 'Bright Spots' of practice that contribute to children flourishing in care.

The project was funded by the Hadley Trust, the DfE Innovation Fund and the Children's Commissioner for Wales

- Through the programme we developed the *Bright Spots Well-Being Indicators*, which put children's experience and voices at the heart of how we measure subjective well-being.
- The indicators are measured by the '*Your Life, Your Care*' survey – a tool grounded in research and comparable to national data sets.
- The survey was developed from literature reviews, roundtable discussions with professionals and from focus groups and individual interviews with 140 looked after children and young people living in nine different English local authorities.
- The survey identifies the areas where children appear to be flourishing and where things could be improved, providing an evidence base of children's experience and well-being to inform service improvements.

# Index

	<b>Pages</b>
Section 1: Summary: Key findings	4
Section 2: Methodology	8
Section 3: Survey results	12
1. Demographics	13
2. Relationships	19
3. Resilience	28
4. Rights	38
5. Recovery	45
6. Well-being	54
Section 4: Children and young people's comments	65
Section 5: Positive aspects of practice and areas for improvement	71
Section 6: References	74



# **Section 1: Summary: Key Findings**

# Key findings:

255 looked after children and young people completed the survey: a response rate of 44%. Cardiff achieved a good representative sample by gender and by placement. Minority ethnic children were slightly under-represented.



**77%** of children (8-11yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) felt their lives were improving.

**One in ten** young people did not have a trusted adult in their lives. Having a trusted adult during childhood is a protective factor after adversity and is associated with resilience.



**A third** of young children (4-7yrs) felt that no-one had explained why they were in care. Children's understanding increased with age but 29% of young people (11-18yrs) also wanted more information about why they were in care.



19% of children (8-11yrs) and 24% of young people (11-18yrs) had no face to face contact with *either* parent.

Most children and young people wanted more contact with immediate and extended family members. Some (5%) wanted less parental contact or to have more information on relatives.

# Key findings

## Comparison with general population



Young people (11-18yrs) liked school as much (75%) as other young people living in Wales.



18 (13%) young people could not connect to the Internet in their placement:

a much larger proportion than the 2% of households in the Welsh population with no Internet.



About one in ten young people (11-18yrs) did not have a good friend compared to 3% in the general child population. Being friendless puts young people at greater risk of anxiety and depression.



have low well-being

- 22% girls
- 5% boys



be afraid of bullying

- 47% girls
- 14% boys

Compared to boys more girls were more likely to:



dislike their appearance

- 35% girls
- 3% boys



feel their carers didn't take an interest in their learning

- 12% girls
- no boys

# Key findings



None of the children aged 4-7yrs had low well-being but two children (8-11yrs) and 17 young people (11-18yrs) gave responses that suggested low well-being



Young people with low well-being were more likely to be girls and have poorer relationships with their social workers and carers.

The strongest statistical effect on low well-being was:

- disliking appearance
- not trusting their social worker
- not feeling safe or settled in placement
- not having opportunities to explore the outdoors
- not having a trusted adult.



## **Section 2: Methodology**



# Methodology

- Three online surveys were used to capture looked after children and young people's views on their own well-being. The three versions were for:
  - a) younger children aged 4-7yrs (16 questions);
  - b) children aged 8-11yrs in primary school (31 questions); and
  - c) young people of secondary school age 11-18yrs (46 questions).
- There was a common set of 16 core questions.
- Surveys were available in English and Welsh.
- Paper surveys were also available and used in cases where no Internet connection was available, or when the child preferred this method.
- In Cardiff at the time of the survey 581 children and young people aged 4-18yrs were looked after and able to complete the survey.
- Children and young people completed the survey anonymously: individual identifiers such as name, school etc. were not collected in order to allow responses without fear of consequences.
- If children recorded names or any identifying information on the survey these were removed by the researchers.

# Methodology

- The survey was introduced to the Children's Services Management team, so that all managers could distribute information across the service. At that meeting a lead manager was identified.
- The lead manager shared information with her management team, including those with responsibility for all looked after children and care leavers so that information can be cascaded
- Information was then sent to all social workers, fostering service, personal advisors, support staff and IROs.
- Information was repeated in all team meetings and team briefs across the Directorate.
- Lists of looked after children, by age group, were sent to social workers with the details of how to proceed with engaging the trusted adults – this was followed up weekly to ensure that all social workers responded.
- Lead manager sent weekly, then daily emails with updates and reminders.
- Children and young people were asked to complete the online survey over a four week period in March 2018 and, where appropriate, with a trusted adult present.
- The trusted adults were a combination of school staff, LAC Education staff, IROs, personal advisers, support workers and business support colleagues.

# Methodology

## Subjective well-being: Are children flourishing?

- Subjective well-being in this survey refers to children's own evaluations of how they feel about their lives.
- There are questions in the surveys about affect (e.g. how happy a child feels now), cognitive judgements (e.g. evaluations of relationships) and the inner world (e.g. life having meaning).
- All these elements help us understand whether children are flourishing.

- Where possible, LA data are compared to data on children in the general population, and to the average responses from 5 other Welsh local authorities.
- Data were weighted and tests run for significant difference between LAs.
- In addition to questions that measure overarching well-being indicators (happiness, life satisfaction etc.) the questions cover four domains that are important to children and young people: Relationships, Resilience, Rights and Recovery. The report covers each of these.



On some pages of this report you will see a 'Bright Spots' icon (shown left). This indicates a 'good news' story – a positive aspect of practice in your local authority.

This is where children and young people are doing significantly better than children in care in other local authorities or report the same or higher well-being than their peers in the general population.



## **Section 3: Survey results**



# 1. Demographics

- Sample sizes
- Age and gender
- Ethnicity
- Placements
- Length of time in care

# Sample sizes

Although the sample size must be borne in mind when considering the representativeness of the data, the response rate was significantly better than in some similar surveys. *The State of the Nation: Children in Care, 2015* for example, had a response rate of 3%.

- 255 children and young people completed the surveys from an eligible looked after population of 581.
- The overall response rate was 44%.

Age	Care population <i>n</i>	Responses <i>n</i>	Response rate %
4-7yrs	117	41	35%
8-11yrs	137	67	49%
11-18yrs	327	147	45%

# Age and gender

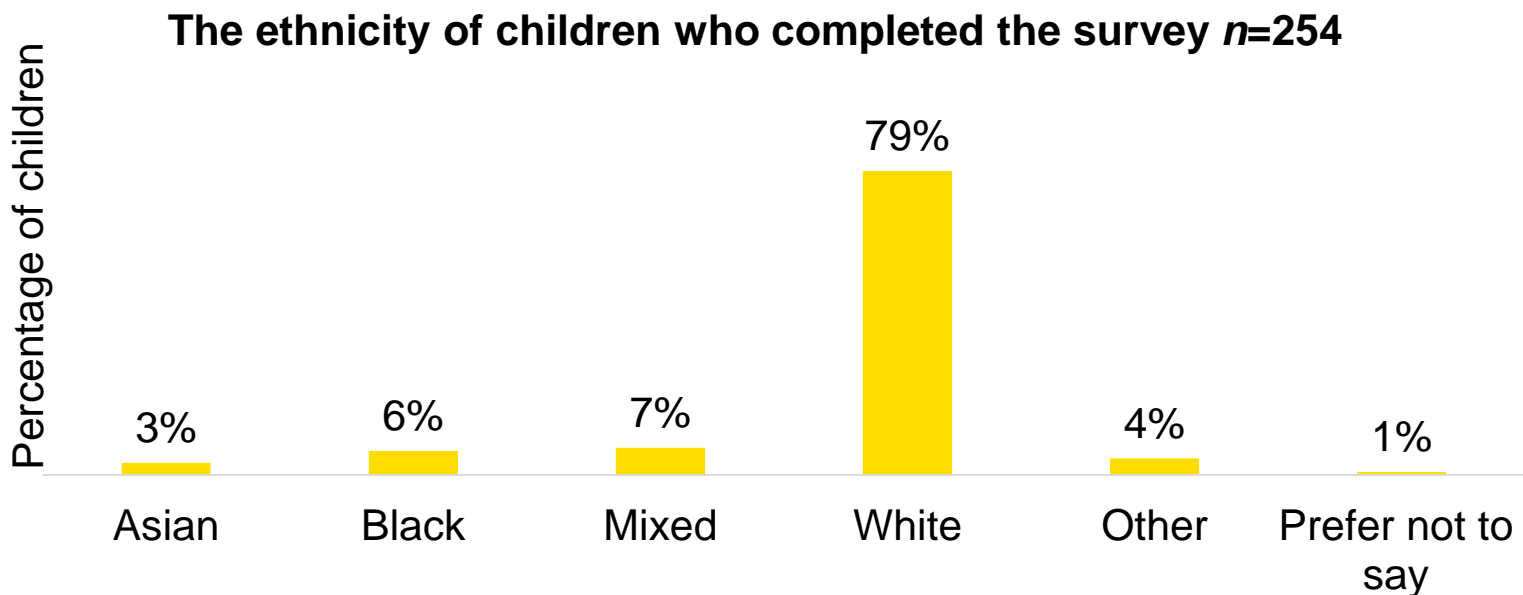
- In Cardiff, 54% of the looked after population were boys. The sample is reasonably representative of the care population.

Age group	Girls <i>n</i> (%)	Boys <i>n</i> (%)	Prefer not to say/no reply <i>n</i> (%)
4-7yrs	18 (44%)	22 (54%)	1 (2%)
8-11yrs	28 (42%)	39 (58%)	
11-18yrs	73 (50%)	70 (48%)	4 (2%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>119 (47%)</b>	<b>131 (51%)</b>	<b>5 (2%)</b>

# Ethnicity

Minority ethnic children were slightly under-represented in the survey, as they made up about 24% of the care population in Cardiff's statistical return to the Welsh government (2017) compared to 21% in our sample.

