



Your Life, Your Care:

*a survey of the views of
looked after children and
young people aged 4-18yrs in
Flintshire*

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 was originally developed in England with funding from the Hadley Trust.

Bright Spots in Wales is a pilot with six local authorities funded by the Children's Commissioner for Wales & Welsh Government through the work of the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group to measure looked after children's subjective well-being – how they feel about their lives and their care.

- 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.

Contents

	Pages
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	69
Section 6: References	72



Section 1: Summary: Key Findings

Key findings:

61 children and young people responded to the survey: a 36% response rate with boys under-represented.



79% of young people (11-18yrs) thought their lives were getting better.



Young people had trusting relationships with their carers and social workers



More than a third of 11-18yrs had had three or more social workers in the previous year.



All the children (8-11yrs) and 73% of young people (11-18yrs) had contact with at least one parent. Most children and young people wanted longer and more frequent contact with relatives and more information about why contact decisions had been made.

Compared to other local authorities



Fewer (65%) young people (11-18yrs) liked school in comparison with young people (73%) in Wales and looked after young people in other Welsh authorities



Young people (19%) in Flintshire felt embarrassed by adults drawing attention to their care status more frequently than young people (14%) in other Welsh local authorities.

Key findings:

There were gender differences in responses from young people (11-18yrs).



In comparison with girls, fewer boys reported being able to access the Internet outside school;



more boys found their social workers difficult to get hold of and felt excluded from social work decision-making.



More girls worried about their feelings or behaviours than did boys.



Girls felt their carers were less sensitive to their feelings,

4-7 year olds



The majority (62%) of younger children (4-7yrs) did not understand why they were in care.



Half of this age group did not know who their social worker was

Key findings:



Two of the ten children aged 4-7yrs gave responses that suggested they had low well-being. The children did not understand why they were in care, wanted more family contact, and had poorer relationships with adults and peers.



The two children in the 8-11yrs group with low well-being disliked school, were afraid of bullying and had poor relationships with their social workers.



Nine of the 33 young people (11-18yrs) had low well-being. These young people were more likely to not feel safe or settled in placements, not have a good friend, not like their appearance and lack trusting relationships with carers and social workers

There were only 18 responses from the 8-11yrs age group but they were the least settled in their placements. Only 50% thought their lives were improving and four (22%) felt they were unable to explore nature and the outdoors in comparison with 11% of Welsh children.

Although half of young people (11-18yrs) had high well-being in all areas, more looked after young people were dissatisfied with their lives and not as happy or optimistic about their futures as other young people living in Wales. The survey results suggest about a quarter of the young people need to have targeted interventions that focus on improving relationships (with carers, social workers and friends).



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 Flintshire, at the time of the survey, 171 children and young people aged 4-18 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 distributed through the Interim Chief Officer for Education and Youth to Head Teachers and Additional Learning Needs Coordinators (ALNCoS) in schools, and to other residential educational settings by email and letter. Regular email reminders were sent and some schools were followed up directly through phone calls.
- The Senior Manager for Children and Workforce within Social Services asked Team Managers and Social Workers to encourage children and young people to complete the survey. Letters were also sent out to foster carers to encourage children and young people to take part.
- Independent Reviewing Officers were encouraged to introduce the survey to young people at review meetings.
- In the final week, a small project team followed up contacts in schools.
- Most children and young people were asked to complete the online survey in school over a four week period from February- March 2018 and, where appropriate, with a trusted adult present. The trusted adult was usually a teacher, learning mentor or ALNCo. A small number of surveys were filled in on hard copy and entered on to the online survey.

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.



bright spots

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%.

- 61 children and young people completed the surveys from an eligible looked after population of 171.
- The overall response rate was 36%.

Age	Care population <i>n</i>	Responses <i>n</i>	Response rate %
4-7yrs	40	10	(25%)
8-11yrs	35	18	(51%)
11-18yrs	96	33	(34%)

Age and gender

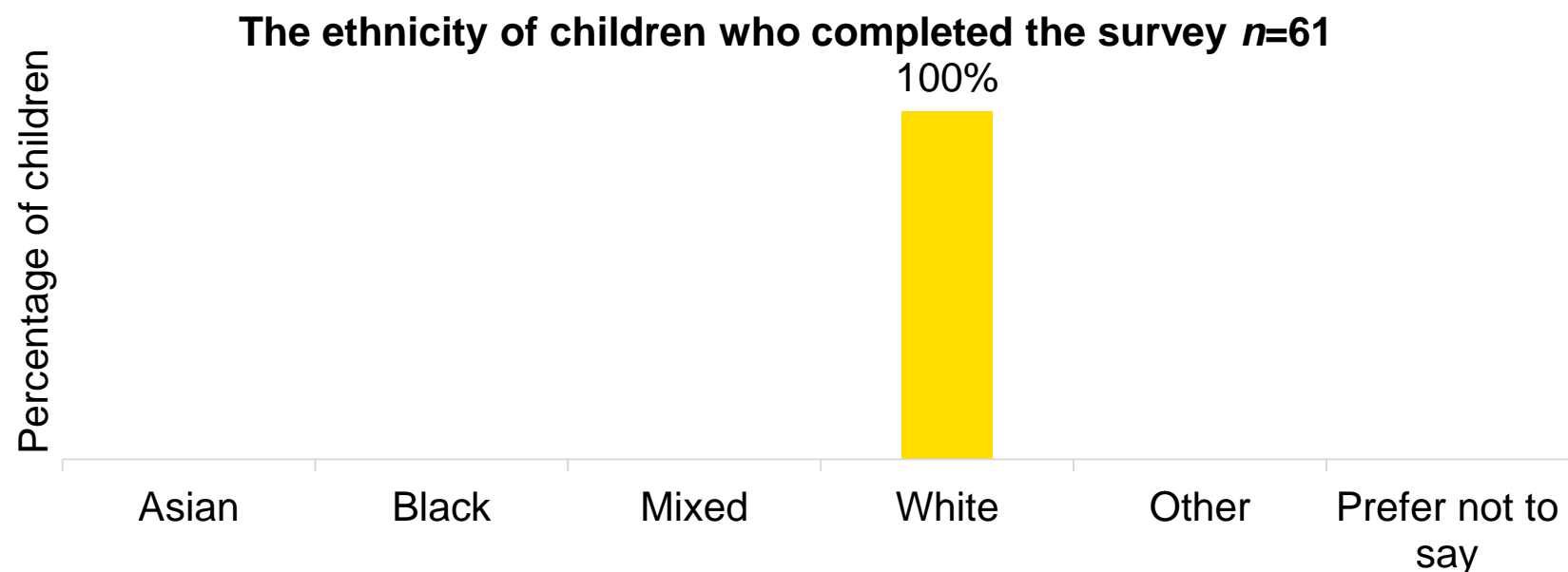
- In Flintshire, 54% of the looked after population were boys (StatWales 2017). Therefore, boys are slightly under-represented in the survey responses.

Age group	Girls <i>n (%)</i>	Boys <i>n (%)</i>	Prefer not to say/no reply <i>n (%)</i>
4-7yrs	5 (50%)	5 (50%)	
8-11yrs	9 (50%)	8 (44%)	1 (6%)
11-18yrs	18 (54.5%)	15 (45.5%)	
TOTAL	32 (52%)	28 (46%)	1 (2%)

Ethnicity

All the looked after children in Flintshire were recorded in the StatWales (2017) database as being of white ethnicity.

- All the children and young people who responded to the survey described themselves as being of white ethnicity, which is consistent with official data.



