



# **Your Life, Your Care:**

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

*August 2021*

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# About this research

## Bright Spots

This research is part of the Bright Spots Programme: a collaboration between Coram Voice & the University of Oxford, funded by the Hadley Trust.

Currently official statistics only provide a partial picture of children in care & care leavers' lives. Data focuses on adult perspectives using objective outcomes measures – e.g. where children live, educational results. None of this information tells us about how children feel: are they happy, safe and feel they are doing well?

The Bright Spots Programme seeks to address these gaps by measuring children's subjective well-being. Subjective well-being is defined as feeling good and doing well at an individual and interpersonal level.

- The Programme helps LAs systematically listen to their children in care and care leavers about the things that are important to them.
- 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 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.

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# **Section 1: Summary: Key findings**

# Your Life, Your Care 2020-21

*The views of children in care aged 4-18yrs in Barnet on their well-being*

**152**

Children in care responded to the survey from a total eligible population of 291: an impressive response rate of

**52%**

**Between April and June 2021 all children aged 4-18yrs in care in Barnet were asked to take part in an online survey to find out how they felt about their lives. This is a summary of the findings.**

- More boys ( $n=91$ , 60%) than girls ( $n=59$ , 39%) completed the survey. Two (1%) other young people did not state their gender.
- Most (64%) of the children and young people were living in foster care, 22% were in residential care. Most others were in semi-independent accommodation or family/friends care.
- 63% of children and young people were of Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicities.

Age group	<i>n</i>	%
4-7yrs	16	10%
8-11yrs (primary)	21	14%
11-18yrs (secondary)	115	76%
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>100%</b>

# What is working well?



## Trusting carers (4-7yrs)

- All children aged 4-7yrs trusted the adults they lived with. This is a Bright Spot of practice.



## Happiness (4-11yrs)

- Not a single child reported having been unhappy the previous day. This is a Bright Spot of practice.



## Sensitive parenting (4-7yrs)

- All children aged 4-7yrs thought that the adults they lived with noticed how they were feeling. This is a Bright Spot of practice.



## Access to nature (8-18yrs)

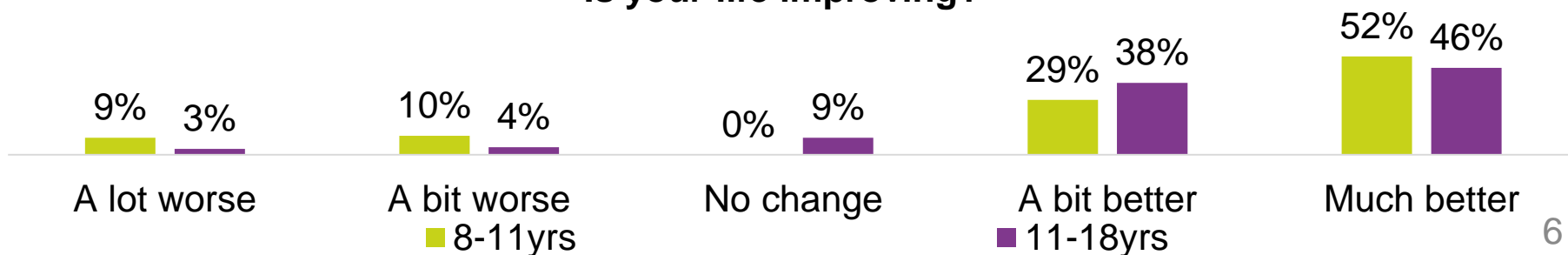
- 95% of children (8-11yrs) and 96% of young people (11-18yrs) had spent time outdoors in the previous week: higher than children (70%) in the general population. This is a Bright Spot of practice.



## A trusted adult (4-11yrs)

- All the children ( $n=37$ ) had a trusted adult in their life. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

## Is your life improving?



# What is working well?

## Social worker identity (4-18yrs)



- Just one young person (11-18yrs) reported not knowing who their social worker was. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

## Social worker trust



- Every child in the 4-7yrs and the 8-11yrs age groups reported trusting their social worker. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

## Social worker continuity (11-18yrs)



- Young people (11-18yrs) in Barnet were statistically more likely than young people in other LAs to have retained the same social worker in the previous 12 months (54% vs 32%). This is a Bright Spot of practice.



## Liking school/ college

- All of the children (4-11 years) liked school.
- 83% of the young people (11-18yrs) liked school or college 'a lot' or 'a bit' – slightly higher than young people (80%) in the general population.
- Children and young people liking school is a Bright Spot of practice in Barnet.



## Support for learning

- Nearly all (98%) of the children and young people (8-18yrs) reported that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

# What could be improved?



## Family time (8-18yrs)

- Of the children and young people who were able to see their birth family, only about half thought the time they spent with their Mum, Dad, and siblings was 'just right'.
- Children/ young people who were unhappy about how often they saw their birth family nearly always wanted more contact.

*I would like to see my mum and my dad more often.*  
11-18yrs

*My opinion would be that I would really like to see them (mum and dad). I do not know what my dad sounds like.*  
8-11yrs



## Pets (8-18yrs)

- Children and young people in Barnet were statistically less likely than those in other LAs to live in a household with a pet (37% vs. 62%).



## Feeling safe where you live

- Children aged 8-11yrs in Barnet were more likely to report not 'always' feeling safe at home compared to the average for other LAs (30% vs. 13%).



## Knowing reasons for care

- 37% of children 4-7yrs, 45% of children aged 8-11yrs and 21% of young people aged 11-18yrs either did not know, or wanted more information about why they were in care.

## Good friends (4-18yrs)



- Compared to children in the general population, children and young people in Barnet less often reported having a good friend (97% vs. 91%).

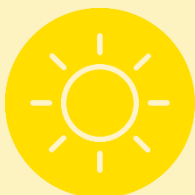


# Well-being



The well-being of children aged 4-11 years was encouraging, with none reporting low levels of happiness.

4-11yrs



In Barnet, around a third of the young people appeared to be thriving. Across the four well being measures:

- 31% reported very high levels of happiness;
- 36% reported very high life satisfaction;
- 34% reported feeling that things done in life were very worthwhile; and
- 40% reported feeling very positive about the future.

11-18yrs



13% of the young people reported low well-being **with girls statistically more likely to do so than boys**. Factors most strongly associated with low overall well-being were:

- Disliking your appearance
- Not always feeling safe at home
- Little or no trust in their social worker
- Not always feeling settled where they live
- Disliking school

11-18yrs



## **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) 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.
- Paper surveys were also available and used in cases where no Internet was available, or when the young person preferred this method.
- In Barnet at the time of the survey 291 children and young people aged 4-18yrs were looked after and able to complete the survey.
- Children and young people completed the survey anonymously: individual identifiers such as name, school etc. were not collected in order to allow responses without fear of consequences.
- If children recorded names or any identifying information on the survey these were removed by the researchers.

# Methodology (2)

- The survey was distributed through the virtual school to head teachers and designated teachers in schools.
- Social care staff, including foster carers and social workers, were asked to encourage children and young people to complete the survey.
- Regular reminders were sent to head teachers and designated teachers and some schools were followed up directly.
- The survey was promoted in training sessions for designated teachers.
- Most children and young people were asked to complete the online survey in school between April and June 2021, generally with a trusted adult present. The trusted adult was usually the designated teacher, learning mentor or SENCO, or otherwise a key professional from their placement.

# Methodology (3)

## 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 if children are flourishing.

- Where possible, local authority (LA) data are compared to data on children in the general population, and to the average responses from 17 LAs.
- Data were weighted and tests run for significant difference between LAs.
- In addition to questions that measure overarching well-being indicators (happiness, life satisfaction etc.) the questions cover four domains that are important to children and young people: Relationships, Resilience, Rights and Recovery. The report covers each of these.

On some pages of this report you will see a '**Bright Spots**' icon (top right of page), and a yellow text box. This indicates a 'good news' story – a positive aspect of practice in your LA. This is where children and young people are doing significantly better than children in care in other LAs or report the same or higher well-being than their peers in the general population.

We also highlight with a grey text box where young people are doing significantly less well compared to children in care in other LAs, or where results are markedly less favourable than in the general population. This may be an area to focus on in service development.

- If we have not highlighted a difference the findings are in line with the results in other LAs.



## **Section 3: Survey results**



## 3.1 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 Nation: Children in Care 2015*, for example, had a response rate of 3%.

- 152 children and young people responded to the surveys from an eligible looked after population of 291.
- The overall response rate was 52%.

Age range	Care population <i>n</i>	Responses <i>n</i>	Response rate %
4-7yrs	28	16	57%
8-11yrs	32	21	66%
11-18yrs	231	115	50%

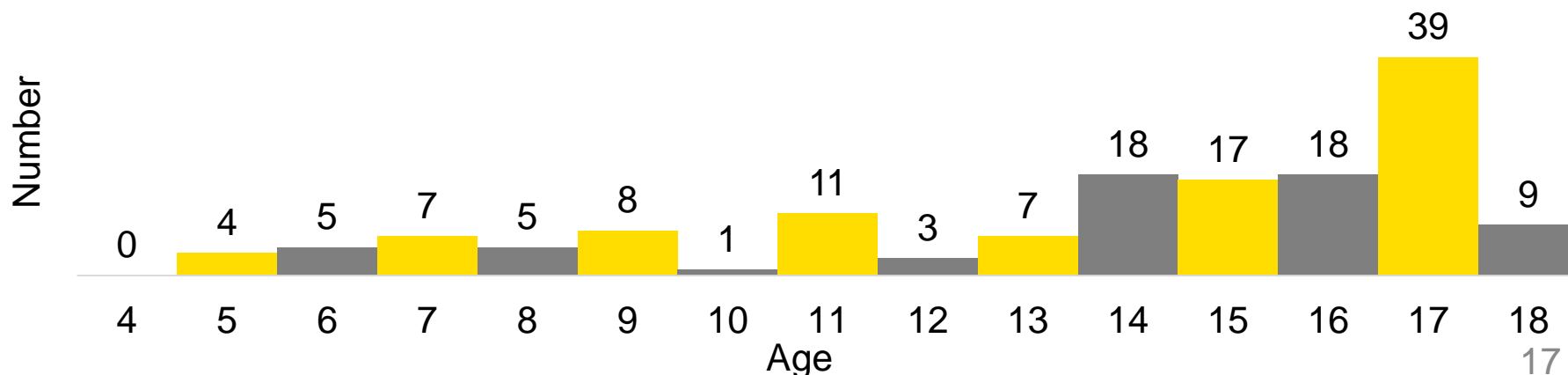


# Age and gender

- In Barnet, 59% of the looked after population were male (DfE, 2019). A comparable gender mix featured in this survey, with 60% of respondents being male.