- The majority (78%) of children and young people who completed the survey described themselves as being of white ethnicity.





# Placements

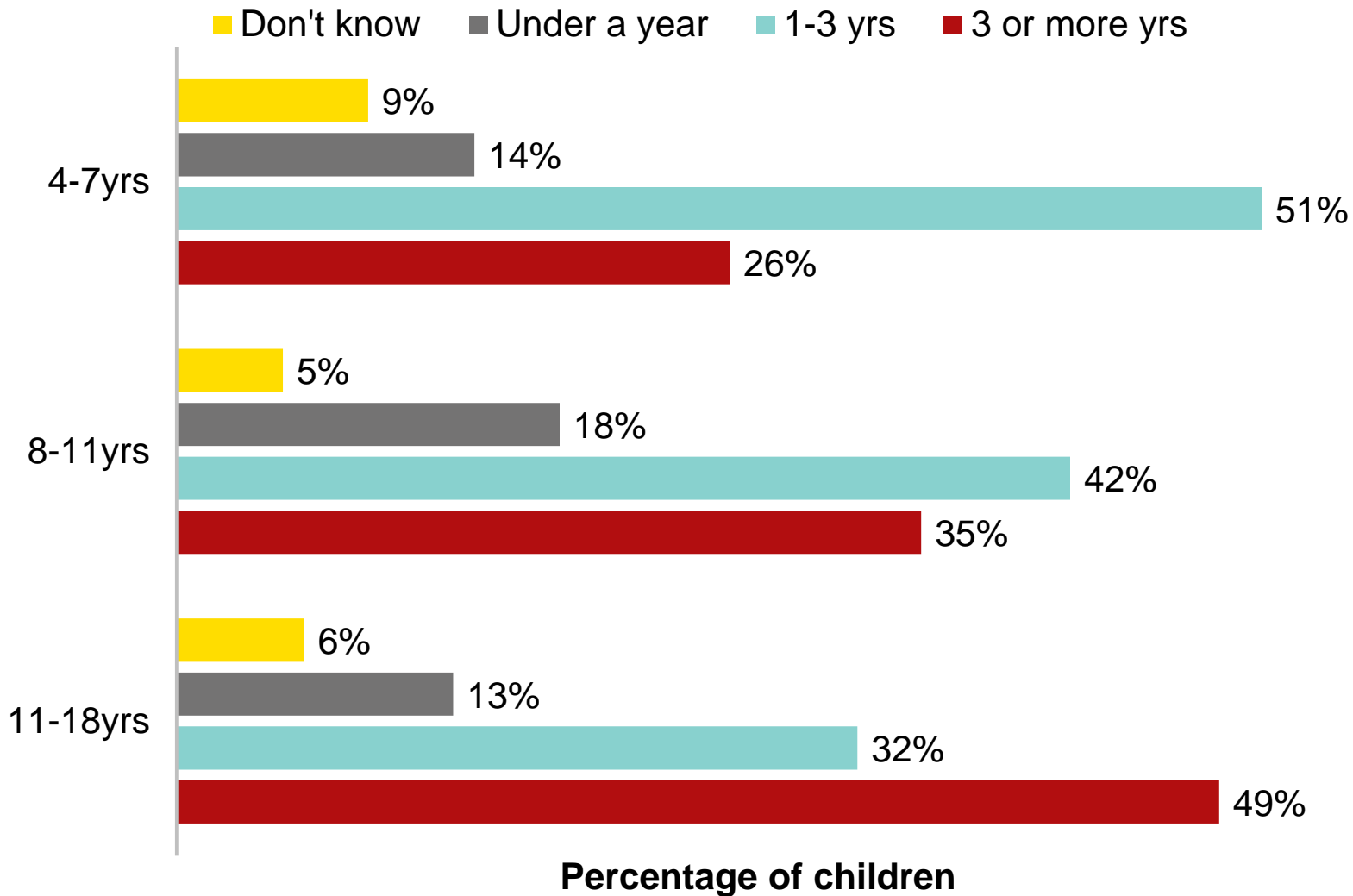
The responses broadly mirror the overall pattern in the local authority (where 68% are placed with foster carers and 7% live in residential care) (STATWales, 2017).

- The majority (67%) of children and young people were living in foster care.

Age group	Foster care %	Family or friends care %	Residential care %	With parents %	Somewhere else %	Prefer not to say %
4-7yrs	76%	5%		15%	2%	2%
8-11yrs	76%	12%	6%	6%		
11-18yrs	61%	5%	20%	3%	9%	2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>1%</b>

# Length of time in care

## How long have you been in care?





## 2. Relationships

- Family contact
- Good friends
- Pets
- Adults you live with:  
Continuity and trust
- Social worker:  
Continuity and trust

# Family contact




The youngest children (4-7yrs) were not asked questions about family contact, as it was thought that they might become distressed or anxious.



Children and young people (8-18yrs) were asked whether they were *content with the frequency of contact that was taking place with their mother, father, and siblings.*

- 19% of children (8-11yrs) and 24% of young people (11-18yrs) had no face to face contact with *either* parent.
- Children (8-11yrs) wrote about wanting more contact with family including wider family such as grandparents and aunts. They also wanted more information on why contact decisions had been made. A few children felt that either the quality of contact was poor and/or they were having too much.

# Family contact

Family member	Age group	Too much	Just right	Too little	I am unable to see them	Don't have any siblings
	8-11yrs n= 65	1 (1%)	25 (38%)	16 (25%)	23 (36%)	-----
	11-18yrs n=140	5 (4%)	54 (39%)	41 (29%)	40 (28%)	-----
	8-11yrs n=63	2 (3%)	14 (22%)	18 (29%)	29 (46%)	-----
	11-18yrs n= 140	2 (1%)	38 (27%)	29 (21%)	71 (51%)	-----
	8-11yrs n=65	6 (9%)	30 (46%)	17 (26%)	5 (8%)	7 (11%)
	11-18yrs n=141	7 (5%)	62 (44%)	49 (35%)	18 (13%)	5 (3%)

# Family contact: 8-11yrs

Children were also given the option of providing *comments about contact*.

- 40 children took the opportunity to write their thoughts and feelings about contact. Example quotes are shown below.

*Why does my contact have to be supervised and watch us? They type on the computer when they are in the room.*

*I would like to see my brothers and sisters more.*

*I cannot see my father. I would like to know why, and who he is.*

*I want to see my mum less.*

*I really want to see my mum and dad in contact. I can't see them because my dad can't be trusted and my mum's not well.*

*Dad: I enjoy going over his house in the holidays.  
Mum: never turns up ...  
Nana and Grampa: love having me for the holidays.*

# Family contact: 11-18yrs

- 63 young people took the opportunity to write their thoughts and feelings about contact. Example quotes are shown below.

*Everything is fine and I am really pleased with the amount of times I see my birth family.*

*3 times a year is not enough!  
We could make it 4 times to make it an even number?*

*We love seeing Mum and baby sister and we want more.*

*I have chosen not to associate myself with my birth family ... However, ... someday I may feel comfortable enough to visit them.*

*I want to see them when they have been traced.*

*I would like to see more of my dad and his side of the family at his home.*

*I do not want to have contact with my birth parents, but would wish to see my siblings more.*

# Good friends



A lack of friendships is associated with loneliness and anxiety. All children and young people were asked whether they *had a really good friend*.

**General population:** *The Millennium Cohort Study (2015)* of young people aged 14yrs found that 3% of young people did not have a good friend.

- Most of the children (4-11yrs) had at least one good friend but 15 young people (11-18yrs) did not.
- The proportion (11%) of looked after young people without a good friend was higher than reported by children in the general population where 3% are friendless.

Age group	Yes I have a really good friend <i>n (%)</i>	No, I don't have a really good friend <i>n (%)</i>
4-7yrs	40 (98%)	1 (2%)
8-11yrs	62 (98%)	1 (2%)
11-18yrs	121 (89%)	15 (11%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>223 (93%)</b>	<b>17 (7%)</b>



# Pets



Pets were important to children in all the focus groups we ran.

Children and young people aged between 8-18yrs were asked if they *had a pet in the home they lived in.*

## Focus group feedback

Children and young people said that pets are non-judgmental – they love you no matter what and are always pleased to see you. They can also give children an opportunity to take responsibility.

**General population:** In Wales, 66% of households with a child (under the age of 19yrs), have a pet.

- 70% of children (8-11yrs) lived in a household with a pet.
- In the older (11-18yrs) group, 57% of young people had a pet where they lived. 20% without a pet answered that they would like to have a pet.

*I would like to have a pet because I believe this would improve my mental wellbeing, preferably a dog.*

11-18yrs

# Adults you live with: Continuity & trust

## Placement moves



Young people (11-18yrs) were asked, *how many placements have you had since coming into care?*

Number of placements	Percentage
1 placement	36%
2-4 placements	42%
5-7 placements	8%
8-10 placements	6%
11+placements	1%
Don't know	7%

## Trust



Children and young people were asked whether they *trusted the adults they lived with (i.e. carers, parents).*

Positive responses:

- 98% of children (4-7yrs);
- 87% of those aged 8-11yrs; and
- 93% of young people (11-18yrs) trusted their carers.

