



York's Children's Rights and Advocacy Service

U MATTER SURVEY 2019

CONSULTATION FINDINGS FROM CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

Georgette Pooley and Nikki Wilson



Introduction

The U Matter Survey is a chance for children and young people in care to feedback to the City of York Council about their experiences of being in care. The importance of understanding the views of children and young people in care is addressed in Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. This states that “*when adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.*” This survey helps to ensure this is the case as it gives children and young people an opportunity to voice their opinion on what the local authority should improve for children and young people in care, as well as highlighting areas of strength.

This report will outline the findings from the 2019 U Matter Survey and, where possible, discuss them in relation to the findings from the previous 2015 and 2017 reports. While the 2015 and 2017 survey included questions targeted at care leavers, there was no separate survey for children in care and care leavers. In 2019 this was changed, when Speak Up carried out two separate surveys, one for children in care aged 11-17 and one for Care Leavers aged 18-21. This enabled questions to be more specific to the young person’s age and will help ascertain the effectiveness of the different types of provisions that are specific to their age group.

Method

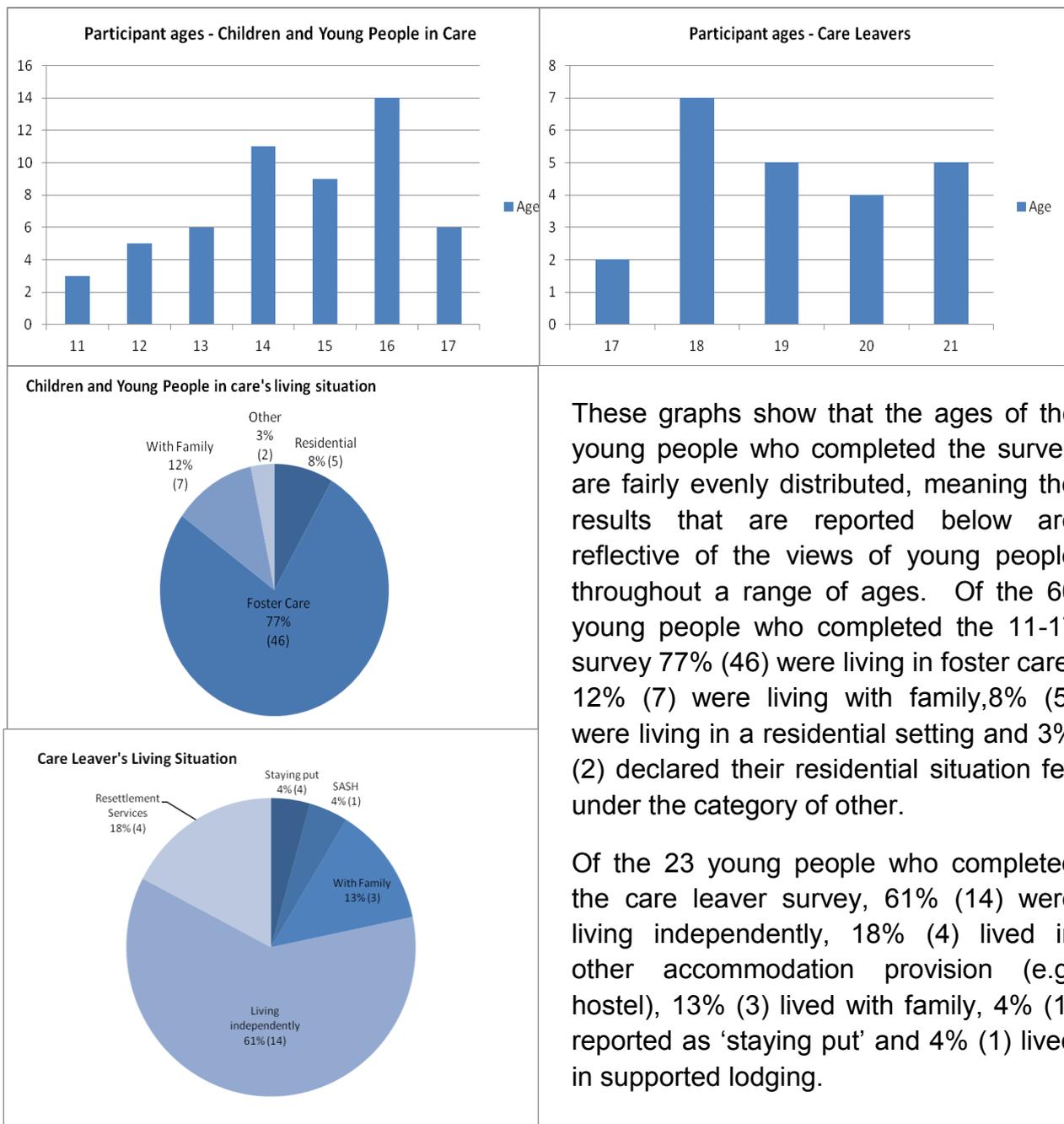
The consultation was carried out with young people between November 2018 and January 2019. The U Matter Survey was made available to young people both online and as a paper copy. The online version could be accessed via Survey Monkey (surveymonkey.com) and this was promoted to young people via Facebook and the quarterly Children in Care Council Newsletter.

