

Annex B

Children's Rights and Advocacy Service

U MATTER SURVEY

CONSULTATION FINDINGS FROM LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



BACKGROUND

The green paper Care Matters (DfES, 2006) outlines as part of its transformation programme for children living in care, the expectation for local authorities to develop a pledge to set out the things that all children in the care of that authority can expect to receive. York's Children in Care Council, *Show Me That I Matter* played a key role in developing and steering City of York's pledge before it was launched in February 2011. The pledge would be periodically reviewed and updated to reflect the up-to date views of children and young people living in care.

A survey, named *U Matter* was conducted as a means to collect current views of young people in care, the results of which have been shared with the Show Me That I Matter panel in the first step to updating the pledge. This report contains the findings of the survey, which, in addition to shaping the pledge, should also be used to inform future practice.

METHOD

The survey was available in paper format and online, through Survey Monkey (Surveymoney.com). The survey was promoted to young people in a variety of ways; the survey money link was advertised in the newsletter sent out to all looked after young people over the age of 11. There was also a link provided on the Show Me That I Matter website (showmethatimatter.com) and the Show Me That I Matter Facebook page. In addition social workers were asked to identify young people on their caseload who may be willing to participate in completing the survey. Young people who were already in the process of receiving services from the Rights and Advocacy Service were also approached about completing the survey.

Young people were supported by the Children's Right Service, school or carer (if required) to complete the survey, although some completed it independently. Some young people chose to complete the survey via Surveymoney.com but most completed a paper copy. The survey enabled young people to complete the survey anonymously if they wished.

A total of 50 children and young people in care completed the questionnaire, ranging in age from 8 to 17. The majority of these were living in foster placements, however 2

young people were currently living in a residential placement, 2 were living with family and 1 was living independently. The survey included the views of young people placed out of area. 27 of the young people were female, 22 were male and 1 didn't specify their gender.

PLACEMENTS

37% of young people had experienced only one placement, whilst 46 % had experienced 2-4 placement moves, and 17% had 5-10 placement moves. However only 13% of young people felt they'd moved too many times; the majority of young people felt that the number of moves had not been a problem.

Almost half of young people had been required to move school for as a result of a placement (44%). There were mixed views about having to move schools, with some feeling upset about leaving friends, but others feeling that their new school was better. One young person felt relief that they no longer had to travel to school by taxi.

Only small percentages (13%) of young people were given written information or photographs about their placement prior to moving there. However lack of written information did not appear to affect the quality of young people's experience in that placement, as the 87% who didn't receive written information all agreed with the statement that 'City of York Council provides good quality placements'. Furthermore all said that they felt they could talk to their social worker if there was a problem. One young person commented how they would have liked more preparation time to get to know their carer:

"I would have liked to have spent more time with my foster carer before I moved in, we don't get on".

Most young people (93%) felt they had an adult they could talk to if there was a problem; either their social worker or their carer. The 7% who felt they could not talk to either their carer or social worker were mainly females (one didn't disclose their gender, the others were all female). This could suggest that females have more specific needs with regards to communication with those caring for them. There were 7 young people who chose not to answer the question about whether they could talk to their social worker or carer; these were all male. 5 out of 7 of these were under 10.

42 out of 50 young people said their foster carers listened to them, 3 ticked both 'yes' and 'no' and 4 young people felt their foster carers did not listen to them. 46 out of 50 young people thought their foster carers spent enough time with them, with only 2 stating a definite 'no'. One young person had a lot of praise for their foster carers:

"The good thing about this placement is that my carers are very kind; they care about you a lot. It makes it easier for me to not be living with family, which some people find very hard".

However this was not everyone's experience. The importance of feeling part of a family was highlighted by one young person:

"In my current placement we get on well together and I'm included in my family activities. In my previous placement nothing was good. My carer did not talk to me, I did not feel like I was part of the family"

Respondents were given the following statement and asked whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed:

"the Council provides good quality placements for children and young people"

The majority (90%) either agreed or strongly agreed that City of York provides good quality placements. Of the 10% who either disagreed or strongly disagreed, all were female; a total of 5 people.

Summary: Most young people were positive about their placements and felt listened to by their carers; they agreed that city of York Council provides good quality placements. They were able to talk to a foster carer or their social worker if there was a problem, however the majority were not given written information or photographs about their placement prior to moving.