*My foster carers are nice to me and make me happy.  
4-7yrs*

# Social worker: Continuity & trust

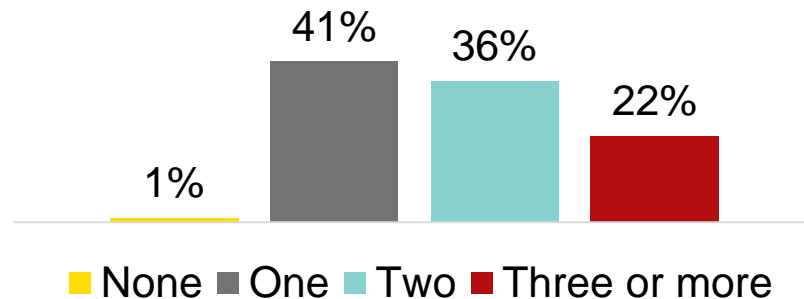
## Changes in social workers



11-18 year olds were asked, *how many social workers have you had in the past 12 months?*

- 31 (22%) answered that they had had three or more social workers in the previous year.

**How many social workers have you had in the last 12 months?**



## Trusting social worker



Children & young people (n=189) who knew who their social worker was, were asked whether they *trusted their social worker.*

The level of trust in social workers was high amongst the younger children but decreased in the older age groups.

- 97% of children (4-7yrs);
- 94% of children (8-11yrs); and
- 83% of young people (11-18yrs) trusted their social worker.

*Social workers shouldn't abandon the young person and move around jobs. Don't like having to meet new people/workers all the time.*

11-18yrs



### 3. Resilience

- Trusted adult
- Being trusted & helping out
- Liking school
- Adults you live with:  
Support for learning
- Having fun & hobbies
- Access to nature
- Second chances
- Life skills
- Access to Internet at home

# Trusted adult



Children and young people aged between 8-18yrs were asked, *do you have an adult who you trust, who helps you and sticks by you no matter what?*

## A turning point

The availability of one key adult has been shown to be the turning point in many looked after young people's lives. (Gilligan, 2009)

Having a trusted adult has been shown to be the main factor in helping children recover from traumatic events.

- Most children and young people wrote that they had a trusted adult in their lives:
  - 98% of children (8-11yrs); and
  - 90% of the 11-18yrs young people.
- One in ten young people did not have a trusted adult in their lives.

*I felt in my previous foster placement I could have received better emotional support as I needed to attend court as a victim.*

11-18yrs

# Being trusted & helping out

Younger children (8-11yrs) were asked if they *got the chance to help the teacher*. Children had said in the focus groups that they were never trusted to show visitors around school or deliver a message because they were looked after.

- 28% of children (8-11yrs) responded that 'all or most of the time' they were asked to help and 59% answered 'sometimes'.
- 13% wrote that they 'hardly ever' or 'never' were given trusted roles in school.



We asked young people, *how often do you get the chance to show you can be trusted?*

Having trusting relationships and being trusted were key issues raised by the children in the focus groups that underpinned the development of this survey.

- 39% of young people (11-18yrs) thought they were given opportunities 'all or most of the time' to show they could be trusted and 51% given them 'sometimes'.
- 6% 'hardly ever' and 4% wrote that they were 'never' given the opportunity to be trusted.

# Liking school



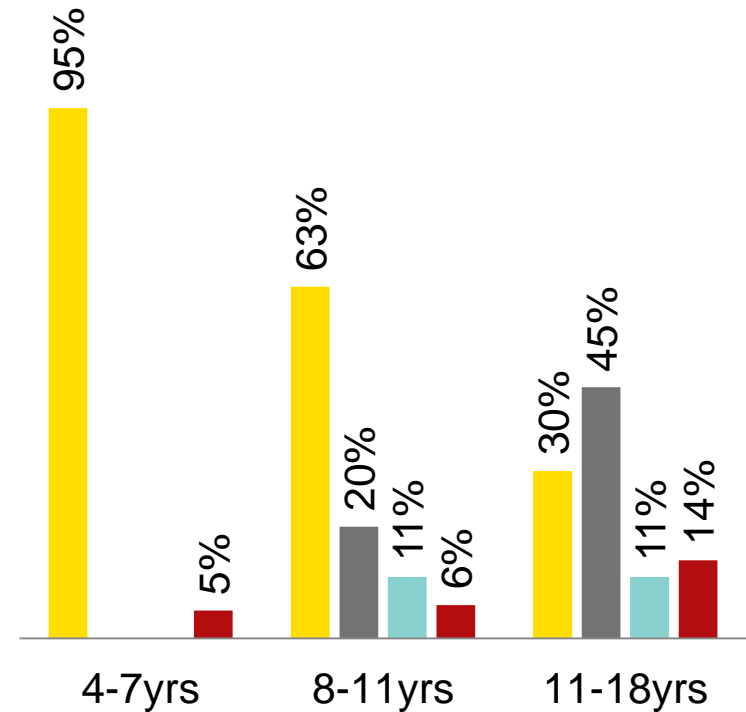
All the children and young people were asked how much they *liked school or college*.

## General population: Liking school

The *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey* (Wales, 2015) of 5,335 young people (11-16yrs) reported that 73% liked school 'a lot' or 'a bit' and 27% 'not very much' or 'not at all'. Liking school decreased with the child's age and girls were more likely to say they enjoyed school 'a lot' in comparison with boys.

- Young people (11-18yrs) liked school just as much as other children living in Wales.
- 75% of the 11-18yrs group liked school or college 'a lot' or 'a bit', compared to 73% of young people in the Welsh population and 71% of looked after young people in other Welsh authorities.

## Do you like school?



- A lot/Mostly yes
- A bit
- Not very much
- Not at all/Mostly no

# Adults you live with: Support for learning



Children in the 8-11yrs and 11-18yrs surveys were asked whether the adults they lived with (e.g. carers, parents)

*showed an interest in what they were doing in school or college.*

## General population:

### Support with learning

In comparison, the *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children survey* (11-15yrs) reported that 90% of young people in England thought that their parents were interested in what happened at school.

- 94% of children (8-11yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) recorded that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- Carers are doing a good job in supporting young people's learning. 94% of looked after young people in Cardiff felt their carers were interested in their education compared to 90% of young people in the English general population.



# Having fun & hobbies

Children aged 4-7yrs and 8-11yrs were asked if they had *fun at the weekend*.



The 11-18yrs survey asked young people if they were able to *spend time on their own hobbies or activities outside of school*.

- The majority (94%) of children and young people (4-18yrs) had fun and took part in activities outside school.

*It's really fun and we get to go down the caravan.*  
4-7yrs

Age group-	Yes, I have fun/take part in activities <i>n (%)</i>	Sometimes I have fun/take part in activities <i>n (%)</i>	No, I don't have fun or take part in activities <i>n (%)</i>
4-7yrs	40 (100%)	-	-
8-11yrs	47 (73%)	15 (23%)	2 (3%)
11-18yrs	81 (59%)	44 (32%)	12 (9%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>168 (70%)</b>	<b>59 (24%)</b>	<b>14 (6%)</b>

# Access to nature



Contact with nature can reduce stress and improve mental health. (Play England, 2012)

We asked whether children and young people had opportunities to *explore the outdoors*, such as visiting parks, beaches, and forests.

## Focus group feedback

Some of the children in our focus groups said safeguarding fears limited their opportunities.

## General population:

About 11% of children (6-15yrs) had not visited the natural environment in the last year. (National Survey for Wales – outdoor recreation, 2015)

- 95% of children (8-11yrs) and 90% of young people (11-18yrs) answered that they had access to nature ‘all or most of the time’ or ‘sometimes’.
- Three children (8-11yrs) and 13 young people were ‘hardly ever’ or ‘never’ given these opportunities.
- Not having contact with nature was associated with lower well-being.

# Second chances

All children make mistakes and need a second or many more chances. It is part of learning and growing up.



Young people aged 11-18yrs were asked if they felt they *got second chances if they did something wrong.*

## Focus group feedback

Many children involved in the focus groups stated that looked after children were too readily refused a second chance.

- 54% responded 'all or most of the time';
- 37% answered 'sometimes'; and
- 9% thought they 'hardly ever' or 'never' got a second chance.

*My foster carers ... don't trust me and think I steal and lie which is hurtful to me because I don't.*

11-18yrs

# Life skills



We asked the young people in the 11-18yrs group, *how often do you get to practice life skills like cooking healthy food, washing clothes or going to the bank?*

## Focus group feedback

This question was asked as many young people in the focus groups thought that they had been insufficiently prepared for independence.

- 84% of young people answered that they were taught independence skills 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- 16% thought this was 'hardly ever' or 'never' true.

# Access to Internet at home



Young people 11-18yrs were *asked if they could connect to the Internet from home.*

## General population: Access to the Internet

- In Wales, 98% of households with children and two adults have an Internet connection. 90% of single parents have an Internet connection. (National Survey for Wales, 2017)
- The *Millennium Cohort Study* of children aged 11yrs old found that children who never used the Internet outside school had a high probability of low well-being. (The Children's Society Report, 2014)

- The *majority* (87%) of young people reported that they did have access to the Internet in their placement.
- 18 (13%) young people could not connect to the Internet in their placement: a much larger proportion than the 2% of households with children in the Welsh population with no Internet.