When approaching children and young people about completing the survey, multiple strategies were adopted. A variety of professionals were asked to encourage young people they were working with to complete the survey (Social Workers, Pathway Workers, Youth Offending Team Workers, Independent Visitors and Advocacy and Participation Workers). All three strands of York’s Children in Care Council (Show Me That I Matter, I Still Matter, and Speak Up Youth) were supported to complete the survey. In addition to this, members of Speak Up also contacted foster carers and families to explain what the survey entailed and to gain advice on the best way to engage the young people in their care.

When completing the survey, young people participating were not required to include any personal information; however they were able to leave their name and contact details if they wanted further information about their rights and entitlements or to be entered into a prize draw with a chance to win £25 in vouchers.

Participants

A total of 83 children and young people aged 11-21 took part in the consultation. Unlike previous years, the 2019 consultation was separated into a survey for children and young people in care (age 11-17) and a survey for care leavers (age 18-21). A total of 60 young people aged 11-17 took part in the survey (approximately 55% of all children and young people in care within this age bracket). In regards to the Care Leaver Survey, a total of 23 care leavers aged 18-21 took part (approximately 28% of those eligible in this age bracket). While this is a substantial number and is an increase from previous U Matter Surveys, it should be noted that this isn't a full reflection of the opinions of all children and young people in care and care leavers and the opinions are specifically of those who were willing to engage.



These graphs show that the ages of the young people who completed the survey are fairly evenly distributed, meaning the results that are reported below are reflective of the views of young people throughout a range of ages. Of the 60 young people who completed the 11-17 survey 77% (46) were living in foster care, 12% (7) were living with family, 8% (5) were living in a residential setting and 3% (2) declared their residential situation fell under the category of other.

Of the 23 young people who completed the care leaver survey, 61% (14) were living independently, 18% (4) lived in other accommodation provision (e.g. hostel), 13% (3) lived with family, 4% (1) reported as 'staying put' and 4% (1) lived in supported lodging.

Results

As a result of having a separate 11-17 Survey and Care Leavers Survey, some of the sections below contain feedback from young people in care, other from care leavers and some section contain feedback from both groups. It is worth noting that not all of the questions were answered by all of the young people who took part in the survey and therefore there are varying levels of response rates to different questions.

Placements – views of young people in care

When asked whether young people feel safe and happy where they are living, 94% (49) of young people reported to feel safe and happy where they were living, 6% (3) stated that they did not. When young people were asked further how happy they were in their placement responses continue to be positive. In the 2019 survey, young people were asked to rate how happy they are in their current placement using a scale of 1-5 (1 being low and 5 being high). 77% (44) of young people rated their current placement a 4 or a 5, 21% (12) of young people rated their current placement a 2 or a 3, and only 2% (1) young person rated their current placement a 1. Although not directly comparable due to a different style of question, 2017's survey results also saw a positive result with 95% expressing they were happy at their current placement, with only 5% reporting that they were not.

76% (44) of young people said if they had ever been unhappy about a placement, they were able to talk to their social worker or carers about this. Despite this indicating that a relatively high proportion of young people are able to do this, it is a notable decrease from the previous consultation, when 92% of young people stated they could talk to their social worker or carer in 2017.

90% (50) of young people said that they felt included in activities where they live. This is a notable increase from previous years with 70% saying yes in 2017. However, it is worth noting that 2017 had a 'sometimes' option, and the most recent survey does not.