Age group	Girls <i>n</i> (%)	Boys <i>n</i> (%)	Prefer not to say/ no reply <i>n</i> (%)
4-7yrs	9 (56%)	7 (44%)	0 (0%)
8-11yrs	9 (43%)	12 (57%)	0 (0%)
11-18yrs	41 (36%)	72 (62%)	2 (2%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59 (39%)</b>	<b>91 (60%)</b>	<b>2 (1%)</b>

Age of children responding

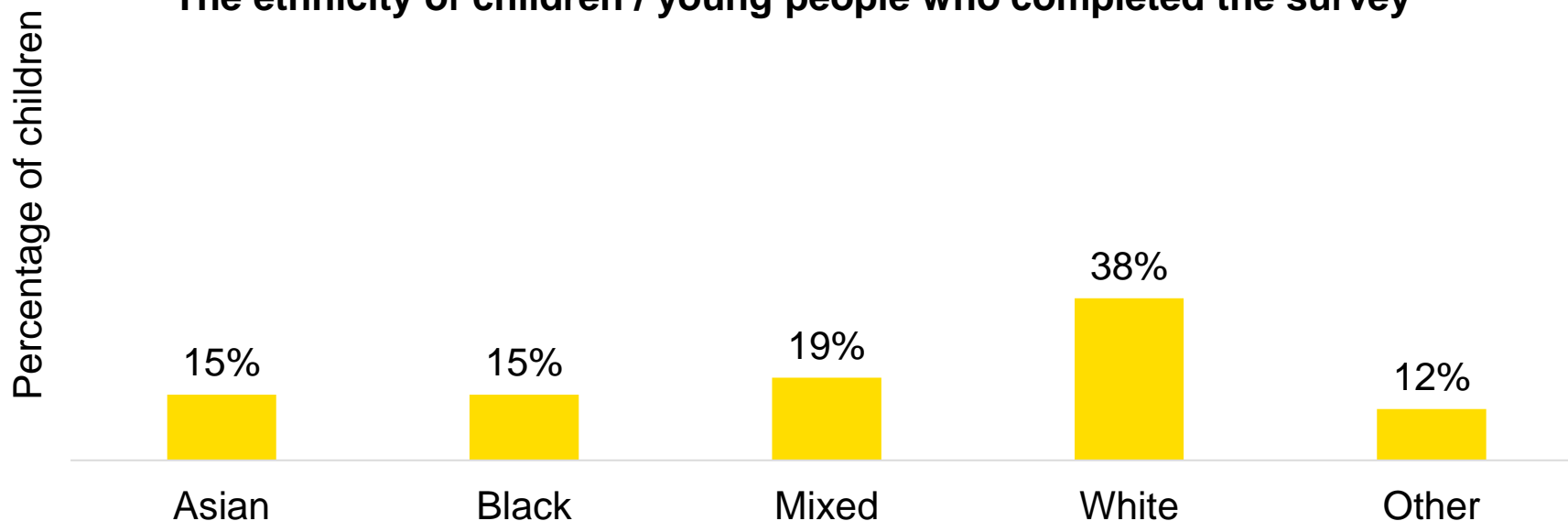


# Ethnicity

Children of Asian, black, mixed and other ethnicities appear fairly represented in the survey. They make up 61% of the care population in Barnet's statistical return to the DfE (2019). This compares to 63% in our sample.

- 38% of the children and young people who completed the survey were white. About one fifth (19%) were of mixed ethnicity, 15% were Asian, and 15% black.
- Of those who identified as Other (12%), Afghan and Iranian/ Persian were the most commonly stated ethnicities.

**The ethnicity of children / young people who completed the survey**



\*Missing:  $n=2$

# Placements

The proportion of respondents in foster care matched that recorded in Barnet's statistical return (both 63%). The survey contained a slight under representation of children and young people in residential care: 22% in the sample compared to 28% in Barnet's published statistics. (DfE, 2019)

- The majority (63%) of children and young people were living in foster care. Just over one fifth (22%) were in residential care, whilst smaller proportions were in family or friends' care (6%), or were living with parents (1%).
- Of the 11-18 year olds living 'somewhere else', most were living in semi-independent accommodation.

Age group	Foster care <i>n</i> (%)	Family or friends care <i>n</i> (%)	Residential care <i>n</i> (%)	With parents <i>n</i> (%)	Somewhere else <i>n</i> (%)
4-7yrs	15 (94%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
8-11yrs	15 (75%)	3 (15%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
11-18yrs*	65 (57%)	5 (4%)	31 (27%)	1 (1%)	12 (11%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>95 (63%)</b>	<b>9 (6%)</b>	<b>33 (22%)</b>	<b>1 (1%)</b>	<b>12 (8%)</b>

\*Missing: *n*=1

# Length of time in care

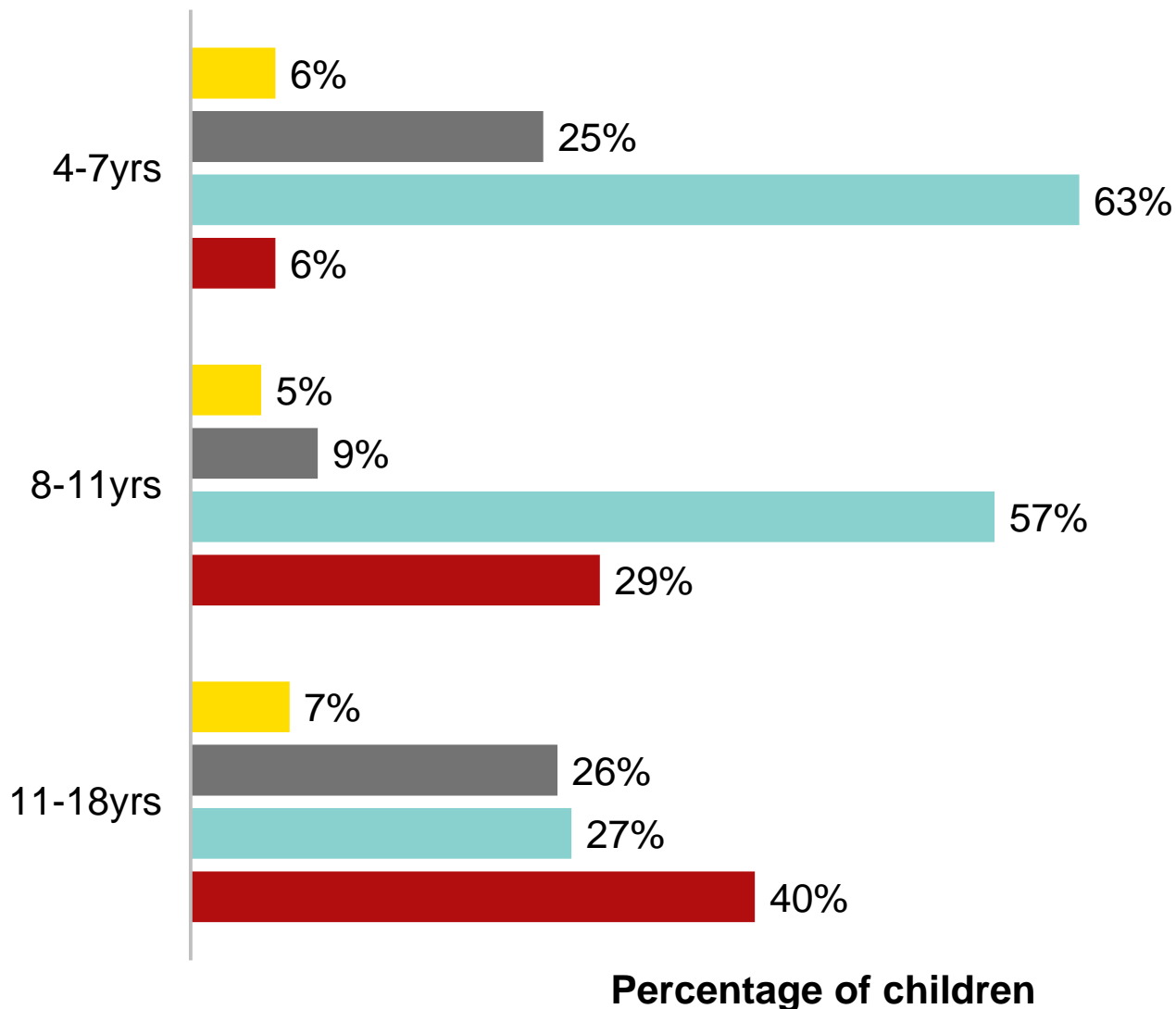
How long have you been in care?