**Is there anything else you want to say or tell us about being in care?**

*For adults to ease up on the mobile phone access rule and access to the internet.*

11-18yrs



## 4. Rights

- Included in decision making
- Stigma of being in care
- Feeling safe in placement
- Bullying
- Knowing and contact with social workers

# Included in decision-making



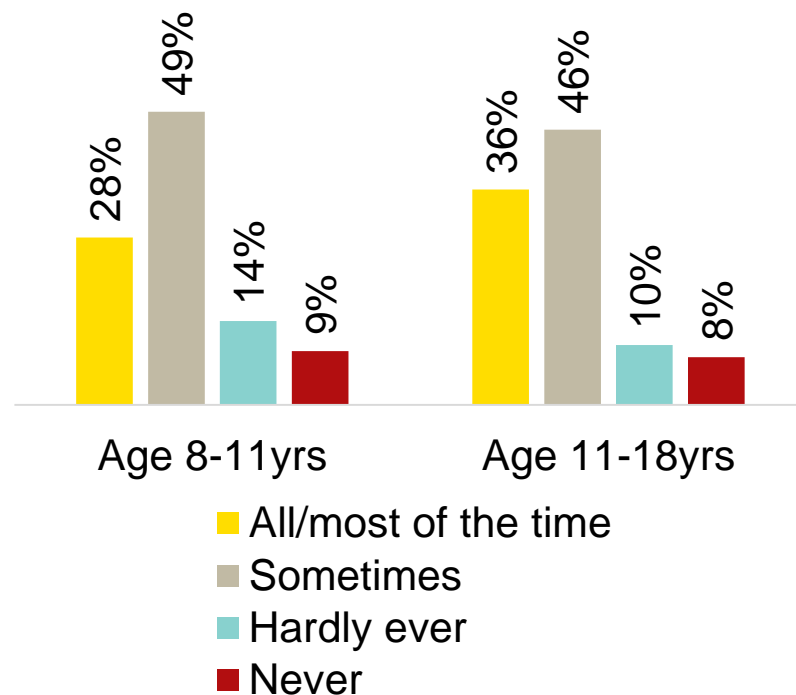
Children and young people aged 8-18yrs were asked, *do you feel included in the decisions that social workers make about your life?*

- 77% of 8-11yrs 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' felt included.
- 82% of 11-18yrs 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' felt included.

*I like having my voice heard. I feel the social worker needs to listen to me more and remember that it's my life and not Dad's.*

8-11yrs

**Do you feel included in the decisions that social workers make about your life?**



# Stigma of being in care



The 11-18yrs age group were asked a question in the survey about feeling different, *do adults do things that make you feel embarrassed about being in care?*

Younger children were not asked these questions, as the focus groups suggested that being made to feel different was of much greater concern in adolescence.

- 12% of young people recorded that adults did things that made them feel embarrassed about being in care.

*Bring up personal things about me at the dinner table.*  
11-18yrs

*Adults that know you are in care should keep it to themselves.*  
11-18yrs



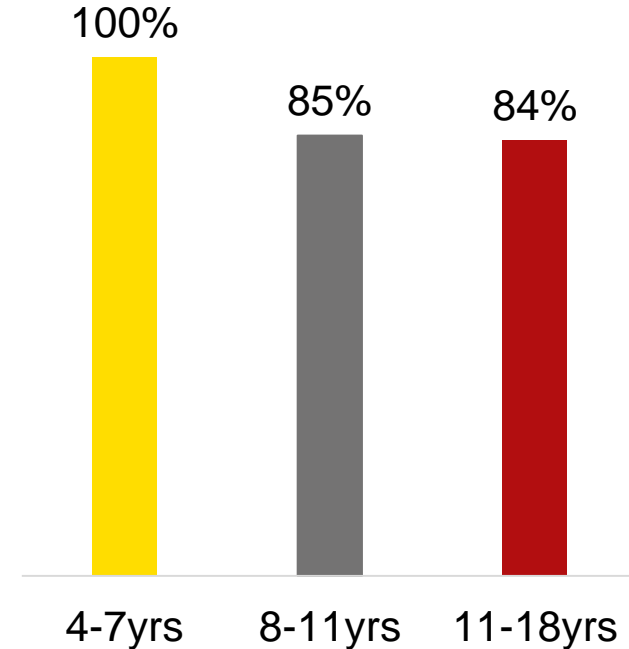
# Feeling safe in placement



All children (4-18yrs) were asked whether they *felt safe in the home they lived in now*. It is difficult to know what children were thinking about when answering, but feeling secure is about how the world *feels*, not necessarily how it is.

- All of the children aged 4-7yrs felt safe.
- Ten (15%) children aged 8-11yrs and 23 (16%) young people aged 11-18yrs ticked the 'sometimes', 'hardly ever' or 'never' boxes.
- Overall, 87% of children and young people reported that they felt safe 'all or most of the time' in their placements – a larger proportion than children in the general population where 75% reported feeling safe.

**I feel safe in the home I live in all or most of the time**



## General population:

*The Children's Worlds* survey found that 75% of children (8-13yrs) in the general population felt 'Totally safe' at home (Rees *et al.*, 2014). Not feeling safe is associated with raised cortisol levels and difficulty in learning and concentration. (Harvard University, 2012)

# Bullying

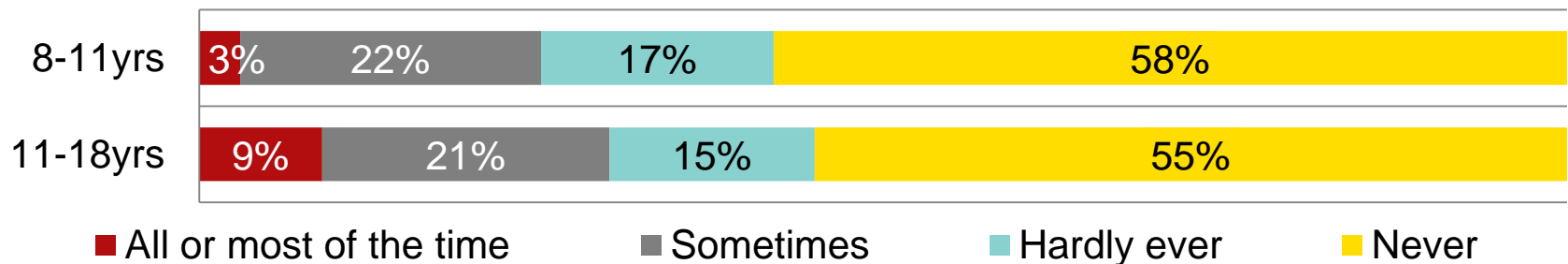
Our question asked whether children (8-18yrs) *felt afraid of going to school because of bullying* and if they were bullied were they *getting support from an adult*.

## General population: Bullying

- The analysis of the *Children's Worlds surveys* in 22 countries has shown that being free from bullying is one of the most important factors in children's well-being. (Rees *et al.*, 2010)
- About 10% of children in Wales report that they are regularly bullied at school. (ONS, 2016b)

- 16 (25%) children (8-11yrs) reported being afraid to go to school because of bullying. **All** thought they were getting support from an adult to stop the bullying.
- In contrast, while a similar proportion (22%) of young people (11-18yrs) reported being afraid to go to school because of bullying, only three-quarters felt they were getting adult support.
- More looked after children and young people were reporting bullying compared to children in the general population.

## Do you ever feel afraid of going to school or college because of bullying?



# Knowing identity of social workers



All the children and young people were asked if they *knew their current social worker*.

- Overall 7% of the children and young people who responded did not know their social worker.

Age group	Know social worker <i>n (%)</i>	Don't know social worker <i>n (%)</i>
4-7yrs	34 (83%)	7 (17%)
8-11yrs	61 (97%)	2 (3%)
11-18yrs	131 (95%)	7 (5%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>226 (93%)</b>	<b>16 (7%)</b>

# Contact with social workers



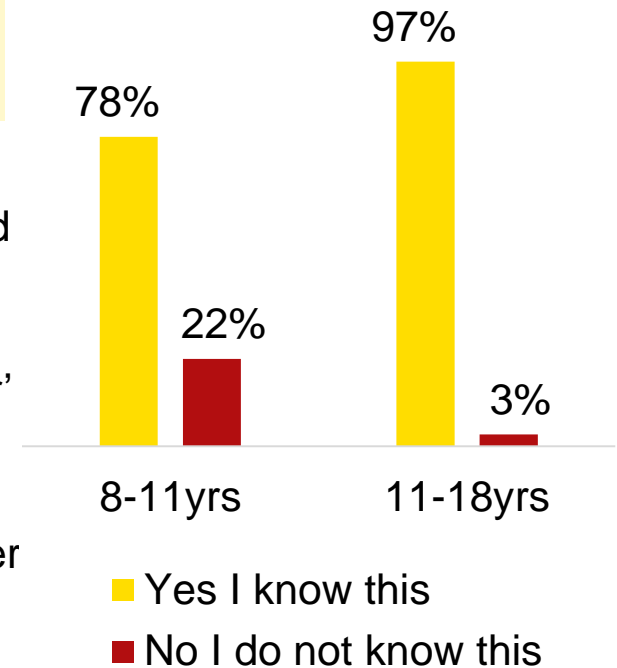
11-18 year olds (n=131) who knew their social worker were asked how *easy it was to contact them*.



Children (8-11yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) were asked whether *they knew they could speak to their social worker on their own*.

- 79% of young people (11-18yrs) reported that they could easily get in touch with their social worker 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- About one in five (21%) young people could 'hardly ever' or 'never' get in touch with their social worker.
- 78% of children (8-11yrs) and 93% of those aged 11-18yrs knew they could ask to speak to their social worker on their own.

