

Who Cares? Scotland

Consultation with Children and Young People

Strategy for Children's Residential Care



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1. Introduction

When shaping the future provision of any service, listening to the user's experience is fundamental – without this there is no way to determine whether services are actually providing what is needed.

As part of Scotland Excel's consultation on proposals for a Residential Child Care Strategy, Who Cares? Scotland, were commissioned to find out what young people's experiences were, of the services they were receiving. Who Cares? Scotland staff met and consulted with 95 young people, living in a range of externally purchased residential placements. The focus for this consultation was young people's experience of 'purchased' placements which Local Authorities commission to provide residential care to young people typically on a spot purchase arrangement, however there are increasing examples of block purchase arrangements. It was explained to young people that purchased placements are generally placements that are not run by the Local Authority and their experience of these placements was the focus of the consultation.

Findings were overwhelmingly positive, with young people able to state clearly how their residential care placement was helping to improve their lives.

The voices of children and young people in care need to be clearly heard in relation to the strategic commissioning of residential care services. Recent consultation work undertaken by Who Cares? Scotland in connection with the Children and Young People's Bill gave a clear and loud aspiration from looked after children of **'care being done with them'** rather than **'to them'**. For this to become a reality, a process for capturing looked after children and young people's views needs to be embedded into service procurement, design and delivery. It is our belief, from this direct consultation work, that children and young people can and should be included in all aspects of commissioning residential care services for children and young people in Scotland.

Who Cares? Scotland welcomes the opportunity to engage directly with young people to hear about their experiences of commissioning. In March 2009, Who Cares? Scotland consulted with 103 young people on their experience of residential childcare for the National Residential Child Care Initiative (NRCCI). This consultation concluded that in relation to commissioning participants experiences indicated high instances of unplanned moves and little evidence of the majority of children and young people having a real say and active role in the transition process. Significant improvement appears to have been made in this regard in relation to the current snapshot we now have from the 95 young people we have recently consulted, 4 years on from the work we did for the NRCCI.

2. Our methods

Views of the children and young people who participated in the consultation, were gathered via semi-structured one to one dialogue using a questionnaire. Children and young people also had the option to complete the form online, or by completing a paper form, with the assistance of a member of Who Cares? Scotland's staff. Semi-structured questionnaires allowed both quantitative and qualitative information to be collected.

Young people were advised that the consultation would be completely confidential, and their consent was obtained to allow their information to be included in the consultation.

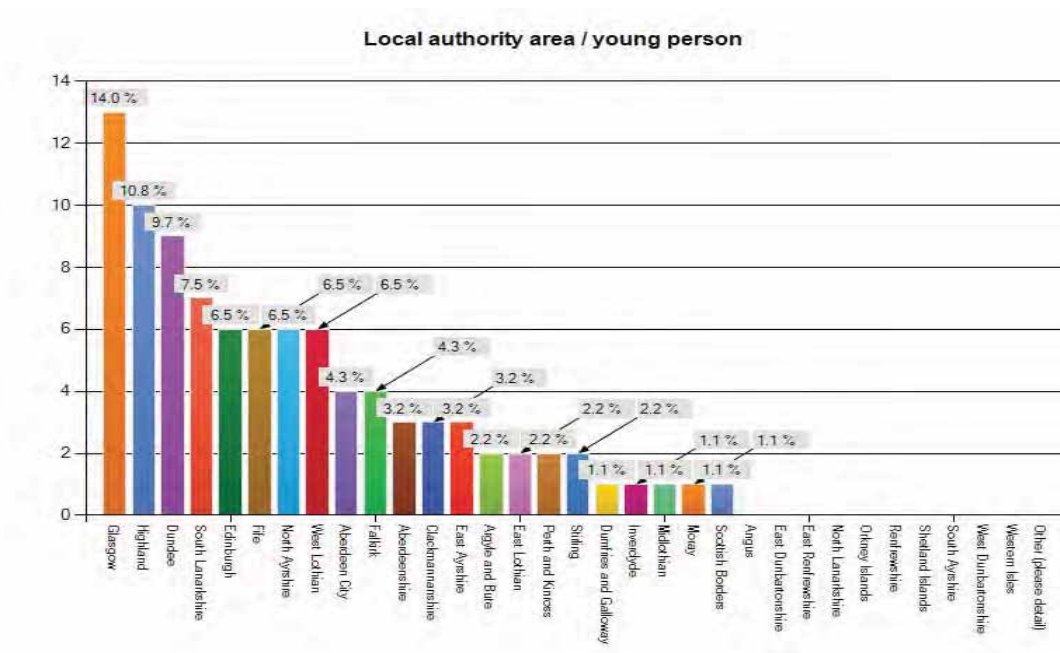
95 young people took part in the consultation. The young people were asked a range of questions which were broadly designed to collect information under the following themes:

- Involvement in commissioning of current placement
- Involvement in care planning
- Experience of being heard – including access to complaints processes
- Whether or not residential care had improved their lives
- How they would wish to give feedback to commissioners