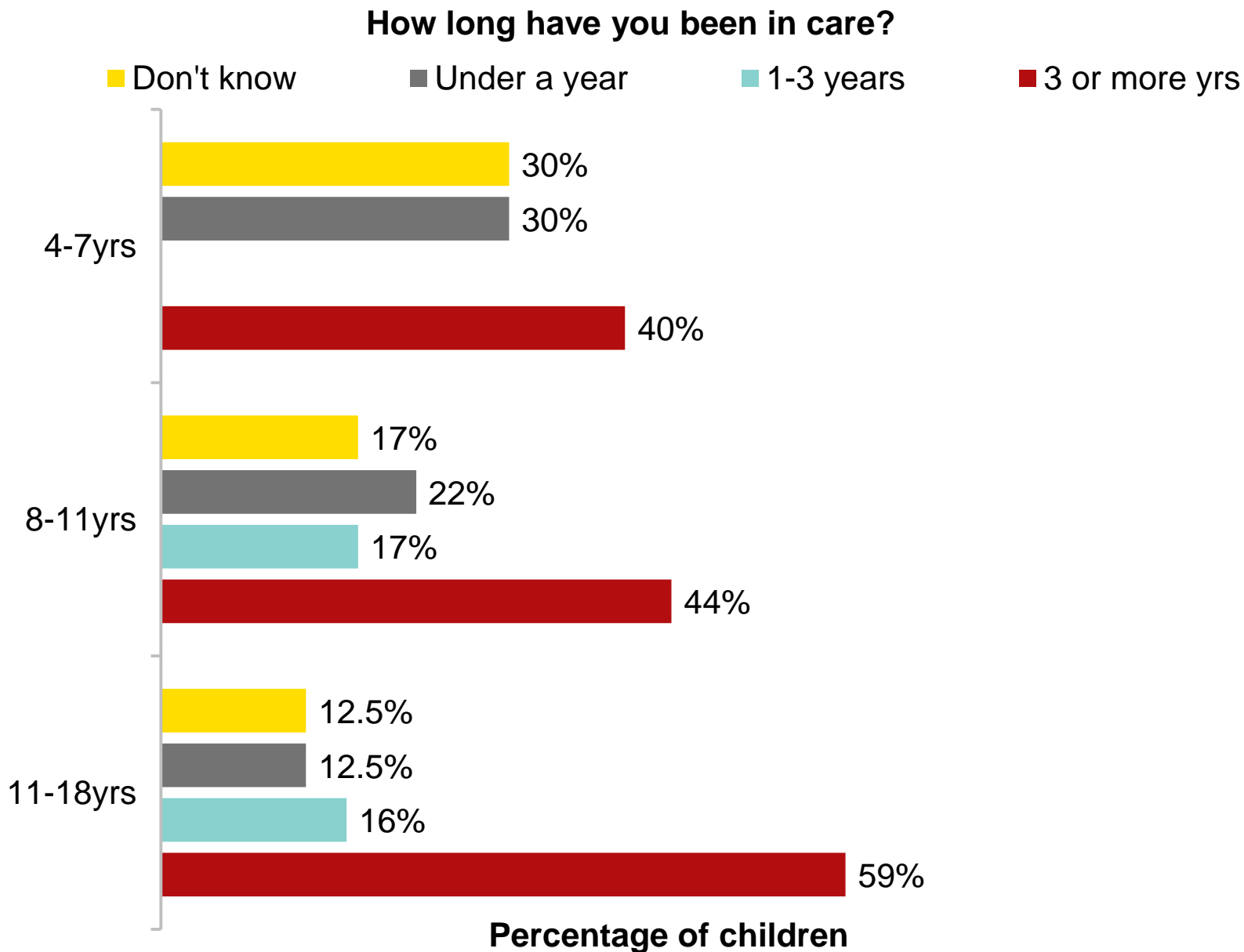
Placements

Children and young people placed with parents were over-represented in the survey responses: 23% of responses compared to the 17% recorded in StatWales 2017.

The majority (44%) of older young people were living in foster care. But younger children who responded were more likely to be in kinship care.

Age group	Foster care %	Family or friends care %	Residential care %	With parents %	Somewhere else %	Prefer not to say %
4-7yrs	20%	60%		20%		
8-11yrs	28%	55%		17%		
11-18yrs	44%	16%	12%	25%	3%	2%
TOTAL	33%	34%	6%	23%	2%	2%

Length of time 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.*

*I would like to see
my mum more than
once a month.*

8-11yrs

- All the children aged 8-11yrs had contact with their mother.
- 9 (30%) young people (11-18yrs) had no face to face contact with either parent.
- Most of the comments from children and young people asked for more time with their birth family. They also wanted more information on family members who they were not seeing.
- There were a few negative comments on contact centres not providing a good experience.
- Younger children were more satisfied with the frequency of contact than older young people.

Family contact

Family member	Age group	Too much	Just right	Too little	I am unable to see them	Don't have any siblings
Mother 	8-11yrs <i>n</i> = 17	3 (18%)	9 (53%)	5 (29%)		-----
	11-18yrs <i>n</i> =30	2 (7%)	7 (23%)	9 (30%)	12 (40%)	-----
Father 	8-11yrs <i>n</i> =16	1 (6%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	7 (44%)	-----
	11-18yrs <i>n</i> = 30		8 (27%)	6 (20%)	16 (53%)	-----
Siblings 	8-11yrs <i>n</i> =17	4 (23%)	11 (65%)	-	1 (6%)	1 (6%)
	11-18yrs <i>n</i> =28	4 (14.3%)	10 (35.7%)	12 (42.9%)	1 (3.6%)	1 (3.6%)

Family contact: 8-11yrs

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

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

Don't want to see dad because I don't like him.

I would like to have more time with my mum.

I miss my big brother and sister who are in [place].

Really, really a lot, I see them all Saturdays.

I get to talk to my Mum every single day but my little sister doesn't talk to me that much.

I would like to have contact in different places instead of the same place ... The place we go to is boring and there is not much to do.

Family contact: 11-18yrs

- Nine young people took the opportunity to write their thoughts and feelings about contact. The majority wanted more contact with family members.

I would like to see them more.

I don't have a lot of contact with my birth family and I think that there should be more.

I don't have any contact with them but that's because they don't want it.

When I was little my dad went to the army and I don't know if he is still alive and I haven't seen my mum in about 3/4 years.

There should be more contact hours.

Want more.

I would like to see my sisters more please.

I would like to live with my mum.

I wish I could have contact with my adopted brother and sister.

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 and young people stated that they had at least one good friend but 4 (7%) did not.
- Being friendless increases the risk of these four children and young people developing depression and anxiety (Hawkley et al., 2010; Criss et al., 2002)

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	9 (90%)	1 (10%)
8-11yrs	16 (94%)	1 (6%)
11-18yrs	25 (93%)	2 (7%)
TOTAL	50 (93%)	4 (7%)



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.

- Ten children (8-11yrs) lived in a household with a pet. Six more answered they would have liked a pet.
- In the 11-18yrs age group, 31 (94%) young people had a pet where they lived. Two young people expressed a wish for a pet.
- In Flintshire more looked after children and young people had a pet in comparison with other looked after children in Wales (average 66% with a pet) and compared to children in the general population (average 66% with a pet). This is a Bright Spot of practice.