**Do you know you have the right to speak to a social worker on your own?**





## 5. Recovery

- Knowing reason for being in care
- Feeling settled in placement
- Liking bedrooms
- Adults you live with:  
Sensitive parenting
- Adults you live with:  
Sharing confidences
- Support with worries
- Parity with peers
- Happiness with appearance

# Knowing reason for being in care



All the children and young people were asked if *someone had explained why they were in care.*

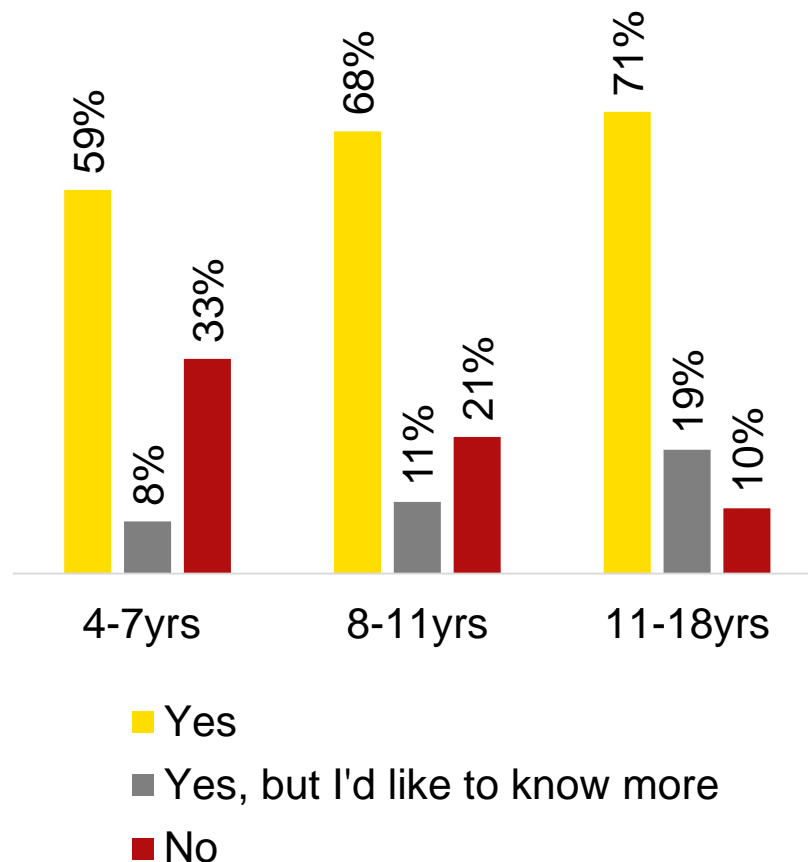
## Important for recovery

Having a coherent account of one's history and understanding the reasons that led to becoming looked after are important in the development of an integrated identity and in recovery from abuse and neglect.

(Adshead, 2012; Adler, 2012)

- A third of young children (4-7yrs) felt that no-one had explained why they were in care.
- Children's understanding increased with age but even so 29% of young people (11-18yrs) wanted more information.

Has someone explained to you why you are in care?



# Feeling settled in placement



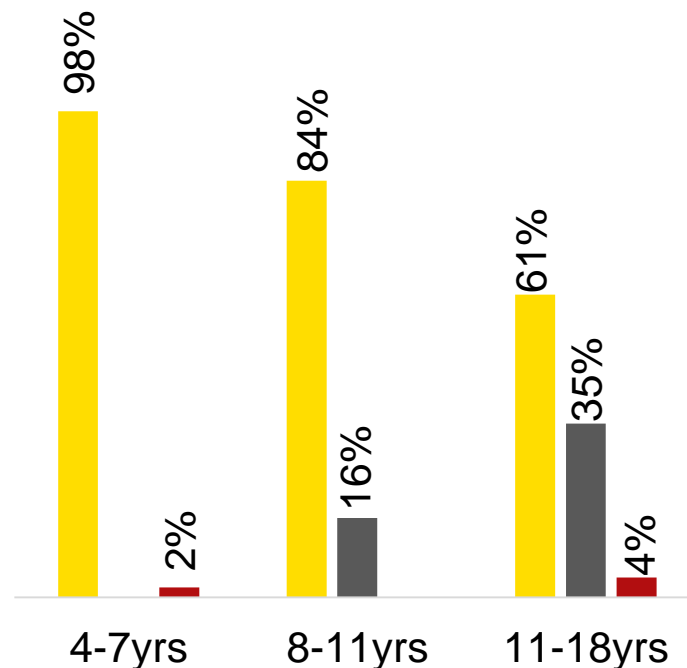
The surveys aimed to capture whether children felt a sense of belonging and felt at ease in their placements. Based on the advice from our focus groups, children and young people were asked,

*do you feel settled in the home you live in now?  
(Do you feel comfortable, accepted and at ease?)*

Children (4-7yrs) could answer 'mostly yes' or 'mostly no'. Children (8-11yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) could answer: 'all or most of the time', 'sometimes', 'hardly ever', or 'never'.

- Young people (11-18yrs) were far less settled in their placements compared to the youngest children. 7 children and young people 'never' felt settled.
- Fewer young people (61%) in Cardiff felt settled compared to other looked after young people in Wales where 73% felt settled.

## Feeling settled



■ All or most of the time/Mostly yes

■ Sometimes

■ Hardly ever/Never/Mostly no

# Liking bedrooms



Children and young people were asked, *do you like your bedroom?*

## Focus group feedback

Liking your bedroom was an important feature for the focus groups we ran. Young people reflected that their bedrooms were a place for being on your own in busy homes.

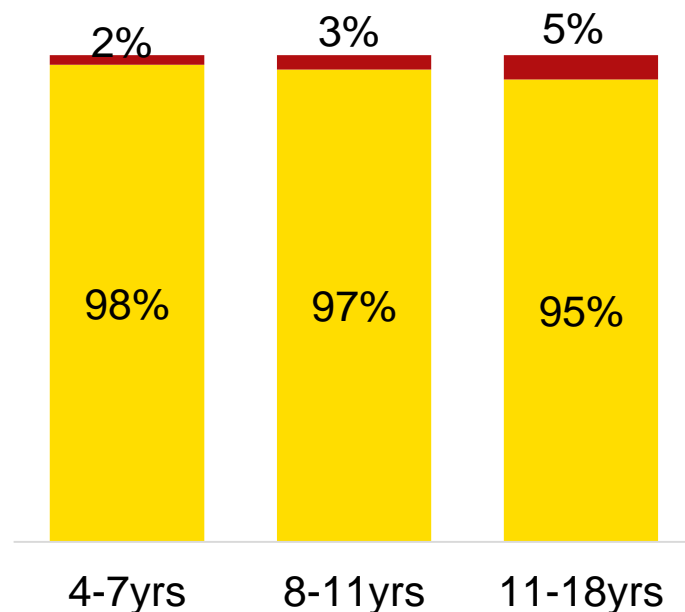
It was linked to safety, a sense of identity and feeling a sense of belonging.

- The vast majority of children and young people liked their bedrooms.

*I've got my own telly in the bedroom.*  
4-7yrs

*Not comfortable as we have to share a bedroom.*  
4-7yrs

## Do you like your bedroom?



■ Like ■ Dislike



# Adults you live with: Sensitive parenting



All children were asked whether they felt the adults they lived with *noticed how they were feeling*.

- 100% of children (4-7yrs) and 95% of children aged 8-11yrs thought their carers noticed how they were feeling 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- This is a 'Bright Spot' of practice.
- 90% of young people (11-18yrs) felt their carers noticed how they were feeling.

*My foster carers  
are nice to me and  
make me happy.  
4-7yrs*

*I love being in care  
because the people I  
live with are very nice  
and love me very much.  
8-11yrs*

# Adults you live with: Sharing confidences



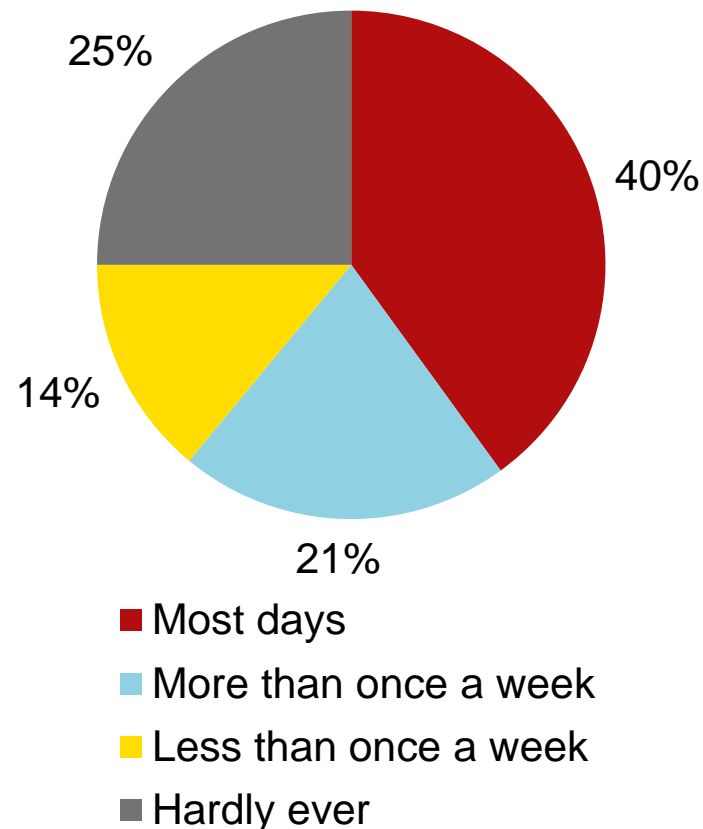
Young people (11-18yrs) were asked how frequently they *talked to the adults that they lived with about the things that mattered to them.*

## General population

The UK *Understanding Society* survey (2017) found that 65% of children (10-15yrs) talked regularly to a parent.

- 61% of young people talked regularly with their carers about things that mattered to them. That is a similar proportion to the 65% of young people in the general population who talk to their parents.

## Speaking to adults about things that matter



# Support with worries



Children and young people (8-18yrs) were asked if they *worried about their own feelings or behaviour* and, if they *did have concerns, were they receiving support*.