3. Who we talked to

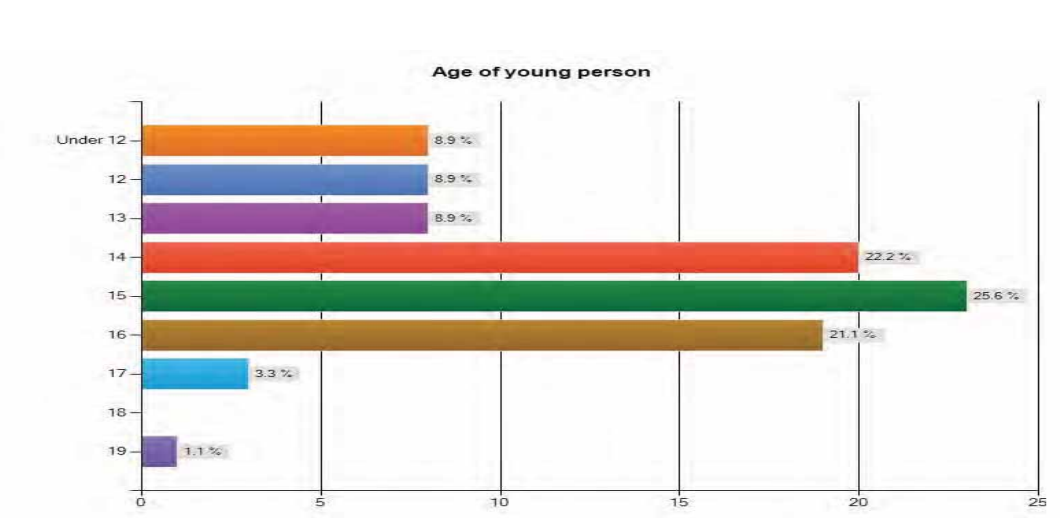
In total, we consulted with **95 young people** – 80% of which were male, with the remainder being female. All young people classified their ethnic origin as Scottish or U.K. white. Young people were represented from 2/3rds of Scotland's 32 local authority areas – as shown below.

Chart 1: Local authority area of young person



Young people of various ages were talked to – with 14, 15 and 16 year olds representing the majority.

Chart 2: Age of young person



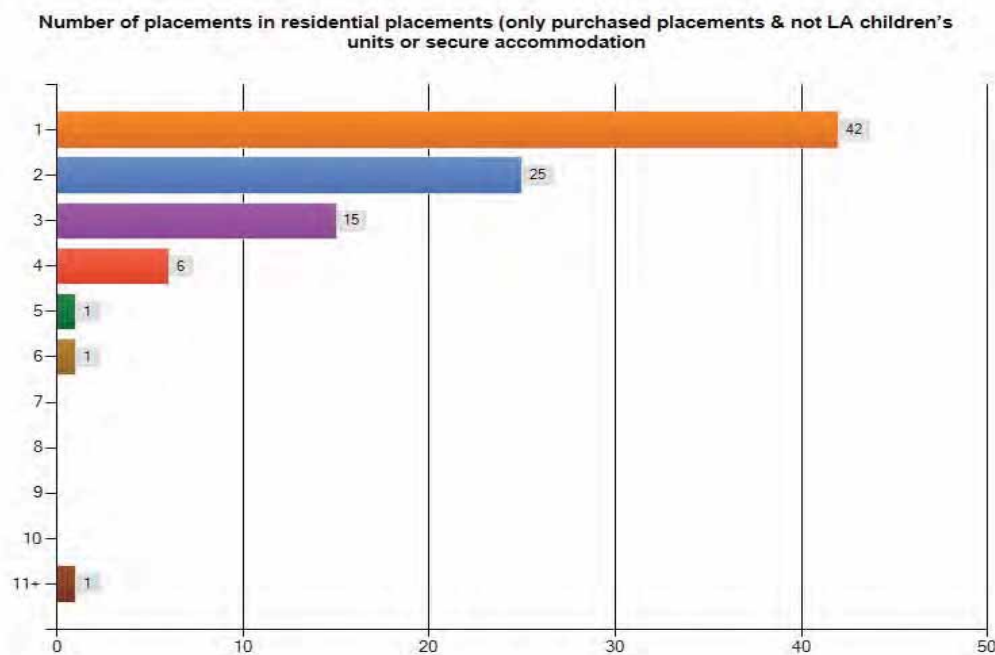
The young people we spoke to came from a range of providers, including voluntary sector independent and private providers.

4. Prior to coming into their current placements

Often children are placed in purchased placements because there are either no in-house resources that can accommodate their needs or there are no places available in-house. Of the young people we spoke to 69% were placed in purchased placements on a planned basis, indicating the former and 31% were placed on an emergency basis which could have been chosen for either reason. We heard from one young person that they had exhausted all other placements and another young person had too many foster care placements break down. This indicates that these young people and potentially many others have complex needs and require a high level of support. We asked young people how many placement types (of all kinds, not just purchased placements) they had prior to their current one - over 13% had 1 previous placement; around 15% had 11+ placements and the remainder had between 2 and 10 previous placements.

Prior to being placed in their current purchased placement, many of the young people consulted with had experienced multiple residential placements – Of these placements, young people were asked how many of them were 'purchased placements' of the 91 young people who responded to this question **97.9%** of young people experienced 5 placements or less. The remaining **2.1%** had each been placed in 6 or more placements, with one young person having lived in more than 11 different purchased placements.

Chart 3: Number of 'purchased' residential placements



The majority of young people had only experienced one 'purchased placement', prior to their current placement.

Young people were asked if their current placement was a planned or an emergency one; **69%** said it was planned and **31%** said it was an emergency move.

Planned v emergency placements

It is useful to understand any difference in context for those young people who had a *planned* or an *emergency* move into their current placement. For instance, comparing the number of placements a young person had prior to their current one, shows that the majority of young people had experienced **3** placements prior regardless of whether their current placement was a planned or an emergency one.