Don't know

Under a year

1-3yrs

3 or more yrs



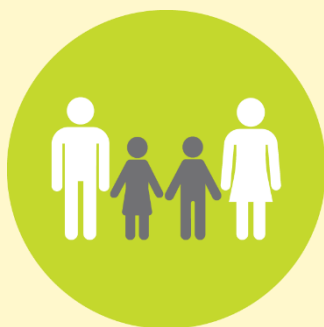


## 3.2 Relationships

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

# Family time




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 if they were *content with the frequency of contact that was taking place with their mother, father, and siblings.*

- 19% of children (8-11yrs) and 42% of young people (11-18yrs) reported no face to face contact with either parent.
- Of the 75 children and young people (8-18yrs) able to have contact with mothers, just over half (52%,  $n=39$ ) thought that the contact was just right.
- 43 children and young people (8-18yrs) were able to have contact with fathers. 47% ( $n=20$ ) thought that the contact was just right.
- Amongst those able to see siblings ( $n=76$ ), exactly half (50%  $n=38$ ) thought that the contact was just right.
- Too much parental contact was rarely reported – just one young person (11-18yrs) reported too much contact with their mother.
- 20 (18%) young people (11-18yrs) reported that their mother had passed away, and 12 (11%) that their father had passed away. 6 young people had lost both parents.

# Family time (2)

Family member	Age group	Too much	Just right	Too little	I cannot see them	Parent passed away	Don't have siblings
	8-11yrs <i>n</i> =21	0 (0%)	5 (24%)	12 (57%)	3 (14%)	1 (5%)	-----
	11-18yrs <i>n</i> =109*	1 (1%)	34 (31%)	23 (21%)	39 (36%)	12 (11%)	-----
	8-11yrs <i>n</i> =21	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	9 (43%)	10 (47%)	1 (5%)	-----
	11-18yrs <i>n</i> =109*	0 (0%)	19 (18%)	14 (13%)	56 (51%)	20 (18%)	-----
	8-11yrs <i>n</i> =20	4 (20%)	6 (30%)	6 (30%)	1 (5%)	-----	3 (15%)
	11-18yrs <i>n</i> =108**	5 (5%)	32 (30%)	23 (21%)	39 (36%)	-----	9 (8%)

\*Missing: *n*=6

\*\*Missing *n*=7

# Family time: 8-11yrs (comments)

Children and young people were also asked to say *what they thought about family time*.

- 15 (71%) of the 21 children completed this section.
- 11 of the 15 children (73%) wanted to see, or see more of, birth family members (particularly parents and siblings).
- One child simply wrote 'contact is fun'.

*I would love to see my mum and dad more because I haven't seen them for a long time and I want to stay with them.*

*My opinion would be that I would really like to see them (mum and dad). I do not know what my dad sounds like.*

*I would like to see my mummy and daddy much more.*

*I would like to see my brothers more and possibly see my dad.*

*It would be better if they turn up at the contact centre more often.*

*Want to see my whole family.*

*I would like to see my sister more.*

*I live with my 2 brothers.*

*I can call my sisters a lot as I have a phone now.*



# Family time: 11-18yrs (comments)

- 54 (47%) of the 115 young people shared their thoughts and feelings about family time. More than two fifths of those who commented wanted contact (or more contact) with family, or certain family members. Some wanted more choice over contact arrangements, including the opportunity for unsupervised contact.
- Other young people were happy with how often they saw their family. About 20% reported no contact with family; for some this was by choice, for others, their family were uncontactable.

*My mother and siblings are in [another country] and I have no means of contacting them. The Red Cross have not been able to trace them.*

*I want more contact with my father that is unsupervised.*

*It's going well.*

*I think it's a good amount of contact at the moment.*

*I would like to see my brother more.*

*Do not get to see extended members of birth family. For example, aunts, uncles and cousins.*

*I don't see mum and dad and don't want to see them.*

*I would like more contact with my siblings.*

# Good friends



A lack of friendships is associated with loneliness and anxiety. All children and young people were asked if 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.

- As a group, most of the children and young people reported having at least one good friend but about one in ten (9%) did not.
- Compared to those in the general population, fewer children / young people in Barnet had a good friend (97% vs. 91%).

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	15 (94%)	1 (6%)
8-11yrs	18 (86%)	3 (14%)
11-18yrs*	102 (91%)	10 (9%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>135 (91%)</b>	<b>14 (9%)</b>

\*Missing: *n*=3

# Pets



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

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

*So the woman in the house and we get a cat and she is allergic to fur and then we bring the cat and put it in my room or [name]'s room and she won't sneeze, the woman in the house.*

8-11yrs

- Almost half (48%,  $n=10$ ) of the 8-11yrs children lived in a household with a pet.
- In the older group (11-18yrs), just over a third (35%  $n=40$ ) of the young people had a pet where they lived.

**[What would make being in care better for you?]**

*If I was able to get a pet like a hairless cat.*

8-11yrs

- As a group, children and young people (8-18yrs) in Barnet were statistically less likely than those in other LAs to live in a household with a pet (37% vs. 62%).

# Adults you live with: Continuity & trust

## Placement moves



Young people (11-18yrs) were asked: *How many placements have you had?*

Number of placements	Percentage
1 placement	39%
2-4 placements	46%
5-7 placements	10%
8-10 placements	2%
Don't know	3%

*I have been in care for 6 months and I have moved to 7 different placements ... my voice hasn't been heard and social services haven't been mindful of how I feel.*

## Trust



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

- All (100%) of the youngest children (4-7yrs) responded 'mostly yes' to trusting the adults they lived with. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

### Trust the adults you live with

Answer options	8-11 yrs n (%)	11-18yrs* n (%)
All / most of the time	17 (81%)	87 (77%)
Sometimes	2 (9.5%)	19 (17%)
Hardly ever / never	2 (9.5%)	7 (6%)

\*Missing: n=2

# Social worker: Continuity & trust

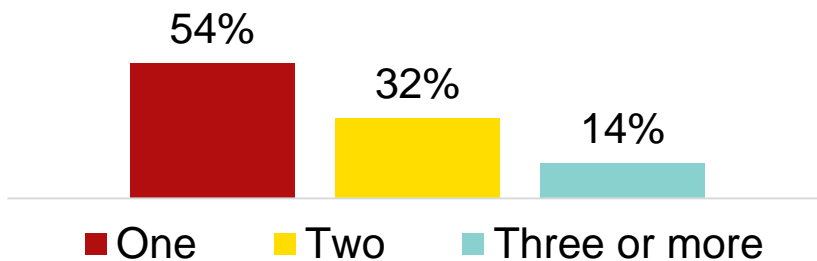
## Changes in social workers



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

- 16 young people (14%) reported having had three or more social workers in the previous year.

### No. of social workers in last 12 months?



- Young people in Barnet were statistically more likely than young people in other LAs to have kept the same social worker in the last 12 months (54% vs. 32%). This is a Bright Spot of practice.

## Trusting social worker



Children & young people who knew who their social worker was were asked if they *trusted their social worker*.

The level of trust in social workers was high:

- 100% of the youngest children (4-7yrs) responded 'mostly yes' to trusting their social worker.
- 100% of children aged 8-11yrs and 90% of young people (11-18yrs) reported trusting their social worker 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.

- Every child in the age groups 4-7yrs and 8-11yrs trusted their social worker. This is a Bright Spot of practice.



### 3.3 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?*



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

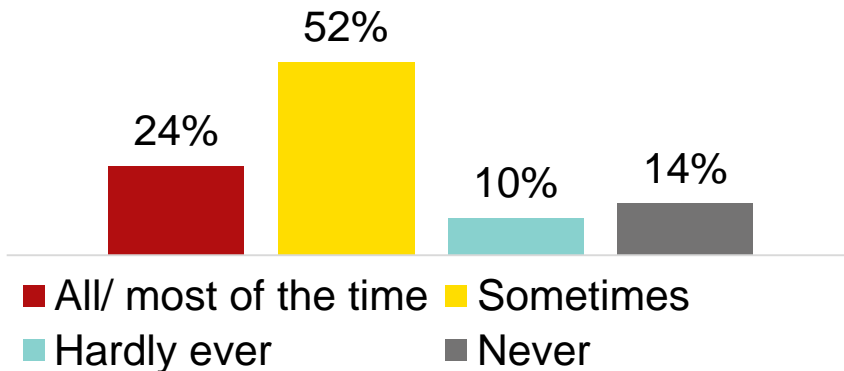
Having a trusted adult has been shown to be the main factor in helping children recover from traumatic events.

