



'Your Life, Your Care' Survey Local Authority Guidance Pack



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Introduction and Welcome

Dear Local Authority,

Thank you for signing up to participate in the Bright Spots programme and the 'Your Life, Your Care' survey. We are extremely pleased that you are taking the first steps to identifying and improving the well-being and care experience of children and young people in your care.

In this guidance pack you will find a list of resources created to help you to understand the purpose of the survey and support you to achieve organisational buy-in and distribute the survey to all looked-after children and young people aged 4 to 18.

The Bright Spots programme was launched in 2013 as a joint partnership between Coram Voice and the Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies at the University of Bristol. Funded by the Hadley Trust, the programme has worked with local authorities across England to improve the care experience and well-being of children and young people in care and care leavers.

The programme is unique in combining a children's rights perspective with rigorous data analysis, allowing local authorities to use the information from the survey to drive change based on what is important to children and young people. The Bright Spots programme starts from the premise that children have important things to say about their lives, as 'experts' in their experience of the care system. The surveys we have created give a unique insight into children's subjective well-being that is also comparable to national data.

We are really proud of the interest from local authorities that can see the potential of the survey, and hope that you will join us in identifying and promoting the 'Bright Spots' – the practices that have a positive influence on children and young people's well-being.

Best wishes,



Linda Briheim-Crookall
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If anything in this guidance pack is unclear please do not hesitate to contact susanna.larsson@coramvoice.org.uk

Bright Spots Programme Overview

The *Your Life, Your Care* survey was developed through the Bright Spots Programme – a partnership between Coram Voice and the University of Bristol. The programme aims to improve the care experience and well-being of looked after children and care leavers by identifying and promoting 'bright spots' – the policies and practices that have a positive influence on children and young people's well-being.

Through the project, we have developed the Bright Spots Well-being Indicators and the *Your Life, Your Care* survey, which measures them – tools to systematically look at children's care experience and well-being, based on what they say is important. Over the past five years we have invested in developing, piloting and refining the tool and our methodology for disseminating it.

The role of Coram Voice

We have developed a successful methodology for distributing the survey with local authorities in England achieving an average 35% response rate in the 16 areas we worked with in 2017. Our model of support to local authorities has been an essential part of making the roll out of the survey a success. We provide intensive support both face-to-face and by email and telephone to assist local authorities to adapt our national model to their local context and ensure the dissemination of the survey is successful. We also support local authorities by analysing and presenting the findings to help them explore the implications for policy and practice.

Our successful model of distribution, relies on:

- **Strategic buy-in** so that the Local Authority (LA) prioritises the survey and can dedicate time to ensuring successful distribution (e.g. releasing staff; sharing information and contact lists; senior managers communicating value of engagement). Coram Voice currently undertakes an initial visit to the LA to present the project to senior managers and answer queries prior to sign up to ensure the LA understands the benefits and commitment required and can make an informed decision about using the survey.
- Distributing an **online survey** to all looked after children in care during a **time-limited survey period** – providing focused activity to encourage participation.
- Identifying a **trusted adult** who is responsible for identifying a time and space for the child to complete the survey and supporting them if necessary (essential for younger children and children with disabilities).
- A **Strategic champion, a Project Lead and Working Group** within the local authority who takes responsibility for disseminating the survey, sending reminders and encouraging participation – supported by Coram Voice staff.
- **Wide communications** about the survey to children and young people, foster carers, residential care staff, social workers, schools, managers and other stakeholders to ensure buy in and awareness of the survey – in advance of and during the survey period.
- A **detailed guidance pack with communications templates**, as well as regular prompts about key activities and updates on response rates during the survey period.
- **Comprehensive analysis and reporting** of findings to local authority staff and young people including a full report, summary findings for staff and all children and young people in each of the survey age groups.
- **Follow up visits to share and explore findings** – we present findings and facilitate discussions to understand local implications and help plan next steps including the response to and dissemination of findings.
- **Peer learning seminars** that provide local authorities with opportunities to network and share learning.