Chart 4: Number of placements prior to coming into current placement (for young people who had a 'planned' move)

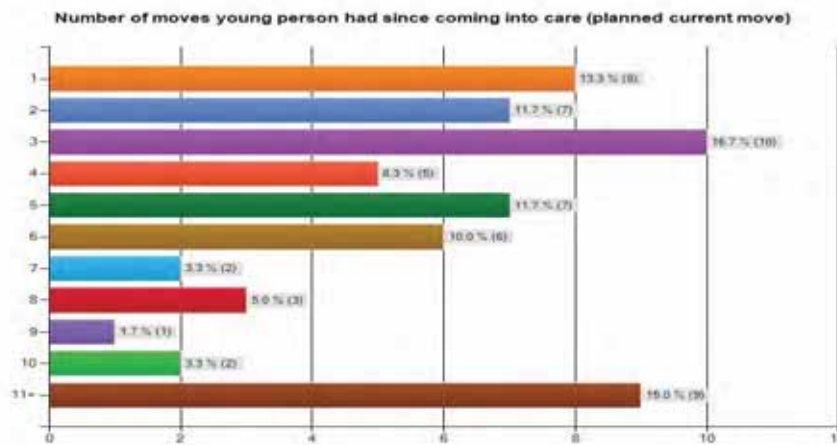
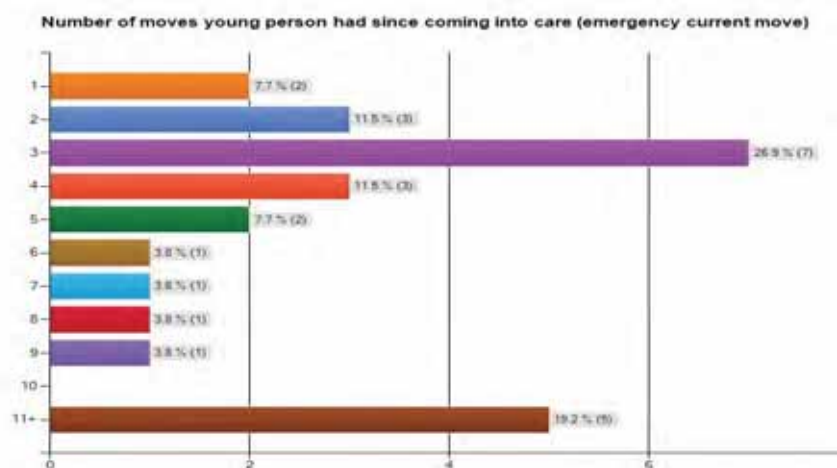


Chart 5: Number of placements prior to coming into current placement (for young people who had an 'emergency' move)



Additionally, there is no real difference in the number of purchased placements prior to the current 'planned' or 'emergency' one, which were in residential care settings. With both sets

of young people showing **one** prior placement as the majority response. The young person with 11+ prior purchased placements was moved on an emergency basis.

Chart 6: Number of prior placements in residential care (for young people who had a 'planned' current move)

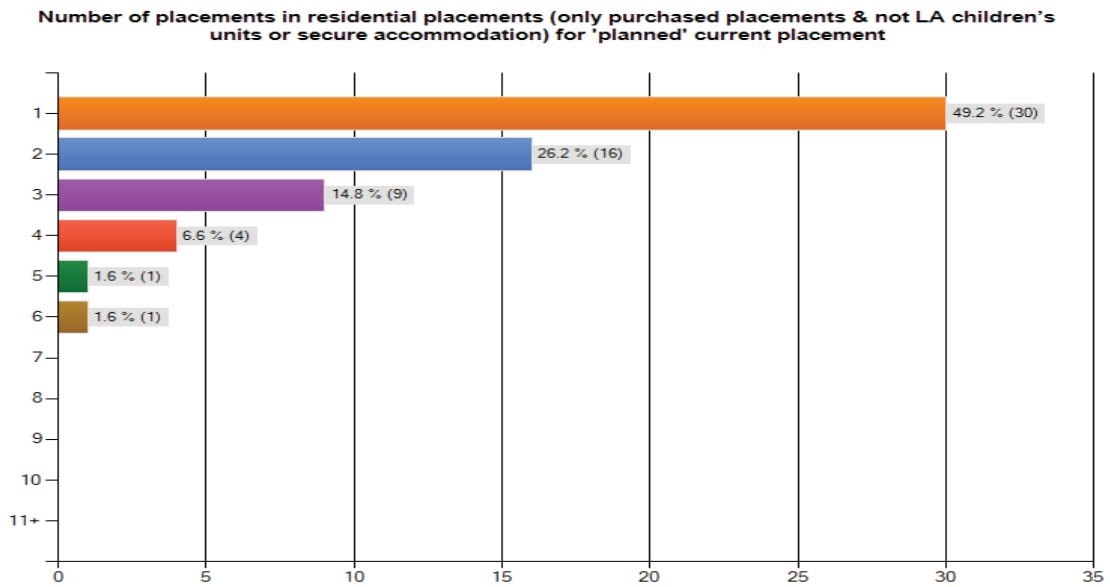
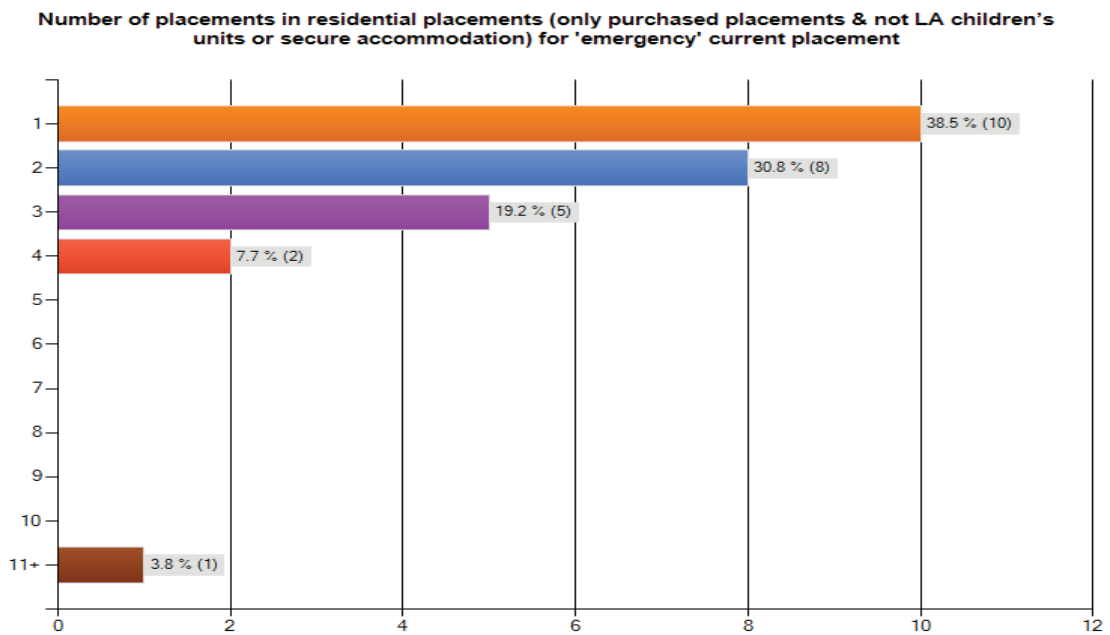