- Most children and young people reported having a trusted adult in their lives:
  - 100% of the youngest children (4-7yrs);
  - 100% of children aged 8-11yrs; and
  - 87% of the 11-18yrs young people.
- 15 (13%) of the looked after young people had no such adult in their lives.
- Every child in the 4-7yrs and 8-11yrs age groups reported having a trusted adult. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

# Being trusted & helping out

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

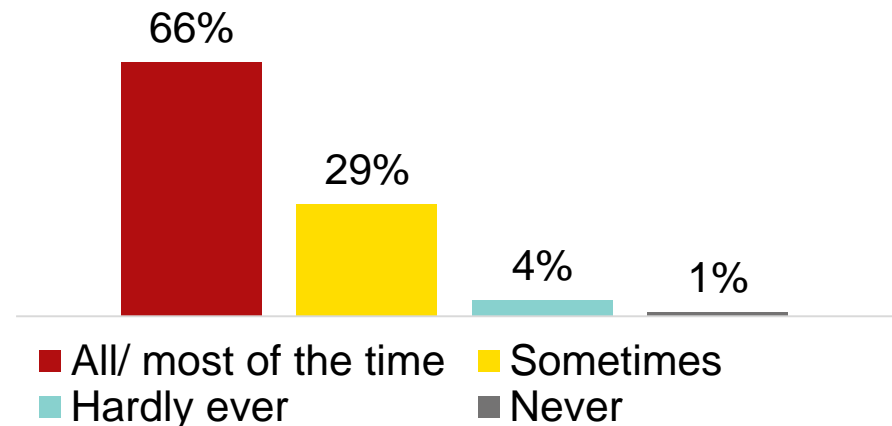
**Get the chance to help the teacher (8-11yrs)**



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

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

**Get the chance to show you can be trusted (11-18yrs)**





# Liking school/ college



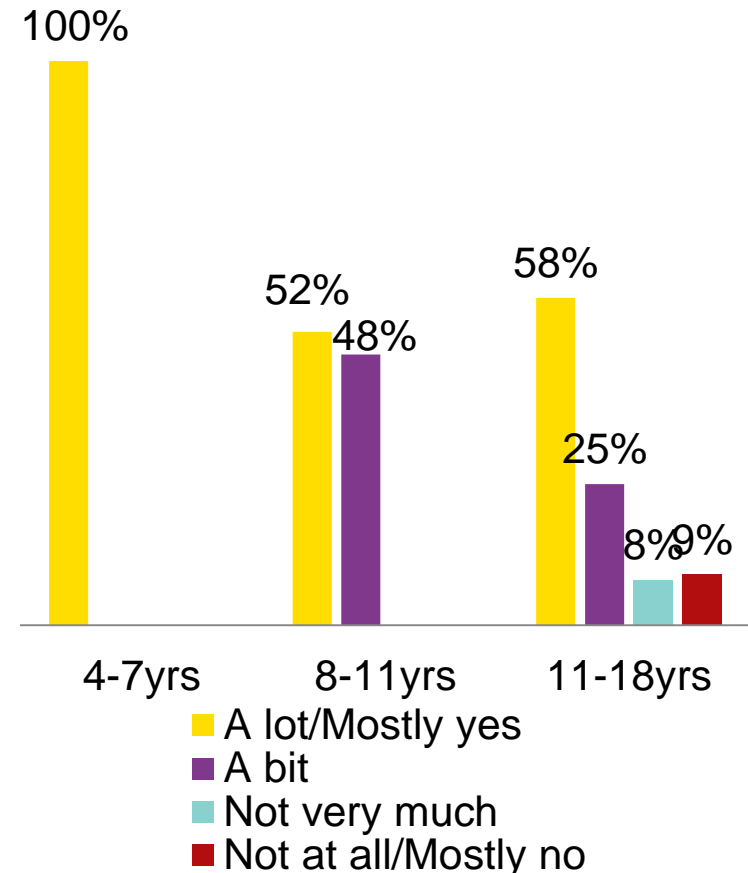
All the children and young people were asked how much they *liked school or college*.

## General population: Liking school

The *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey* (2015) of 5,335 young people (11-15yrs) reported that 80% liked school 'a lot' or 'a bit' and 20% '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.

- All children (4-11 years) liked school.
- 83% of the young people (11-18yrs) liked school or college 'a lot' or 'a bit' – a slightly higher proportion than reported by young people (80%) in the general population.
- Children and young people liking school is a Bright Spot of practice in Barnet.

## Do you like school/ college?



# Adults you live with: Support for learning



Children in the 8-11yrs and 11-18yrs surveys were asked if 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 said their parents were interested in what happened at school.

- 100% of 8-11yrs and 97% of 11-18yrs reported that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- This is higher than is reported by children (90%) in the general population and therefore a Bright Spot of practice.

# Having fun & hobbies

Children aged 4-11yrs 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 had fun or took part in hobbies or activities outside of school.
- Ten (7%) children and young people reported not having fun / taking part in activities.

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	16 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
8-11yrs	15 (71%)	5 (24%)	1 (5%)
11-18yrs	65 (56%)	41 (36%)	9 (8%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>96 (63%)</b>	<b>46 (30%)</b>	<b>10 (7%)</b>

# Access to nature



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

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

We asked *how often in the last week* children and young people (8-18yrs) had opportunities to *explore the outdoors*, such as visiting parks, beaches, fields and forests. Answer options were *'every day'*, *'more than once this week'*, *'once this week'* and *'not at all'*.

## General population:

70% of children (6-15yrs) had visited the natural environment at least once a week in the last year. (Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey, 2016)

- 95% of children (8-11yrs) and 96% of young people (11-18yrs) reported having spent time outdoors at least once this week.
- The snapshot of time spent outdoors reported by the children and young people (8-18yrs) in Barnet compares favourably to that reported by their peers (6-15yrs) in the general population, where 70% had visited the natural environment at least weekly. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

# Life skills



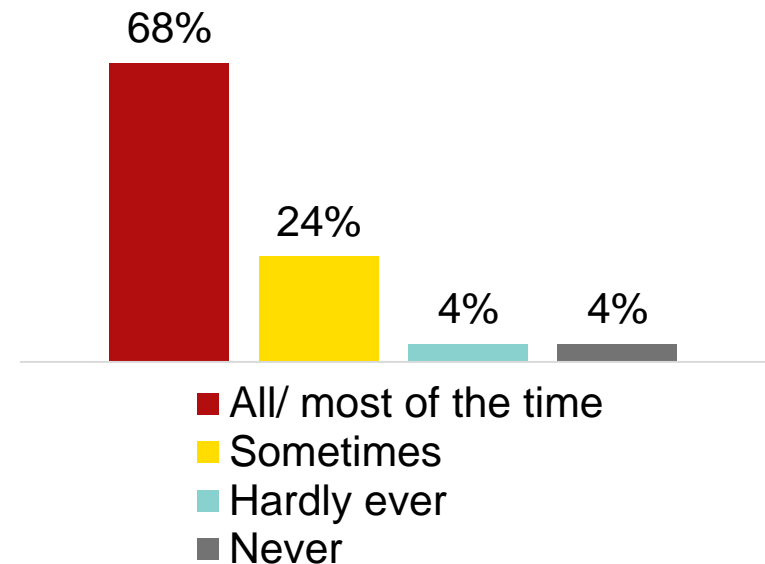
We asked the young people in the 11-18yrs group

*How often do you get to practise life skills like cooking healthy food, washing clothes or going to the bank?*

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

- 92% ( $n=106$ ) of the young people reported being able to practise independence skills at least sometimes.
- Nine (8%) reported 'hardly ever' or 'never' being able to do so.

## How often do you practise life skills?



# Access to the Internet where you live



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

## General population: Access to the Internet

- In the UK, 100% of households with children have an Internet connection. (ONS, 2020)
- 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, 2014)

- The vast majority (96%) of young people reported having access to the Internet where they lived. Just 5 (4%) did not.
- 'Good internet' was specifically identified by one young person as something that would make being in care better for them.

### [What would make being in care better for you?]

*Getting things to help me in school e.g. a Chromebook to use at home and at school as it is smaller. An iPad for my artwork in school so I can do digital artwork.*  
11-18yrs



## 3.4 Rights

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

# Included in decision-making



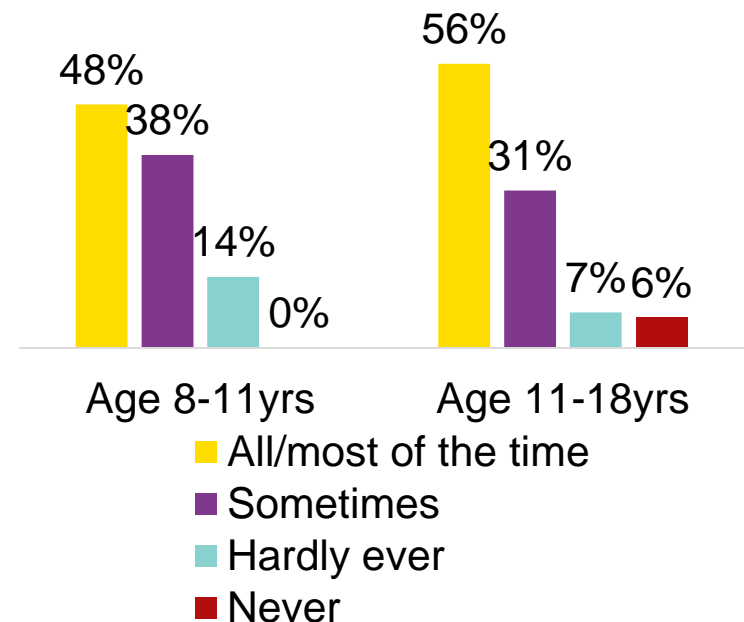
Children aged 8-18yrs were asked, *Do you feel included in the decisions that social workers make about your life?*

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

- 86% of the 8-11year olds and 87% of the 11-18 year olds felt included in decisions about their life.

*I feel included but I don't have the power to influence decisions – I would like my views to be acted upon more often.*  
11-18yrs

*I just ain't always included in decisions made about my future.*  
11-18yrs





# 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.

- 16 (14%) of the young people (11-18yrs) reported adults doing things that made them feel embarrassed about being in care.
- Embarrassing adult behaviour included speaking about the young person's situation in front of others, emphasising the fact that they are fostered, as well as judging or not trusting the young person.

*Carer can sometimes speak openly about the care situation in front of my friends.*

*When we go to places they say I am a foster child to get a discount.*

*Unnecessary comments about the reason for me being in placement, when they don't know me ... it's easy for others outside of it to judge.*

*They make me feel like I'm not normal and I always have to be watched which is embarrassing as I'm getting older.*

# Feeling safe in placement



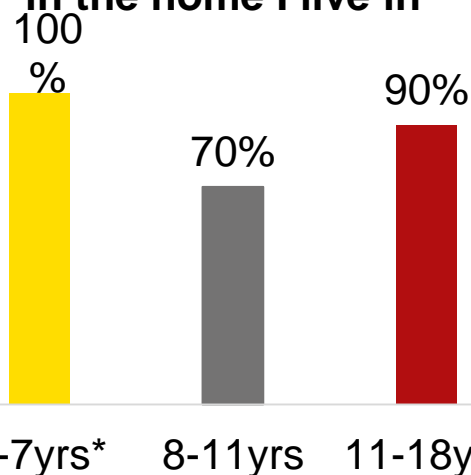
All children were asked if they *felt safe in the home they lived in now*. It is difficult to know what children were thinking about when answering, but feeling secure is about how the world *feels*, not necessarily how it is.