In coordinating the delivery of the survey process, Coram Voice and the University of Bristol will:

- Visit each local authority prior to the survey period to facilitate working group meeting to plan local dissemination
- Clone and set up online surveys for each local authority (LA) 2-4 weeks prior to the survey period in Welsh and English.
- Give weekly feedback to local authorities on response rates and provide support and advice on how to boost response rates during the survey period.
- Respond to queries from local authorities via email and telephone.
- Clean and anonymise the data and make raw data available to participating local authorities upon request.
- Analyse each LA's local data to create reports of findings, summaries for professionals and summaries for children and young people.
- Visit each participating LAs to present and explore local findings.

Why distribute the 'Your Life, Your Care' Survey

Our aim is for the survey to be the main resource for identifying the quality of children and young people's care experience and well-being. The survey is unique because:

- **Measures well-being and quality of care experience** – YLYC is the **only** survey of its kind to provide an effective measure of looked after children's subjective well-being, capturing the quality of the care experience of children as young as four.
- **It is designed by young people** – the survey has been developed based on what 140 young people in care told the researchers was important to looked after children, through focus groups and interviews around the country. It uses a basket of indicators to measure well-being.
- **It is strongly evidence based** – the survey draws on two international literature reviews, conducted by the University of Bristol, of '[Children and young people's views of being in care](#)' and '[Measuring well-being](#)', which informed the focus groups with young people. We have also used survey development experts to simplify and test questions and make sure our findings can be compared to national data.
- **It is quick and easy to complete** – young people stressed the survey should not be too long. We carefully tested and chose questions, developing three age-appropriate questionnaires (for ages 4-7, 8-11 and 11-18) that only take an average of 10 minutes to complete. We ensured that children understood and interpreted the questions as intended through cognitive interviewing in the pilot phase.
- **It is confidential** – the data is aggregated, individual children cannot be identified and this increases the likelihood of more honest feedback.
- **It captures the experience of younger children:** Through age appropriate questionnaires and a methodology using trusted adults it allows children as young as 4 to share their experiences.
- **It helps local authorities understand children's experience of care and well-being, what is working well and where things could improve** – we can analyse the data to help local authorities understand how their looked after children compare to: (a) general population (b) their own cohorts over time (by repeating the survey) and (c) children in care nationally.
- **It allows a wider group of children and young people to participate and give their views** – the survey is a way of giving more looked after children in a local authority the chance to say what is important to them, not just those who are able to participate in groups like the Children in Care Council.
- **It supports evidence led practice** – When we work intensively with a local authority to roll out the survey we analyse what children and young people say and support local authorities to understand what that means for their services. We create bespoke reports and summaries and facilitate workshops to help them feedback to staff and children and young people what they found and what actions they will take as a result.

The Role of the Local Authority Working Group

The aim of the working group is to coordinate and disseminate the 'Your Life, Your Care' survey, and set up an action plan based on the survey findings. Each local authority will nominate a project lead whose role will be to liaise with Coram Voice and champion the Bright Spots programme internally.

The local authority working group will consist of lead and key staff members from the following areas within your local authority:

- Senior managers in Children's Services;
- Service Development or Quality Assurance;
- LACE Team or Independent Reviewing Services;
- Youth Engagement or Participation.

You may also want to involve leads from relevant specialist services, e.g. services for young people with disabilities, asylum-seeking, not in education, employment and training, youth offending, health and well-being teams.

The working group will:

1. Generate buy-in and commitment to the survey across the local authority amongst professionals, carers and children and young people in care;
2. Identify how many children aged 4-18 who are able to complete the survey with assistance;
3. Identify the best way to distribute the survey to children and young people and what professionals are best placed to support young people to complete it (i.e. designated teachers, IROs, youth workers, YOT, health visitors/LAC nurses, advocates, participation workers, support workers, NEET workers etc.);
4. Ensure that communications to professionals and children and young people is timely and inclusive;
5. Identify how the local authority will use and respond to the findings once children and young people's responses have been analysed.