Chart 7: Number of prior placements in residential care (for young people who had an 'emergency' current move)



Of those who had a 'planned' move to their current placement, **73%** felt they were involved in that planning. However, when compared to those who had an 'emergency' move to their current placement, **96%** said they were not involved in planning for that move.

The young people that were involved in an 'emergency' move to their current placement were asked if they knew why they were being moved to that placement, despite not being involved in the planning process. Several young people were aware that the move was for **safety reasons** or **to meet their needs** (such as dealing with drugs or alcohol issues). However, some young people felt they had no explanation of why they were being moved.

In comparison to those young people that were involved in a 'planned' move to their current placement, young people (unsurprisingly) generally felt they were more prepared for their move. This preparation came in two main ways - *visiting the unit several times and meeting the workers* and *spending some nights at the unit prior to making the move*. Some young people also commented that their social worker gave them some options prior to making the move to their current placement.



Of those young people that were not involved in the planning for their 'planned' move, many felt that they would have liked to have been prepared more and understood better why they were making the move.

Therefore, irrespective of whether the young person's current placement was a 'planned' or an 'emergency' one, young people who were not involved in the planning for it, experienced a lack of understanding as to what was happening. Several young people

seemed to blame themselves for their current move happening as it did. For instance, one young person felt the reason for their move was:

'Because (they) had used all the care homes up and no one wanted someone with behaviour like me'

Another stated they were moved because:

'I was told I had too many foster placements that broke down'.

Only 3 out of the 39 who responded to this question were of the view that their placement had been selected to help better meet their individual needs.

Whilst involvement in planning is limited in an emergency situation, taking time to explain the reasons for the move and ensuring that the resource is selected to best meet the individual needs of each young person is crucial to the success of the placement. The best way to determine whether the placement is best meeting the needs of the young person is by involving them directly in that assessment as their perspective is an important aspect of this assessment.

5. Their care environment

The consultation process in relation to our work presented in March 2009 for the NRCCI revealed very little evidence of children and young peoples understanding and informed involvement in care planning. Many Young People viewed their care plan as a document for staff and not as a developmental tool for themselves.

The current snapshot indicates some improvement in young people's understanding of care planning and involvement in their care plan.

As outlined above many of the young people we spoke to had multiple placements prior to their current purchased placement. The importance of ensuring young people are informed, engaged and listened to cannot be overstated, their active involvement in their care is a key factor in achieving stability and positive outcomes for them.

Care planning

Young people were asked if they knew what a 'care plan' was. Of the 89 respondents, **87%** said they did whilst **8%** were unsure and **5%** said they didn't have a care plan. Of the overall 87% who did know what a care plan was, there is some variation between those who had a planned move and those who had an emergency one. Of those whose move was planned, **92%** knew what a care plan, compared to **75%** of those whose move was an emergency one.

When young people were asked if they could give an example or explanation of what the purpose of their care plan was, it is clear that whilst they are aware of a 'care plan', they have varying understanding of its purpose. Below is a snap shot of what young people said their care plan did:



Being listened to

Young people were asked if they felt they had opportunities to have their say in their current placement. They were asked to indicate how well they felt they were listened to, in relation to:

- Education,
- Health,
- Keeping Safe,
- The Placement (e.g. residents meetings, menu planning, school council),
- Activities and
- Future planning / Moving On.

Young people gave the following overall responses to this question.

Chart 8: How listened to young people feel in relation to themed areas

	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Not At All	Not Applicable
Education	48.9%	36.4%	8.0%	3.4%	3.4%
Health	72.7%	17.0%	3.4%	0%	0%
Keeping You Safe	77.8%	16.7%	3.3%	1.1%	1.1%
Placement e.g residents meetings, menu planning, school council	58.4%	28.1%	9.0%	3.4%	1.1%
Activities	64.0%	27.0%	7.9%	1.1%	0%
Future planning / Moving On	54.7%	5.8%	1.2%	15.1%	23.3%

As can be seen from chart 8, the areas where young people felt listened to most were in relation to **health** and **safety**. **Education** was the area in which young people felt their views were heard least, with young people showing a higher rate of only being listen to 'sometimes' than any other area. There is no real difference in the ages of young people who felt listened to 'sometimes' or 'mostly' in relation to education – with the majority of both groups of young people being in their late teens (14, 15 or 16-years-old) – as shown in chart 9 and 10 below. However, there is some variation in the number of placements these young people had prior to their current placement, as charts 11 and 12 shows below.