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	33%
2-4 placements	39%
5-7 placements	3%
8-10 placements	3%
11+placements	3%
Don't know	19%

Trust



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

Positive responses

- 100% of younger children (4-7yrs);
 - 94% of those aged 8-11yrs; and
 - 100% of young people (11-18yrs) who responded to the question trusted their carers.
- Children and young people reported trusting relationships with their carers. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

Social worker: Continuity & trust

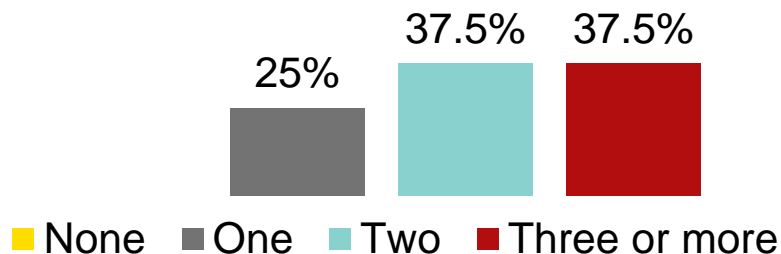
Changes in social workers



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

A larger proportion (37%) of young people in Flintshire reported being allocated 3+ social workers in the year in comparison with other looked after young people (25% with 3+ social workers).

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



Trusting social worker



Children and young people (n=40) who knew who their social worker was, were asked whether they *trusted their social worker*.

- 80% of the youngest children (4-7yrs);
- 85% of children aged 8-11yrs; and
- 78% of young people (11-18yrs) who responded trusted their social worker.
- Unsurprisingly, trust in social workers was affected by frequent changes of worker.



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 key turning point

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

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

- Most children and young people wrote that they had a trusted adult in their lives:
 - 100% of children (8-11yrs); and
 - 88.5% of young people (11-18yrs).
- Three young people had no such adult in their lives. Seven of the 33 young people chose not to reply to this question.

Being trusted and helping out

Children (8-11yrs) were asked if they *got the chance to help the teacher*.

Focus group feedback

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.

- 35% of children (8-11yrs) responded that 'all or most of the time' they were asked to help and 53% answered 'sometimes'.
- Two children wrote 'hardly ever'.



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

Focus group feedback

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

- 41% of young people (11-18yrs) thought they were given opportunities 'all or most of the time' to show they could be trusted and 45% given them 'sometimes'.
- Two young people responded 'hardly ever' and one felt they were 'never' trusted.

Liking school



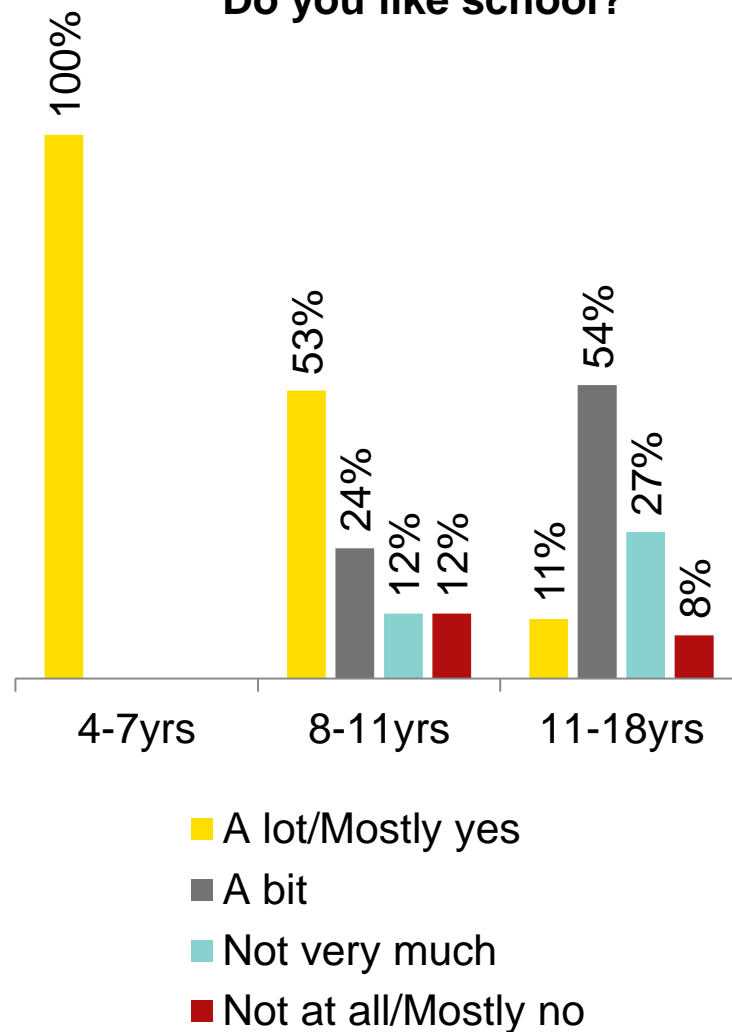
All the children and young people were asked how much they *liked school or college*.

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.

- 65% of the 11-18yrs group liked school or college 'a lot' or 'a bit', which is a smaller proportion than reported by young people (73%) living in Wales and looked after young people (71%) in other Welsh local authorities.

Do you like school?



Adults you live with: Support for learning

bright spots

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 children in England felt that their parents were interested in what happened at school.

- 15 of the 17 children (8-11yrs) and all but one young person (11-18yrs) recorded that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- More (97%) looked after young people in Flintshire felt their carers showed an interest in their education than children (90%) in the general population and other looked after children (93%) reporting carer interest. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

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 of children and young people (94%) did have fun and took part in activities outside of school.

I would like to go split dancing.
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	10 (100%)		
8-11yrs	9 (53%)	7 (41%)	1 (6%)
11-18yrs	15 (60%)	8 (32%)	2 (8%)
TOTAL	34 (65%)	15 (29%)	3 (6%)

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)

- 76% of children (8-11yrs) and 100% of young people (11-18yrs) who answered felt that they got the opportunity to explore the outdoors 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
 - The response from younger children in Flintshire was unexpected, as it is usually teenagers that report less access to nature and green spaces.
- In comparison with children (89%) in Wales overall, fewer looked after children (8-11yrs) in Flintshire felt they were given opportunities to enjoy the outdoors.

Second chances



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

Focus group feedback

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

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

- 58% responded 'all or most of the time';
- 33% answered 'sometimes'; and
- 8% thought they 'hardly ever' or 'never' got a second chance.

Some things that I did when I was younger and that ... adults still talk about and they ask why I did it.
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.

- 96% of young people answered that they were taught independence skills 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' but 4% said this was 'hardly ever' or 'never' true.
- More young people felt they were being taught independence skills: 96% in Flintshire compared to 86% of looked after children in other Welsh LAs. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

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 (88%) of young people reported that they did have access to the Internet.
- Three young people were unable to connect to the Internet from their placement.

What would make care better?

Have Internet WiFi for my tablet/ device
11-18yrs

What would make care better?

Having the wifi code.
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

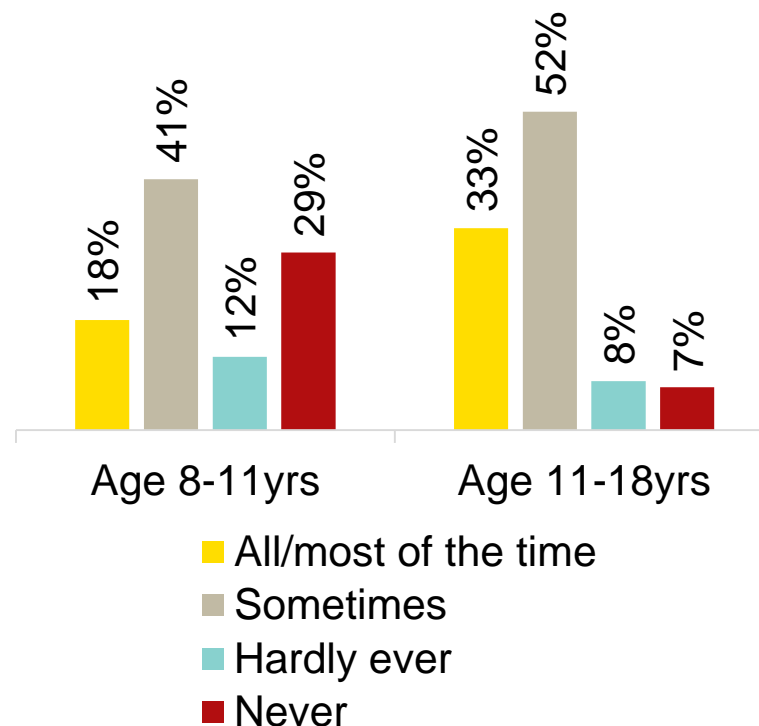


Children aged 8-18yrs were asked, *do you feel included in the decisions that social workers make about your life?*

- 59% of 8-11yrs felt included 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- 85% of 11-18yrs 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' felt included.