FOSTER CARE

Most young people (91%) felt that they were able to make their bedroom feel like their own/have a say in how it looked. The remaining 9% accounts for 4 young people who, reassuringly had all agreed earlier in the survey that they could talk to their social worker or foster carer if there were any problems. However:

- one young person had disagreed that City of York provides good quality placements, indicating a particular problem with their placement/carer.
- one young person felt that their foster carer didn't listen to them
- one young person was in residential care

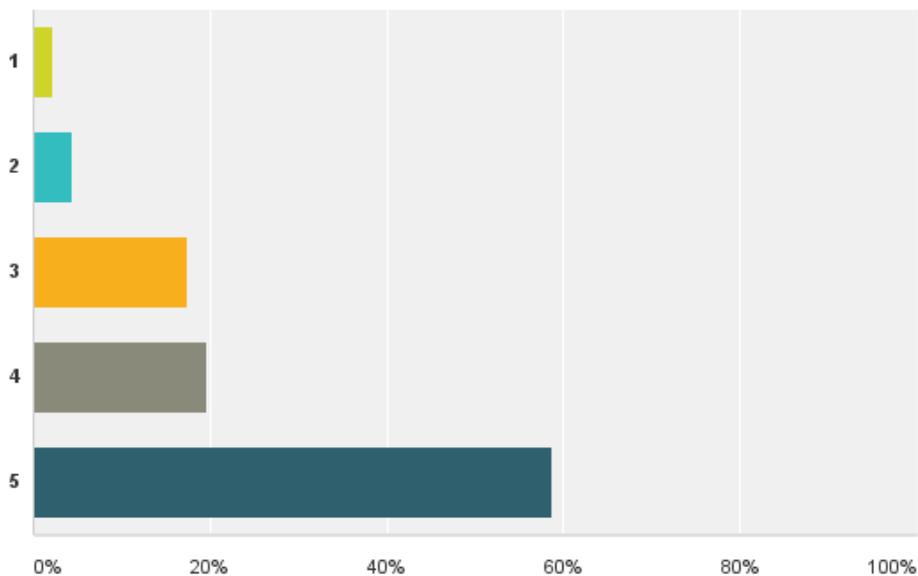
2 young people who completed the survey reported that they had shared a bedroom; one of these felt that they could make their bedroom their own.

Consistent with the remarks about bedrooms, 91% of young people said they were invited to family events within their placement. From the 9% who weren't invited to family events, all agreed earlier in the survey that they could talk to their social worker or foster carer if there were any problems. It should be noted that, (discounting one young person who lived in residential who mistakenly answered this question), all of these were teenage boys.

City of York Council received high scores when young people were asked to rate the quality of their placement out of 5 (1 being lowest and 5 being highest); 58% rated their placement 5 out of 5.

Q16 Overall how would you rate the quality of your placement? (1 = lowest, 5 = highest)

Answered: 46 Skipped: 4



The young people who gave a score of 3 or below, which accounted for 11 individuals (19%), had all previously indicated they felt able to talk to their social worker or foster carer if they were unhappy about a placement. Furthermore, all had agreed with the statement that City of York Council provides good quality placements. It should be noted that all of these young people were in their teens.

However one young person explained the difficulty in addressing any problems, even when they felt able to talk to someone about it:

“when I was unhappy in placement it was difficult to talk to someone about it, eventually I spoke to the Children’s Right Officer. It’s difficult to complain about bad placements when you don’t want another move.”

Summary: Most young people were happy with foster care; they were able to make their bedrooms feel like their own and were invited to family events. Should any problems arise they were able to talk to their carer or social worker about it.

