

# Your Life Beyond Care

*The views of care leavers in  
Barnet on their well-being &  
what makes life good*

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# About the Your Life Beyond Care survey

The ***Your Life Beyond Care*** survey was developed with funding from Coram I through the DfE Social Care Innovation Fund. It complemented and built on an existing survey for children in care ***Your Life Your Care*** developed as part of the **Bright Spots Programme**: a partnership between Coram Voice and the Rees Centre, University of Oxford, funded by the Hadley Trust.

- Currently official statistics only provide a partial picture of care leavers' lives. Data focuses on adult perspectives, objective outcomes measures – where young people live, education. None of this information tells us about young people's own viewpoints: are they happy, safe and feel they are doing well?
- The Bright Spots Programme seeks to address these gaps by measuring children and young people's subjective well-being. Subjective well-being is defined as feeling good and doing well at an individual and interpersonal level.
- Through the Programme we developed the *Bright Spots Well-Being Indicators* that put care leavers' experience and voices at the heart of measuring subjective well-being. The indicators are measured by the *Your Life Beyond Care* survey, which builds on the *Your Life, Your Care* surveys for children in care (4-18yrs).
- The development of *Your Life Beyond Care* included a literature review of care leavers' views (Baker, 2017), research into comparative data, seminars with professionals working with care leavers and workshops with 31 care leavers to co-produce the survey. Through the workshops young people identified what was important to them, selected questions and helped plan how to distribute the survey.
- The survey identifies the areas where care leavers are doing well and where things could be improved, providing an evidence base of young people's experience and well-being to inform service improvements.

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## Section 1: Key Findings



# Your Life Beyond Care 2020/2021

*The views of care leavers in Barnet on their well-being*

**116**  
young people  
responded to the  
survey from a care  
leaver population of  
354: a response rate of  
**33%**

**In April to June 2021 all care leavers in Barnet were asked to participate in an online survey to find out how they felt about their lives. This is a summary of the findings.**

- More young men ( $n=63$ , 57%) than young women ( $n=47$ , 42%) completed the survey. One (1%) young person identified as 'other'.
- The rate of disability reported by young people in Barnet (16%) was lower than that reported by care leavers in other LAs (24%), but higher than that reported by young people (12%) in the general population. Young women were statistically more likely to report a disability than young men.
- There was considerable ethnic diversity amongst those who completed the survey.

Age group	<i>n</i>	%
16-17yrs	6	5
18-20yrs	63	55
21-25yrs	45	40
<b>TOTAL*</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Missing  $n=2$

# What is working well?

## Leaving Care Workers

### Getting in touch



- The vast majority (96%) of young people reported being able to get in touch with their leaving care worker 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.

### Trust



- All but two young people reported trusting their leaving care worker 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.

### Relationship with leaving care worker



- Comments about leaving care workers were overwhelmingly positive, with many young people revealing high levels of satisfaction with the support provided.
- Workers were described as wonderful, helpful, excellent, amazing, caring, committed, kind and a legend.

*She has always listened and always tried to help, she has never left me without some solution.*

*Leaving care is really good for me. I wish I started staying here from a young age. I had someone finally that I could talk to; Someone would believe in me; Someone to trust; Someone that won't abuse me; Someone that could help my mental health. So leaving care has helped my life, physically and mentally.*

## Positivity about the future



- Care leavers in Barnet were statistically more likely than care leavers in other LAs to report feeling very positive about the future (39% vs. 27%). This is a Bright Spot of practice.

# What could be better?

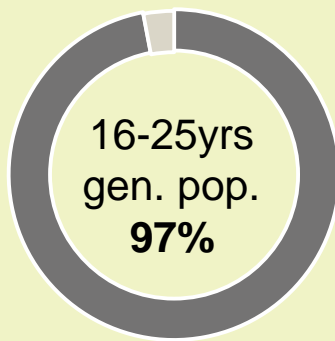
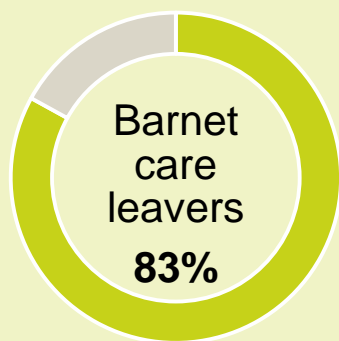
The majority of findings in Barnet were broadly in line with that seen in other LAs. However, there were several areas where Barnet's care leavers were faring markedly less well than young people in the general population.



## Friendships

- 17% of care leavers in Barnet reported not having at least one good friend.
- The same is true for just 3% of young people in the general population.

### Do you have a really good friend?



## Life satisfaction

- 23% of care leavers recorded low life satisfaction compared to just 3% of young people in the general population.



## Anxiety

- 35% of care leavers in Barnet reported high levels of anxiety the previous day – nearly twice that reported by young people in the general population (18%).



## Trusted person

- About one in five (19%) reported not having someone they trusted, who would stick by them no matter what.
- In comparison just 2% of young people in the general population report having no one they can rely on.



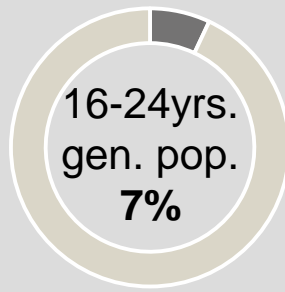
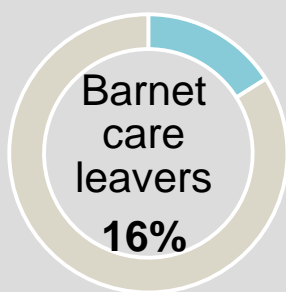
# What could be better? (2)



## Finances

- Compared to young people in the general population, care leavers in Barnet were more than twice as likely to report financial difficulties.

Proportion finding it '*quite*' or '*very*' difficult to get by financially



## Housing

- 38% of the care leavers did not 'always' feel safe where they lived.
- 42% did not 'always' feel settled.
- Nearly one quarter (23%) did not think that their current accommodation was right for them.



*I don't really feel safe there anymore. I explained to my key worker about it but I guess there is nothing he can do.*

*Every time I remember the day I started living here, I get emotionally upset. I know saying this will help nothing; I just don't wish young people to go through what I'm going through.*



## Internet access

- Compared to the general population (ONS, 2020), care leavers in Barnet less often lived in households that had Internet access (82% vs. 96%).

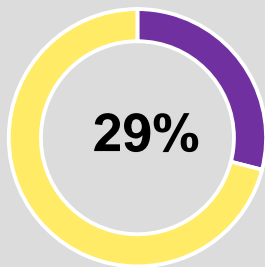


# Well-being



- A sizeable minority of care leavers in Barnet appeared to be thriving.
- Across the four well-being measures 20% reported very high levels of happiness, 23% reported very high life satisfaction, 30% reported feeling that things done in life were very worthwhile and 33% reported very low levels of anxiety.

## Care leavers with low overall well-being in Barnet



- 33 (29%) young people in Barnet had low well-being.
- Young people with low well-being were statistically more likely to report a **disability or long-term health problem**.

## Young people who scored in the least favourable category in 2 or more of the 4 well-being measures were judged to have low overall well-being.

Factors most strongly associated with low overall well-being were:

- Having no-one who believed in them
- Having no-one who praised their achievements
- Not 'always' feeling safe at home
- No internet access at home.
- Not having a good friend
- Feeling unhappy with their appearance

## Section 2: Methodology



# Methodology

- An online survey was used to capture care leavers' views on their own well-being.
- There are 41 questions in the survey. All the questions were optional.
- 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 there were 354 care leavers aged 16-25yrs able and eligible to do the survey.
- Young people completed the survey anonymously: individual identifiers such as name, place locations etc. were not collected in order to allow responses without fear of consequences.
- If young people recorded names or any identifying information on the survey these were removed by the researchers.
- The leaving care team presented the survey to young people and encouraged them to complete it. Most young people completed the survey on their own.
- Some young people needed additional support to complete the survey and a trusted adult was identified who was not their Personal Advisor or carer.
- Care leavers were asked to complete the online survey between April to June 2021.
- The Coronavirus global pandemic was ongoing through the survey data collection.

# Analysis

- Where possible, local authority (LA) data are compared to data on young people in the general population, and to the average responses from 21 local authorities who participated in Your Life Beyond Care survey in 2017-19.
- Barnet ran the Your Life Your Care survey with children in care aged 4-18yrs in 2021. Where relevant, we have made comparisons to young people in care aged 11-18 years from this survey.
- Data were weighted and tests run for significant difference between LAs. If something is statistically significant it means that it is unlikely to have occurred by chance.



On some pages of this report you will see a '**Bright Spots**' icon (shown left), and a yellow text box. This indicates a 'good news' story – a positive aspect of practice in your local authority. A 'Bright Spot' is where young people are doing significantly better than care leavers in other local authorities 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 care leavers in other local authorities, or where results are markedly less favourable than in the general population. This may be an area to focus on in service development.

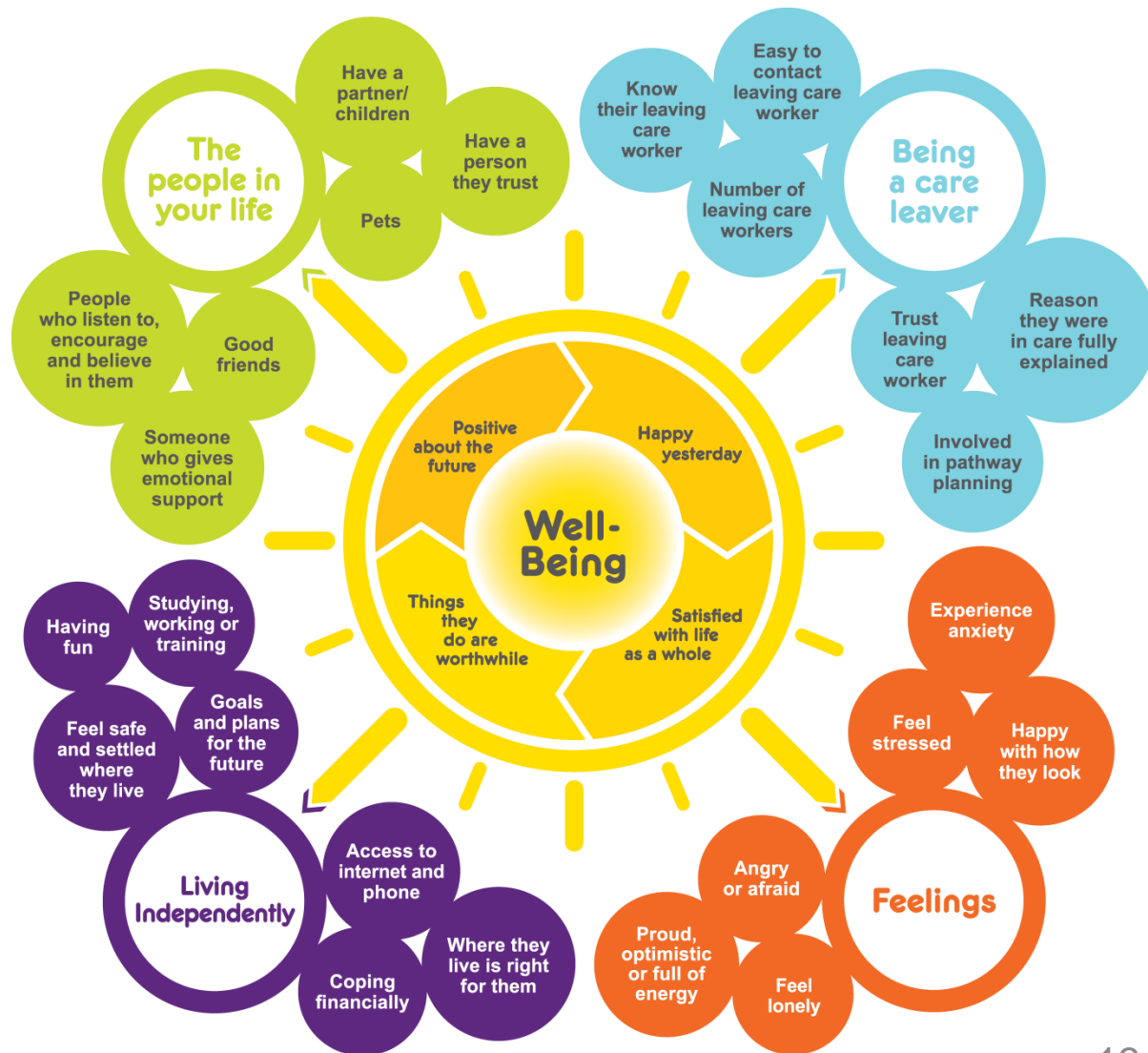
- If we have not highlighted a difference this means that the findings are in line with the results in other local authorities.