Chart 9: Age of young person who felt they were listened to 'sometimes' in relation to education

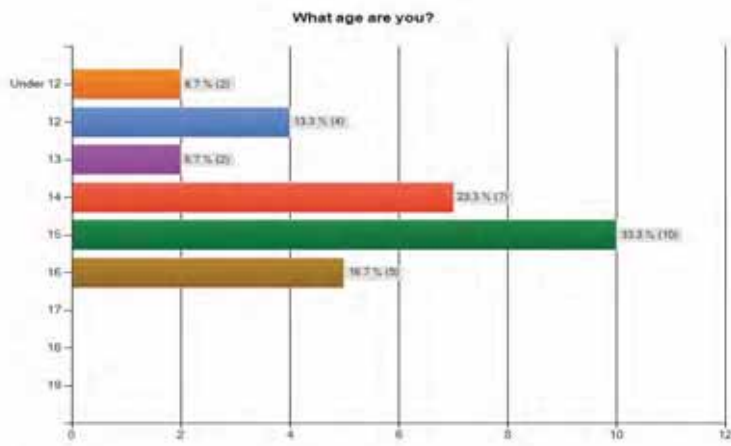


Chart 10: Age of young person who felt they were listened to 'mostly' in relation to education

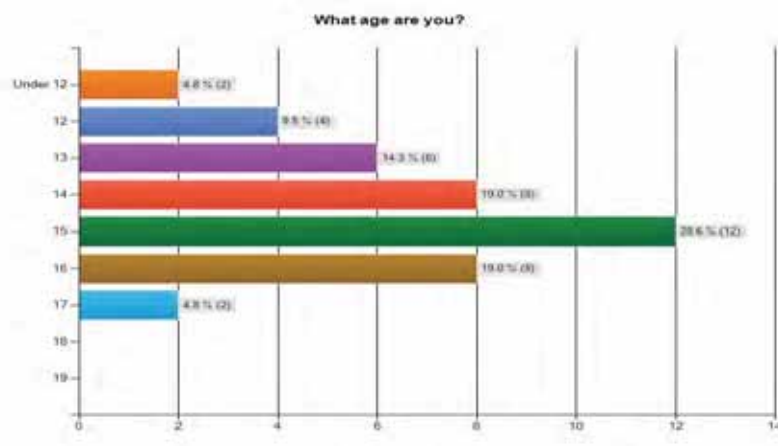


Chart 11: Number of prior placements who answered 'mostly' in relation to education

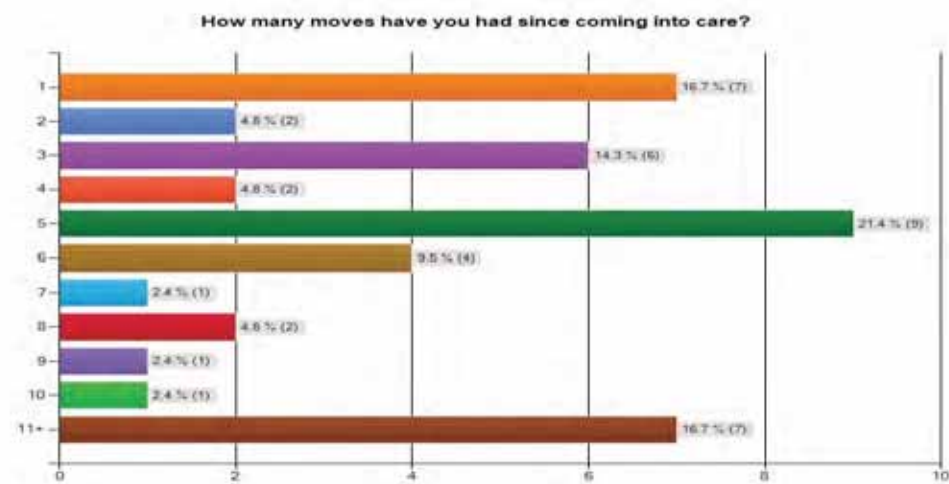
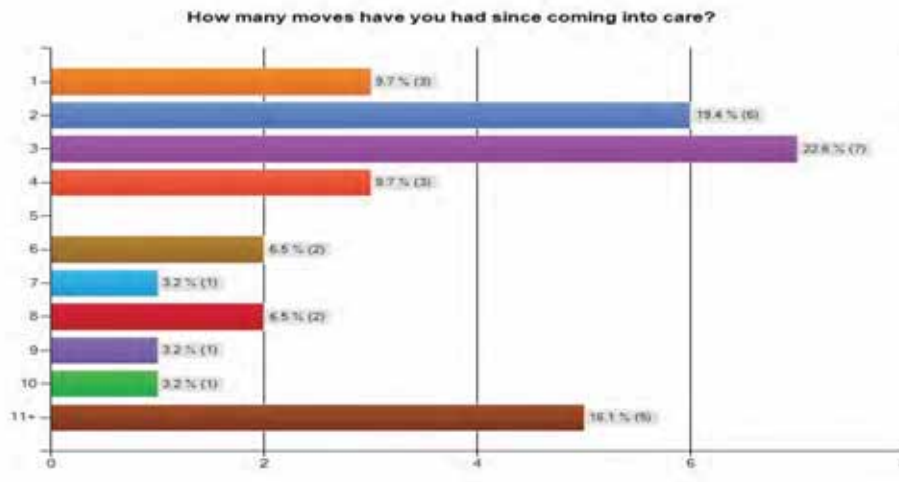
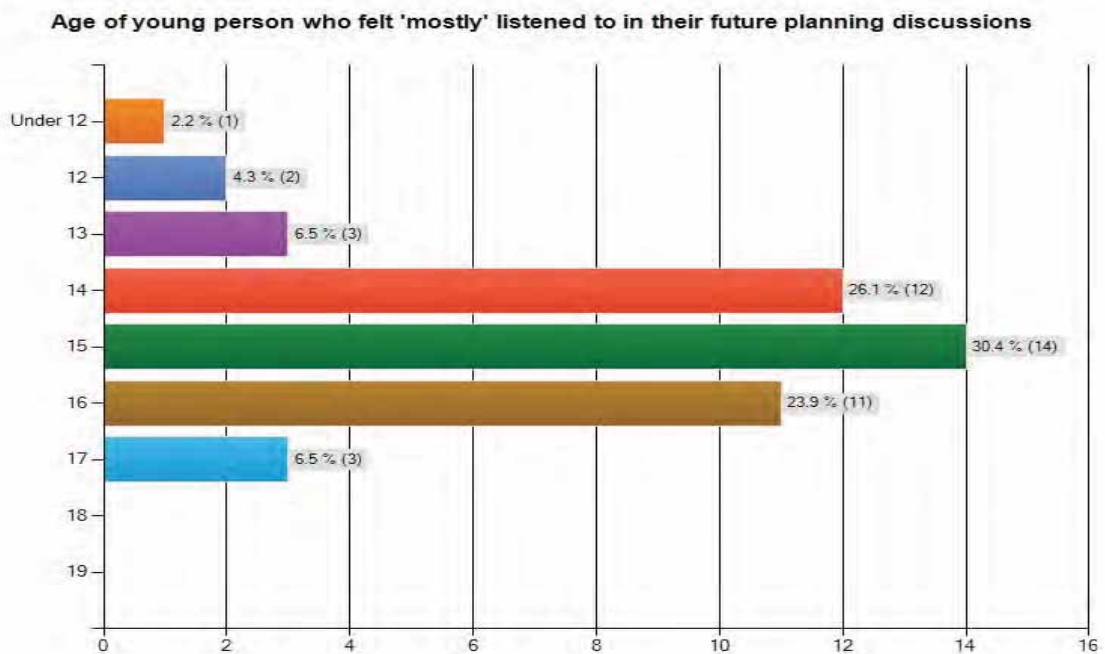