RESIDENTIAL CARE / CHILDREN’S HOME

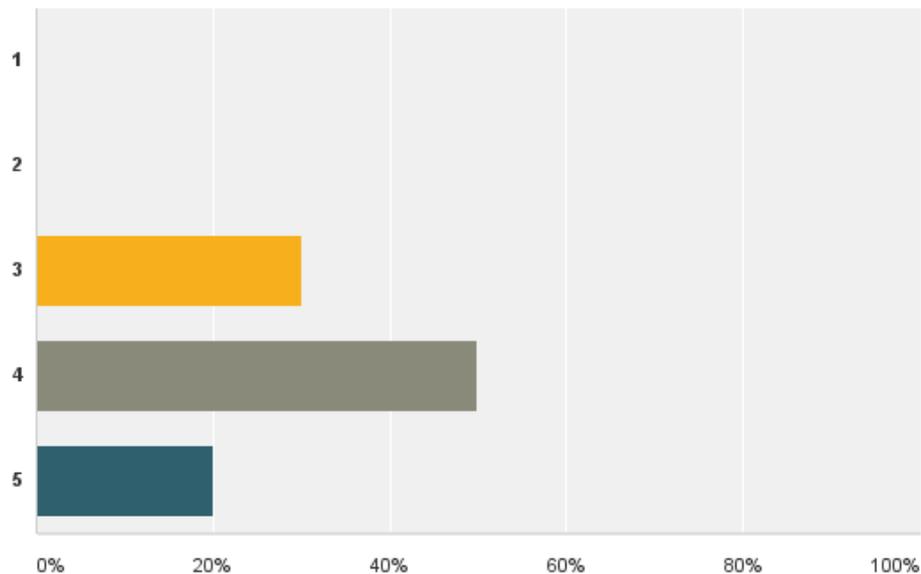
Whilst only 2 young people were currently living in residential care, 10 young people completed this section of the survey, presumably commenting on previous experiences of being in residential care. 5 of these young people experienced residential care in York and 5 outside of York. 9 of these young people said the staff who cared for them were interested in their views, however 5 young people said the staff didn’t spend enough time with them.

“the good things about my care home are more things to do, being independent. The bad things are too many rules (stupid rules) and being away from my family”

4 out of 10 young people said they could make their bedroom feel like their own, whilst 3 felt they could not; the remaining 3 did not answer.

Q21 Overall how would you rate the quality of your placement? (1 = lowest, 5 = highest)

Answered: 10 Skipped: 40



Summary: Residential staff were interested in young people's views, but young people's experience wasn't as positive as those living in foster care. Half of the young people felt staff didn't spend enough time with them.

RIGHTS AND RESPECT

When asked whether their carers had treated them as an individual and with respect, only 40 out of 50 young people responded. 37 felt that they had been treated in this way, 1 thought 'yes and no' and 2 felt that their carers had not treated them in this way.

However 35 young people (out of 40 who chose to answer) felt that they've had a say in the decisions that have been made about them. 3 young people ticked the boxes 'yes' and 'no' indicating that they had a say either sometimes or to a limited extent. Only 2 said they had not had a say. One young person commented on making a choice *not* to have a say:

"I can have a say in decisions... but I usually choose not to have a say"

Of those who answered, around half of young people said they were aware of the Rights and Advocacy Service, however as 9 young people skipped this question, it is reasonable to presume that the figure who don't know about the service is much higher (60%). Of those who said they knew about the service, there were degrees of understanding as to what support was offered; one young person commented:

“I've heard of it but I don't know what it is”

However 87% of young people knew they had a right to complain if they were unhappy about the care that they received, and 19% (8 people) had made a complaint. Of these 8 young people 3 were happy with how it was dealt, 1 was 'happy-ish' and 1 was not happy. The remaining 3 did not comment.

Exactly half of young people knew about the Pledge made by City of York Council to look after young people. When asked to prioritise what issues City of York Council should be promising, young people identified:

- good quality placements
- help to keep in contact with friends and family
- a social worker who is reliable, trustworthy, who will listen to you and treat you with respect.

One young person summarised the details of a good quality placement:

“The most important thing the Council should promise is that you get a good placement with kind and caring foster carers, where you can say if you're unhappy and they'll understand”.