- Overall, 89% of children and young people reported 'always' feeling safe in their placements. This included every child in the 4-7yrs group.
- 6 (30%) of the 8-11yrs group and 11 (10%) of the 11-18yrs group ticked the 'sometimes', 'hardly ever' or 'never' boxes.
- Children aged 8-11yrs in Barnet were statistically less likely than children in other LAs to report 'always' feeling safe at home (70% vs. 87%).

## 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)

## I always feel safe in the home I live in



\*Percentage of 4-7year olds answering 'Yes, always' (4-7 year olds had 'yes, always' and 'no, not always' as response options whereas the older age groups could indicate whether they 'always', 'sometimes', 'hardly ever' or 'never' felt safe).

*I have a beautiful home with my foster parents, I feel safe, loved and valued.*  
11-18yrs

# Bullying

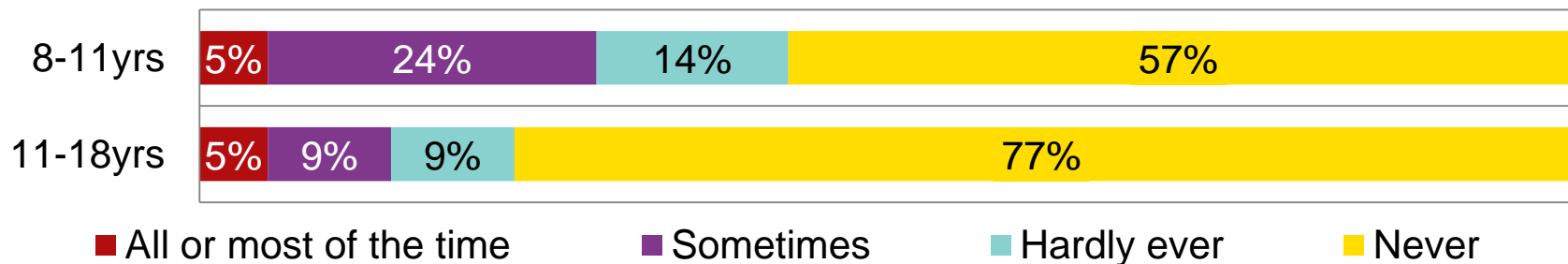
Our question asked if *children felt afraid of going to school because of bullying* and if they were afraid were they *getting support from an adult*.

## 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 88% of children in England say they are not bullied at school. (ONS, 2016b)

- Overall, 99 (74%) children and young people (aged 8-18 years) reported 'never' feeling afraid to go to school because of bullying, whilst one in ten (10%  $n=13$ ) reported 'hardly ever' feeling afraid.
- 11% ( $n=15$ ) reported 'sometimes' feeling afraid, whilst 5% ( $n=7$ ) reported feeling afraid to go to school 'all or most of the time' because of bullying.
- Of the 23 children and young people who responded to the question about support, 17 (74%) reported getting help for the bullying from an adult.

## 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 who their current social worker was*.

- Just one young person (11-18yrs) in the entire survey reported not knowing who their social worker was. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

Age group	Know social worker <i>n</i> (%)	Don't know social worker <i>n</i> (%)
4-7yrs	16 (100%)	0 (0%)
8-11yrs*	20 (100%)	0 (0%)
11-18yrs	114 (99%)	1 (1%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>150 (99%)</b>	<b>1 (1%)</b>

\*Missing: *n*=1

# Contact with social workers



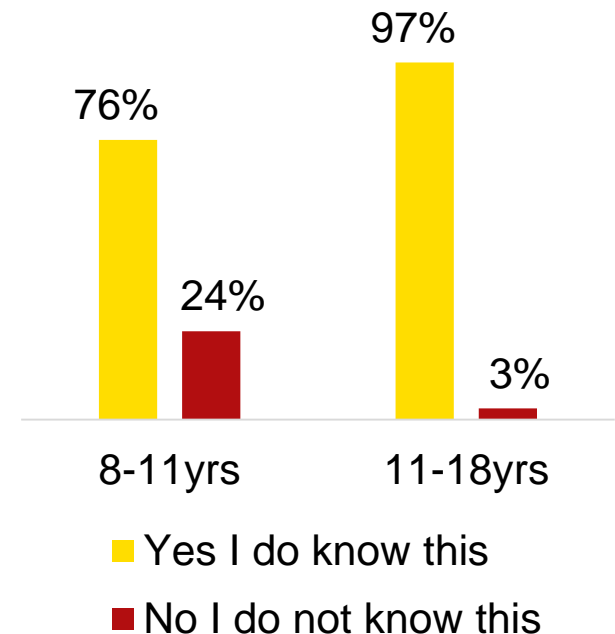
Young people aged 11-18yrs who knew who their social worker was ( $n=114$ ) were asked *how easy it was to contact them*.



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

- A high proportion (93%) of young people (11-18yrs) reported that they could get in touch with their social worker 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- 7% reported 'hardly ever' or 'never' being able to get in touch with their social worker.
- Nearly one quarter (24%) of children (8-11yrs) did not know that if they wanted, they could speak to their social worker alone. Just three young people aged 11-18yrs did not know this.

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





## 3.5 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

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.

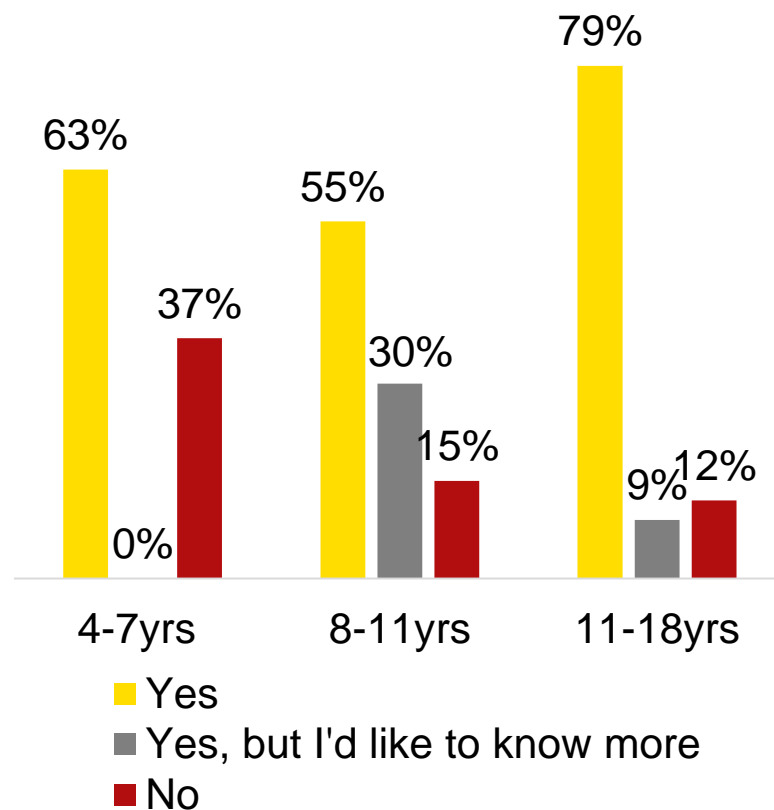
(Adshead, 2012; Adler, 2012)



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

- In Barnet, children in the 8-11yrs age group most often reported not knowing why they were in care, or wanting to know more (45%).
- The same was true for 21% of the young people aged 11-18yrs.

Has an adult explained why you are in care?



# Feeling settled in placement



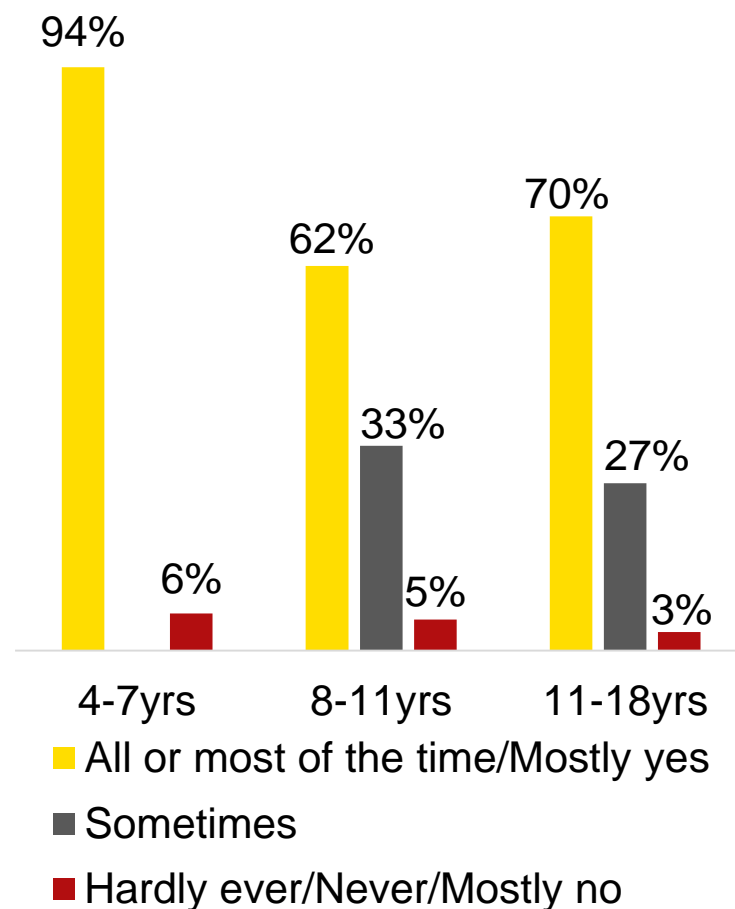
We wanted to know if children felt a sense of belonging and felt at ease in their placements. Based on the advice from our focus groups, children and young people were asked:

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

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

- All but one of the youngest children (4-7yrs) felt settled where they lived.
- Amongst the children and young people aged 8-18yrs, just over two thirds (69%) felt settled 'all or most of the time'.