## General population & other comparative data: Mental health

- Studies of looked after populations show that children's level of difficulties are much higher, ranging from about 45% of children in foster care to 75% of those in residential. (Ford *et al.*, 2007)
- In Wales about 17% of children have concerning SDQ scores that suggest they have a clinical level of mental health difficulties. (Statistical Bulletin, 2017)
- Five (8%) children (8-11yrs) worried 'all or most of the time' and 35 (53%) 'sometimes'. A total of 40 children who worried.
- Six (15%) children who reported worrying thought they were *not* getting help.
- 13% of young people (11-18yrs) worried 'all or most of the time' and 58% 'sometimes'. A total of 99 young people worried about their feelings or behaviour.
- 18 (18%) young people thought they were *not* getting support with the things that worried them.

# Parity with peers



Young people (11-18yrs) were asked if they *got the chance to do similar things to their friends.*

- 81% of young people reported that 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' they were able to do similar things to their friends.
- 26 (19%) young people reported that they could 'hardly ever' or 'never' do similar things to their friends.

*Things could be fairer.  
Sometimes we can't  
make choices on our own  
and we have to have  
meetings before we can  
do things like going on  
holiday  
8-11yrs*

# Happiness with appearance



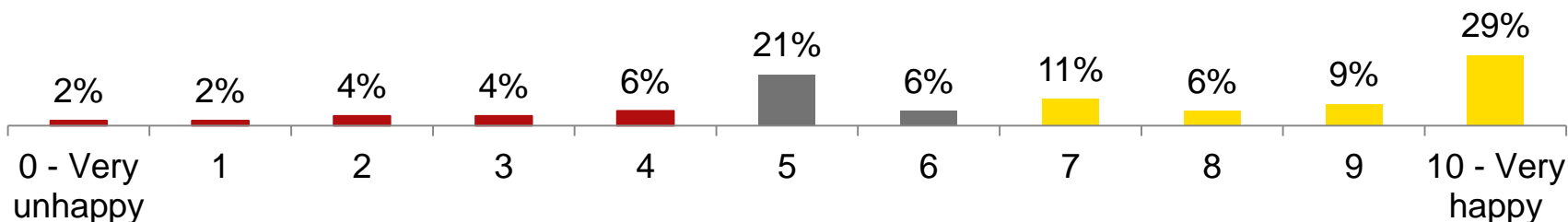
Studies have shown that poor body image is associated with low self-esteem, depression and self-harm (Cash and Smolek, 2011).

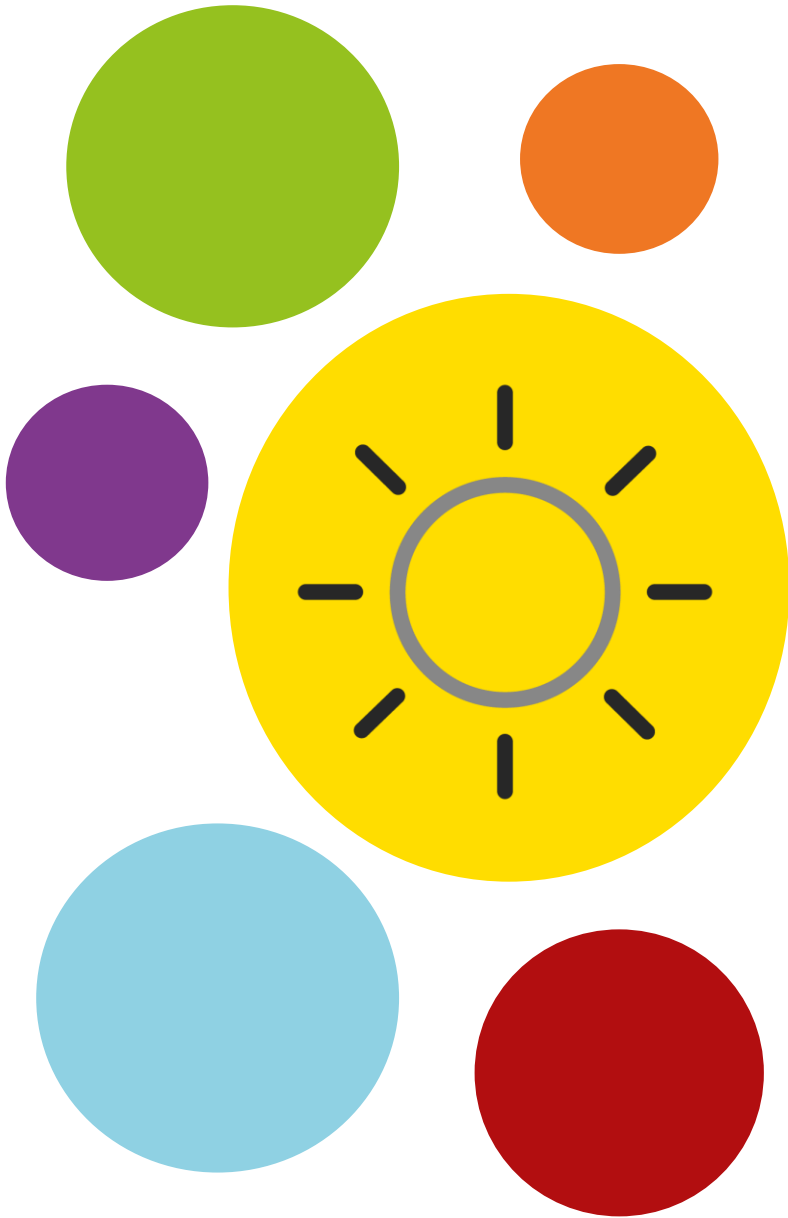
## General population: Happiness with appearance

- 10% of 10-17 year olds in the general population are unhappy with their appearance. Girls are more likely to have a lower opinion of their appearance than boys (The Children's Society, 2017).

- The majority of young people were happy with their appearance.
- On this scale scores of 0-4 show low happiness and this applied to 18% of the young people.
- There were significant gender differences with 24 girls (35%) and just 2 (3%) boys disliking their appearance.

## How happy are you with the way you look?





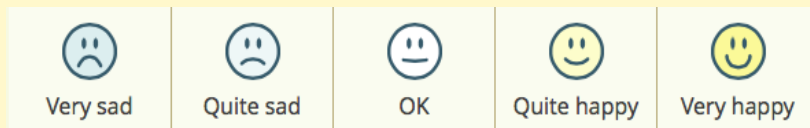
## 6. Well-being

- Happiness yesterday – affect
- Life satisfaction – overall evaluation
- Life is worthwhile – psychological/eudemonic well-being
- Life is improving
- Positivity about the future

# Happiness

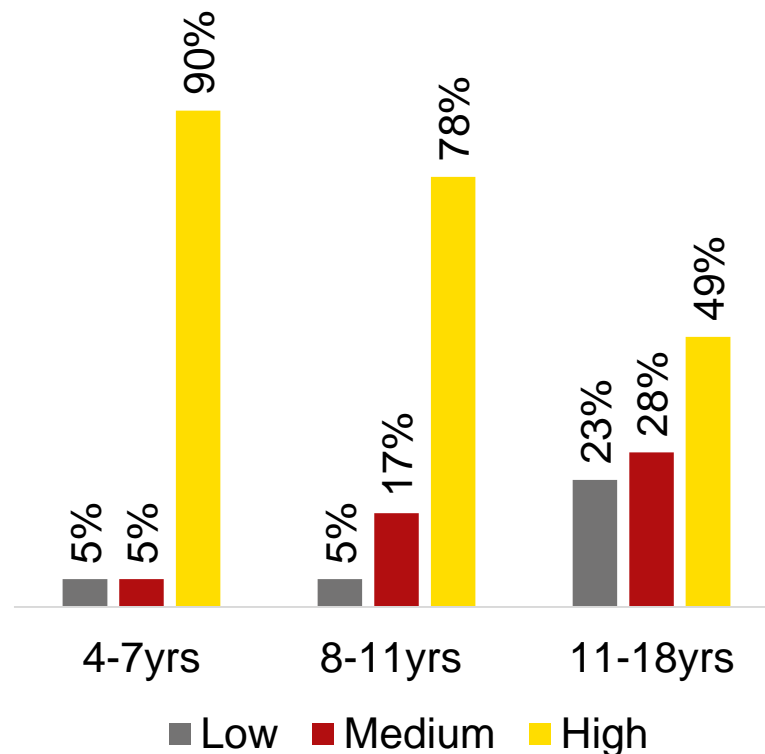
The decrease in happiness with age occurs in all surveys. Well-being decreases from school year 5 onwards with age 14-15yrs being the lowest point. It then starts to rise again. (Rees et al., 2010)

- Children (4-7yrs & 8-11yrs) were asked to rate *how happy they were yesterday* on a five-point scale, from 'very sad' to 'very happy'.



- Young people (11-18yrs) selected a point on a 0-10 scale with 0 being 'very sad'.
- The majority of children and young people had been happy the previous day.
- 5 (5%) children and 32 (23%) young people reported that yesterday they had been 'quite sad' or 'very sad'.

### Happiness yesterday



# Life satisfaction

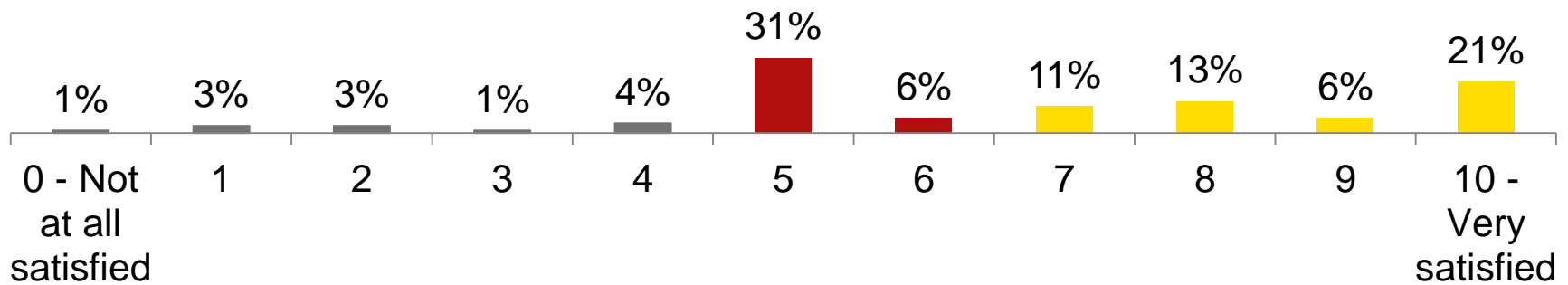


Young people (11-18yrs) were asked, *how satisfied they were with their life* on a 0-10 scale.