# Measuring subjective well-being

## Are care leavers flourishing?

- Subjective well-being in this survey refers to young people's own evaluations of how they feel about their lives.
- The questions measure the Bright Spots well-being indicators (right)
- In addition to questions that measure overarching well-being (happiness, life satisfaction etc.) the questions cover four domains that are important to young people: people in your life, being a care leaver, living independently and feelings.
- All these elements help us understand if young people are flourishing.

## Bright Spots well-being indicators



## Section 3: Survey results



### 3.1 Who responded?

- Sample size, age & gender
- Ethnicity
- Number of years spent in care
- Partners, being a parent and / or pregnant
- Long term health problem / disability



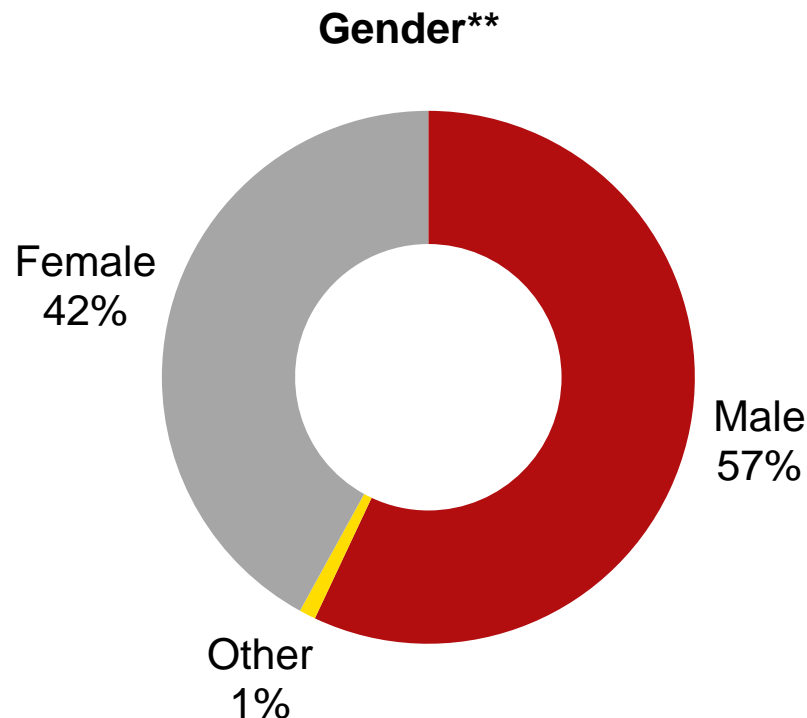


# Sample size, age and gender

- 116 young people responded to the survey from a possible care leaver population of 354.
- The response rate was 33%.
- All the questions were optional.
- The largest group of respondents (55%) were aged between 18 and 20 years.

Age group	<i>n</i>	%
16-17yrs	6	5%
18-20yrs	63	55%
21-25yrs	45	40%
<b>TOTAL*</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Missing: *n*=2



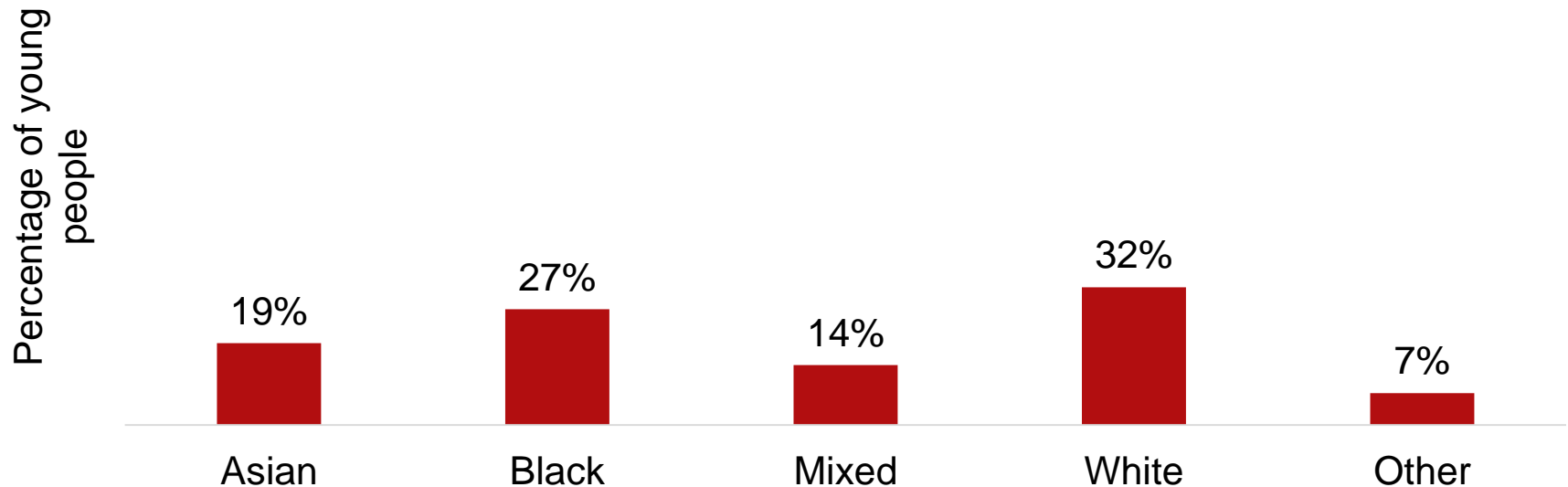
- In Barnet, more young men (*n*=63) than young women (*n*=47) responded to the survey.
- The young person who answered 'other' gave further details and said they were 'gender fluid'.

\*\*Prefer not to say: *n*=3; Missing *n*=2

# Ethnicity

- The survey sample was ethnically diverse: nearly one third (32%) of the young people were White, 27% were Black, about a fifth (19%) were Asian, whilst 14% were of mixed ethnicity.
- 7% identified as other, including Afghan, Arab and Jewish.

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



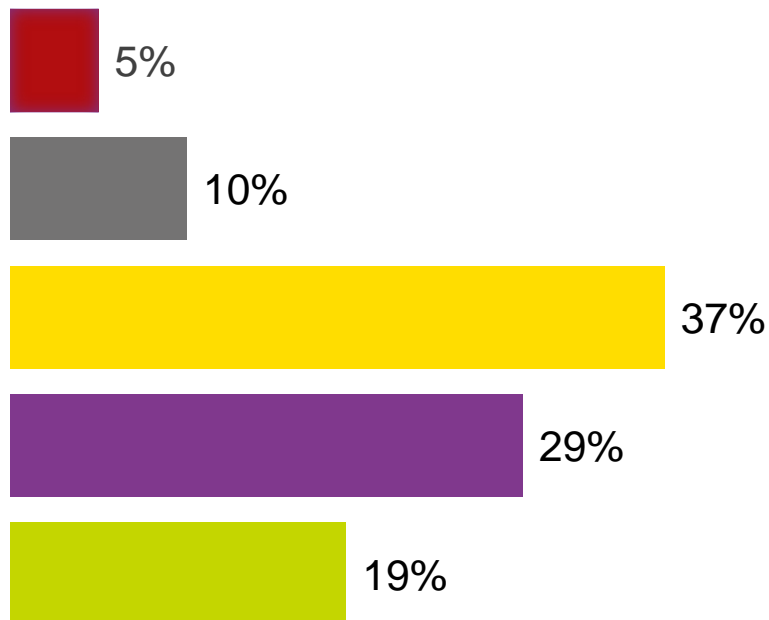
\*Missing:  $n=1$ ; Prefer not to say:  $n=7$

# Number of years spent in care

- Almost half (48%) of the care leavers who responded had been in care for at least four years.
- Just one in ten (10%) had been in care for less than a year.

## How many years were you in care in total?

■ Don't know ■ Less than a year ■ 1 to 3 years ■ 4 to 7 years ■ More than 7 years



Percentage of young people

# Partners, being a parent and/or pregnant



All care leavers were asked, *Are you a parent?* They could choose more than one answer: 'yes', 'no' or 'I am pregnant/my partner is pregnant'

They were also asked, *Do you have a partner (are you in a relationship)?*

Research evidence shows the benefits of good quality, stable couple relationships for well-being. (Sserwanja, 2016)

Research with care leavers has shown that some felt living with a partner could reduce loneliness and provide emotional support, but others described their relationships as volatile. (Dixon, 2004) Some young people had experienced abusive or manipulative relationships. (Kelly, 2016)

- One third (33%  $n=38$ ) of the care leavers had a partner. This was true for 38% of the young women and 29% of the young men.
- Two thirds (68%) of the 38 care leavers with a partner felt that they were supported emotionally by them.
- 17 (15%) of the care leavers were parents and/or they (or their partners) were pregnant.
- In Barnet, young women were more often parents or expectant parents than young men (28% vs. 5%).
- Seven of the young people who were parents considered their own child/ren to be a source of emotional support.

# Long-term health problem/disability

All care leavers were asked, *Do you have a long-term health problem or disability that limits your day-to-day activities? (by long-term we mean lasting, or expected to last, at least 3 months).*

The ONS (2017) reported that about 12% of young people (16-24yrs) in the general population have a disability

Across all local authorities 24% care leavers report having a disability.