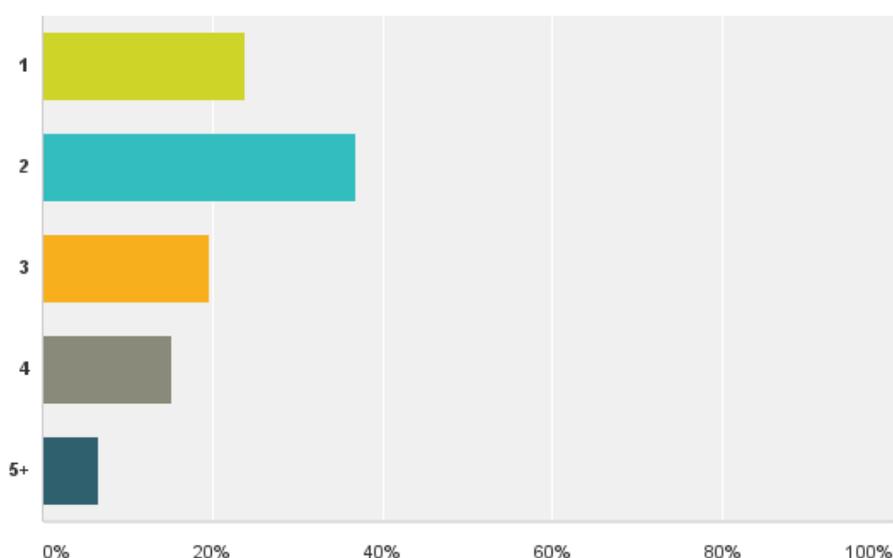
Summary: Most young people feel they have been treated as an individual and with respect and that they've had a say in decisions that have been made about them. Only half (possibly less) knew about the Rights and Advocacy Service, however most people knew they had a right to complain.

YOUR SOCIAL WORKER

There appears to be a high staff turnover which is represented in the graph below. Only 23% of young people have had the same social worker in the last 2 years. Conversely, 40% of young people have had 3 or more social workers in the last 2 years. 21% have had 4 or more in the last 2 years.

Q28 How many social workers have you had in the last 2 years?

Answered: 46 Skipped: 4



77% of young people were happy with the frequency of the visits from their social worker. Some young people who thought they had less regular visits from their social worker were still happy with the frequency. The quality of the contact with social workers was rated quite highly too; 81% thought their social worker was reliable and 76% got to see their social workers alone. Importantly 89% of young people felt that they could talk to their social worker about any worries they may have.

However ease of making contact with social workers was less clear. Over half of young people didn't have their social worker's mobile phone number, and 6 people skipped this question which suggests a higher figure. It was noted that of those that did have their social worker's mobile number, the contact details tended to be held by the foster carer(s). Those who did have their social worker's number tended to be in their mid to late teens: 13 out of 20 young people were 15 years or above. It should be noted that 71 % of young people didn't know who to contact if their social worker was on holiday.

Furthermore, 8 young people skipped this question, therefore it is reasonable to assume this figure is higher. Again those who did know who to contact in their social worker's absence tended to be older, the breakdown as follows:

- 1 x 12 year old
- 3 x 14 year olds
- 2 x 16 year olds
- 5 x 17 year olds
- 1 x 19 year old

88% of young people felt that their social worker acts on their wishes and feelings. The remaining 12% (5 young people) who felt that their social worker did not act on their wishes and feelings comprised of 1 male, aged 15 and 4 females aged 15 or 16. 5 males (aged 8-17) and 1 female skipped this question. These figures could suggest that females value being listened to more than males, an issue that seems to be of particular importance during teenage years for females. Although almost half of young people didn't answer this question, 60% thought that when it has not been possible for their social worker to act on their wishes and feelings, their social worker explained why. One young person explained their acceptance of decisions made in their best interests:

“I was very young when decisions were made so I don't think I had a say. I don't mind, they were good decisions”.

Summary: Most young people were positive about the relationship they had with their social worker, however making contact with them didn't seem quite so easy; over half of young people didn't have their social worker's mobile number and most people didn't know how to contact if their social worker was on holiday.

REVIEWS

More than half of young people didn't know who their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) was, and a further 7 young people skipped this question. It can therefore be presumed that the proportion of young people who didn't know who their IRO is higher. It should be noted that only 3 out of 21 young people who knew who their IRO was, were male.

74 % of young people said that their IRO doesn't contact them in between meetings/reviews (19 skipped this question). However, of the 21 young people who did know who their IRO was, all except 1 reported that their IRO visits them in between meetings. This suggests face-to-face contact with young people is the most effective way to establish contact.