Chart 12: Number of prior placements who answered 'sometimes' in relation to education



Future planning / moving on was another of the categories where young people felt less listened to (either mostly, or sometimes). Just over half of the 90 young people who responded to this question felt they were mostly listened to, however 15% felt they were not listened to at all. Of those who felt they were 'mostly' involved, **70%** had come to their current placement on a planned basis; and **55%** of them felt they were involved in their move to that placement. Chart 13 below shows the breakdown of ages of young people who felt 'mostly' listened to.

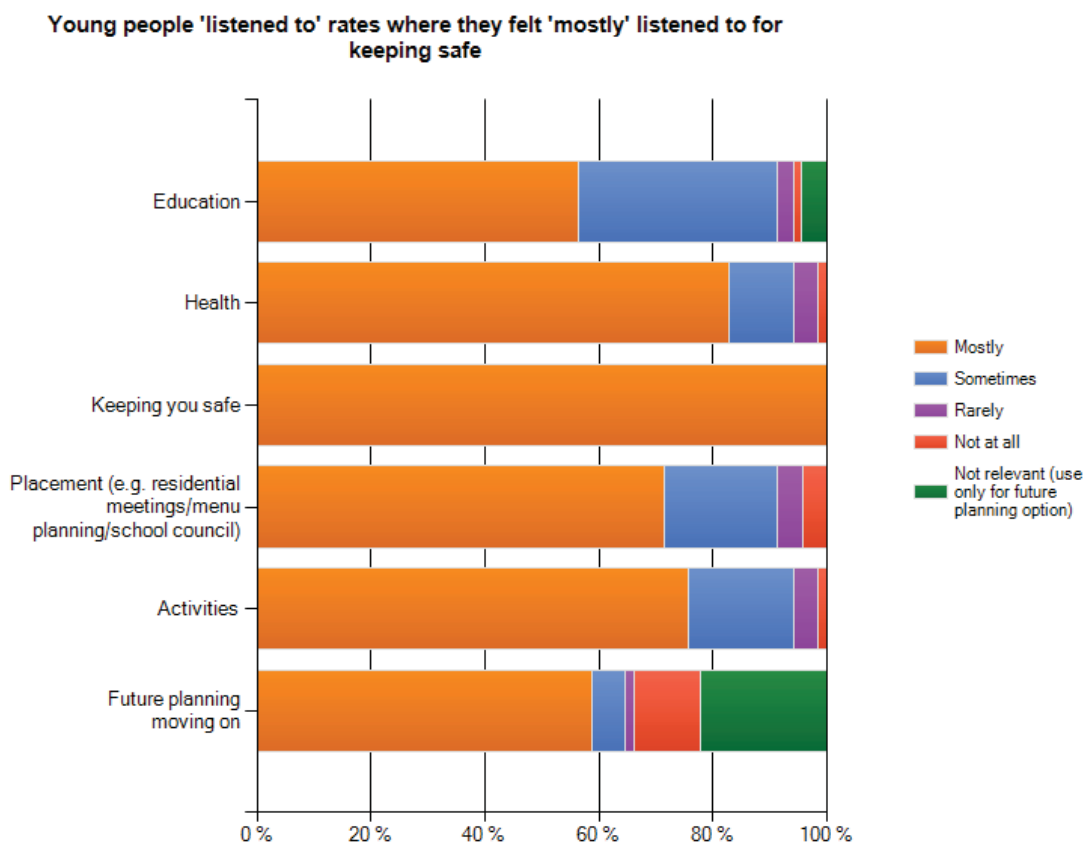
Chart 13: Age of young people who felt 'mostly' listened to in relation to their future planning



Of those young people who felt they were only 'sometimes' listened to, **40%** of them are 16-year olds, with the remainder 13, 14 and 15-years of age.

In relation to **health** and **keeping safe**, young people on the whole felt listened to. Of those who felt mostly listened to in relation to health, **73%** came to their current placement via a planned move. Of this amount, **53%** felt they were involved in planning for their move. Of those who felt mostly listened to in relation to 'keeping safe', **66%** had come to their current placement via a planned move, however, **52%** of these young people did not feel involved in planning for the move. However, **92%** felt they were aware of what a care plan was. It is also noteworthy, that where young people felt they were mostly listened to in relation to **keeping safe**, they also indicated that they felt listened to higher than the overall averages in relation to all other areas. Chart 14 shows this below.