In relation to placement information provided to young people when they first coming into care, 40% (21) of young people not living with family reported being given written information or photos of their foster carers/residential setting before moving in. This is a decrease from 2017 (60%) and 2015 (71%). When questioning whether young people had received a New to Care Pack, 24% (14) stated that they had received one, 17% (10) stated that they did not, and the largest proportion 59% (35) stated that they cannot remember. Although statistics gathered for those who said they had received a new to care pack appear to be low, it is important to bear in mind that the highest rated answer is 'can not remember', which may be a reflection on the young person's age when they first came into care. Some of those who selected 'can't remember' may have been in care for a significant period of time and so it could have been several years since they received the New to Care Packs. Nevertheless, information received by young people regarding this is clearly an area that could be improved.

Experience of Social Workers – views of young people in care

The 2019 survey results revealed that 85% (50) knew how to contact their Social Worker if needed, with 15% (9) reporting that they did not. This is a very similar statistic to both 2017 (84%) and 2015 (85%), highlighting that this continues to be a strength of the City of York Council, but suggests there is still scope to improve this further. When asking young people if they knew who to contact when their Social Worker was not available, 76% (44) answered yes. This shows a gradual increase over the years with 70% (39) reporting they knew who to contact in 2017 and just 45 % in 2015.

In terms of how often young people saw their Social Worker, 74% (42) of young people said they were happy with how often they saw their Social Worker, an almost identical statistic to the 2017 survey. Of the 26% that weren't happy with the frequency some stated that they would like to see their Social Worker more frequently and others indicated that they would like to see them less.

When discussing a change of Social Worker, 18% (10) stated that they were not happy with how this has been done. This is a significant improvement from 2017 results, whereby young people previously reported that 42% were unhappy with how this was done. Despite this, when given the opportunity to provide any extra information, several young people (4 in total) reported that they had too many changes in Social Workers. One young person said, "I've had too many social workers, I had five in a year and four months and didn't get told appropriately when they changed over". Another young person indicated that she had had a more positive experience since being transferred to the Permanence Team, commenting, "We had a lot of social workers, when we got [name of social worker from the Permanence Team] I thought how long is she going to be here but she was with us for five years. It has been good since [name of the social worker from the Permanence Team]."

When asked their views on the reliability of their Social Worker, 75% (42) of young people expressed that they thought their Social Worker was reliable. This is an increase from both 2017 (54%) and 2015 (65%). This year's results also revealed that 77% (44) of young people felt that their Social Worker listened to them.

Finally, the survey asked young people to rate their current Social Worker using a scale of 1-5 (1 being low and 5 being high). This question saw a mixed response, with just over half (53%- 44) of young people rating their current Social Worker a 4 or a 5, 44% (19) of young people rated their current Social Worker a 2 or a 3, and 14% (8) of young person rated their current Social Worker a 1. Although a different question style, this is a decrease from 2015, whereby 77% stated that they were happy with their current Social Worker.

Experience of Pathway Workers – views of care leavers

95% (21) of care leavers knew how to contact their Pathway Worker when they needed to, with only 5 % (1) reporting that they did not. When asked if care leavers knew who to in contact the Pathway Team if their own Pathway worker was not available, a positive 91% (20) of care leavers knew who to contact. When asked if care leavers were happy with how often they saw their Pathway Worker, the 2019 survey revealed an extremely positive 100% of care leavers were happy with this. This is an increase from 2017, whereby 91% of care leavers reported they were happy with these arrangements. The 2019 survey also revealed that, 100% of care leavers found that their Pathway Worker took a genuine interest in their views and opinions.

Reviews – views of young people in care

This section of the results will focus on children and young people's experiences of their Independent Reviewing Officers and their Review. The survey revealed that 68% (40) of young people said they were aware of who their Independent Reviewing Officer is. This is an increase from 2017 (61%), however it is important to note that both 2017 and 2019 are a decrease from 2015 where 78% of young people were able to identify their IRO.

When asked if young people attend their review meetings, 76% (45) of young people reported that they did attend. This is a slight decrease from 2017, whereby is was previously reported that 84% (48) of young people regularly attended their reviews, however it is still an increase from 2015 where 65% of young people reported that this was the case. When discussing whether young people had the opportunity to speak to their IRO before review meetings, 63% (35) of young people reported that they did have the opportunity, again a notable decrease from 2017, where 85% of young people previously reported that they had the opportunity to meet their IRO before meetings.