81% of young people said they attend their review and 76% feel comfortable enough to have their say in the meeting. 19% said they didn't attend, some young people commented that they chose not to have a say:

“I chose not to go to my review meetings because they are boring”

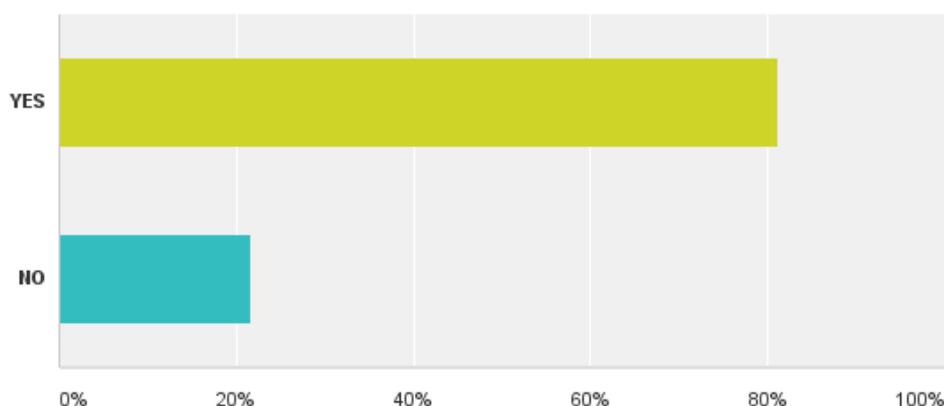
And

“Sometimes I feel a bit nervous and don't have much to say so I don't always go”

The figures on review attendance are difficult to determine; it's fair to assume that the 13 people who skipped the question can be added to the figure who don't attend their review. Therefore the review attendance figure is more likely to be around 60%, rather than 81%.

Q43 Do you normally go to your review meetings?

Answered: 37 Skipped: 13



37% of young people had received the support of an advocate to help them have their say, whilst others used people already in their support network to advocate on their behalf as required, such as a teacher or foster carer. 8 young people said they didn't understand the things that were discussed at their review meetings. When asked

whether the review focuses on the positives as well as any difficulties they may be experiencing, only one young person said 'no' (however 17 people skipped this question).

Only 5 young people said there are people at their review meeting who they would rather they not be there; only 2 of these had addressed this with their social worker or IRO. 4 young people said there were people who they would like to attend their meeting who weren't invited. However 2 of these commented it was actually a parent who had not been able to make it rather than not been invited. 1 young person had addressed the invitation list with their social worker or IRO.

Only 3 young people said that they were unhappy about the venue for their meeting, and 11 young people had helped to chair their own meeting. One young person commented:

"In my reviews I always do a theme; once I made name badges for everyone, another time I made everyone a bun".

Another young person said:

"I do a powerpoint presentation with lots of photos of me and what I've been doing in school"

Unfortunately this particular topic (reviews) saw many young people disengaging from the questionnaire with high levels of young people (sometimes up to 19 young people) skipping questions. This suggests there is still some way to go to engage young people effectively in the review process.

Summary: A lot of young people didn't know who their Independent Reviewing officer was and reported that they did not contact them in between meetings.. It appears that a lot of young people attend their review, and those who do, tend to feel comfortable enough to have their say. However young people showed a level of disinterest in reviews as almost a third of young people chose not to answer questions about reviews.