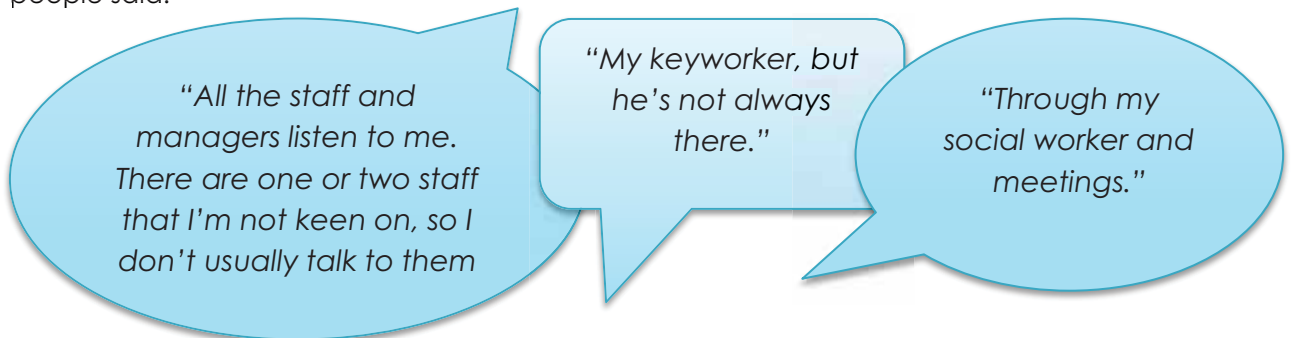
Chart 14: Young people's responses where they felt 'mostly' listened to in relation to keeping safe.



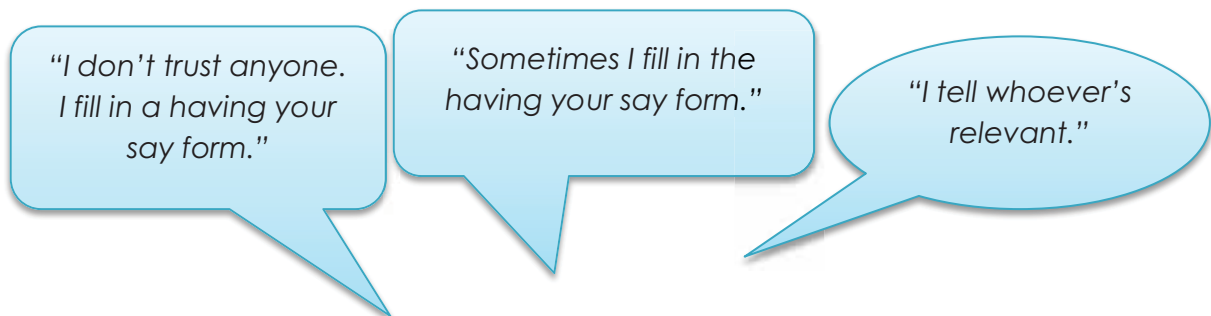
Who listens

In our findings for the NRCCI we concluded that 'Relationships are important to young people. This can be with family, friends, workers, and other young people in care. The impact on young people when relationships are taken away from them is significant and should never be underestimated.'

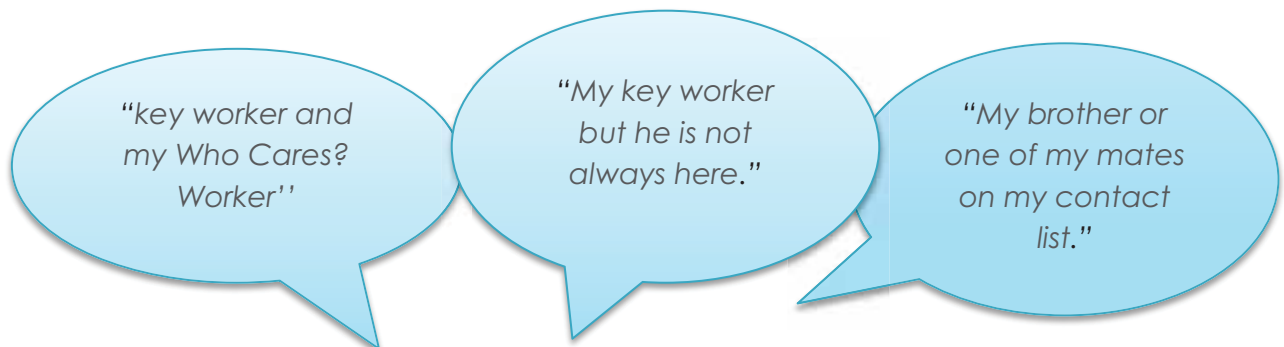
Young people were asked who they feel listens to them, and how. **Key workers** scored highly amongst the young people, followed by social workers, unit staff (including management) and Who Cares? Scotland workers. Below is a snap shot of what the young people said.



However, some young people commented:



Young people were also asked how they could feel more listened to, and to indicate who they feel is the best person to help them have their say and feel listened too. Of the 14 young people who answered this question, the following comments were captured:



It is also evident from young people, that the having your say forms and meetings, provide formats which help them be listened to.

Feelings about their current care setting

Young people were asked whether they felt their current placement was having a positive impact on their lives. **56%** said 'yes'; **20%** said 'no' and the rest said 'sometimes' – as chart 15 shows below. Of those who answered 'yes', **78%** of them moved to their current placement on a planned basis – and **63%** felt involved in planning for their move. **92%** of this amount were also aware of what a care plan is, and they show high levels of feeling 'mostly' listened to (see chart 16 below). When asked what specific aspects of their lives, they felt had been improved as a result of their current care setting, **96%** felt this in relation to education and relationships with others; **88%** in relation to feeling good about themselves; **86%** in relation to family relationships; **84%** in relation to feeling safe; **82%** in relation to confidence; **76%** in relation to confidence, motivation and planning for the future.