- In Barnet, 16% ( $n=18$ ) of the 114 young people who answered this question reported a disability or long term health problem that limited their day to day activities. 11% ( $n=13$ ) who answered the question selected the 'prefer not to say' option.
- The rate of disability reported by young people in Barnet was lower than that reported by care leavers in other LAs (24%), but slightly higher than that reported by young people (12%) in the general population.
- Female care leavers in Barnet, were statistically more likely than their male counterparts to report a disability or long term health problem (33% vs 7%).

## 3.2 The people in your life

- Good friends
- Pets
- Trusted person
- Who gives you emotional support?
- People who listen to, encourage and believe in you



# Good friends

Young people in the focus groups identified good friends as very important to them. Our research review also found that care leavers thought that their friends could be an important source of support and help reduce social isolation.

(Baker, 2017)



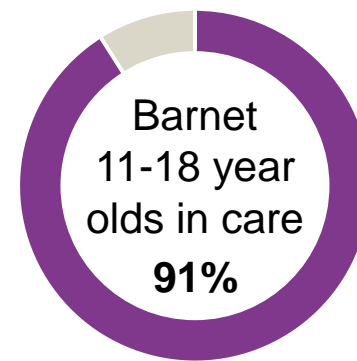
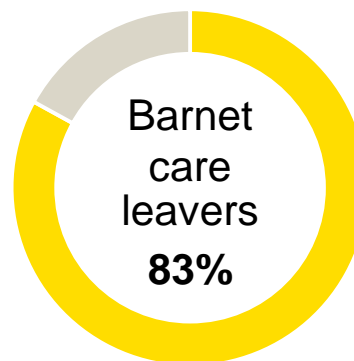
All care leavers were asked if they *had a really good friend*.

In the general population, 3% of young people (16-25yrs) said they did not have a good friend.

(Understanding Society)

Nationally 85% of care leavers report that they have a good friend compared to 90% of children in care.

## Do you have a really good friend?



- Most care leavers reported having at least one good friend, but 20 (17%) did not – a much greater proportion than is recorded by peers in the general population, where 3% report not having a good friend.

*I have no money and no friends.*



# Pets



Pets were important to some of the care leavers in the focus groups that underpinned the development of the survey.

These young people said their pets loved them unconditionally. Care leavers were asked if they *had a pet*.

Nationally, 28% of care leavers and 59% of children in care report having a pet.

- 22% ( $n=25$ ) of the care leavers had a pet.
- In comparison, 35% of young people in care in Barnet had a pet where they lived.
- Ten young people answered that their pets were a source of emotional support.

*My mum's dog, she helps me loads. I want to get a dog.*

Do you have a pet?	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	25	22%
No	89	78%
<b>Total*</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Missing:  $n=2$

# Trusted person



Care leavers were asked, *do you have a person who you trust, who helps you and sticks by you no matter what?*

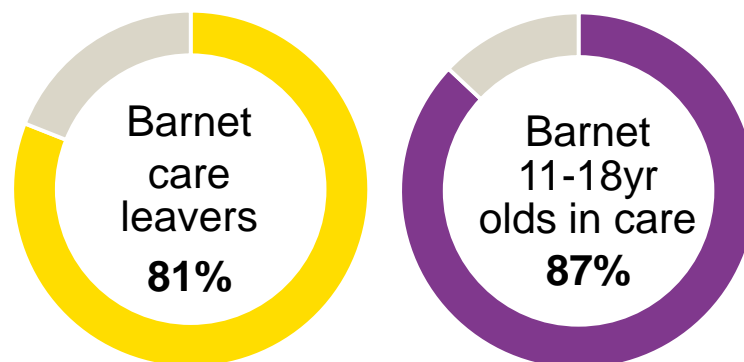
The availability of one key adult has been shown to be the turning point in many looked after young people's lives (Gilligan, 2009).

Having this person continued to be important for care leavers. In our research review (Baker, 2017) young people reported that coping with transitions was easier when they had a key person to rely on.

**General population comparison:** 98% of young people (16-24yrs) reported they had someone to rely on. (ONS, 2017)

*I can't trust nobody.*

## Trusted person



- Most care leavers ( $n=92$ , 81%) had a trusted person in their lives, but nearly one in five ( $n=22$ , 19%) did not. In comparison, 87% of young people in care in Barnet had a trusted person.
- Fewer care leavers in Barnet reported having a trusted person in their lives compared to their peers in the general population (81% vs. 98%).

# Emotional support



Research has found that some care leavers reported that the availability of emotional support diminished after they had left care. (Dixon & Baker, 2016)

Care leavers were asked, *Who gives you emotional support?* and we counted the types of people who care leavers thought gave them emotional support.

- Most often care leavers identified two different types of people who provided them with emotional support. The average [mean] was three (range 0-9 people).

*[Leaving care worker] has helped me believe in myself which was something I lost touch with in myself.*

Who gives you emotional support?	n*	%
Friend(s)	79	69%
Leaving care worker	63	55%
Brother(s) or sister(s)	29	25%
Mum	29	25%
Partner	26	23%
Other relatives	21	18%
Dad	13	11%
Foster carer(s)	12	10%
Pet(s)	12	10%
Counsellor / mental health worker	11	10%
Educational professional	10	9%
Own child(ren)	7	6%
Residential home staff	6	5%
Other (inc. key/support worker)	4	4%
Other care leavers	3	3%
I don't have anyone	7	6%

\*Missing: n=1

# People who listen to, encourage and believe in you

Care leavers who were involved in developing the survey stressed how important it was to know that there was someone there for them in both *“good and dark times”*.

- Most young people (89%) had someone who listened to them. A similar proportion (88%) had someone told them when they'd done well.
- Nine in ten (90%) young people had someone who believed that they would be a success.

Young people who did not have someone who believed in them were more likely to report:

- Not having a good friend
- Not having a person they could trust
- Little or no involvement in their pathway planning
- Not having goals or plans for the future
- Not having a smartphone
- Feeling unhappy with how they look
- 'Always' feeling lonely

Do you have a person who ...	Yes		No		TOTAL	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Listens to you?	103	89%	13	11%	116	100%
Tells you when you've done well?	101	88%	14	12%	115	100%
Believes you'll be a success?	104	90%	12	10%	116	100%

## 3.3 Being a care leaver

- Knowing & getting in touch with your leaving care worker
- Leaving care worker: Continuity
- Leaving care worker: Trust
- Comments: Leaving care worker
- Involvement in pathway planning
- Understanding why you were in care



# Knowing & getting in touch with your leaving care worker



All care leavers were asked if they *knew who their current leaving care worker was*.

Knowing their worker was an important issue for young people in focus groups.

Young people who knew their worker were asked: *How easy it was to get in touch with their leaving care worker*.

Nationally, care leavers are more likely to report that it is easy to get in touch with their worker than children in care. Only 4% of care leavers felt it was hardly ever/never easy to get in touch with their worker compared to 16% of children in care.

- Most young people (94%) knew who their leaving care worker was but seven (6%) did not.
- The vast majority (96%) of young people were able to get in touch with their leaving care worker 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.

Easily get in touch with workers	Care leavers		11-18 year olds in care	
	n*	%	n	%
All or most of the time / Sometimes	105	96%	104	93%
Hardly ever / never	4	4%	8	7%

\*Missing: n=7

*Being able to get to know the whole leaving care team has been great as I know if I have any issues I can speak to any one in the team and that they will do their best to help.*

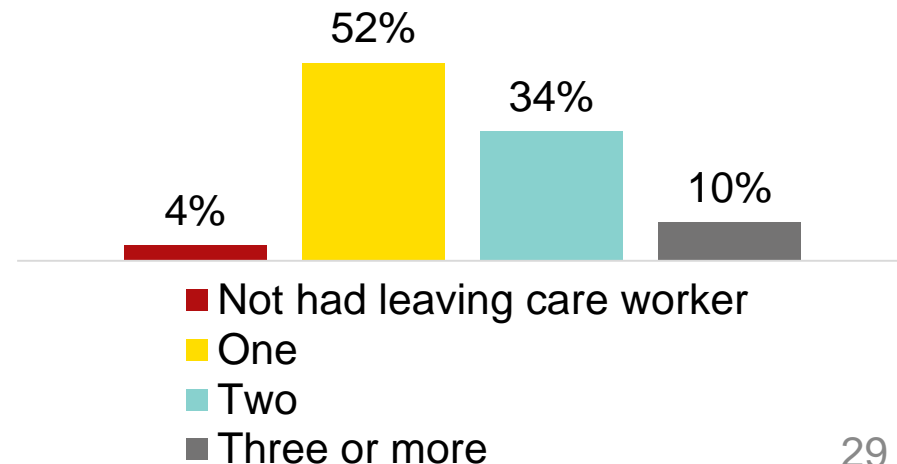
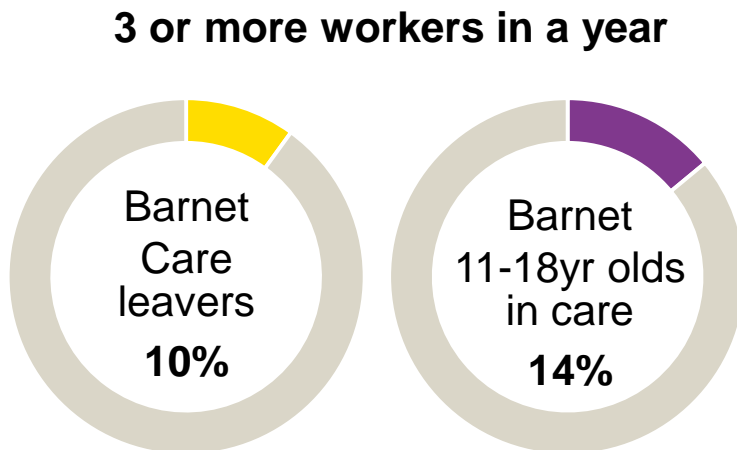
# Leaving care worker: Continuity

Care leavers were asked, *How many leaving care workers have you had in the last 12 months?*

Across a range of research in our review (Baker, 2017), care leavers were clear about the qualities they valued in workers such as, someone who was responsive, consistent, and reliable.

- Just over half (52%) of the care leavers had retained the same worker in the previous year.
- In Barnet care leavers and young people (11-18yrs) in care experienced comparable levels of worker stability.