CONTACT WITH FRIENDS & FAMILY

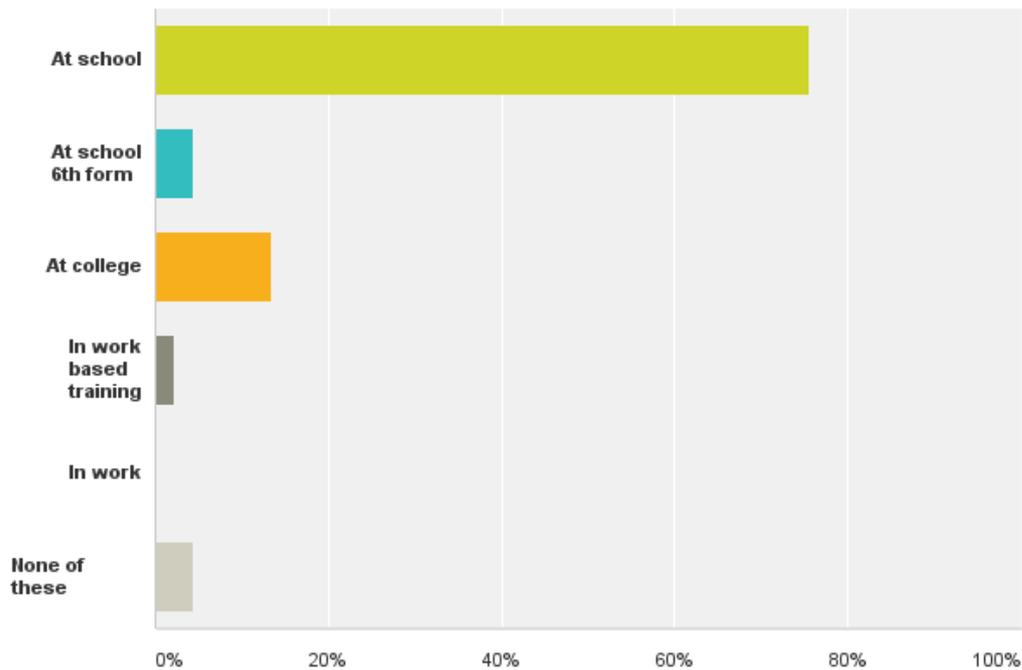
Statistics showed that the majority of young people were happy with their contact arrangements. 87% of young people have been asked who they would like contact with and 92% felt they'd had the help and support they needed to keep in touch with family. 86% felt they'd had support to keep in touch with friends. 93% had been given enough information about practical arrangements for contact, such as where, where and how often contact took place; 73% were happy with the arrangements. However 95% of young people knew who to speak to if they were unhappy.

Summary: Most young people were happy with their contact arrangements with family (but slightly less felt they'd had enough support to keep in touch with friends). Most young people knew who to speak to if they were unhappy.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Q58 What education setting are you in?

Answered: 45 Skipped: 5



27% of young people had changed schools because of a change in placement, however once person commented on the benefits of this:

“Although I had to change school for this placement I didn’t mind, I don’t have to go in a taxi anymore and my new school is even better”

90% of young people felt that their carers take enough interest in their education, and 93% said they had the right amount of support in their education or training. Personal Education Plans were not a familiar concept to everyone; only 27 young people out of 50 said they had a Personal Education Plan, 3 of these commented that they ‘weren’t sure’. These 27 young people were then asked about whether they were consulted about what support they wanted with their education; 10 young people responded, 6 feeling they were consulted and 4 saying they were not consulted.

When thinking about transitions, 71% of young people feel they were given enough information and support (at the right time) about choices in education, training or employment.

It is worth noting that questions around education saw fairly high numbers of young people disengaging (between 9 and 19 young people skipped these questions). While

this was not a high as the Review's section, it suggests that education is a topic that young people feel less motivated about.

Summary: Young people showed less interest in answering questions about education, but from those who answered, most felt well supported in their education. However, only around half of young people knew that they had a Personal Education Plan.