When young people were asked whether they were involved in planning their reviews, answers were relatively split with 47 % (28) stating that they were involved in planning, and 53% (31) stating that they are not. These results are similar to those seen in the 2017. The final question in this section revealed that 53% (30) of young people felt they were involved in decisions made about them, 16% (9) did not and 31% (18) did sometimes.

Pathway Plans – views of care leavers

This section of the results will focus on care leaver's experiences of their Pathway Plans. Results revealed that 100% of care leavers had contributed to their Pathway Plan and that 100% had been able to discuss their future goals and aspirations for life in their plan. Despite extremely positive results for young peoples contributions to their Pathway Plans, 67% (14) reported that their Pathway Plan was important to them and just over half (55% -11) of care leavers said that they consult their Pathway Plan for important information or telephone contacts. However, it is important to consider that young people may have different methods for storing this information.

Health & Well-being – views of young people in care and care leavers

This section of the report will focus on young people's views about health and wellbeing and has responses from both young people in care and care leavers. In response to young people's awareness of Health Assessments 75% (44) of young people in care said they are aware of what a Health Assessment is. This is a slight decrease from 2017 where 83% reported yes. When asked if young people found Health Assessments helpful, 49 % (24) reported that they did, however when asked if they thought they got all of the health information they needed, 79% (44) answered yes.

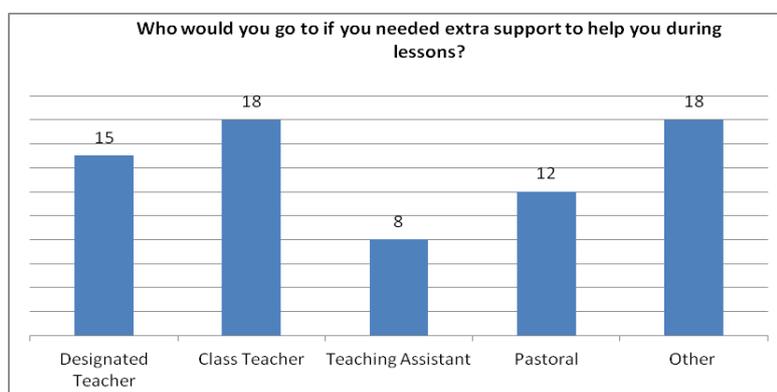
In terms of young people's emotional wellbeing, 83% (48) of young people in care said they know who they could talk to if they needed help with their emotional wellbeing. Whilst this is a high percentage, it should be noted that 17% (10) reported that they did not know who they could speak to. Although not directly comparable, a similar question in 2017 saw young people answer 100% in response to whether they had somebody to talk to if they were unhappy. One young person commented, "My carers help a lot, I speak to my foster carer if I am feeling low."

In relation to the views of care leavers, when asked if they know who they can talk to if they need help with their emotional health, 85% (17) of care leavers reported that they did and 15% (3) stated they did not. If young people were in need of information on how the access health services, 95% (19) of care leavers reported that they would ask their Pathway Worker for this information.

The 2019 survey also revealed that a positive 100% of care leavers who took part in the survey were registered with a GP and 85% (17) were registered with a dentist. When asked if care leavers preferred to use walk in services, 26% (5) reported that did they prefer this but the majority of young people (74% -14) expressed they did not have a preference for this.

Education – views of young people in care and care leavers

When young people in care were asked to rate on a scale of 1-5 how well their school or college supported them to do their best educationally, the responses received were fairly positive. 69% (38) of young people rated their support as a 4 or a 5, 20% (11) of young people rated their support as 2 or a 3, and 11% (6) rated the support they receive as a 1.



When young people in care were asked if there was an adult in school they felt that they could talk to, 83% (43) answered yes. Young people in care were asked further who they would go to if they needed extra support to help them during lessons and young people identified a number of different adults including class teacher and form tutors,

designated teachers, pastoral staff and teaching assistants.

In terms of young people's Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting, 51% (27) stated they found it 'quite useful', 19% (10) answered that 'they did not attend', 19% (10) answered 'no use at all' and 11% (6) answered that they found it 'very useful'.

When young people in care were asked whether they felt their carers took an interest in their education results were extremely positive with 92% (48) of this who answered the question stating that they did. One young person expressed that "no additional pressure should be put on children by carers, as carers are sometimes unaware of how much pressure is received at school".