They don't include the fact that I would like someone to be there as well.
11-18yrs

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.

- 19% of young people in Flintshire recorded that adults did things that made them feel embarrassed about being in care. This is a larger proportion than other looked after young people in Wales, where 14% said they felt embarrassed by adults.

Label us as looked after children.
11-18yrs

When I am at youth club I have staff with me.
11-18yrs

Not let us open a bank account.
11-18yrs

They talk about it in front of other people who give me weird looks.
11-18yrs

Not let me be in photos.
11-18yrs

Feeling safe in placement

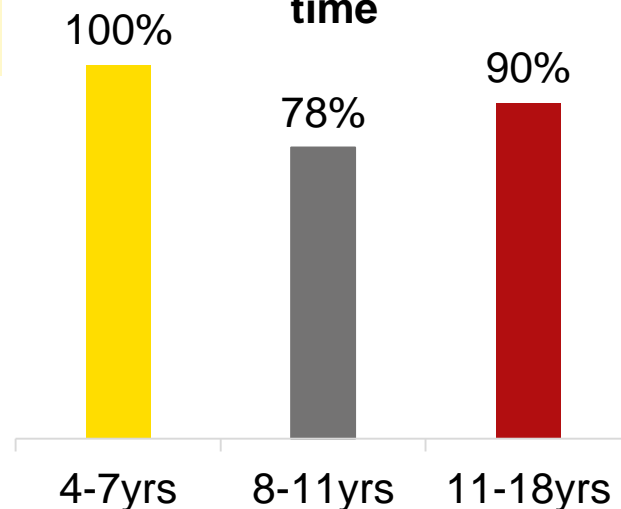


All children (4-18yrs) were asked whether they *felt safe* in the home they lived in. It is difficult to know what children were thinking about when answering, but feeling secure is about how the world *feels*, not necessarily how it is.

- Overall, the majority of children and young people reported that they felt safe 'all or most of the time' in their placements.
- 4 (22%) children (8-11yrs) and 3 (10%) of the 11-18yrs group ticked the 'sometimes', 'hardly ever' or 'never' boxes.
- The proportion of children aged 8-11yrs not always feeling safe is concerning.

- A larger proportion of looked after young people felt safe in their homes compared to children in the general population. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

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

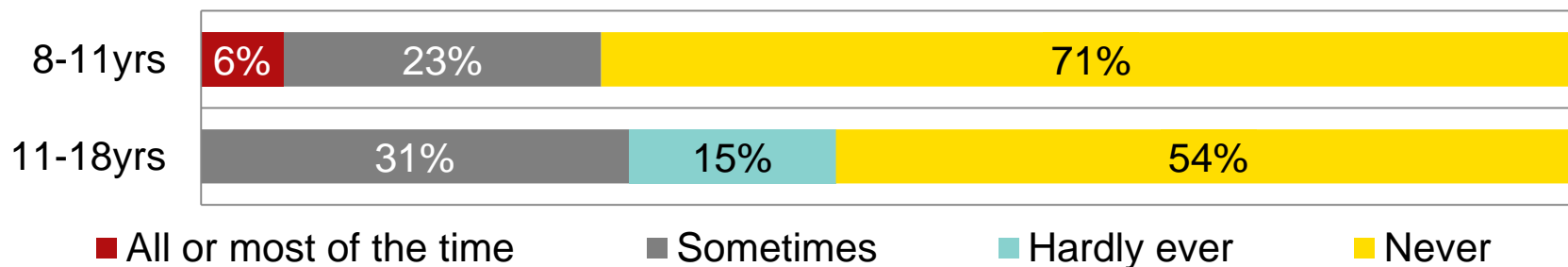
Our question asked whether *children felt afraid of going to school because of bullying* and if they were bullied were they *getting support from an adult*.

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 say they are regularly bullied at school. (ONS, 2016b)

- One child (6%) aged 8-11yrs reported being afraid of bullying 'all or most of the time' and four children recorded 'sometimes'. All but one of these children felt they were getting support from an adult.
- Similarly few young people (11-18yrs) felt afraid to go to school because of bullying. Just 8 young people answered 'sometimes'. But two of the eight felt that they were not getting help or support from adults to stop the bullying.

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 19% of children and young people did not know who their social worker was.
- Half of the youngest children (4-7yrs) did not know their social worker.

Age group	Know social worker	Don't know social worker
	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>n (%)</i>
4-7yrs	5 (50%)	5 (50%)
8-11yrs	14 (82%)	3 (18%)
11-18yrs	24 (92%)	2 (8%)
TOTAL	43 (81%)	10 (19%)

Contact with social workers



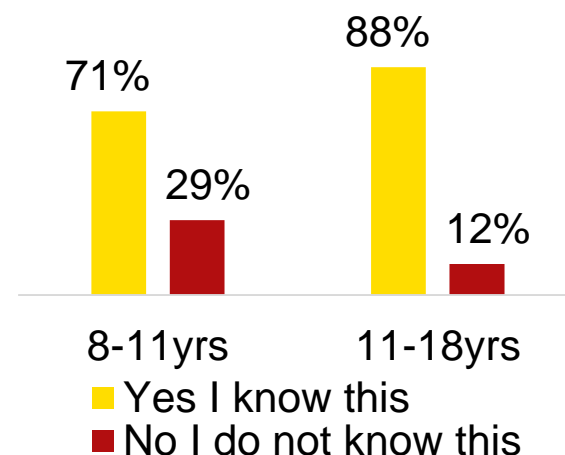
Children (8-11yrs) and young people aged 11-18yrs ($n=38$) who knew their social worker were asked how *easy it was to contact them*.



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

- A high proportion (87%) 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'. Just 3 young people (13%) could 'hardly ever' or 'never' get in touch with their worker.
- Fewer young people (11-18yrs) knew they could ask to speak to their social worker on their own compared to looked after young people in other Welsh local authorities: 88% in Flintshire compared to 98% elsewhere.