## Feeling settled





# Liking bedrooms

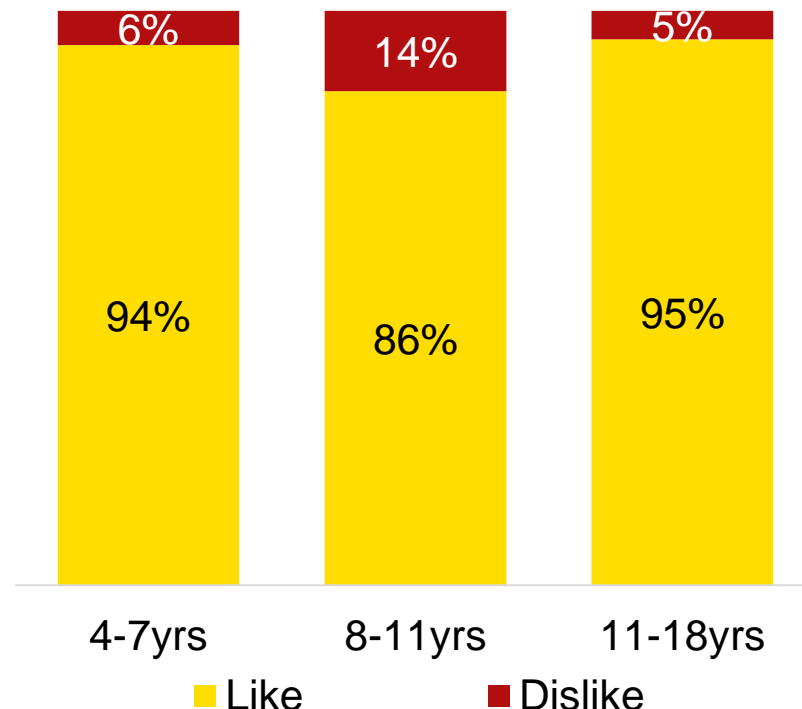


Liking your bedroom was an important feature for the focus groups we ran.

Young people reflected that their bedrooms were a place for being on your own in busy homes. It is linked to safety, sense of identity and feeling a sense of belonging.

- Most children and young people liked their bedrooms.
- In the survey, children and young people made comments about their bedroom: wanting a bigger bed, a room of their own, or fewer rules about what they were allowed to keep in their rooms. One child wrote about liking the pictures and light in their room.

## Do you like your bedroom?



*I like my room cos it has pictures of [name] and a light, cos dark is scary.*  
4-7yrs

# Adults you live with:

## Sensitive parenting



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

- 100% of children (4-7yrs), responded 'mostly yes' when asked if the adults they lived with noticed how they were feeling. This is a Bright Spot of practice.
- 86% of children (8-11yrs) and 94% of young people (11-18yrs) thought their carers noticed how they were feeling 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.

*It is like living with your real parents even though you are not. They totally accept me and love me like their own child.*

11-18yrs

*I think foster carers may need to know the foster child may not want to talk straight away – they need to feel comfortable.*

11-18yrs

# Adults you live with: Sharing confidences



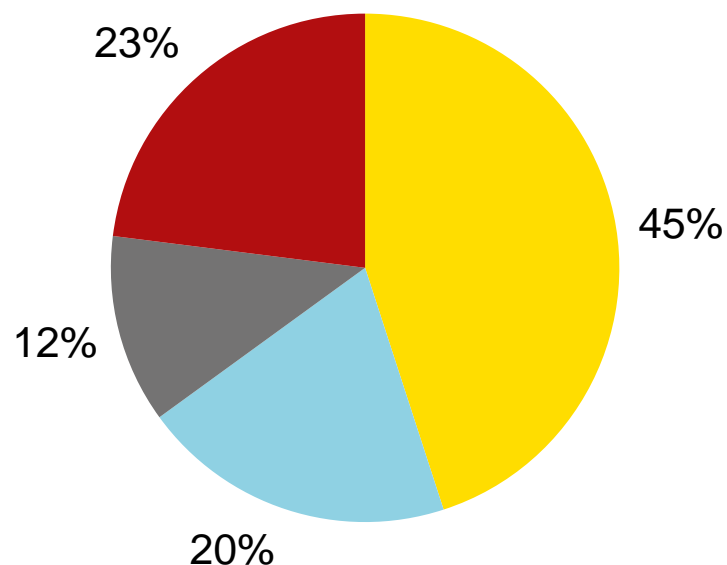
Young people (11-18yrs) were asked how often they *talked to the adults that they lived with about the things that mattered to them.*

## General population

The *Understanding Society* survey (2017) found that 66% of children (10-15yrs) talked regularly to a parent.

- Nearly two thirds (65%) of young people talked regularly with their carers/ parents about things that mattered to them – a proportion similar to that reported by young people (66%) in the general population and looked after young people (70%) in other LAs.

## Speaking to adults about things that matter to you



- Most days
- More than once a week
- Less than once a week
- Hardly ever

# 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

- In England, 39% of looked after children aged 5-16yrs have concerning SDQ scores. (DfE, 2019)
- 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 the general population, 13.5% of children have SDQ scores that suggest a clinical level of mental health difficulties. (ONS, 2016b)

- 14% ( $n=3$ ) of children (8-11yrs) worried 'all or most of the time' about their feelings and behaviour whilst 48% ( $n=10$ ) worried 'sometimes'.
- All 13 children who worried, reported getting help from an adult about these worries.
- 12% ( $n=14$ ) of young people (11-18yrs) worried 'all or most of the time', whilst 47% ( $n=54$ ) worried 'sometimes'.
- Of the 68 young people who worried, about three quarters (76%  $n=52$ ) reported getting help.

# Parity with peers



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

- 37% ( $n=42$ ) of the young people reported having the chance 'all or most of the time' to do similar things to their friends. 42% ( $n=48$ ) reported that they were 'sometimes' able to do so.
- 23 (21%) young people reported that they were 'hardly ever' or 'never' able to do similar things to their friends.

*[I am] not allowed to do certain things other kids can and this embarrasses me.*

*I don't like that my carer speaks to my friends' parents.*

# Happiness with appearance



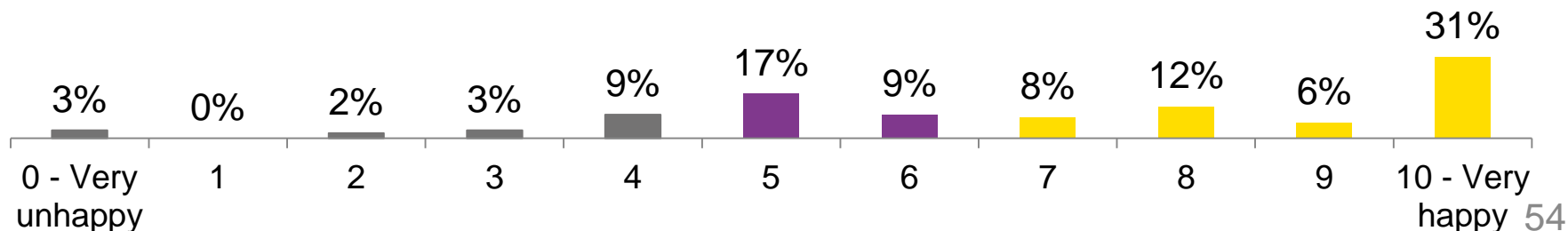
Studies have shown that poor body image is associated with low self-esteem, depression and self-harm. (Cash and Smolek, 2011)