In relation to care leavers, an encouraging 100% of young people knew they can get support to apply for college, university and employment and 95% (19) of young people felt they had the opportunity to discuss their ETE options and interests. As well as this, 90% (18) of young people feel they had the right amount of support with their education, training and employment.

Family & Friends – views of young people in care and care leavers

Unlike previous years, young people were asked separately about the support they had received for seeing family and friends. This was proven to be useful as results in relation to friends and family were different, however both results show that young people in care feel relatively well supported, in line with findings from previous years. 93% (52) of the young people in care felt that they have received the help and support they need to keep in touch with their family and 87% (47) stated that they had the support that they needed to keep in touch with their friends.

When young people in care were asked if they were happy with the arrangements for seeing their family, 76% (42) stated that they were happy and 93% (54) said that if they were unhappy they knew who to speak to about their unhappiness with these arrangements. This is a very similar result to 2017, and shows a continuous positive response to this area. However, when given the opportunity to offer any additional information, several young people commented on the fact that they would like to see their family more (five in total). One young person went on to make the following statement regarding the importance of positive relationships between carers and birth families; "I feel like if a foster child is keeping in contact with their biological family then the carer should also have a good, stable relationship for the sake of the child."

In relation to care leaver's experiences of support available to them to keep in touch with family and friends upon leaving care, 86% (18) of young people feel they have had the support to keep in touch with family and friends and 90% (19) of young people knew they can have support to keep in contact with family and friends.

Rights & Entitlements – views of young people in care and care leavers

Responses showed that young people in care and care leavers have a good understanding of their rights and entitlements. Feedback from young people in care provided us with the following statistics:

- 90% (52) were aware of their right to make a complaint
- 93% (55) were aware of the Children’s Rights and Advocacy Service
- 83% (49) were aware of the Children in Care Council
- 76% (45) were aware of the Independent Visitor Service
- 68% (40) were aware of the Violet Chambers Fund

Improvements can be seen in young people’s awareness of the Children’s Rights and Advocacy Service, known as Speak Up, and the Children in Care Council, Show Me That I Matter. In 2017 82% were aware of Speak Up (this is now increased to 93%) and 73% were aware of the Children in Care Council (this has now increased to 83%), showing a steady increase in young peoples awareness of the service.

Data shows that figures have fluctuated slightly over the recent years regarding young people’s aware of their right to make a complaint, as in 2015 88% were aware of their right to complain, in 2017 this figure rose to 95% and in 2019 we have seen a slight drop to 90%. Nevertheless, we can see that these consistent high responses indicates that this a continued area of strength.

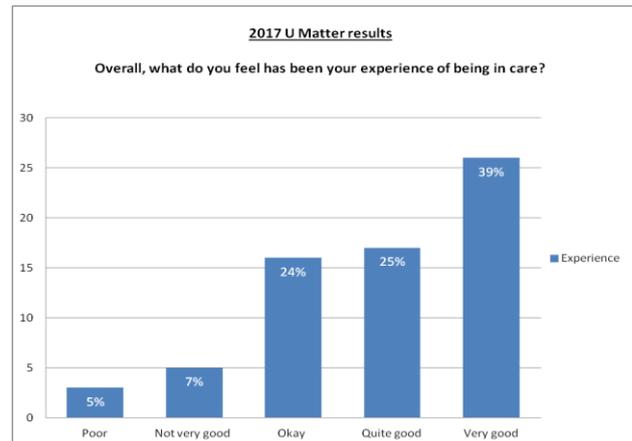
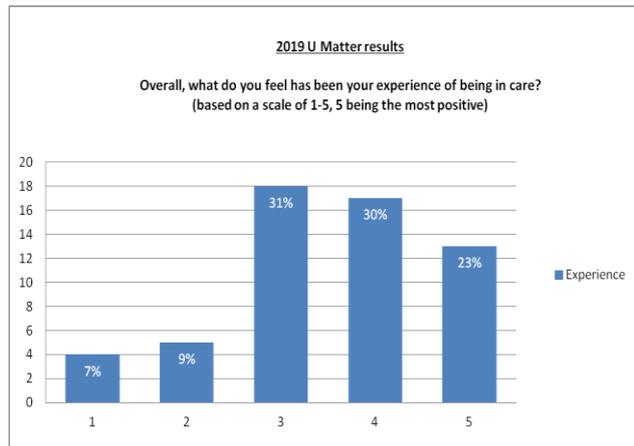
Feedback from care leavers regarding awareness of their rights and entitlements is positive with care leavers reporting the following:

- 100% (21) were aware of their right to make a complaint
- 90% (18) were aware that they can now ask for support from the Pathway Team up to the age of 25 years.
- 86% (18) were aware of Speak Up and their right to access advocacy
- 81% (17) were aware of the Care Leavers Forum
- 79% (15) reported that they regularly receive the I Still Matter Newsletter, which informs young people of work carried out by the Care Leavers Forum and opportunities available to care leavers.
- 70% (14) were aware of their right to access a free gym pass

Overall Experience – views of young people in care and care leavers

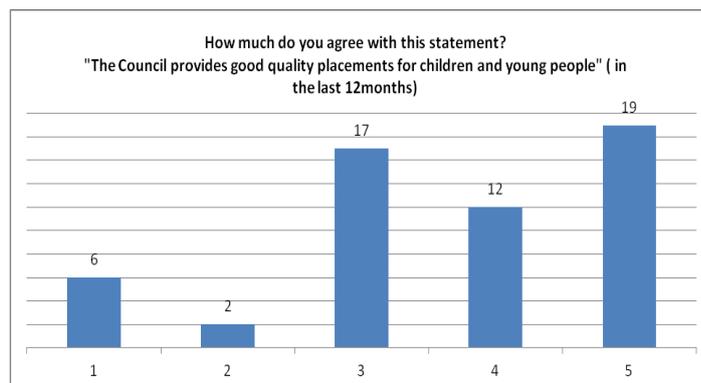
The final section will look at the overall experience that children and young people have had of being in care, as well as young people’s experiences of leaving care. When young people in care were asked if they felt that they had an adult in their life that they can trust, a positive 91% (51) expressed that they did.

Children and young people in care were then invited to rate their overall experience of being in care on a scale of 1-5 (1 being negative, 5 being positive). 84% (51) of young people rated their overall experience of being in a care somewhere between 3/5 and 5/5 and 16% (9) rating it as a 2/5 or 1/5. In previous surveys, young people answered using phrases ‘Very Good’ to ‘Poor’, so although answers cannot be directly compared,



similar results can be seen from the 2017 survey, with 88% rating their experience as being, 'Okay', 'Quite Good' or 'Very Good'.

Children and young people were asked to rate how much they agree with the following statement: "The Council provides good quality placements for children and young people." 55% (31) of children and young people in care rated this statement a 4 or 5, 34% (19) rated this statement a 2 or a 3, and 11% (6) rated this statement as a 1. As with previous questions in this section, due to the different question styles used in previous reports, answers cannot be directly compared, however in 2017 80% of young people said they either 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' with the given statement.



Care leavers were asked to score on a scale of 1 -5 their experience of leaving care services (1 being low and 5 being high). 81% (17) rated their experience of leaving care as a 4 or 5, and 19% (4) rated their experience as 3. In relation to whether care leaver's feel they have learnt adequate independence skills, 85% (17) of young people felt they learnt independence skills whilst in care and 68% (13) of young people feel they had received enough advice about budgeting and money management. In regards to housing, 91% (19) of care leavers are aware of the support available and who to contact if they have problems with their housing and 86% (18) of young people are aware of their accommodation options going forward.

Summary of Findings

The majority of young people in care reported that they felt happy and safe in their placement and were included in activities by their carers. There was a slight decline in young people who felt able to talk to their carers or social workers if they were feeling unhappy in their placement, however the number still remains high with just over three-

quarters reporting that they could. The provision of written information for young people, both when they first come into care in the form of the New to Care Packs and regarding a new placement for young people who are experiencing a placement move, have been identified as areas requiring improvement with relatively low numbers being able to recollect receiving such written information.

The majority of children and young people knew how to contact their Social Worker, in line with previous years, and there has been a steady increase in those who know who to contact if their Social Worker wasn't available, with current figures demonstrating that just over three quarter of young people are aware of this. Three quarters of young people said that they thought their Social Worker was reliable (a significant improvement from previous years) and were happy with how often they saw them. Improvements have also been made in relation to young people's experience of how a change of Social Worker was done, with a decrease in young people stating that they had been unhappy with this.