**Number of leaving care workers in the last 12 months**





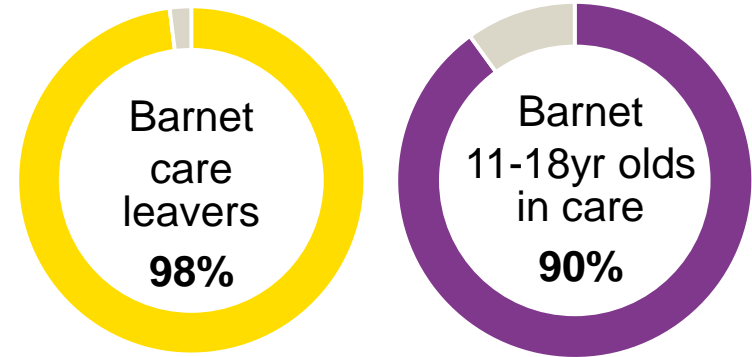
# Leaving care worker: Trust



Both our focus groups and research review identified 'trust' as a very important quality in relationships with leaving care workers.

Care leavers were asked, *Do you trust the leaving care worker you have now?*

## Trust workers 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'



- 84% reported trusting their worker 'all or most of the time'.
- 14% 'sometimes' trusted their worker.
- Just 2 (2%) care leavers 'hardly ever' or 'never' trusted their leaving care worker.

# Comments: leaving care worker

Young people were also given the opportunity to provide *comments about their leaving care worker*. 48 (41%) young people completed this section.

- The vast majority ( $n=44$ ) of comments were entirely positive, revealing high levels of satisfaction with, and appreciation of the support provided.

*I respect her a lot and thank her for everything she has done for me and for sticking by my side.*

*I would not be where I am without her help and guidance and I am eternally grateful for her. She has always listened and always tried to help, she has never left me without some solution.*

*My leaving care worker is amazeballs.*

*[Name] is wonderful.*

*She is very helpful.*

*He goes above and beyond to help the young people he works with.*

*She's been a great help to me and she's amazing.*

*My Leaving Care Worker [name] always tries his best to help me.*

*Thanks for everything you're amazing*

□

*Supportive. A great asset.*

## Comments: leaving care worker (2)

- Just four sets of comments were not completely positive – these young people reported wanting better availability, more support or more understanding from their leaving care workers.
- One young person reported having only recently met their leaving care worker.

*My leaving care worker is good she listens to my needs and sometimes acts.*

*I would like more understanding in each other.*

*I have put 'sometimes' for the question above because I've only just met her therefore it's hard to say how much I trust her.*

*Could have provided more support within certain areas but overall very helpful.*

*She has been good and helps me with problems I have though she is busy.*

# Involvement in pathway planning



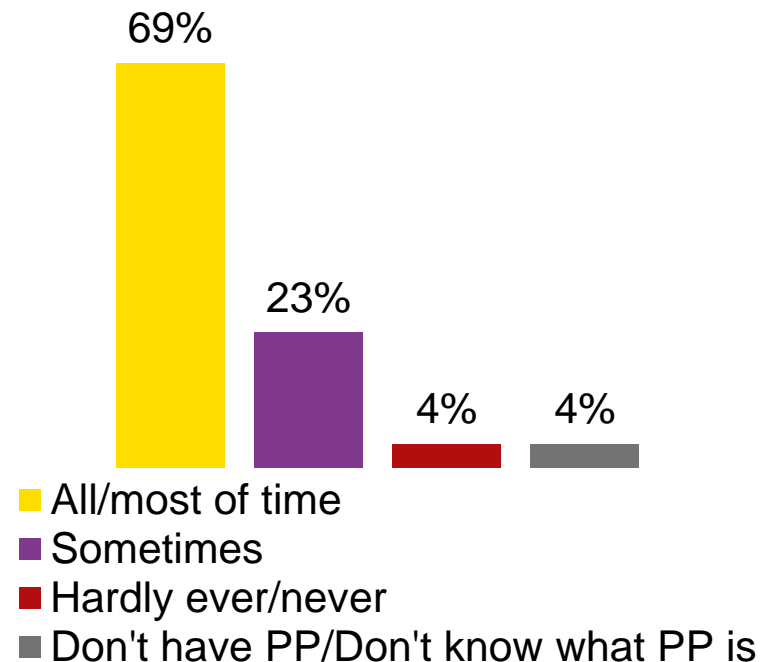
Pathway planning involves a local authority and young person setting goals and outlining the support needed to reach those goals.

Research shows care leavers have mixed experiences; some reported pathway planning as helpful, but others found it stressful and irrelevant. (Dixon & Lee, 2015)

Care leavers were asked, *do you feel involved in your pathway planning?*

- More than two thirds (69%) of the young people felt wholly or mostly involved in their pathway planning.
- 5 (4%) young people reported not having a pathway plan or not knowing what one was.

## Involvement in pathway planning



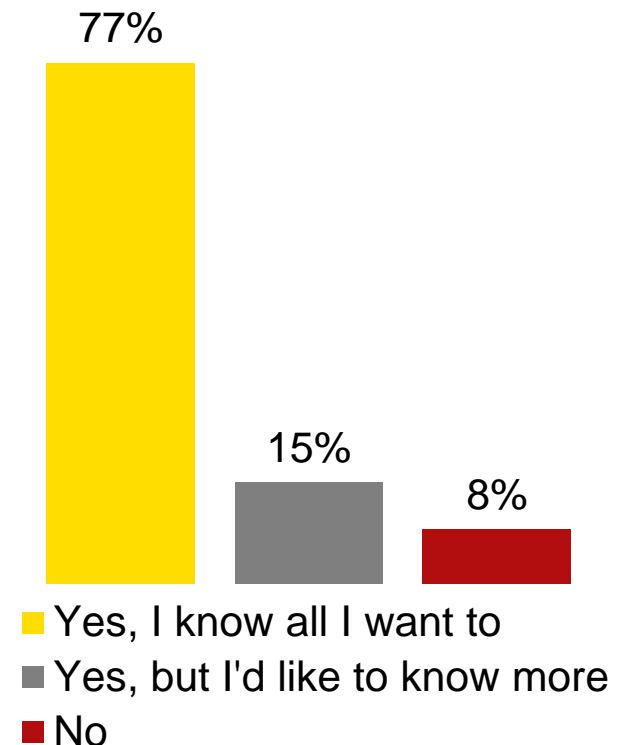
# Understanding why you were in care

Research with care leavers has shown that some young people felt strongly that the care system had not sufficiently equipped them with an understanding of their background and personal history. (Kelly, 2016)

All care leavers were asked, *has someone explained to you why you were in care?*

- Just over three quarters (77%) of the care leavers felt that they had been given a good enough explanation as to why they had been in care.
- 23% reported either not having been told, or wanting to know more about the reasons for being in care.

**Has someone explained to you why you were in care?**



- Where care leavers live
- Feeling safe where you live
- Feeling settled where you live
- Suitability of accommodation
- Comments about housing



# Where care leavers live

All care leavers were asked *where they lived*.

- More than half ( $n=67$ , 58%) of the care leavers lived in a house or flat they rented.
- Notably no care leavers lived with parents or other family, whilst only 9 (8%) lived with foster carers. As a comparison, 49% of 23 year olds in the general population still live at home (Hagell and Shah, 2019).

Where do you live?	<i>n</i>	%
Flat or house I rent	67	58%
Supported accommodation (e.g. hostel)	13	11%
With foster carer(s) (Staying Put)	9	8%
Flat or house I own	6	5%
College or university halls	5	4%
Long term accommodation provide by Barnet housing	5	4%
Short stay/emergency accommodation (e.g. B&B, hostel, Nightstop)	4	3%
Supported lodgings	2	2%
Semi independent accommodation	2	2%
With parent(s) or other relative(s) (e.g. auntie, grandparent)	0	0%
Other (inc. partners accommodation, shared housing)	3	3%

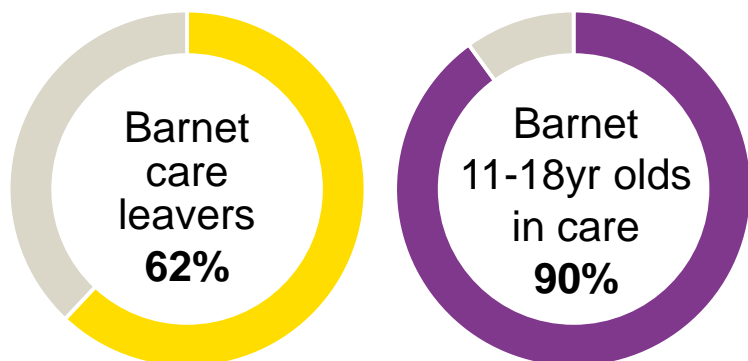


# Feeling safe where you live



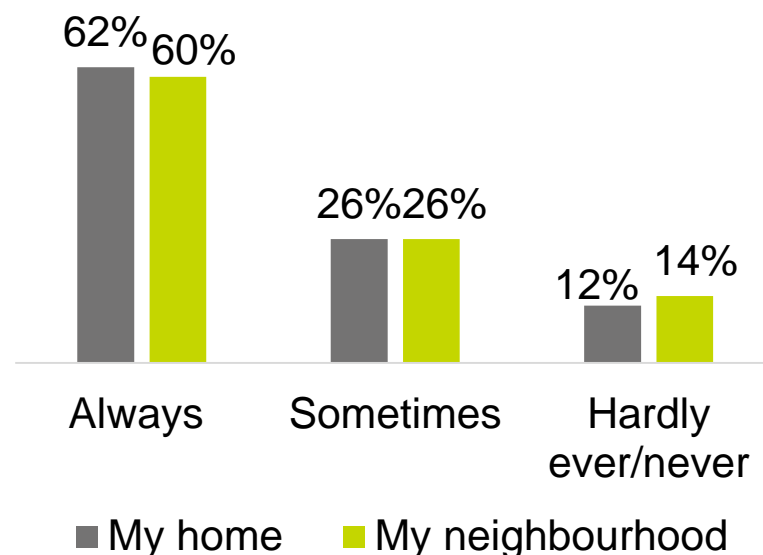
In our research review of care leavers' views young people emphasised the importance of feeling safe in their homes and neighbourhoods and having good quality housing. Care leavers were asked, *How do you feel about where you live?* and asked to rate '*in my home/neighbourhood I feel safe*'. The answer options were '*always*', '*sometimes*' or '*hardly ever/never*'.

Do you *always* feel safe where you live?



- 62% of care leavers in Barnet reported 'always' feeling safe in their home. A similar proportion (60%) 'always' felt safe in their neighbourhoods.
- Compared to young people (11-18yrs) in care in Barnet, care leavers less often reported 'always' feeling safe at home (62% vs 90%).