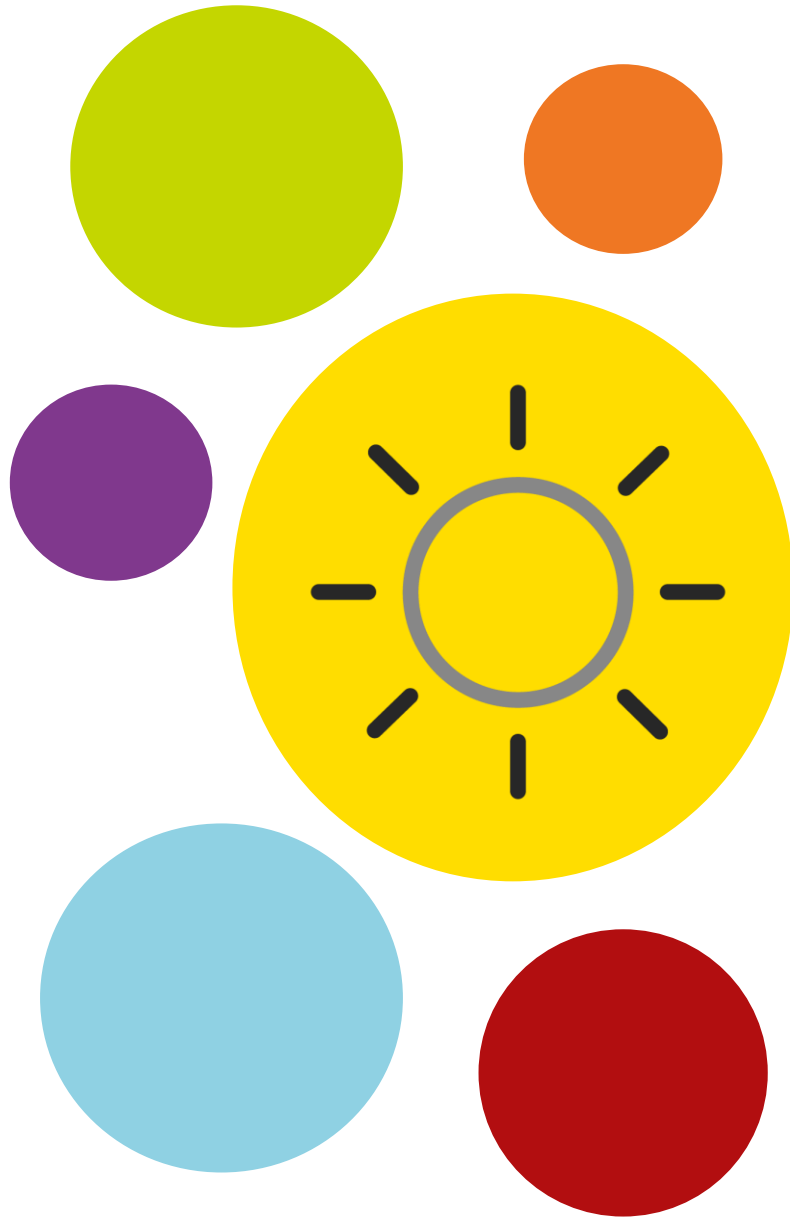
## General population: Happiness with appearance

- 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, 2019)

- The majority (83%) of young people were (at least moderately) happy with their appearance.
- In Barnet, girls more often reported low levels of happiness with their appearance than boys (24% vs. 10%) – a difference approaching statistical significance.

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





## 3.6 Well-being

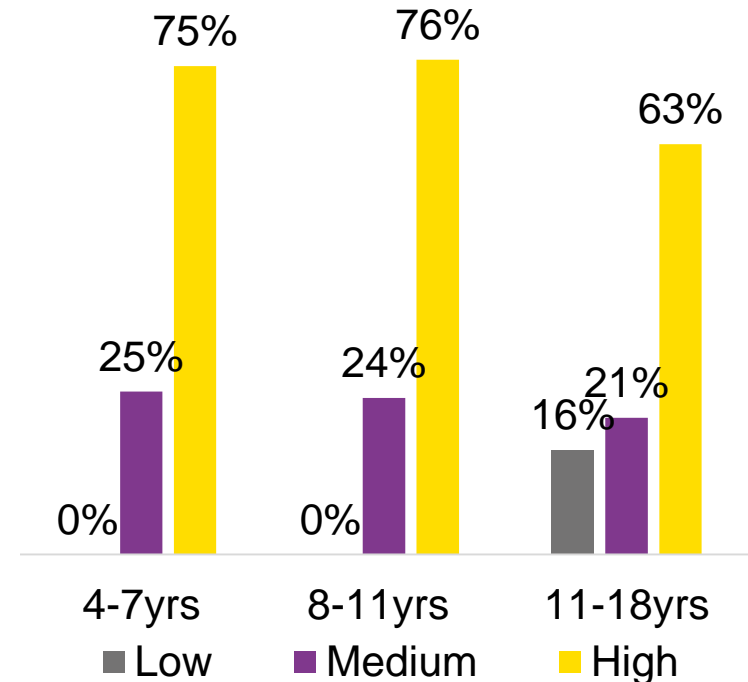
- Happiness yesterday – affect
- Life satisfaction – overall evaluation
- Are the things you do worthwhile? – psychological/ eudemonic well-being
- Positivity about the future
- Comparisons – other LAs and general population
- Life is improving
- Gender differences: 11-18yrs
- Low well-being

# Happiness yesterday

A 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 unhappy' to 'very happy'.
- Young people (11-18yrs) selected a point on a 0-10 scale with 0 being '*not at all happy*' and 10 '*completely happy*'.
- As a group, the majority of children and young people had been happy the previous day.
- About one in 6 young people aged 11-18yrs (16%) reported a low level of happiness.
- No child (4-7yrs or 8-11yrs) reported low levels of happiness the previous day. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

## Happiness yesterday





# Life satisfaction

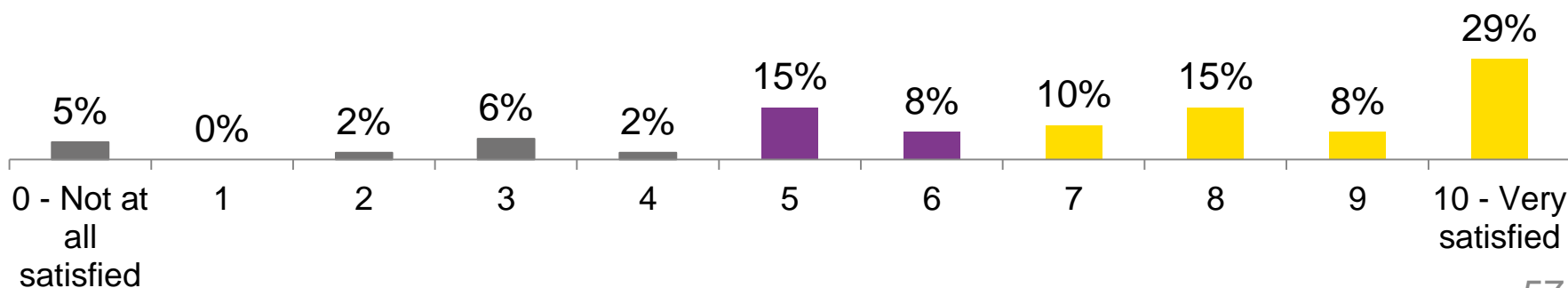


Young people (11-18yrs) were asked *how satisfied they were with their life* on a 0-10 scale.

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)

- 15% of the young people reported low levels of satisfaction with their life, whilst 62% reported high levels.
- Like the general child population in England, there was a positive correlation between high life satisfaction scores and being happy at school.

## How satisfied are you with your life?



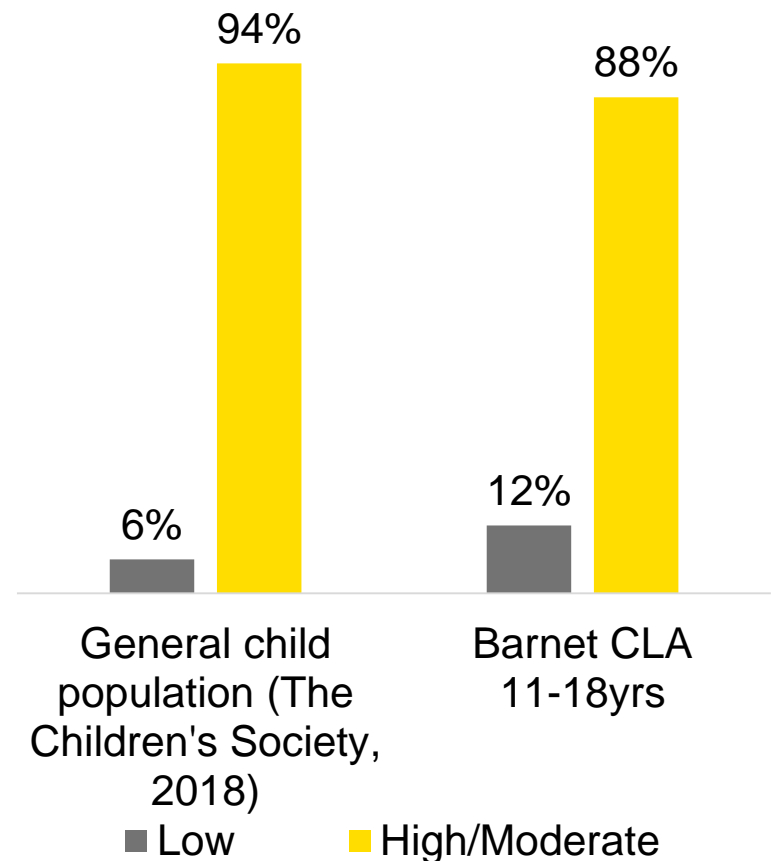
# Are the things you do worthwhile?

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 (2018) in their household survey with 3,000 young people aged 11-17yrs.

- 69% of young people scored highly or very highly;
- 19% scored moderately; whilst
- 12% had low scores.

**Overall, to what extent do you think the things you do in your life are worthwhile?**



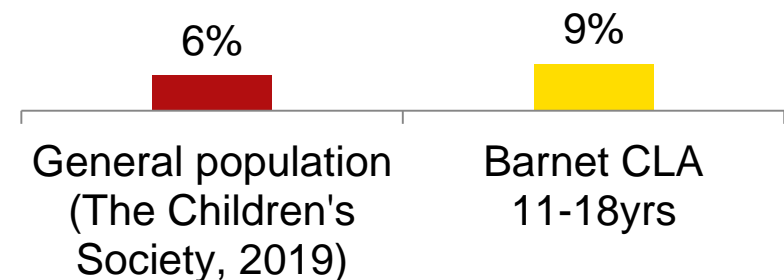
# Positivity about the future



Optimism about the future is linked with happiness and resilience. (Conversano et al., 2010) Young people were asked on a scale of 0-10 *How positive are you about your future?*

- 79 (70%) were positive about their future.
- 23 (21%) were moderately positive about their future.
- 10 (9%) had low scores and did not feel positive about their future.