To achieve the above, the working group will:

1. Contact professionals, send information and provide updates and reminders;
2. Communicate the programme objectives to professionals, carers and young people across the local authority via different communication channels;
3. Identify named individuals who could support children and young people to complete the survey during the survey period, particularly the younger children and children with additional needs;
4. Identify how the survey findings will feed into and inform the local authority's service development programme.

Frequently Asked Questions

Below are frequently asked questions about the Bright Spots programme and the 'Your Life, Your Care' survey. In addition to providing the answers to important questions, this document should serve as a reminder to the key points of the programme and running the survey in your local authority.

Bright Spots Programme

What information does the 'Your Life, Your Care' survey capture?

In bringing together literature reviews, roundtable interviews with professionals and focus groups with 140 children and young people across England, we have developed the 'Bright Spots Well-Being Indicators', which set out what looked after children and young people have said is key to their well-being. The Indicators are broken down into four domains: Resilience, Recovery, Relationships and Rights, which contribute to improving the well-being of children and young people in care.

The 'Your Life, Your Care' survey asks children and young people aged 4 to 18 age-appropriate questions (there are three versions of the survey for 4 to 7 years; 8 to 11 years and 11 to 18 year olds) about their carer, social worker, friends, where they live, how they feel and the things they get to do. The survey allows children and young people to share their views on the things that have an impact on their well-being and care experience.

What is a 'Bright Spot'?

The term 'Bright Spot' refers to an area of local authority practice which positively influences the well-being and care experience of children and young people in care. Through the 'Your Life, Your Care' survey, we identify 'Bright Spots' where children do better than expected in relation to children in the general population or looked after children across local authorities.

The purpose of focusing on 'Bright Spots' is to look beyond negatives and to share and emulate what is going well.

What makes 'Your Life, Your Care' different from other surveys?

'Your Life, Your Care' is a child-led survey where children are asked about their feelings on things that they have said are important to them. The purpose of focusing on well-being and the subjective responses of children and young people rather than objective measures, is to give local authorities a real opportunity to understand how their looked after population are feeling.

Can we include additional questions to the 'Your Life, Your Care' survey?

You cannot include additional local questions to the 'Your Life, Your Care' survey. The questions included were carefully selected to capture what is most important to children and allow comparisons against national data and over time, whilst ensuring it takes no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

The analysis of findings and the production of the report rely on the survey maintaining a consistent structure.

Who is a trusted adult and who can be one?

The trusted adult supports a child or young person to complete the 'Your Life, Your Care' survey. For the 4 to 7 year olds, the trusted adult will read the questions aloud to the child and tick the response they give. For the older groups the support is dependent on the child or young person's needs – this may include explaining the definition of a word or what a question means.

Social workers and foster carers cannot act as trusted adults as there are questions about them in the survey, and children and young people may not feel comfortable answering questions honestly.

Examples of trusted adults in local authorities have been designated teachers, SENCOs, IROs, youth workers, YOT, health visitors/LAC nurses, advocates, participation workers, support workers, NEET workers etc. This list is not exhaustive and will depend on the approach adopted for each local authority.

Can children and young people with learning disabilities complete the surveys?

Trusted adults will be important when supporting a child with learning disabilities to complete the survey. They are asked to use their knowledge of the child to put the questions to them in a way that they will understand and make a judgement about whether or not they are able to respond.

All the questions in the survey are optional and it is possible to skip questions that a child is not able to understand. You must however go through the whole survey and click 'Submit' on the final screen for the responses to be recorded.

How can we address safeguarding issues if the survey is anonymous?

The trusted adult will be asked to be aware of the child or young person's body language or things they say when completing the survey as possible signs of distress. In these instances, local authority safeguarding procedures will apply.