This question exactly replicates The Children's Society survey question. A score of 7 or more is considered to be high life satisfaction. (The Cabinet Office, 2012)

- Just like the general child population in England there was a positive correlation between high life satisfaction scores and being happy at school.
- 12% had low life satisfaction scores – a smaller proportion than in other Welsh authorities where 17% had low life satisfaction scores.

## How satisfied are you with your life?





# Are the things you do worthwhile?

Young people were asked, *how much do you think your life is worthwhile?*

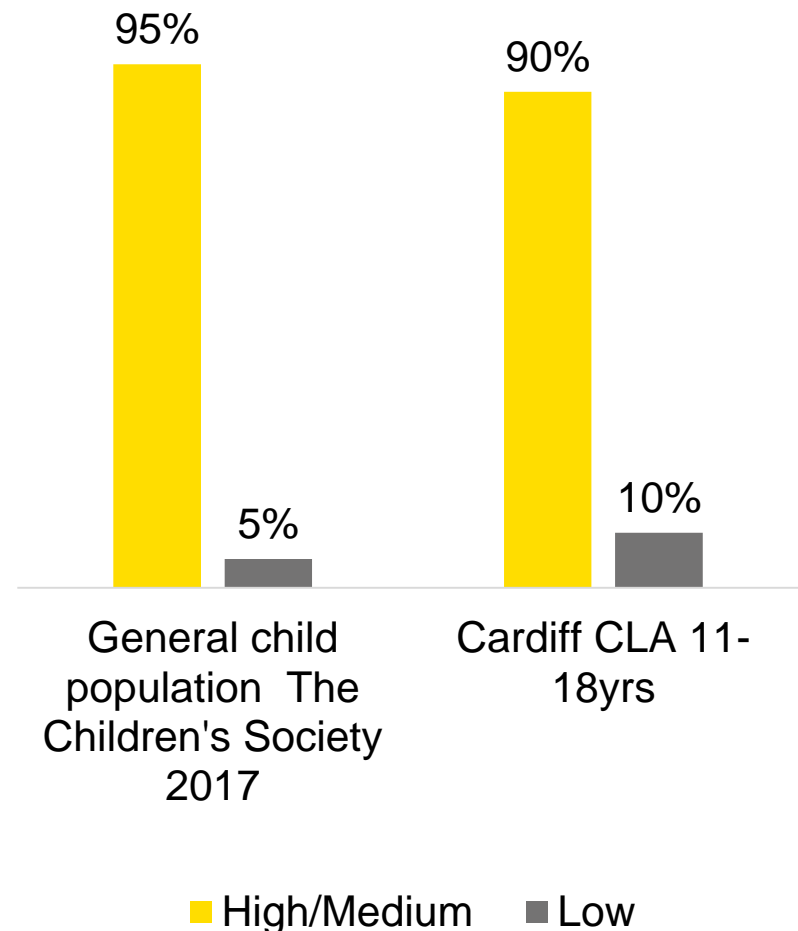
## Importance of purpose

Having a meaning or a purpose to life is strongly associated with well-being. (ONS, 2014)

Young people (11-18yrs) completed the same 0-10 scale as used by The Children's Society (2017) in their household survey with 3,000 young people aged 10-17yrs.

- 59% of young people scored high or very high,
- 31% medium, and
- 10% low – feeling that the things they did were not worthwhile.

To what extent do you think the things you do in your life are worthwhile?



# Positivity about the future



Young people were asked on a scale of 0-10, *how positive they were about the future?*

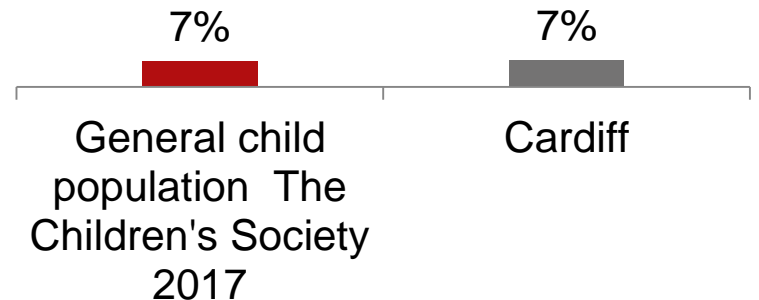
## Links to happiness

Optimism about the future is linked with happiness and resilience. (Conversano et al., 2010).

- 88 (66%) were positive about their future.
- 36 (27%) had moderate scores.
- 10 (7%) had low scores and were pessimistic about their future – a similar proportion as young people in the general population.

*I would like to get a job*  
11-18yrs

**Young people who were pessimistic about their future: comparison of Cardiff's (11-18yrs) looked after young people with the general child population**



# Comparisons

Levels of well-being – Cardiff's looked after young people (11-18yrs) compared to peers (10-17yrs) in the general population in Wales (ONS, 2016) and to the average scores of looked after young people in six Welsh LAs (2018).

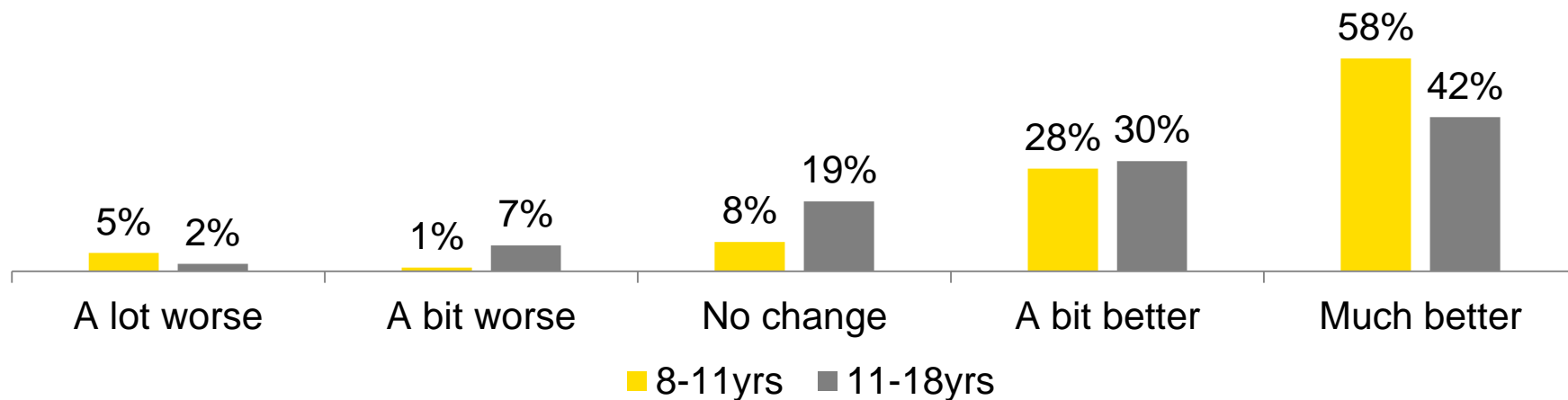
		Cardiff %	2018 average in 6 Welsh LAs %	Peers in general population (10-17yrs) %
Life satisfaction	High scores	51%	55%	80%
	Low scores	12%	17%	8%
Happiness yesterday	High scores	49%	55%	74%
	Low scores	23%	23%	13%
Things done are worthwhile	High scores	57%	62%	75%
	Low scores	10%	12%	11%
Positive about future	High scores	66%	65%	-
	Low scores	7%	13%	-

# Life is improving

Children aged 8-18yrs were asked whether they thought their *life was getting better*, and could choose from a five point scale ranging from 'a lot worse' to 'much better'.

- 77% of children (8-11yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) felt that their lives were improving.

## Is life improving?



# Well-being: 4-7yrs



- Two (5%) of the children in the 4-7yrs group described themselves as 'sad'.
- The children's responses to all the other questions in the survey suggested that they did *not* have low well-being.
- Most children aged 4-7yrs emphasised that they were happy.

*I feel so  
happy to be  
here.*

*I like it.*

# Well-being: 8-11 yrs



- Three (4%) of the children in the 8-11yrs group described themselves as 'Very sad'. However, only two of the three had scores on other questions that suggested they had low well-being.
- One child gave negative responses to most of the questions: she felt life was getting a lot worse, saw family members too little (especially her mother), didn't understand why she was in care, felt her carers were disinterested in her learning and she 'never' had the opportunity to explore the outdoors, 'never' trusted her social worker and felt excluded from decision-making, disliked school and was afraid of bullying 'all the time'.
- The other child thought his life was improving, liked school and seemed happy in placement. But he answered that did not have a good friend, had no parental contact at all and wanted more contact with siblings.