## Young people who were pessimistic about their future



# Comparisons

- Levels of well-being – Barnet's looked after young people (11-18yrs) compared to peers (10-17yrs) in the general population (The Children's Society, 2019) and to the average scores of looked after young people in 17 LAs.

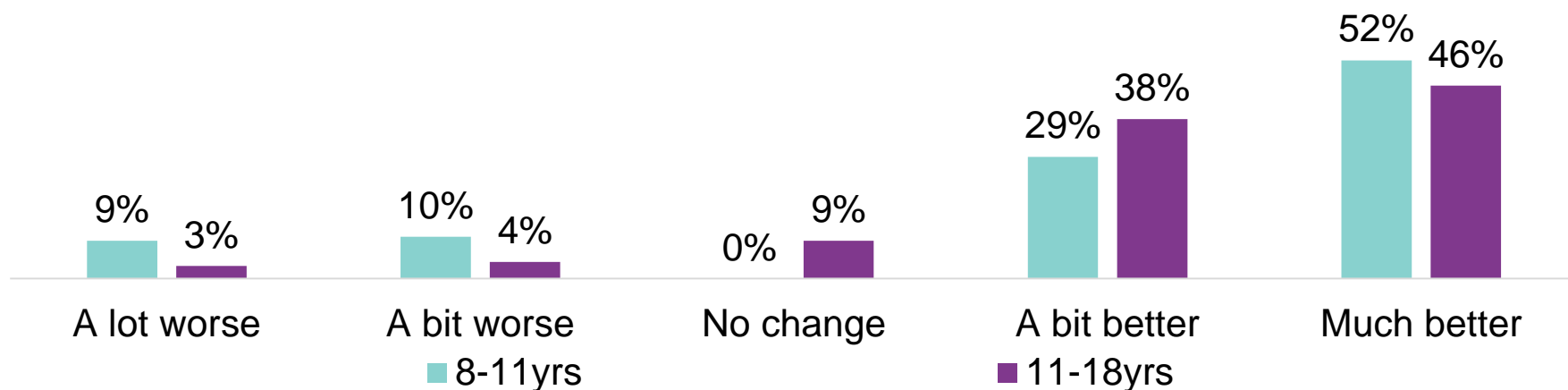
Question	Scores	Barnet	2018 average in 17 LAs	Peers in general pop. (10-17yrs)
<b>Life satisfaction</b>	Very high (9-10)	36%	34%	36%
	Low (0-4)	15%	15%	5%
<b>Happiness yesterday</b>	Very high (9-10)	31%	37%	33%
	Low (0-4)	16%	19%	6%
<b>Things I do in life are worthwhile</b>	Very high (9-10)	34%	37%	35%
	Low (0-4)	12%	12%	6%
<b>Positivity about the future</b>	Very high (9-10)	40%	36%	26%
	Low (0-4)	9%	11%	6%

# Life is improving

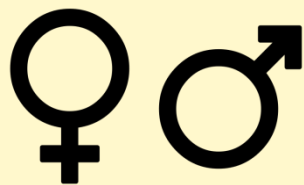
Children aged 8-18yrs were asked if they thought their *life was getting better*. They could choose from a five point scale ranging from 'A lot worse' to 'Much better'.

- Overall, most ( $n=113$ , 84%) of the children and young people in Barnet felt that their lives were improving.
- 10 (7%) thought that there had been no change
- 12 (9%) thought that their lives were getting 'a bit' or 'a lot' worse.

## Is your life improving?



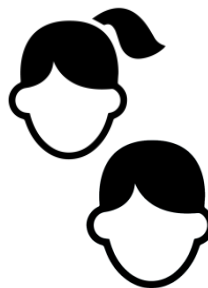
# Gender differences: 11-18yrs



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

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

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



In Barnet, girls were statistically more likely than boys to report overall low well-being (23% v. 6%).

Girls were also statistically more likely to report:

- Disliking their bedroom where they lived.
- Hardly ever or never getting the chance to show they can be trusted
- Worrying about their feelings or behaviour
- Girls also more often reported disliking their own appearance (borderline statistical significance).

# Low well-being: 4-7yrs and 8-11yrs



- Not a single child in either the 4-7 years group or the 8-11 years group described themselves as 'unhappy' or 'very unhappy'. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

*I'm very happy.*  
4-7yrs

# Low well-being: 11-18yrs



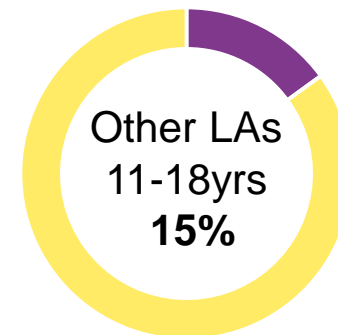
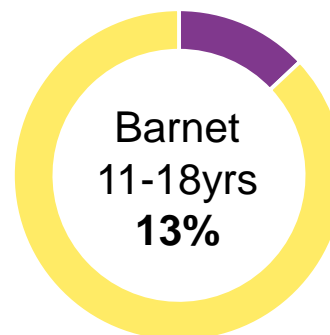
Low overall well-being was calculated (i.e. scored 4 or less on two or more of the 0-10 well-being scales).

In Barnet 14 (13%) of 107 young people had low overall well-being, **with girls statistically more likely than boys** to have low well-being (23% vs. 6%).

The factors most strongly associated with low overall well-being were:

- Disliking their appearance
- Not 'always' feeling safe at home
- A lack of trust in social workers
- Not 'always' feeling settled at home
- Disliking school
- Carers 'hardly ever' or 'never' noticing how they feel

## Young people (11-18yrs) with low overall well-being



Other factors with a statistically significant effect on low well-being were:

- Not regularly talking to carers about things that matter
- Not having a trusted adult
- Feeling excluded from decisions made about their life
- Worrying about own feelings and/ or behaviour
- Little or no trust in carers





## **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

- 8 (50%) children age 4-7yrs responded to the questions: *Is there anything else you want to say? / what would make being in care better for you?*
- One child wrote 'I don't know' and two others simply reported that they were 'alright'.

*I don't know. (If I could change anything) I would be more happy.*

*I want a bigger bed.  
4-7yrs*

*I live with the best foster carers.*

*I'm very happy.*

*I like my room cos it has pictures of [name] and a light, cos dark is scary. I like it (foster care) and I want to go home too. Cos they're trying to keep me safe sometimes sad, happy, angry, they just hold me. I not get angry now.*

# Comments: 8-11yrs

- 10 (48%) children (age 8-11yrs) responded to the questions: *Is there anything else you want to say? / what would make being in care better for you?*
- Most often children reported wanting more contact with birth family.

*If I get everything I want.*

*If one weekend I was allowed and it was holidays I could go to my Mum's house for a whole weekend with Grandma and Grandpa, sister and with my aunts and to have games.*

*I like it the way it is.*

*I would be better if it saw my mum and dad more.*

*Seeing my dad more in a place he could reach to go.*

*I am happy with my carers.*

*I would like to nominate her for the foster carer award. I remember she was nomination as a foster carer in the company (agency).*

*I don't like the way that [name] is being rude to my mum. He is very rude when he gets into a grumpy mood. I think Mum is great. She works too hard and so hard that she only really plays with me a bit. She's going to get us a new flat. I would like to get in touch with my birth family. My mum, my dad, my granny and granddad – they are very old.*

# Comments: 11-18yrs

- 67 (58%) young people responded to the question: *What would you change to make being in care better for you?*
- Of those who responded, about two in five thought that nothing was needed to make things better for them.
- Others described changes that would make being in care better.

*Nothing I would change.*

*Go home to my mum.*

*Nothing really, I am happy.*

*More money.*

*More activities, going out more for outdoor activities. Staying at my friend's house more.*

*Not having silly rules e.g. no technology in bedroom.*

*Seeing my family more often. Seeing my friends more often. Obtaining a mobile phone to contact friends or carers.*

*We shouldn't have our phones taken away at bed time.*

*More contact with my birth parents.*

*Being authorised to stay out.*

*Having my carers trust me more and them being more understanding to life now, in this day and age.*

*I would like my brother to be discharged from hospital and have his own house in this country.*

*Home Office decision to stay.*

# Comments: 11-18yrs

- 28 (24%) young people responded to the final question: *Is there anything else you want to say or tell us about being in care?*
- About a third of the young people who completed this section commented on their positive experiences of being in care or expressed gratitude to those who had helped them.
- A few commented on family – missing them, hoping to live with them, or wanting a better life for them.
- Others reported less positive experiences. Some wanted more contact, support or communication from social workers, as well as more freedom.

*I am happy in my placement. I have a good relationship with my carers, SW and IRO.*

*All good.*

*Thanks for the support.*

*I hate the system.*

*it is hard and lonely.*

*Just better communication with my social worker so I know what is going on all the time.*

*I like staying here but I would eventually love it if I could start going to my dads or live there eventually.*

*When I was living in the hotel I was nervous and sad but now I am fine.*

*Sometimes I feel sad because I cannot see my family.*

*More contact and support from social worker.*

*I feel like most social workers don't understand what it's like being put through the system. So they don't know what emotions and thoughts go through my head.*

# A note on Covid-19

- The *Your Life, Your Care* survey took place during Covid-19 restrictions.
- Just one child (8-11yrs) and two young people (11-18yrs) made comments that directly related to Coronavirus restrictions.
- Respondents noted the reduced contact with family, as well as fewer opportunities to take part in activities.

*Contact has just  
been restricted  
due to Covid-19.  
8-11yrs*

*I don't see mum  
and dad much  
because of COVID.  
11-18yrs*

*I am going to do more  
activities as the lockdown  
restrictions are being eased.  
I would like to play cricket  
and my key worker is looking  
into this for me.  
11-18yrs*



## **Section 5: References**

# References

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