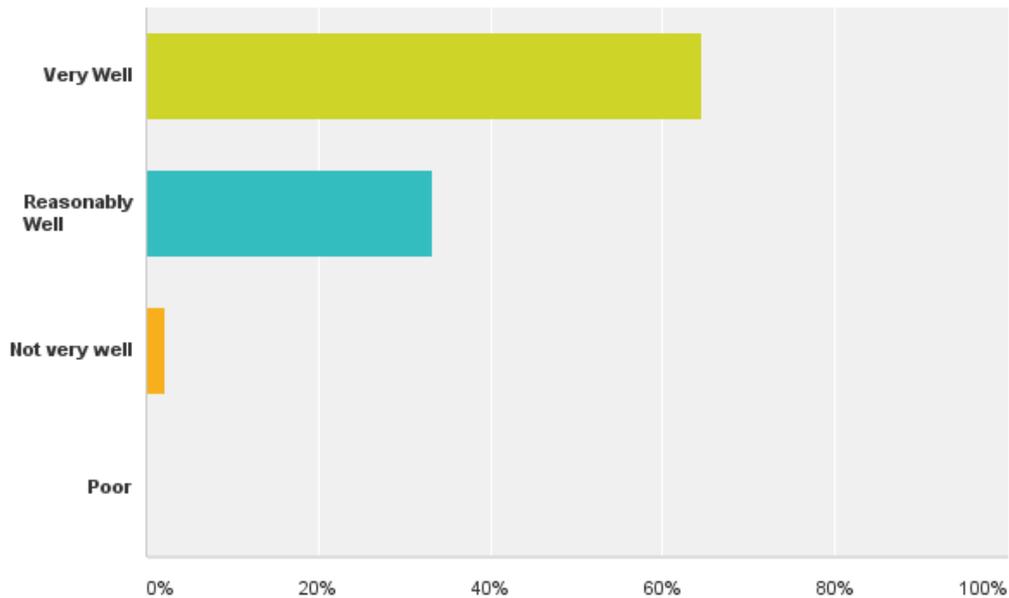
HEALTH & HAPPINESS

77% of young people knew who their GP and dentist were and 91 % reported having regular dental checks. Less reported (70%) having regular eye test, however this could be attributable to the fact that eyesight test are required less frequently than dental appointments. Almost all young people (98%) said they felt able to talk someone about their health, whether that be a foster care, social worker, doctor or schools nurse if they had any concerns about their health.

When asked about whether they had received any other support with their health, 72% of young people reported that they had accessed such support. Young people seemed satisfied with how their health was cared for with 98% reporting that their foster carers had looked after their health either 'well' or 'reasonably well'.

Q71 How do you feel your carers took care of your health? e.g. took good care of you whilst ill, took you to the doctors/ dentist

Answered: 45 Skipped: 5



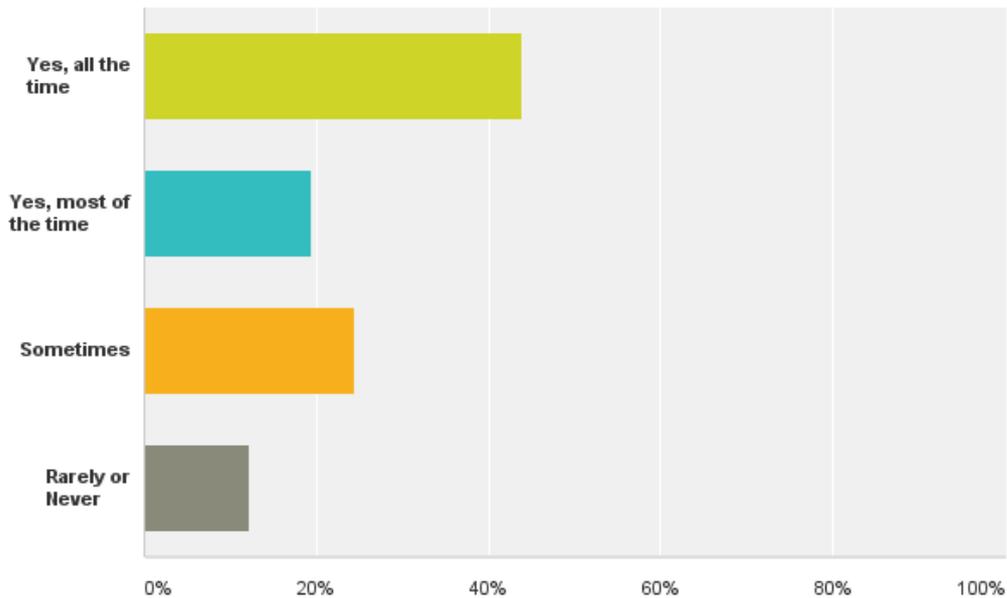
With regards to accessing social and leisure opportunities, 90% reported that they were encouraged to take part in such activities. One young person commented:

“I’ve been encouraged to take part in activities, but only by my social worker, not my foster carers”

However there was a more varied response from young people when asked about whether they could confide in the adults looking after them if they had a personal problem, with 36% saying they could confide rarely or only some of the time.

Q70 If you had personal problems, could you confide in any of the adults looking after you?