**I feel safe where I live**



# Feeling settled where you live

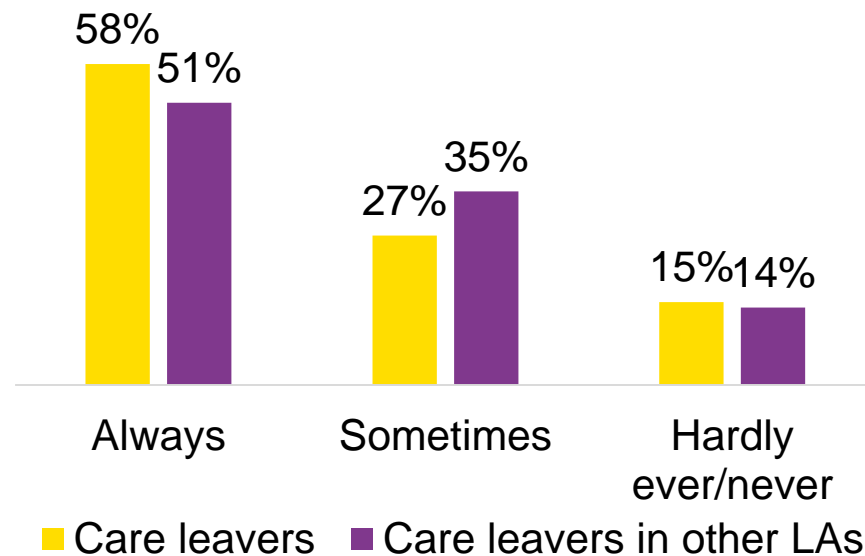
Our care leaver focus groups emphasised the importance of 'security' in relation to where they lived – not feeling 'home' was temporary but somewhere they could settle.

Care leavers were asked, *How do you feel about where you live?* and asked to rate *'in my home I feel settled'*. Answer options were *'always'*, *'sometimes'* or *'hardly ever/never'*.

- 58% of care leavers 'always' felt settled where they lived: a smaller proportion than the 70% of looked after young people (11-18yrs) in Barnet who did so.

*I live in a good area and I have settled well.*

## In my home I feel settled



# Suitability of accommodation



We asked care leavers,  
*Is where you live now  
right for you?*

- Official statistics (DfE, 2020) showed that 86% of care leavers in Barnet aged 19-21yrs were in suitable accommodation.
- Though not exactly the same question, young people aged 16-24yrs were asked in the general population how satisfied they were with their accommodation. 80% reported they were satisfied. (ONS, 2017)

- In this survey, just over three quarters (77%) of the care leavers answered 'mainly yes' to the question 'Is where you live now right for you?'
- 23% of the young people did not think their current accommodation was right for them – somewhat more than that reported in official care leaver statistics for Barnet, where 14% were considered to be living in unsuitable accommodation.
- A discrepancy between the official statistics on accommodation suitability and care leavers' views has been seen in other LAs.

# Comments: housing

- 41 (35%) care leavers commented on where they lived. Nearly a third shared entirely positive experiences: these young people reported being settled and comfortable in their homes, liking the area in which they lived and feeling safe and happy.
- A few young people made more general comments, such as their accommodation location or type.

*Good.*

*Very safe  
and  
homely.*

*Very happy  
and love the  
area.*

*I am used to this  
place and I feel  
comfortable with  
my surroundings.*

*I've been living in a  
one bedroom flat for  
the past year.*

*I live in the  
studio flat. The  
area is called  
[district].*

*I live in a good  
area and I have  
settled well.*

*I love it. Barnet had to  
rehouse me but I'm  
so grateful they did.*

## Comments: housing (2)

- About half of those who completed this section made mixed or negative comments. Young people complained about the size, safety, location, and temporary nature of their housing. Some were residing with or by people they did not want to be around, or were living in neighbourhoods troubled by antisocial or criminal behaviour.
- About a third of the care leavers completing this section specifically expressed a plan or desire to move.

*There is so many crackheads and don't like it at all because they make it look so worse and sh\*t.*

*I suffer with mental health the area I live in is to far away from my support network ... I don't know anyone in my area that I could go to if I have a breakdown or anything.*

*I don't really feel safe there.*

*I live in lovely and well maintained supported living accommodation but I want to have my own permanent accommodation.*

*I have a child and want to upgrade to a bigger place and a better area to meet my child's needs.*

*It's a good experience to live in halls but it can be isolating and difficult at times as a lot relies on yourself.*

### 3.5 Living independently

- Coping financially
- Coping financially:  
comparison with general  
population
- Comments: coping financially
- Life day-to-day



# Coping financially



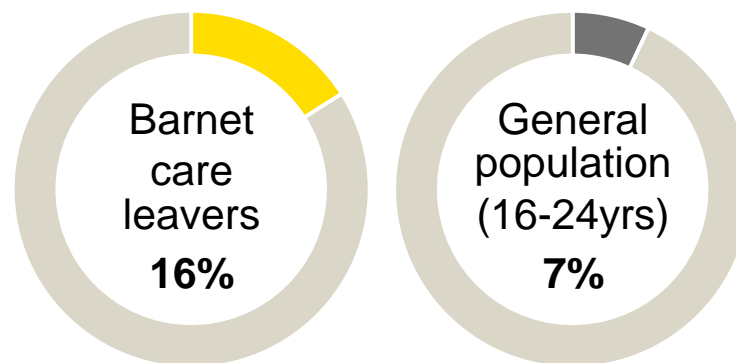
A theme in both our research review and the focus groups was the financial worries care leavers could experience.

Having a very low income or experiencing economic deprivation is associated with low well-being. (What Works Centre for Well-being, 2017)

All care leavers were asked, *how are you coping financially?* Answer options were *living comfortably, doing alright, just about getting by, finding it quite difficult* and *finding it very difficult*.

The question replicates one asked by the ONS to 16-24 year olds in the general population. This allows us to compare how care leavers are doing compared to young people who are not care leavers.

## Proportion finding it 'quite' or 'very' difficult to get by financially



- Compared to young people in the general population, care leavers in Barnet were over twice as likely to report financial difficulties.

# Coping financially: comparison with general population

- 62% of care leavers in Barnet reported 'living comfortably' or 'doing alright': a figure slightly more favourable than that reported by care leavers in other LAs (56%).
- However, it is somewhat lower than that reported by young people (16-24yrs) in the general population, where three quarters (75%) report 'living comfortably' or at least 'doing alright'.

	<b>Barnet Care leavers (16-25yrs) %</b>	<b>ONS (2017) general population (16-24yrs) %</b>	<b>National average (care leavers in 21 local authorities) %</b>
Living comfortably	24%	31%	17%
Doing alright	38%	44%	39%
Just about getting by	22%	18%	24%
Finding it quite difficult	12%	5%	11%
Finding it very difficult	4%	2%	9%



# Comments: coping financially

- When asked specifically, nearly one fifth (18%,  $n=21$ ) of the care leavers shared their thoughts on managing money.
- About a quarter of all those who responded to this question reported managing money well, or at least okay.
- Most others who completed this section complained about budgeting challenges and/or financial hardship. Young people referred to debt problems, the impact of Covid-19, and the cost of further education.
- A few young people set out their source of income, described how their money was spent or offered budgeting advice.

*It's good to save money.*

*I manage my money well.*

*Need support.*

*I feel confident and capable of managing my own finances.*

*It's not easy especially when you're in debt.*

*For food and drinks and clothes and shoes.*

*Universal credit is measly.*

*Due to corona all my utilities have gone up but I'm getting by.*

*Not really great at managing my finances but I still get by.*

*I have enough money to live and things but expenses like postgraduate education put a lot of strain.*

# Life day-to-day

Care leavers were asked, *Right now, are you in education, employment or training?*

Research has found that engaging in fulfilling activities (e.g. education, training, volunteering or work) is important to quality of life. Being unemployed has a negative impact on subjective well-being, diminishing young people's sense of purpose and reducing social connections. (ONS, 2017)

## General population:

Only one in 10 (11%) of young people in the general population (16-24yrs) were not in education, employment or training (NEET). (ONS, 2017)

In Barnet 42% of care leavers aged 19-21yrs are recorded as NEET. (DfE, 2019)

- About one half ( $n=55$ , 48%) of the care leavers were studying, 17% ( $n=20$ ) were working, whilst five (4%) were in training.
- Of the 35 care leavers not in education, employment or training, 7 were caring for their child(ren) or were pregnant, whilst 9 were unable to work due to disability or illness.
- Most others who offered an explanation were either looking or waiting for work or study opportunities. One young person had been excluded from college, two others specifically mentioned their immigration status as a barrier to employment.

Occupation	<i>n</i>	%
Studying	55	48%
Working	20	17%
Training (e.g. Youth Training, training for work, national traineeship)	5	4%
NEET	35	31%
<b>Total*</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Missing:  $n=1$



# Having fun

In our focus groups when care leavers talked about '*What makes a good life*' they were keen to emphasise that doing enjoyable things was important.

However, young people were very aware that there were barriers to having fun such as not having enough money or having mental health concerns.

Care leavers were asked, *In your spare time what do you like doing?*

## The 'other' activities the young people enjoyed included:

- Arts and crafts
- Reading
- Writing poetry
- Praying

Activity	n	%
Listening to / playing music	73	63%
Watching tv / films	71	61%
Hanging out with people I like	65	56%
Using social media	57	49%
Shopping	57	49%
Exercising / sport	52	45%
Gaming	36	31%
Pampering / looking after self	31	27%
Exploring outdoors	29	25%
Clubbing	15	13%
Volunteering	11	9%
Other	12	10%

# Having fun: Comments

Care leavers were asked, *What fun stuff do you wish you could do more of? Is there anything that stops you having fun?*

- 25 (22%) care leavers identified fun stuff they wished they could do more of. Most often they wanted to take part in a range of sport or other activities (such as camping, fishing, walking, bowling and playing drums). Others wanted to socialise more with family and friends, shop, enjoy days out and travel.
- 19 (16%) care leavers identified things that stopped them from having fun. Not having enough money was the reason most often cited. Others identified poor mental health, covid lockdown, and a limited social network, as well as childcare or study commitments.