In terms of care leavers experience of their Pathway Workers and their Pathway Plans, the majority of care leavers were extremely happy with the service provided. The majority of young people knew how to contact their Pathway Worker when needed and all young people stated they were happy with how often they saw their Pathway Worker and found that they took an interest in their views and opinions. All care leavers reported that they had contributed towards their Pathway Plan and had been able to discuss their future goals, however not all saw the value in these plans with only 64% stating they were important.

Improvements can be seen in the number of young people who know who their Independent Reviewing Officer is, which currently stands at 68%. However we have seen a decrease in those who report that they regularly attend their reviews as well as those who have an opportunity to speak to their IRO before review meetings. Improvements could also be made in involving young people in the planning of their reviews, as less than half stated that they had been involved in this.

Whilst a significant proportion of young people were aware of the purpose of Health Assessments, only half saw the value is having them. That said, the majority of young people in care felt that they had all of the health information that they needed. All the care leavers that took part reported that they were registered with a GP and the majority were registered with a dentist. Young people's feedback on support with emotional wellbeing remains positive with the majority of young people in care and care leavers stating that they knew who they could talk to if they needed help with their emotional wellbeing.

The support that young people receive with their education from schools and colleges is reported as being high from the majority of young people and most young people were able to identify an adult in school that they could talk to, with young people naming various professionals including class teachers, designated teachers, pastoral workers

and teaching assistants. Almost all young people felt that their carers took an active interest in their education however a significant proportion reported that they either didn't attend their PEP meetings or didn't find them at all useful. Encouragingly feedback from all care leavers about support with their education, training and employment was particularly positive, with all care leavers reporting that they knew how to access this support and the majority feeling that they had the right amount of support with this.

In terms of seeing their family and friends, most young people in care and care leavers felt that had received a sufficient amount of support in this area and knew who to contact if they were unhappy.

Feedback from young people in care and care leavers showed that most had a good awareness of their rights and entitlements, with most young people reporting that they were aware of their right to make a complaint, the support available from the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service and from the Pathway Team. If improvements were to be made, it would be for more young people to be aware of the Violet Chambers Fund and the free Gym and Swim Pass, as around a quarter of young people reported being unaware.

Finally, when children and young people were asked about their overall care experiences, feedback has been mixed but similar to previous years, with the majority of young people rating it somewhere between a 3/5 and 5/5, with 16% rating it as a 1/5 or 2/5. Importantly, almost all young people stated that they had an adult in their life that they could trust. When care leavers were asked the same question regarding their overall experience of their leaving care support all rated this somewhere between 3/5 and 5/5.

To summarise, findings are that the young people who took part in this survey report to be feeling happy and safe in their placements and are able to identify an adult in their life that they can trust. Improvements have been seen in young people's experience of having a social worker, with most knowing how to contact their social worker and describing them as being reliable. Pathway support is viewed by young people as very positive, with care leavers reporting that they are happy with the support they receive, including support with their education, training and employment. The majority of young people report that they have access to the health information they need and know who to talk to if they need support with their emotional wellbeing or access to support in school. On the whole, young people in care and care leavers have a good awareness of their rights and entitlements. However, improvements could be made in ensuring that young people have access to the New to Care Packs when they first come into care and also written information about placement prior to a move. Consideration should also be given to involving young people more in their reviews and PEP meetings, with more of an emphasis on young people having an opportunity to meet their IRO before the meeting and be involved in the planning of reviews and PEP meetings.

Recommendations

1. Review how the New to Care Packs are distributed to children and young people to ensure that they have access to information when they first come into care.
2. Work to be considered around introducing a children's agreement that Social Worker's could use with children and young people to outline frequency of contact between the Social Worker and the child, a clear message that children can talk to their Social Worker if they are unhappy and how any future changes of workers would be managed. Consideration could be given to this being linked to the new Guarantee for Children and Young People in Care.
3. Re-launch of the Social Work Contact Cards to ensure that all children and young people in care know how to contact their Social Worker and who to contact in their absence. Despite high numbers of young people reporting that they do know this, the City of York Council would further demonstrate it is ambition by ensuring that every child or young person has this basic information.
4. Work to be undertaken to ensure that children and young people have better access to written information about their placements prior to a placement move.
5. An increased emphasis on IROs meeting with children and young people before their reviews and work to be undertaken to further promote children and young people's involvement in their reviews.
6. Work to be undertaken by the Virtual School to promote more engagement of children and young people in their Personal Education Plans.
7. Consideration to be given as to whether there is anything further that can be done to improve children and young people's experience of having a Health Assessment.