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



Try to call my social worker and she never answers. She doesn't tell me when she goes off.
11-18yrs



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



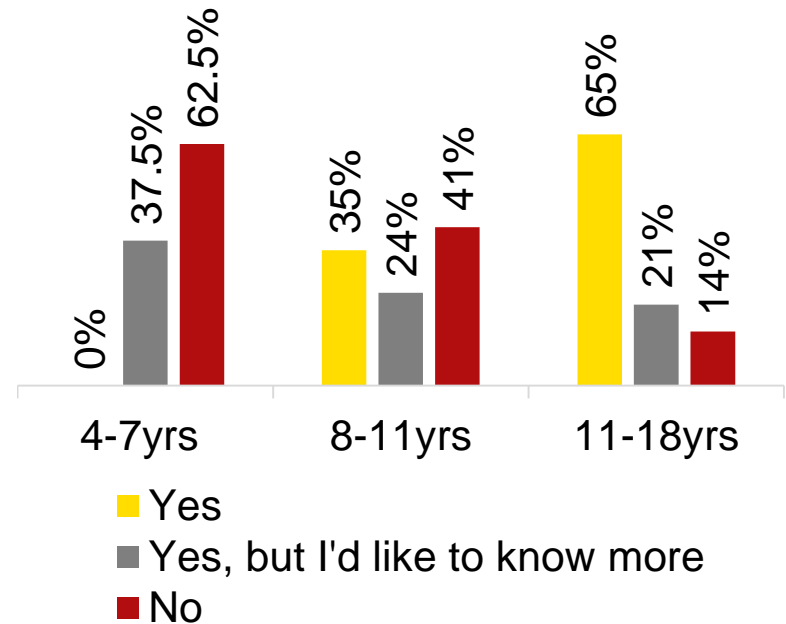
All the children and young people were asked if *someone had explained why they were in care.*

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)

- 62% of the youngest children (4-7yrs) felt that they did not understand why they were in care.
- Although understanding increased with age, more than a third (35%) of those aged 11-18yrs wanted to know and understand more about their history.

Has someone explained to you why you are in care?



If I knew why I had a social worker I would understand more.
4-7yrs

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,

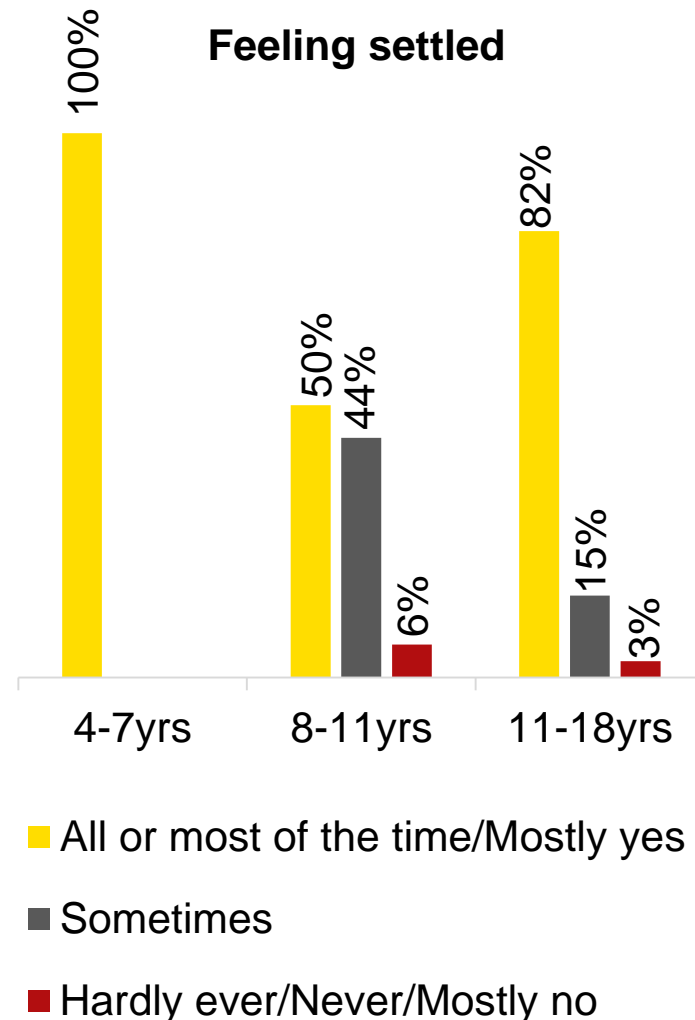
do you feel settled in the home you live in? (Do you feel comfortable, accepted and at ease?)

Answer options

Younger 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'.

- Most children and young people felt settled. The children aged 8-11yrs felt the least settled of all the age groups.
- More young people aged 11-18yrs (82%) in Flintshire felt settled than young people in other LAs where 73% 'always' felt settled. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

Feeling settled



Liking bedrooms



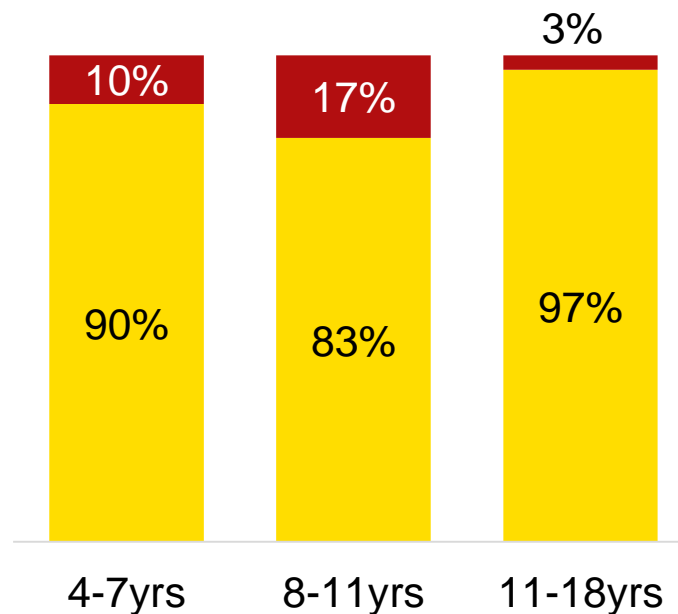
Children and young people (4-18yrs) were asked *if they liked their bedroom*.

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.

Do you like your bedroom?



■ Like ■ Dislike

- 56 (92%) children and young people liked their bedrooms.

I want my own bedroom. But when we move I will have my own room.
4-7yrs

Adults you live with: Sensitive parenting



All children and young people (4-18yrs) were asked whether they felt the adults they lived with *noticed how they were feeling*.

- 70% of younger children (4-7yrs), 77% of children (8-11yrs) and 92% of young people (11-18yrs) thought their carers noticed how they were feeling 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- Young people (11-18yrs) in Flintshire were experiencing sensitive care. But the younger children (4-11yrs) did not respond as positively to this question, and fewer of them felt their carers noticed their feelings.

Adults you live with: Sharing confidences



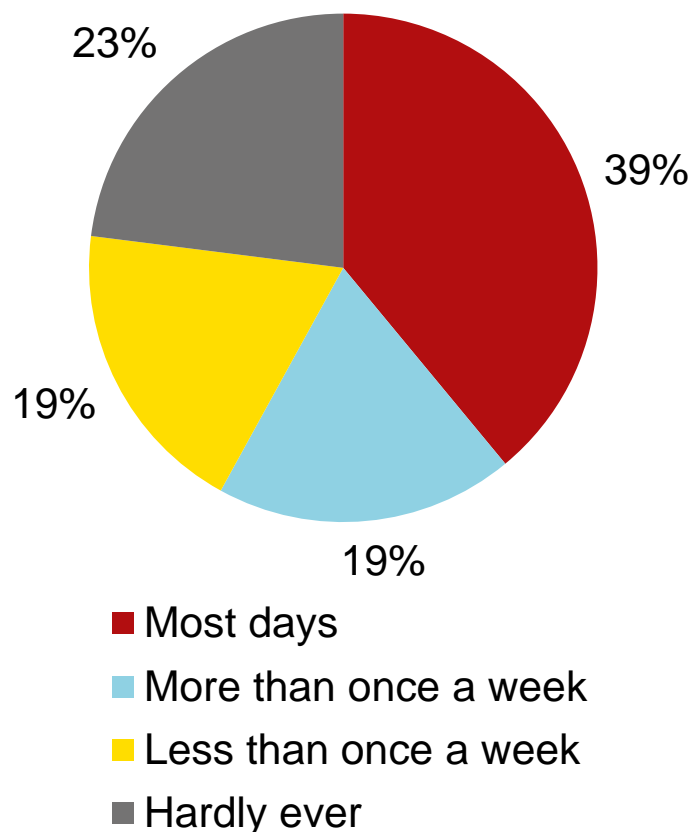
Young people (11-18yrs) were asked how often they *talked to the adults that they lived with about the things that mattered to them.*

General population

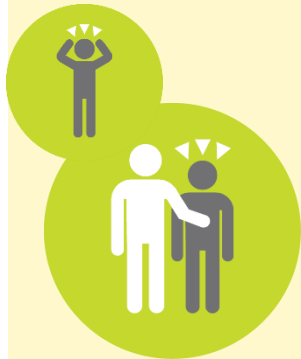
The UK *Understanding Society* survey (2017) found that 65% of children (10-15yrs) talked regularly to a parent.