*Travel more which I plan to after Covid.*

*I'd love to be able to go camping more often. Usually a lack of funds stops me being able to.*

*Covid. 😊*

*Shopping – no money lol.*

*Yes my anxiety and ADHD.*

*Football.*

*More activities. Money isn't there.*

# Having fun: Comments (2)

*I want to get back into fishing but it's money and I want to do get into DJ but it's money again.*

*I wish I could have more fun days out with my child but I can't always afford to have an ideal day because of lack of money.*

*Travelling and yes, only studying.*

*I would like to learn to play drums.*

*Doing more of what I like such as walking.*

*My child ... I have zero time for myself.*

*Spending time with old friends ... going shopping and doing activities like bowling.*

*Go to different areas and do different activities. Sometimes it's emotionally draining and a little anxiety provoking.*

*I don't have enough money to go out to have fun and buy I what I want.*

# Loneliness

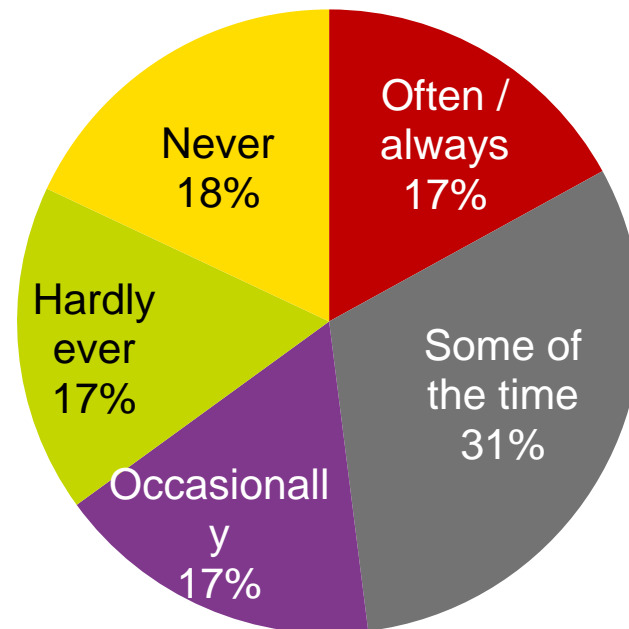
ONS (2017) work has shown that a key determinant of well-being is having positive social connections. In the general population 10% of young people (16-24yrs) report feeling lonely always/often. (ONS, 2018b)

Our research review found that care leavers in many studies described feeling very lonely and socially isolated since leaving care. Some reflected how this affected their emotional well-being. (Baker, 2017)

All care leavers were asked, *In the last few weeks how often have you felt lonely?*

- Care leavers in Barnet more often reported feeling lonely 'often or always' compared to young people (16-24yrs) in the general population where 10% reported loneliness 'often or always'. (ONS, 2018b)

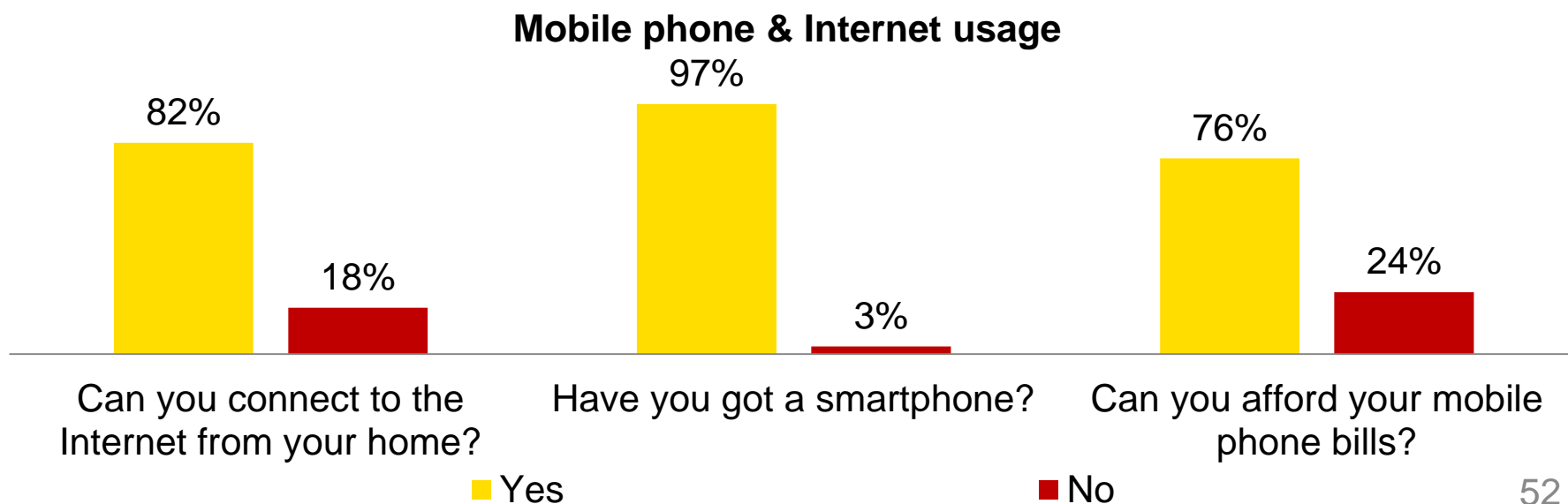
## Felt lonely in the past week



# Internet access

- 'Having and using a phone' was very important to care leavers in our focus groups – a phone was a way to keep memories and photos, keep you in touch with people and source information. It was especially important if living alone.
- Research has shown that social media can be beneficial to young people in care. It can help young people maintain networks and reduce isolation, contribute to increased self-esteem and mental well-being, and give opportunities to network with support organisations. (Hammond et. al, 2018)

- Compared to the general population (ONS, 2020), care leavers in Barnet less often lived in households that had Internet access (82% vs. 96%).





## 3.7 Feelings

- Anxiety
- Happiness with appearance
- Stress
- Different feelings in the last month



# Anxiety

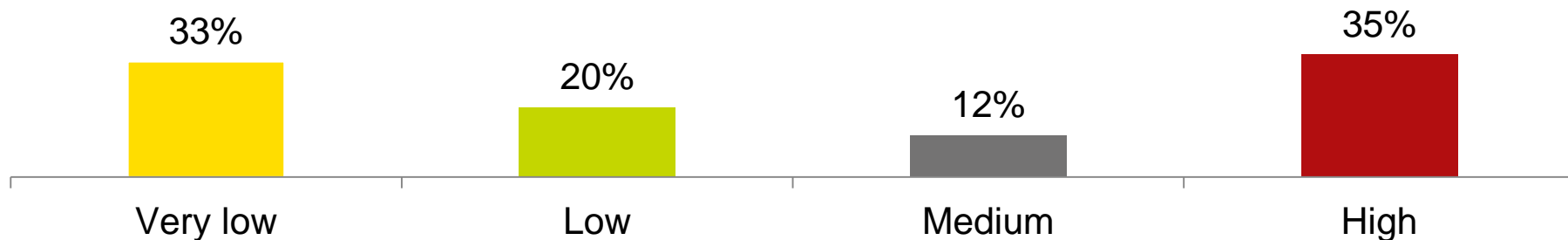


Care leavers were asked on an 11-point scale *how anxious did you feel yesterday?*

**General population:** The ONS found that in the general population (16-24yrs) 42% reported very low anxiety and 18% report high anxiety. (ONS, 2017)

- 35% of care leavers reported high anxiety the previous day, compared to 18% in the general population.

How anxious did you feel yesterday?



# Happiness with appearance

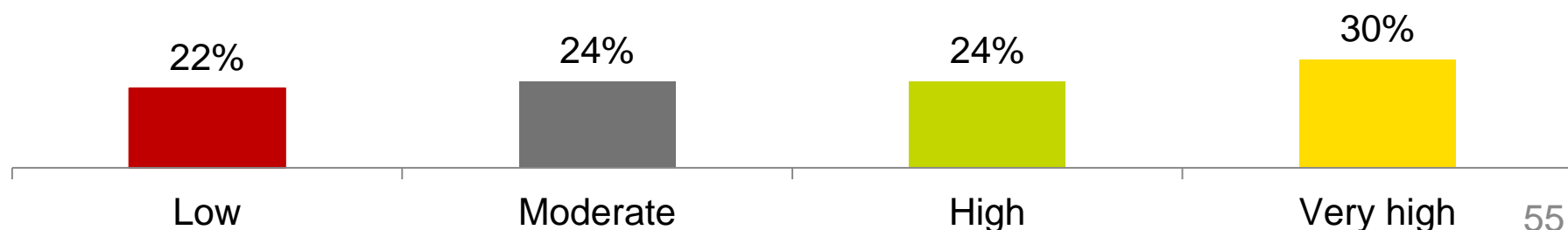


Studies have shown that poor body image is associated with low self-esteem, depression and self-harm. (Cash and Smolek, 2011)

Care leavers in our focus groups discussed how they thought that the way you felt about your appearance was closely linked to self-confidence.

- Our previous Bright Spots work showed that looked after girls were more likely to have a lower opinion of their appearance than boys (Selwyn & Briheim-Crookall, 2017).
- This trend, although not statistically significant, held true for care leavers in Barnet, with more young women reporting feeling unhappy with their appearance than young men (28% vs. 16%).

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



# Stress

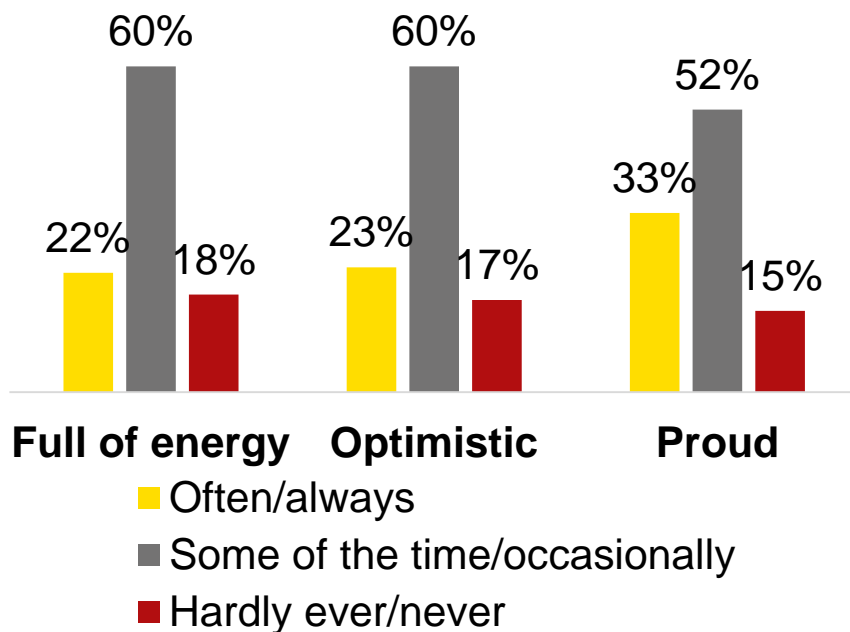
We used questions from the 'perceived stress scale' (Cohen et al, 1983) to ask care leavers about their feelings and thoughts during the last month.

	Very often	Fairly often	Some-times	Almost never	Never
Unable to control the important things in life	11%	25%	46%	10%	8%
Difficulties were piling up higher than you could solve them	12%	24%	41%	15%	8%
Things were going your way	14%	31%	35%	13%	7%
Confident about your ability to handle your personal problems	31%	31%	29%	4%	5%

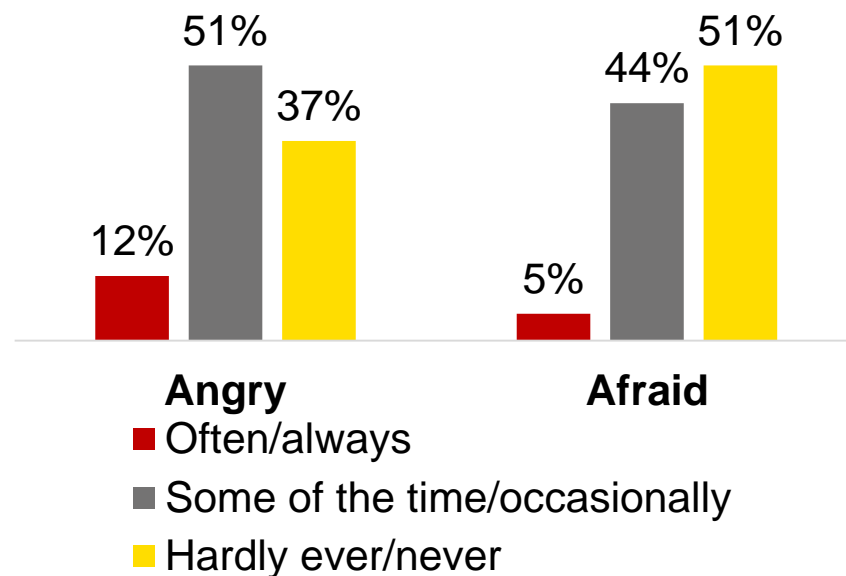
# Different feelings in the last month

All care leavers were asked, *in the last few weeks how often have you felt ... full of energy? optimistic? proud? angry? afraid?*

## Positive feelings in last few weeks



## Negative feelings in last few weeks



# Comments on feelings

19 (16%) care leavers responded to the question: *Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your feelings?*

- Four young people reported entirely positive feelings.
- Others commented on mental health struggles, particularly anxiety. Young people reported sleep problems, feeling low, angry, rubbish, tired, lonely, or emotionally labile.