Answered: 41 Skipped: 9



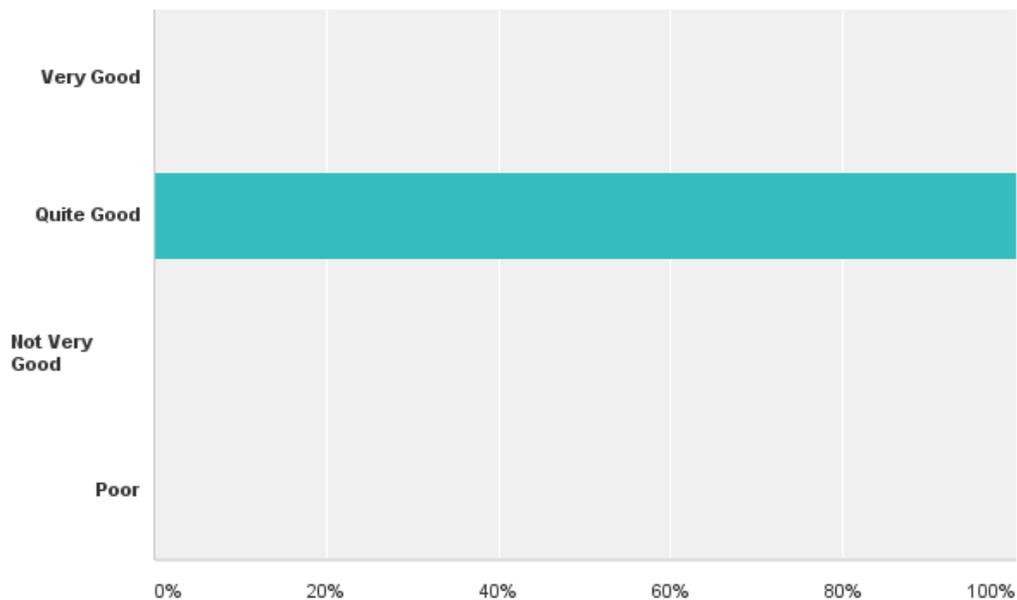
Summary: Many young people knew who the doctor and dentist were and most reported having regular dentist checks. They were encouraged to take part in leisure activities, and nearly all reported they could talk to someone if they had a concern about their health. But when this was framed within talking about a ‘personal problem’ with carers young people were less certain that they could talk to someone.

LEAVING CARE

Only 1 or 2 young people responded to questions about leaving care, therefore more research is required for more conclusive results. Of these young people, 100% felt they had received enough help in getting ready to leave care, but 100% also felt they had not received enough help in finding accommodation. 100% felt they got enough help with finding work or further training/education. Again, 100% felt they were getting enough support since they left care. The preparation for young people leaving care was given an overall rating of ‘quite good’. While information on leaving care was limited during the survey, City of York Council hold more information about young people’s preparation for leaving care and experiences of leaving care through exit interviews undertaken by the manager of the Pathway team.

Q76 Overall, how would you rate the preparation you had for leaving care?

Answered: 2 Skipped: 48



Summary: Young people were satisfied with the support they received for leaving care; however for a more accurate reflection of young people’s experience leaving care further research would be required. Much of this information is collated by the Pathway Team during exit interviews.

OTHER ISSUES RAISED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Some young people commented on their experiences of using taxis to get to school or to clubs and groups they were involved in out of school; often feeling that taxis were late and unreliable. One young person said that taxis ran smoothly during term time when their was a routine in place but in holidays taxis sometimes wouldn’t turn up at all because they hadn’t been booked by the social worker.

One young person disliked having to use taxis for school because it was tiring:

“the journey was long because there were other children to collect. I was the first to be picked up and the last to be dropped off so it was a really long day”

CONCLUSION

Most young people were positive about their placements and felt listened to by their foster carers; they were invited to family events and felt able to talk to a foster carer or social worker if there was a problem. Most young people feel they have been treated as an individual, with respect and have had a say in decisions that have been made about them. They were positive about the relationship they had with their social worker, however making contact with social workers wasn't always easy. Most young people were happy with their contact arrangements with family. Young people were positive about the support they had received in accessing health services and reported that they were encouraged to take part in leisure activities.

Over a third of young people didn't answer questions about Reviews, indicative of disinterest from young people. Many young people didn't know who their Independent Reviewing officer was, this tended to be because their IRO had not visited them between review meetings. However young people tended to feel comfortable enough to have their say in their review meeting. Young people generally felt well supported in their education, yet nearly half of young people thought that they didn't have a Personal Education Plan.

More than half of young people were unaware of the Rights and Advocacy Service, however most young people knew they had a right to complain. Overall young people were very positive about their experience of being Looked After by City of York Council with 76% rating their experience of being looked after as either 'good' or 'very good'. 58% gave City of York 5 out of 5 for the quality of placements and 90% agreed with the statement that 'City of York Council provides good quality placements'.

Sarah Wild
Children Rights and Advocacy Service
March 2014