We provide contact information for the Coram Voice advocacy helpline and ChildLine on the instruction sheet and the final page of the survey for any child or young person who is worried or concerned about memories or feelings completing the survey may have brought up for them. The local authority can also add contact information for a named individual or local helpline on these pages.

Why do you set a minimum response rate target?

The minimum response rate exists to ensure that the data collected is analysable. If the minimum target is not met, there is a risk that individual children and young people could be identified by the information they provide, the findings might not be representative and overall comparative analysis may not be possible.

We would consider the implications of such a scenario in line with the University of Bristol's research ethics.

What resources will we need to run the ‘Your Life, Your Care’ survey?

Coram Voice will set up the online survey and provide advice and support around how to set it up and analyse the data.

The resource needed from the local authority is the staff time to effectively disseminate the survey to all children and young people. You will need to know how many children you have in care for each of the groups we survey (so we can give you feedback on response rates), ensure that you have the means to contact the professionals you want to act as trusted adults and others who should know the survey is happening (e.g. email distribution lists) and the time to plan and share communications about the survey to ensure you get the best response rate.

What support will we receive to run the survey successfully?

The Bright Spots team will provide support pre-, during and post-survey. This may include:

- The provision of a guidance pack, including email/letter templates;
- Attending meetings with the working group;
- Providing regular reminders and prompts about key activities;
- Helping you to troubleshoot, including sharing learning from other local authorities;
- Providing feedback on response rates.

Is the survey incentivised?

We took the decision not to incentivise the survey because of logistics and cost in terms of providing vouchers to the large numbers of children and young people completing the survey across Wales. We also wanted to avoid asking children and young people to provide their contact details to receive a voucher, which might confuse them about the anonymity of the survey.

In the focus groups that informed the development of the survey children and young people said that one of the major things that put them off completing surveys was not seeing an impact of what they said. It is important that you let people know what the survey will be used for and provide them with feedback on the findings. Coram Voice will create summaries of the findings for children and young people where your local authority can add what you will do as a result.

Will we need to analyse the data ourselves?

No, the Bright Spots team will analyse the data for you. We will present the findings to your local authority and facilitate discussion to decide on an action plan.

The project lead in the pilot local authority commented on the post-survey support they received:

“Thank you so much for speaking so clearly and passionately about the findings in our ‘Your Life, Your Care’ survey... You have enabled all of us in [the local authority] to have a very thorough understanding of what we do well and what we need to change from our children in care’s perspective. Because the survey has been carried out to the highest possible standards from beginning to end, the messages are not only clear but very convincing...”

What do we do with our findings once we receive them?

The survey gives you an evidence base to inform service improvement and strategy development based on the subjective well-being of children and young people. They can be used to help staff understand children’s current experiences and identify areas for service improvement and where things are going well. You may choose to explore specific issues in more detail develop and adapt services as a result.

The pilot local authority presented and discussed the findings across the local authority and developed a series of 'we will' commitments, which were sent to all looked after children and young people together with a summary of the findings. They have also worked with their children in care council to address specific issues highlighted by the survey.

"Children's participation in service development is a strength and is evidenced by a clear, child-focused pledge, and the annual survey seeks, and acts on, children's views... Senior managers and political leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to external scrutiny and challenge. (...) Research projects, such as the, 'Your life, your care' survey, conducted with a local university and a national charity, involving young people in care, have resulted in improvements in services for children in care and care leavers." (Ofsted, North Somerset inspection report, 2017) +

Will you share our findings externally?

Data attributable to individual local authorities will be kept confidential and not shared with others without your permission. However, aggregated national anonymised findings will be pulled together in a National Report to be published by the Children's Commissioner for Wales and may be shared as part of research reports and presentations by Coram Voice and the University of Bristol to professional and public audiences and to allow local authorities to benchmark against national averages.