*I FEEL GREAT.  
ENERGISED!!  
High off life.*

*I feel like  
rubbish.*

*It's hard  
opening up.*

*I'm happy yeah,  
that's all thanks  
for listening to  
me god bless  
you guys. 😊*

*My feelings are  
like this because  
my parents made  
them like that.*

*I constantly feel  
angry, guilty,  
alone, anxious  
and tired.*

*I feel good most  
of the time and  
sad other times.*

*I feel ok but I  
can't sleep well.*

*I have complex  
mental health  
difficulties and when  
there are massive  
changes my anxiety  
can flare.*

*I'm at a low  
point right now.*

## 3.8 Well-being

- Happiness yesterday – affect
- Life satisfaction – overall evaluation
- Are the things you do worthwhile? – psychological/eudemonic well-being
- Positivity about the future
- Gender differences
- Very high well-being
- Low well-being



# Happiness yesterday

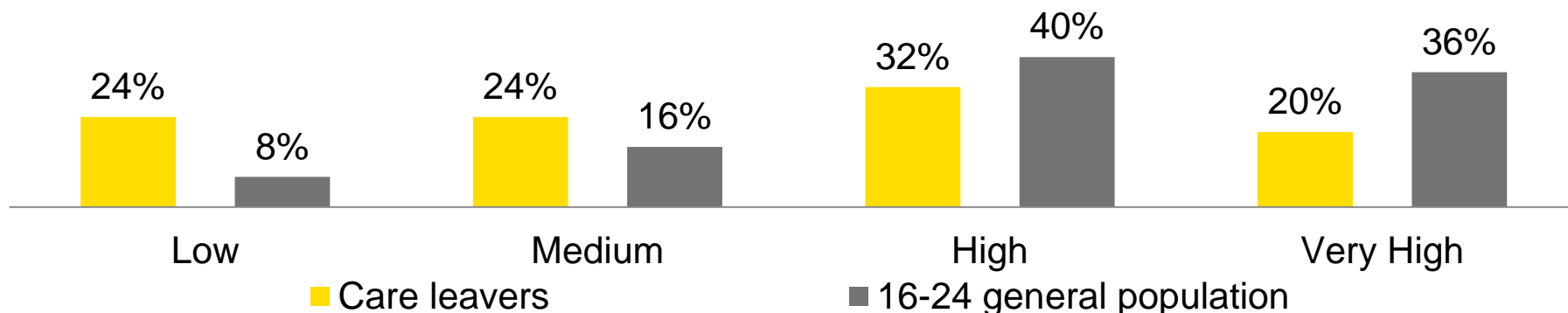


To compare to young people in the general population care leavers were asked the same questions that are used to measure subjective well-being by the Office of National Statistics. (ONS, 2017)

All care leavers were asked, *How happy did you feel yesterday?* and selected a point on a 0-10 scale where 0 = 'not at all' and 10 = 'completely'.

- Just over half (52%) of the care leavers reported high or very high happiness the previous day compared to 76% of young people (16-24yrs) in the general population.

## How happy did you feel yesterday?





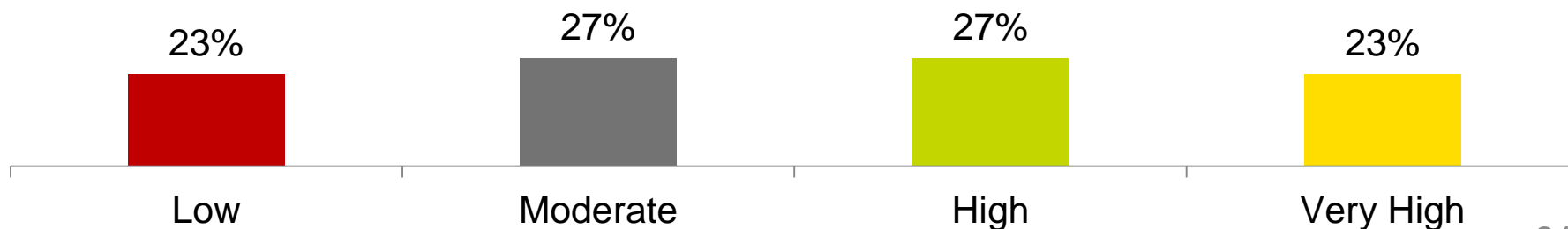
# Life satisfaction



Care leavers were asked *overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?* on a 0-10 scale. A score of 7-8 is considered to be high life satisfaction and a score of 9-10 very high.

- 23% of care leavers reported 'very high' overall life satisfaction compared to 32% of young people in the general population aged 16-24yrs.
- 23% of care leavers recorded low life satisfaction compared to just 3% of young people in the general population.

**How satisfied are you with your life?**



# Are the things you do worthwhile?

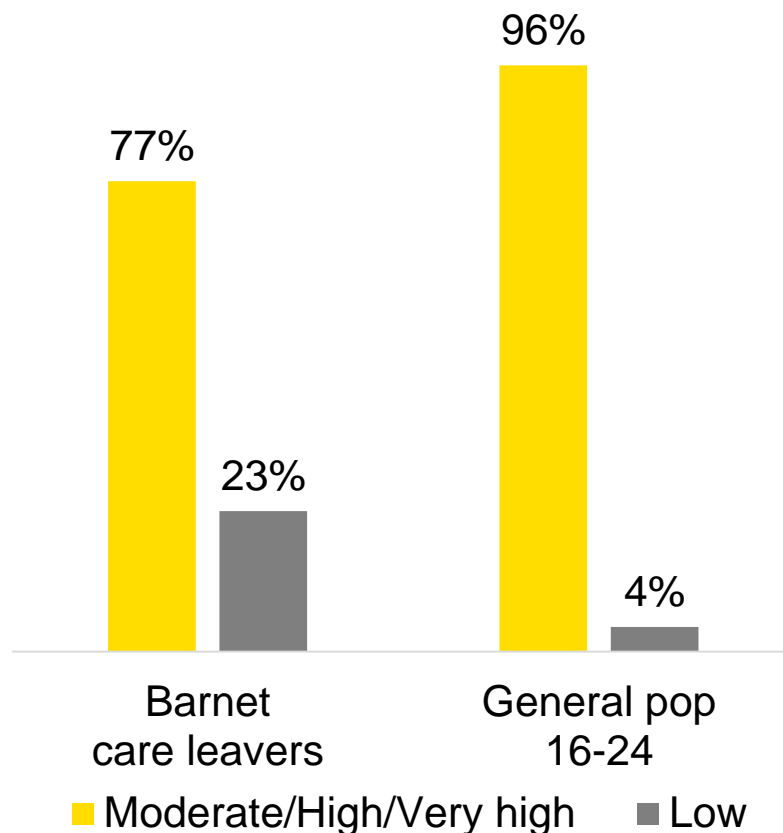
Having a meaning or a purpose to life is strongly associated with well-being. (ONS, 2018a)

Young people were asked on a scale of 0-10 *overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?*

Of the 116 care leavers in Barnet:

- 30% scored very highly
- 23% highly
- 24% moderately
- 23% had low scores.
- 30% of care leavers in Barnet had very high scores in terms of feeling that the things they did were worthwhile – a proportion close to that reported by young people in the general population (32%).

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



# Positivity about the future



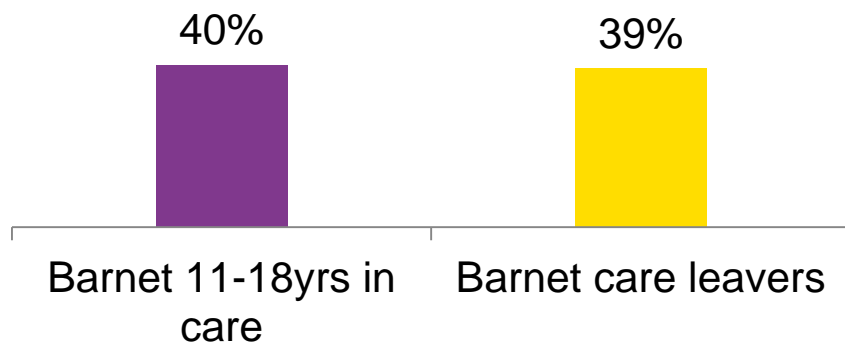
Young people were asked on a scale of 0-10 *how positive are you about your future?*

In the focus groups a main theme for young people was *'having and achieving goals'*. All care leavers were asked if they agreed with the statement *I've got goals and plans for the future.*

- 92% of care leavers in Barnet reported having goals and plans for their future, 8% did not.

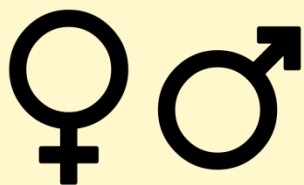
*Being in care was tough, I am starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel.*

## Very positive about the future scores



- Care leavers in Barnet were statistically more likely than care leavers in other LAs to report feeling very positive about the future (39% vs. 27%). This is a Bright Spot of practice.

# Gender differences



Our previous research with children and young people in care (Selwyn & Briheim-Crookall, 2017)

showed that girls in care felt the stigma of their situation more keenly than boys, were much more likely to worry about their appearance and less likely to enjoy school. Girls in care aged 11-18yrs were less likely to say life was worthwhile and were more negative about the future than boys.

Similarly ONS (2017) found that young women in the general population were significantly more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and depression than young men; in 2014 to 2015, around 1 in 4 young women (25%) reported symptoms of anxiety or depression compared with fewer than 1 in 6 young men (15%).

No significant gender differences were found in reported anxiety levels, happiness the previous day, optimism about the future or feeling that life was worthwhile.



However young women were statistically more likely to report:

- Being a parent (28% vs. 5%)
- Having a disability (33% vs. 7%)



Young men more often reported 'hardly ever/never' feeling involved in their pathway planning (16% vs. 3% – approaching statistical significance).