- 58% of looked after young people talked regularly with their carers about things that mattered to them.
- A smaller proportion confided in carers compared to peers in the general population where 65% talk regularly with a parent.

Speaking to adults about things that matter



Support with worries



Children and young people (8-11yrs and 11-18yrs) 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)

- One child (8-11yrs) worried 'all or most of the time' and six worried 'sometimes'. All thought they were getting help with their worries.
- 17% of young people (11-18yrs) worried 'all or most of the time' and 43% 'sometimes'.
- Three young people who reported worrying thought they were not getting support with their concerns.

I'd like to move further away so that if my dad gets out of prison he can't be near us. I don't want him to know where we live.
8-11yrs

Parity with peers



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

- 88% of young people reported that 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' they did do similar things to their friends.
- Three (12%) young people reported that they could 'hardly ever' or 'never' do similar things to their friends.

It's difficult to tell your friends about your life.
11-18yrs

Happiness with appearance



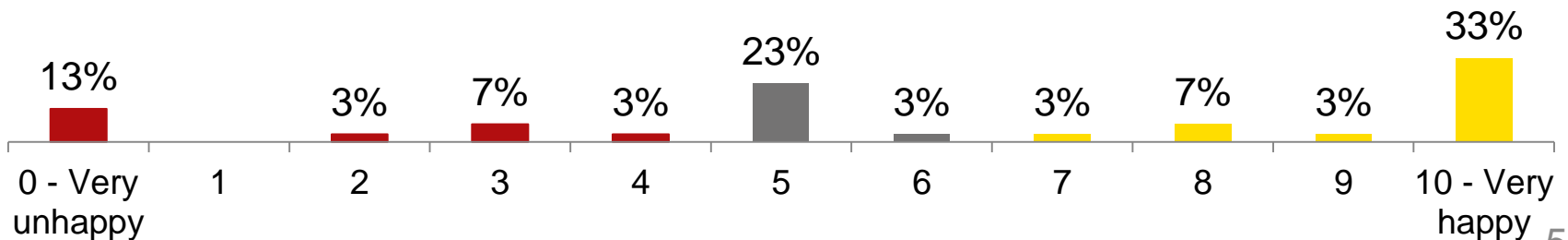
Studies have shown that poor body image is associated with low self-esteem, depression and self-harm. (Cash and Smolek, 2011)

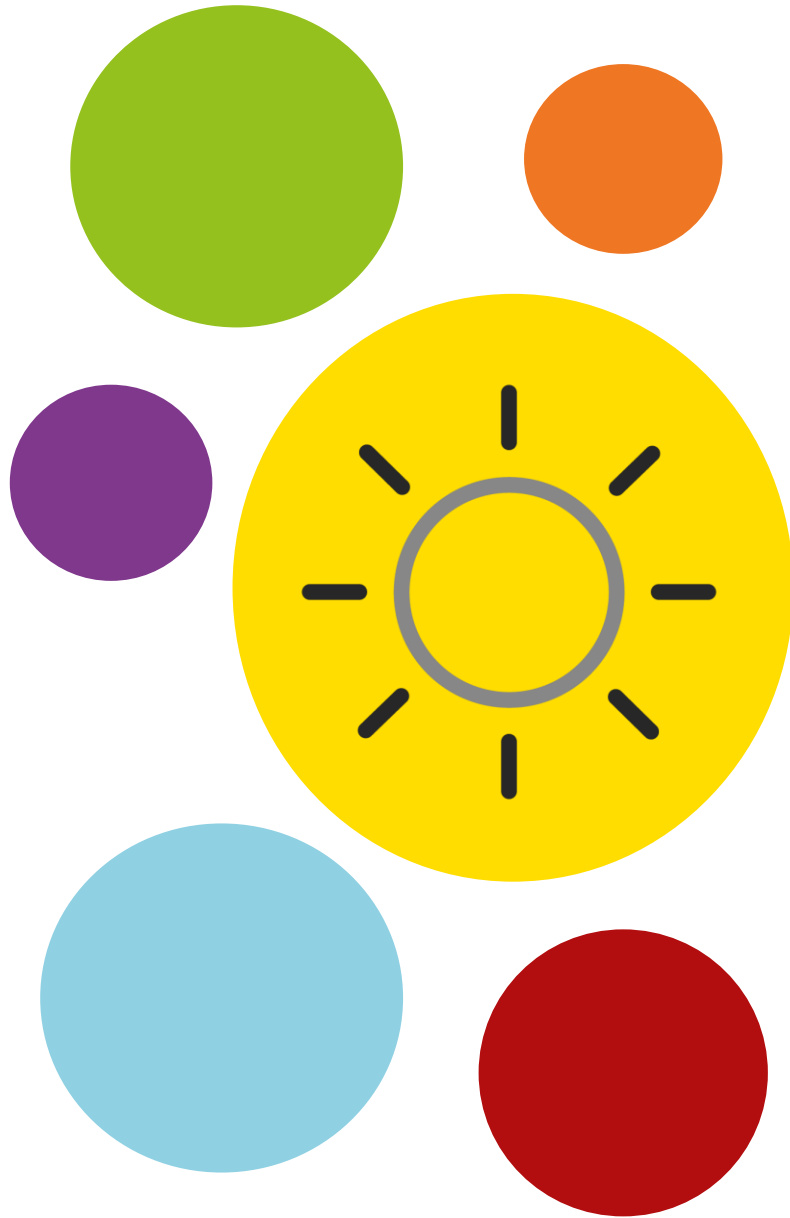
General population: Happiness with appearance

- 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 (11-18yrs) were happy with their appearance.
- 26% were unhappy with the way they looked: a larger proportion than the 10% of young people in the general population and the 19% of other looked after young people who dislike their appearance.

How happy are you with the way you look?