*I want to see my mum for her birthday and want to spend time alone with my dad. I want to see my Aunty [name] and Uncle [name]. I wish I could see my brothers and sisters four times a month.*

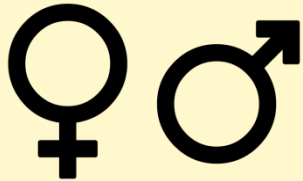
# Well-being: 11-18yrs



- 17 (13%) young people had low well-being (i.e. scored 4 or less on two or more of the 0-10 well-being scales). Length of time in care and number of placements were not statistically associated with low well-being.
- Young people with low well-being in Cardiff were more likely to be girls than boys and to have poorer relationships with their social workers and carers.
- The most strongly associated with low well-being were:
  - Disliking their appearance;
  - Not trusting their social worker;
  - Not feeling safe or settled in placement; and
  - Not having opportunities to explore nature/the outdoors.
- Also contributing to young people's low well-being were:
  - Not having a trusted adult in their lives;
  - Feeling carers were disinterested in their learning, and insufficiently sensitive to their feelings,
  - Not being trusted; and
  - Not being given second chances if they made a mistake.

*I don't like how some social workers speak to us and promise us stuff that doesn't happen.*

# Gender differences 11-18yrs



The Children's Society (2017) reported that in the general

population one in seven (14%) girls (10-15yrs) were unhappy with their lives as a whole as were one in ten boys.

Examining gender differences in our surveys in 2017, we found no gender difference in the surveys for 4-7yrs and 8-11yrs but girls aged 11-18yrs were more likely to report low well-being. Girls were four times more likely to be unhappy with their appearance and this contributed to gender differences in well-being.



In comparison with boys, the girls were statistically more likely to:

- Have low well-being (22% girls; 5% boys).
- Be afraid of bullying (47% girls; 14% of boys).
- Dislike their appearance (35% girls; 3% boys).
- Feel their carers were disinterested in their learning (12% of girls and none of the boys).





## **Section 4: Children and young people's comments**

*Is there anything else you would like to tell us? What would make being in care better for you?*

# Comments: 4-7yrs

- 22 (54%) children (age 4-7yrs) gave text responses on, *what would make care better/ anything else you want to say?*
- Three children answered that there was nothing they wanted to change.
- Twelve children wrote that they were happy and liked living with their carers. Comments included:

*I like living with my foster carer.*

*I like [foster mum's] cooking...*

*I would like to be back with my mum earlier.*

*[Name of carer] shouts when I don't do as I'm told.*

*I would like my mum and dad to visit me ... and be in the same room.*

**What would make care better?**  
*I would like questions answered if I don't know what's happening.*

# What could make care better and other comments: 8-11yrs

- 38 (57%) children gave text responses on, *what would make care better/ anything else you want to say?*
- 7 children wrote that there was nothing they wanted to change or that they were ok.
- Other children wrote about wanting more contact, wanting more information and to be listened to.

**What would make care better?**  
*Having more contact with mum would make being in care better. I wish I could stop worrying about stuff.*

*Would like to have a phone.*

*Being in care made my life better by having a safe house and a bedroom.*

*I like it. I get treated nicely.*

**What would make care better?**  
*A letter of what's been said by people at meetings I'm not at.*

# What could make care better and other comments: 11-18yrs

- 89 (61%) young people gave text responses on, *what would make care better/ anything else they wanted to say?*
- 24 young people recorded that there was nothing they wanted to change or that they were ok.
- Other young people wrote about having more contact, more choices, and some of their difficulties.

*See my mum and dad more and allowed to do stuff like having my phone.*

**What would make care better?**  
*Having a snake.*

*Having wifi on my tablet.*

*To have a bit more freedom and be able to do more things including having more freedom with my social media.*

*I wouldn't change anything about being in care.*

*More contact with social worker finding jobs etc.*

# What could make care better and other comments: 11-18yrs

Other young people wrote:

*I'd like to say to other kids in care – don't be scared. You'll be ok. If you have troubles you'll always have someone by your side. You'll get to see your family one day. Don't give up hope.*

*I am very grateful and extremely lucky to have loving and caring foster carers who have made me feel a part of their family.*

*I feel that I am really getting on with my current social worker and that I know that I can trust her.*

*Sort out social services.*

*It's terrible because people are making decisions about your life.*

*It also upsets me that I may not have anyone outside of the care system to help me with financial problems (if I have them).*

*Better internet.*

# What could make care better and other comments: 11-18yrs

*I would like to go to the shop on my own.*

*I have a happy life in foster care. I have a better life in foster care.*

*Nothing really because I'm happy in foster care.*

*The move to my new placement with [name] and [name] is one of the best things ever.*

*I feel extremely proud of myself at the moment with everything I have achieved.*

*I only saw them once last year and I was supposed to get extra time added but this has not been done.*



## **Section 5: Positive aspects of practice and areas for improvement**

# What's working well

- Most children and young people had good relationships with their carers. They felt that their carers supported their learning and were sensitive to their needs. All the children aged 4-7yrs, 95% of 8-11yrs and 90% of young people (11-18yrs) thought that their carers noticed how they were feeling. The majority of young people also talked regularly to their carers about things that mattered to them.
- The vast majority of children and young people felt safe in their placements.
- Most children and young people liked school. Liking school was correlated with high life satisfaction scores.
- Young people were as positive about their futures as young people in the general population.



# What could be improved

- **Regularly review contact arrangements and ensure children and young people understand why decisions have been made.** Some children/young people felt they were having too much contact, whilst others wanted more frequent contact with parents or siblings and contact arranged with extended family members.
- **Improve support to looked after young people who are experiencing bullying.** More than twice as many looked after children and young people reported being afraid to go to school because of bullying than young people in the general population. A quarter of young people did not feel they were given support to cope with bullying. Lack of support was felt particularly by girls.
- **Connect with the youngest children to make sure they feel included in decisions and understand why they are in care.** The youngest children (4-7yrs) were more likely than older young people to not know who their social worker was and 48% did not understand why they were in care.
- **Be aware of gender differences when care planning and provide opportunities to improve young people's feelings about their appearance and body image.**
- **Actively plan opportunities for children and young people to be trusted and to feel involved in decision-making.**
- **Encourage carers to see the benefits of spending time with children and young people outdoors (e.g. beaches, woods).**
- **Talk to foster carers and young people to understand why 13% of young people were unable to access the Internet from their placements.**



# **Section 6: References**

# References

Adshead, G. (2012). Their dark materials: narratives and recovery in forensic practice. Royal College of Psychiatrists Publication Archives, available at: [www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk) (accessed 31 January 2013).

Adler, J. M. (2012). Living into the story: agency and coherence in a longitudinal study of narrative identity development and mental health over the course of psychotherapy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(2), 367.

Cabinet Office (2012) Wellbeing: Defining high and low scores  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/225519/wellbeing\\_defining\\_high\\_low\\_scores.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/225519/wellbeing_defining_high_low_scores.pdf)

Cash T & Smolek L (2011) *Body Image: A Handbook of Science, Practice and Prevention*. Guilford Press: London.

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2012). *The Science of Neglect: The Persistent Absence of Responsive Care Disrupts the Developing Brain: Working Paper No. 12*. Retrieved from [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu).

Children's Commissioner for England (2015) State of the Nation: Children in Care  
[www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Care-monitor-v12\\_1.pdf](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Care-monitor-v12_1.pdf) 75

Conversano C, Rotondo A, Lensi E, Della Vista O, Arpone F, Reda MA. Optimism and Its Impact on Mental and Physical Well-Being. *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health* : CP & EMH. 2010;6:25-29.

Ford, T. Votares, P., Meltzer, H. & Goodman, R. (2007) Psychiatric disorder among British children looked after by local authorities: comparison with children living in private households *British Journal of Psychiatry* 190, pp 319-325

Gilligan, R. (2009) *Promoting resilience* London BAAF

Gleave, J. & Cole-Hamilton, I. (Revised 2012) *A world without play: a literature review*. Play England

Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey: Wales Key findings Number: 58/2015

Ipsos MORI (2015) *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children: Key Findings*. Cardiff: Welsh Government

National Survey for Wales <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/national-survey>

ONS (2014) *Measuring National Well-Being-Exploring the Well-being of Children in the UK 2014*

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/measuringnationalwellbeing/2014-10-08#what-we-do>

ONS (2016a) *Measuring National Well-being: Domains and Measures*

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/measuringnationalwellbeingdomainsandmeasures>

ONS (2016b) *Selected Children's Measures by Country*

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/adhocs/005283selectedchildrenswellbeingmeasuresbycountry>

ONS Statistical bulletin (2017) *Internet access – households and individuals*.

Rees G., Bradshaw J., Goswami H., and Keung A. (2010) *Understanding Children's Well-being: A national survey of young people's well-being* London: The Children's Society

Rees, G., Main, G., & Bradshaw, J. (2014). *Children's World National Report England*.  
[http://www.isciweb.org/\\_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/ChildrensWorldsEnglandReport-V2.pdf](http://www.isciweb.org/_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/ChildrensWorldsEnglandReport-V2.pdf)

Selwyn, J., & Briheim-Crookall, L. (2017). *Our Lives, Our Care: looked after children's views on their well-being*. School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol & Coram Voice

Statistics for Wales Statistical Bulletin (2017) *Health and well-being measures for children*.

STATS Wales <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue>

The Children's Society (2014a) *The Good Childhood Report*. London: The Children's Society  
[https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/The%20Good%20Childhood%20Report%202014%20-%20FINAL\\_0.pdf](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/The%20Good%20Childhood%20Report%202014%20-%20FINAL_0.pdf)

The Children's Society (2017) *The Good Childhood Report*. London: The Children's Society.  
<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/the-good-childhood-report-2017>

Understanding Society <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/>

**For enquiries about the Bright Spots project see:**  
<http://www.coramvoice.org.uk/professional-zone/bright-spots>

**or contact:**

[brightspots@coramvoice.org.uk](mailto:brightspots@coramvoice.org.uk)



**bright spots**

**coram**  
**Voice**   
getting young voices heard



University of  
**BRISTOL**

Funded by the Hadley Trust