# Well-being scales – very high scores



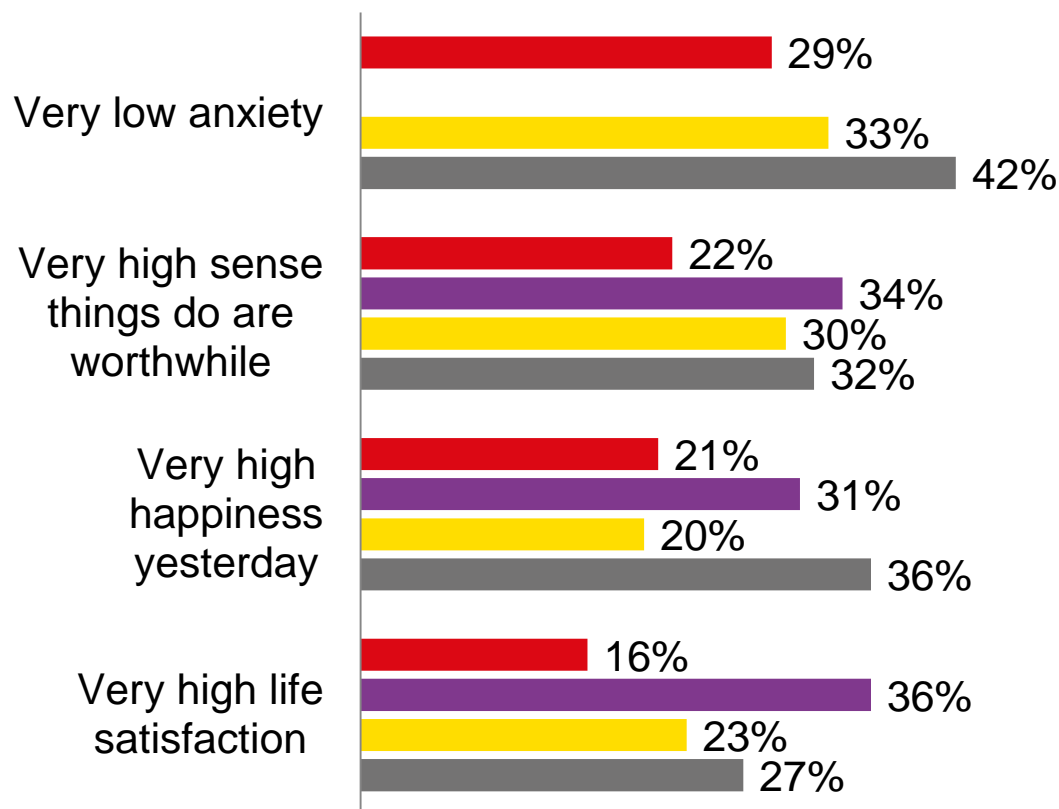
**Proportion of young people with very high well-being scores – comparison with general population and looked after young people**

■ Care leavers nationally (21 LAs)

■ Barnet care leavers

■ Barnet young people in care (11-18yrs)

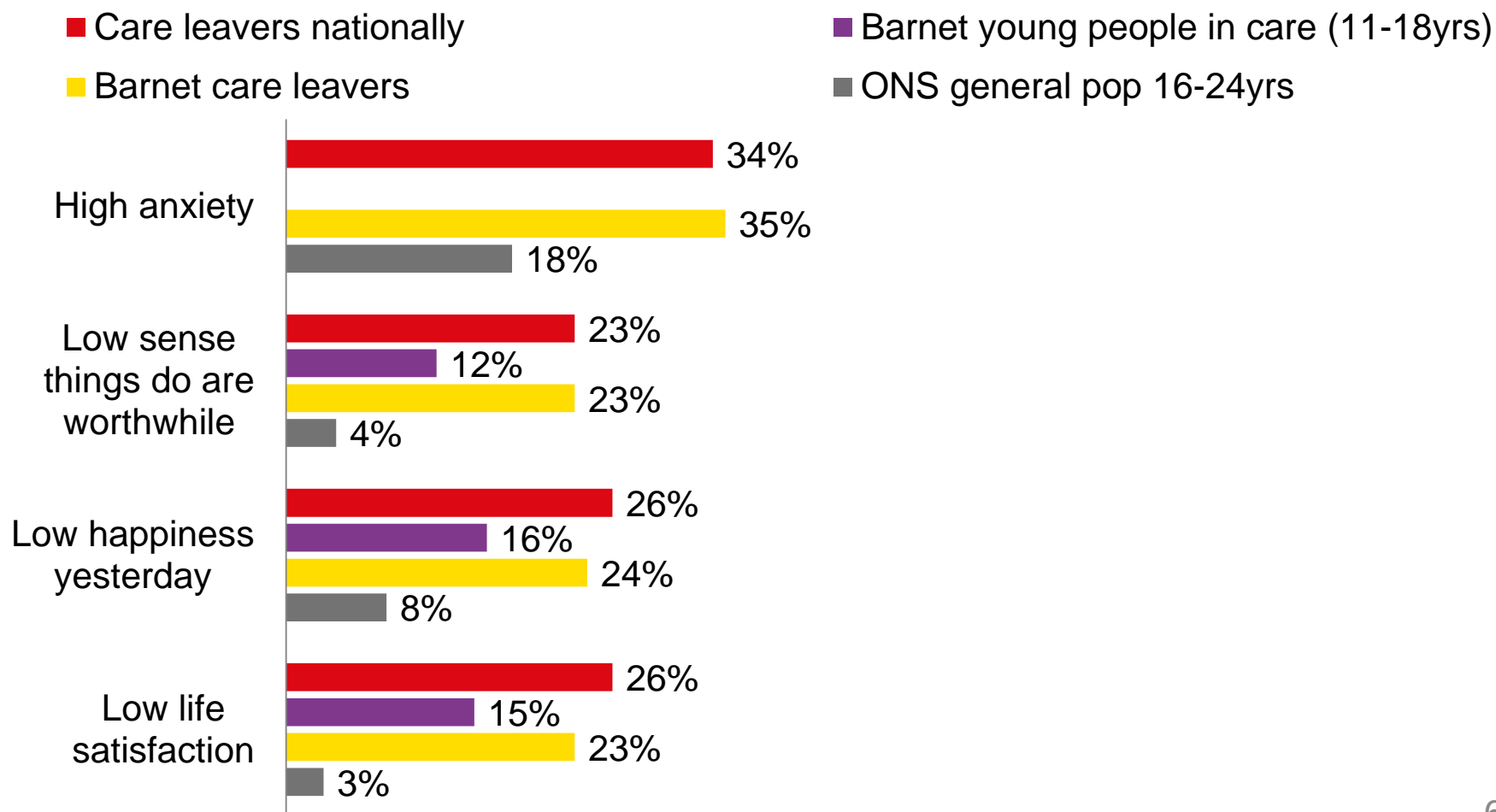
■ ONS general pop 16-24yrs



# Well-being scales – low scores



**Proportion of young people with low well-being scores – comparison with general population and looked after young people**



# Low well-being



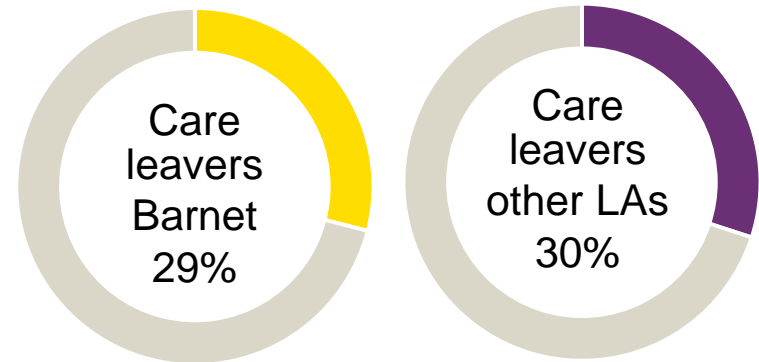
33 (29%) care leavers had low well-being (i.e. scored 4 or less on two or more of the 0-10 well-being scales).

- Young people with low well-being were statistically more likely to report a disability or long term health problem.

Factors most strongly associated with low overall well-being were:

- Having no-one who believed in them
- Having no-one who told them when they'd done well
- Not 'always' feeling safe at home
- No internet access at home.
- Having no good friend
- Dissatisfaction with ones appearance

## Young people with low well-being



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

- Feeling lonely 'always or often'
- The absence goals and plans for future
- Little or no involvement in pathway planning
- Finding it difficult to get by financially
- Not having a smart phone
- 'Hardly ever/ never' feeling settled at home.

## Section 4: Care leavers' comments

*What would you like to say or tell us about leaving care? What could make your experiences better?*





# Comments on leaving care

59 (51%) care leavers responded to the final questions: *What would you like to say or tell us about leaving care? What could make your experiences better?*

- About a quarter of the young people expressed satisfaction with their leaving care experiences.
- They praised leaving care workers, foster carers and other staff members, expressed gratitude for the support shown and did not identify anything that could have made leaving care easier.

*It's nice having a good support worker there.*

*It's very good.*

*If it wasn't for all the help and support the staff offered me I wouldn't not be here. I will always be grateful.*

*I am glad they were able to keep YPs on until 25 if needed. It has been a massive help for me when I have needed support.*

*Satisfied.*

*I don't have nothing to say about my foster carers because they are doing good and I'm happy with them. Thanks.*

*I learnt a lot from my leaving care worker, which makes me the person I am today!*

# Comments on leaving care (2)

*Listen to our needs and help financially.*

- Other young people who responded to these final questions recorded less favourable experiences, gaps in service provision, and/or suggestions for improvement.
- Young people described needing more support in general, or improved support for specific things like housing and finance. Some wanted better mental health provision or more involvement in support planning.
- Others identified wanting help to develop practical skills, such as cookery, as well as the need for staff continuity.

*More support should be available as it's a really big step. Also support out of working hours would be helpful.*

*Probably having a bit more support generally.*

*Personally I believe that the leaving care team could do much better supporting us with our mental health.*

*There's skills I need help developing and there's no resources to support me.*

*The change between constant care to looking after yourself and then having to manage everything is hard.*

*I prefer my personal advisor to find me a flat because she knows better what I need.*

*I think it would be better to have more updates and more involvement with our specific care plan.*

# A note on Covid-19

The *Your Life Beyond Care* survey took place during Covid-19 restrictions. There were just four sets of comments directly linked to the impact of coronavirus; the young people described how the virus had affected their finances, their work opportunities and their chance to have fun.

## How are you coping financially?

- *Due to corona all my utilities have gone up but I'm getting by.*

## If you are not in education, employment or training, can you tell us why?

- *I dropped out because of the pandemic.*

## What fun stuff, if anything, do you wish you could do more of? Is there anything that stops you having fun?

- *Travel more which I plan to after Covid*
- *Covid 😊*

## Section 5: References



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**bright spots**

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