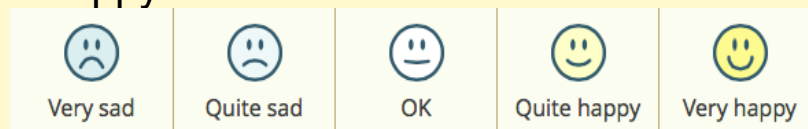
6. Well-being

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

Happiness

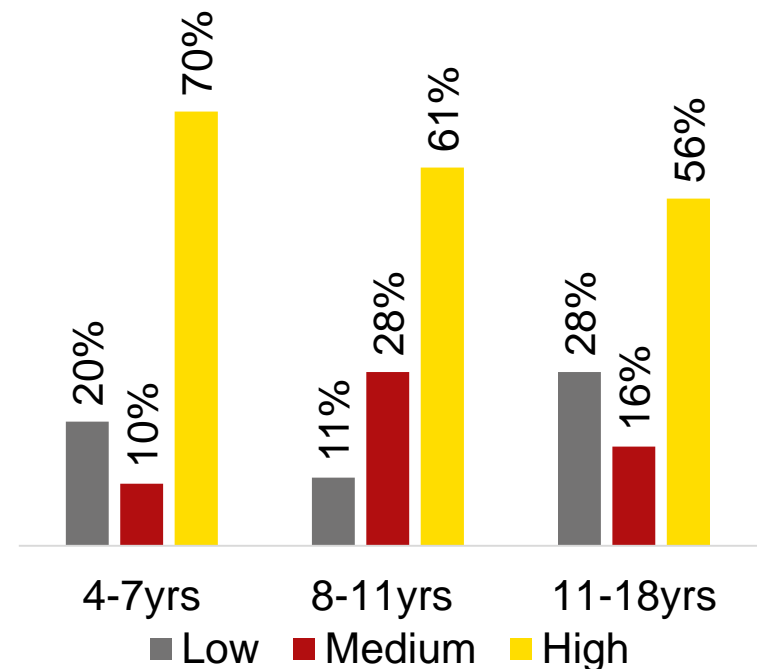
The decrease in happiness with age occurs in all surveys. Well-being decreases from school year 5 onwards with age 14-15yrs being the lowest point. It then starts to rise again. (Rees *et al.*, 2010)

- 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.
- 4 children (4-11yrs) and 7 young people reported that the previous day they had been 'quite sad' or 'very sad'.

Happiness yesterday



Life satisfaction

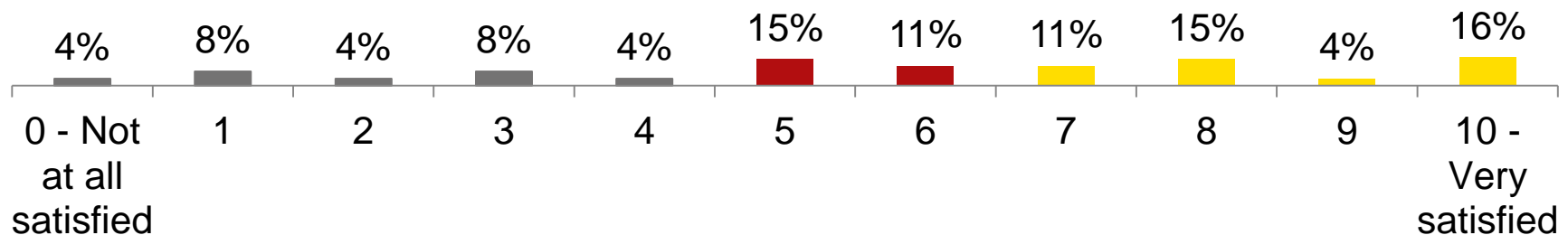


Young people (11-18yrs) were asked *how satisfied they were with their life* on a 0-10 scale.

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)

- Unlike in the general child population there was no correlation between high life satisfaction scores and being happy at school.
- 73% of young people had moderate to high life satisfaction scores.

How satisfied are you with your life?



Are the things you do worthwhile?

Young people (11-18yrs) were asked *if the things they do in life are worthwhile*.

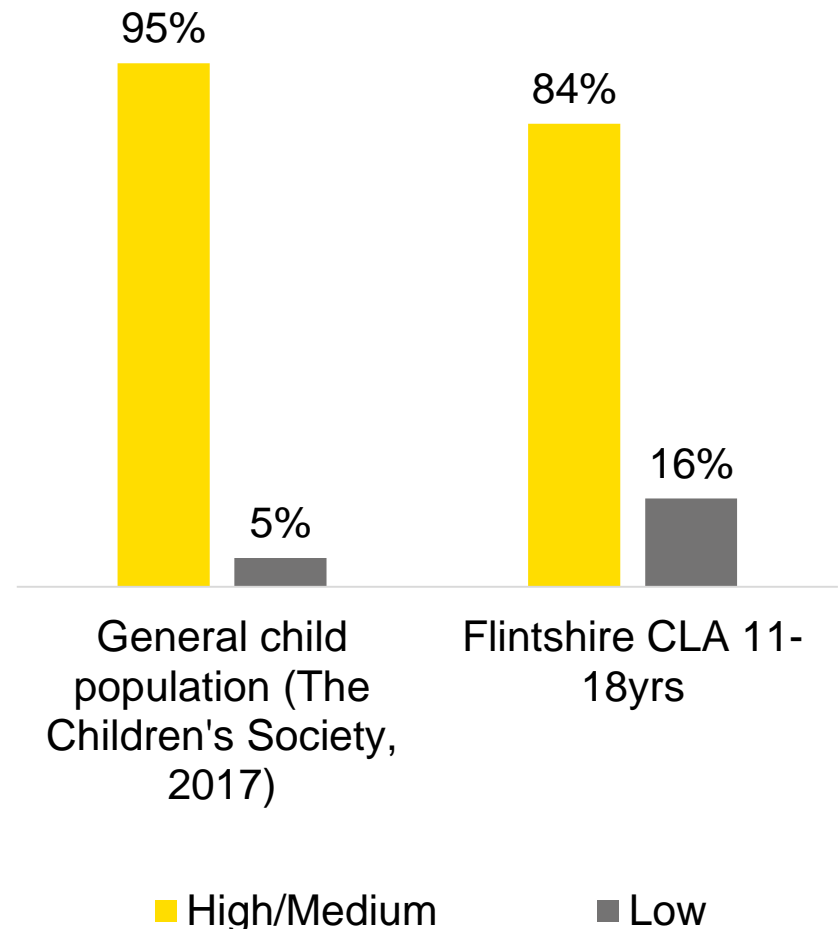
Importance of purpose

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.

- 56% of young people scored high or very high;
- 28% medium; and
- 16% 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



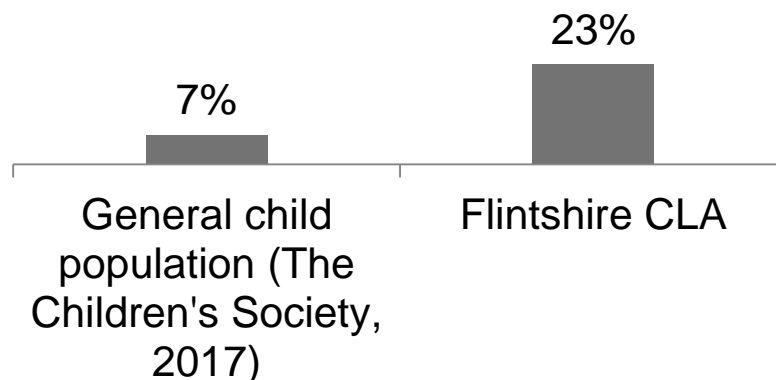
Young people (11-18yrs) were asked on a scale of 0-10 *how positive they were about the future.*

Links to happiness

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

- 16 (48%) were very positive about their future.
- Six (23%) young people had low scores and were pessimistic about their future.

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



Comparisons

Levels of well-being – Flintshire'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.

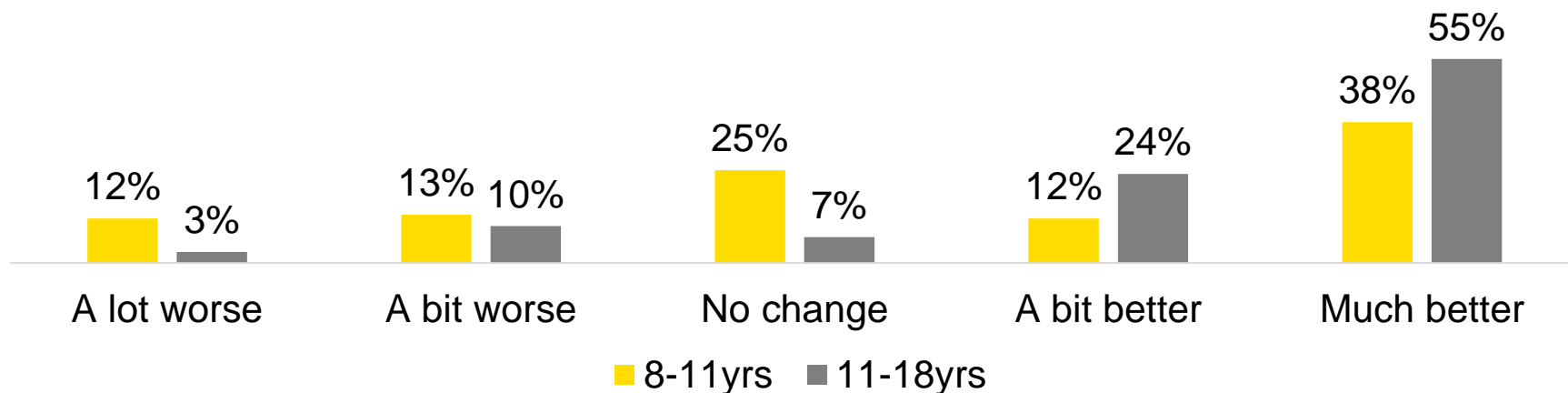
		Flintshire %	2018 average in 6 Welsh LAs %	Peers in general population (10-17yrs) %
Life satisfaction	High scores	46	55	80
	Low scores	28	17	8
Happiness yesterday	High scores	56	55	74
	Low scores	28	23	13
Things done are worthwhile	High scores	56	62	75
	Low scores	16	12	11
Positive about future	High scores	61.5	65	-
	Low scores	23	13	-

Life is improving

Children and young people 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'.

- Half of the children (8-11yrs) and 79% young people (11-18yrs) felt that their lives were getting better.

Is life improving?



Well-being: 4-7yrs



Two of the 10 children in the 4-7yrs group described themselves as 'very sad'.

- Both children were girls.
- Neither of them knew why they were in care.
- Both wanted more family contact.
- One child did not know who her social worker was and felt that her carers did not notice how she was feeling.
- The other child did not have a good friend and did not trust her social worker.

Well-being: 8-11yrs



Two of the 18 children in the 8-11yrs group described themselves as 'very sad'.

- Both children were girls.
- The children did not like school and were afraid to go to school because of bullying.
- The girls did not understand why they were in care.
- Neither of them knew that they could speak to their social worker in private and both recorded that they only trusted their social workers 'sometimes'.

Well-being:11-18yrs



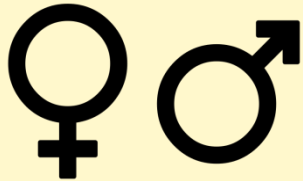
Nine of the 33 young people had low well-being (i.e. scored 4 or less on two or more of the 0-10 well-being scales).

- Three of the young people were girls and six boys.
- The length of time in care and number of placements were not statistically associated with their low well-being.

Young people with low well-being were statistically more likely to:

- Not have a good friend;
- Not like their appearance;
- Not trust their social worker or feel they could easily get in touch with them;
- Not feel safe or settled in placements; and
- Have poorer relationships with their carers. None of the young people talked regularly with their carers about things that mattered.

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 8-10yrs 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.



- More of the girls worried about their feelings or behaviours in comparison with boys.
- More girls than boys thought that their carers didn't notice how they were feeling.



- More boys than girls could not connect to the Internet from home.
- More boys than girls thought social workers were difficult to get in touch with.
- 33% of boys felt they were not included in decisions social workers made about their lives compared to none of the girls.



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

- Seven children gave text responses on:
What would make care better/ anything else you want to say?
- Two children answered that there was nothing they wanted to change.
- Other children said:

*For my mummy to
come to my house and
have dinner with us.
For my sisters and
brothers to come and
play with me.*

*To see my dad and
grandad a bit
more.*

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

- 8 children gave text responses on: *What would make care better/ anything else you want to say?*
- One child wrote that there was nothing they wanted to change.
- Other children wrote:

I do not like being in care.

Would like to have my phone with me more often.

I want it to be more awesome.

More regular contact with mum.

I would like an iPad and a cabin bed

I want to know when I can back to live with my mum. I don't really know when this will be and nobody is telling me.

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

- 17 young people gave text responses on: *What would make care better/ anything else you want to say?*
- 7 young people recorded that there was nothing they wanted to change or that they were ok.
- Most young people wrote about wanting more family contact, writing for example:
 - *Move out of my care home and live with my family.*
 - *To be able to see my birth parents.*
- Other young people wrote:

Nothing as I'm happy with my life as it is.

New social worker if that can happen please.

If they didn't cut the funding for my clubs.

More fun things to do.



Section 5: Positive aspects of practice and areas for improvement

What's working well

- The majority of the youngest children (4-7yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) in Flintshire felt safe and settled in their placements. All the youngest children (4-7yrs) and 90% of the young people (11-18yrs) reported feeling safe 'all or most of the time'. Similarly, all the youngest children (4-7yrs) and 82% of the young people (11-18yrs) felt settled.
- Children and young people's relationships with their carers were very good. The majority of children and young people (4-18yrs) trusted their carers and 97% thought that their carers were interested in their education. Carers in Flintshire are providing sensitive parenting to young people (11-18yrs). 92% of this age group felt their carers noticed how they were feeling. This is unusually high for this age group.
- More looked after children and young people were living in a household with a pet in comparison with children living in Wales and compared to other children in care.
- More young people (96%) in Flintshire felt they were being taught life skills compared to young people (86%) in other LAs.
- School is working well for the youngest children (4-7yrs) who are looked after in Flintshire. All of the youngest children (4-7yrs) reported enjoying school.

What could be improved

- **Explore why children aged 8-11yrs in Flintshire gave more negative responses** compared to the other age groups and similarly aged children in other local authorities.
- **Make sure that reviews of contact arrangements consider the views of all children.** It's important that the reasons for decisions are explained and that children are given the chance to ask questions about contact.
- **When making plans with children and young people, include unstructured opportunities to explore the outdoors** such as walking the dog or playing in a park as well as organised activities.
- **Ensure that all social workers introduce themselves to children and explain their roles in a child-friendly way.** Half of the youngest children (4-7yrs) did not know who their social worker was and some children and young people didn't know they could speak to their social worker in private.
- **Explain to children what has led to them coming into care and provide opportunities for them to ask questions.** Seven of the ten youngest children (4-7yrs) did not understand why they were in care and need help to understand what has happened and that they are not to blame.
- **Provide opportunities for young people (11-18yrs) to build self-esteem and positive self-image.** 26% of young people were unhappy with the way they looked which is a larger proportion than young people (10%) in the general population.
- **Consider how young people might be reassured about the support they can expect to receive in the future.**



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 (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

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.

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

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.

- Criss, M.M., Pettit, G.S., Bates, J.E., Dodge, K.A., & Lapp, A.L. (2002). Family adversity, positive peer relationships, and children's externalising behavior: A longitudinal perspective on risk and resilience. *Child Development*, 73,1220-1237
- 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
- Hawkley, L.C., & Cacioppo, J.T. (2010). Loneliness matters: a theoretical and empirical review of consequences and mechanisms. *Ann Behav Med* 40, 218–227.
- 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

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

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



bright spots

coram
Voice 
getting young voices heard



University of
BRISTOL

Funded by the Hadley Trust