Chart 15: Young people's feelings on their current residential care setting

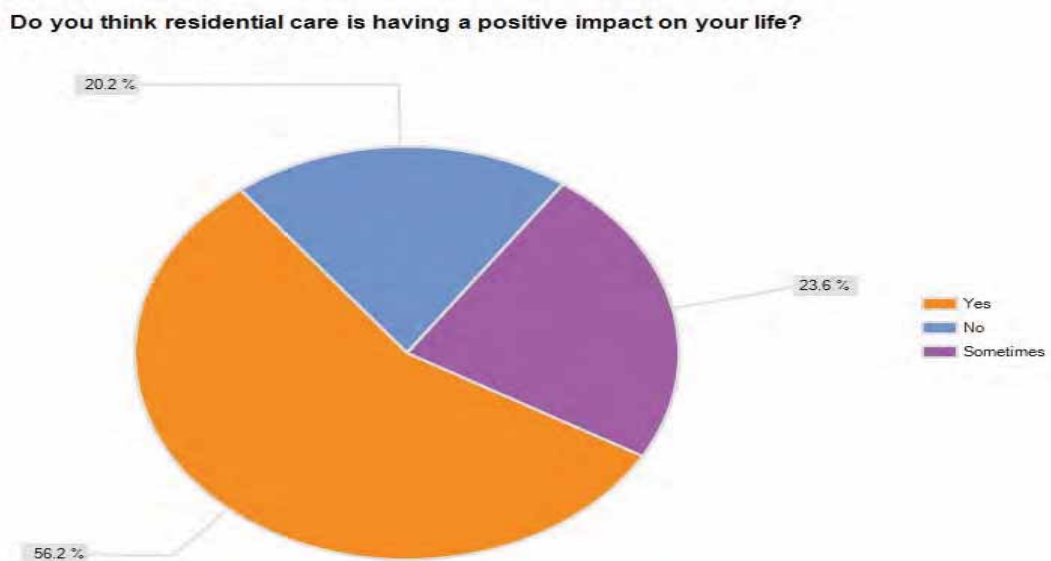
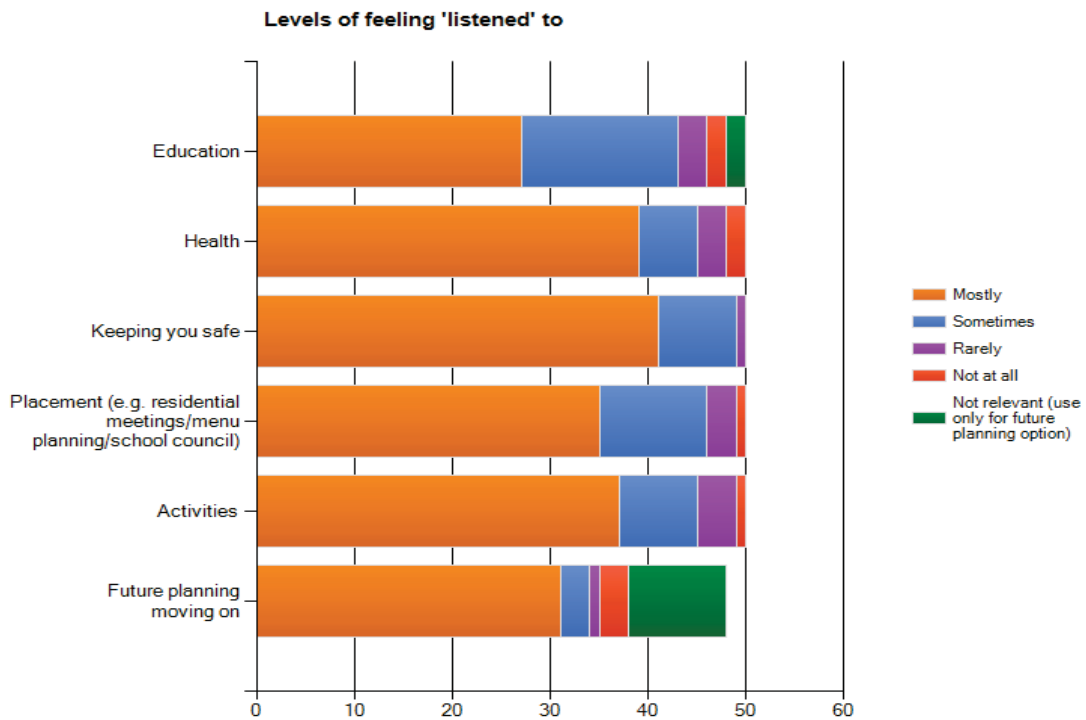


Chart 16: Young people's views on being listened to – from those who felt their current placement was having a positive impact on their life



Below represents some comments from young people on how they feel their care has improved as a result of their current residential placement.



Of the 20% who felt their lives had not improved, **78%** are aware of what a care plan is, and **56%** came to their current placement via a planned move. The 20% who felt they experienced no improvement, show lower levels of feeling listened to, as chart 17 shows below. They also showed lower levels of improvement in specific areas, compared to those who felt their lives had been improved due to their current care setting. See chart 18 below. However, they do acknowledge high levels of improvement in relation to **relationships** with others and **feeling safe** and some young people acknowledged improvement in other areas despite expressing that they felt their current placement was not having a positive impact on their lives, of these 18 young people only 4 young people did not feel there was any improvement in any of the areas we asked about.

Chart 17: Young people's views on being listened to – from those who felt their current placement was not having a positive impact on their life

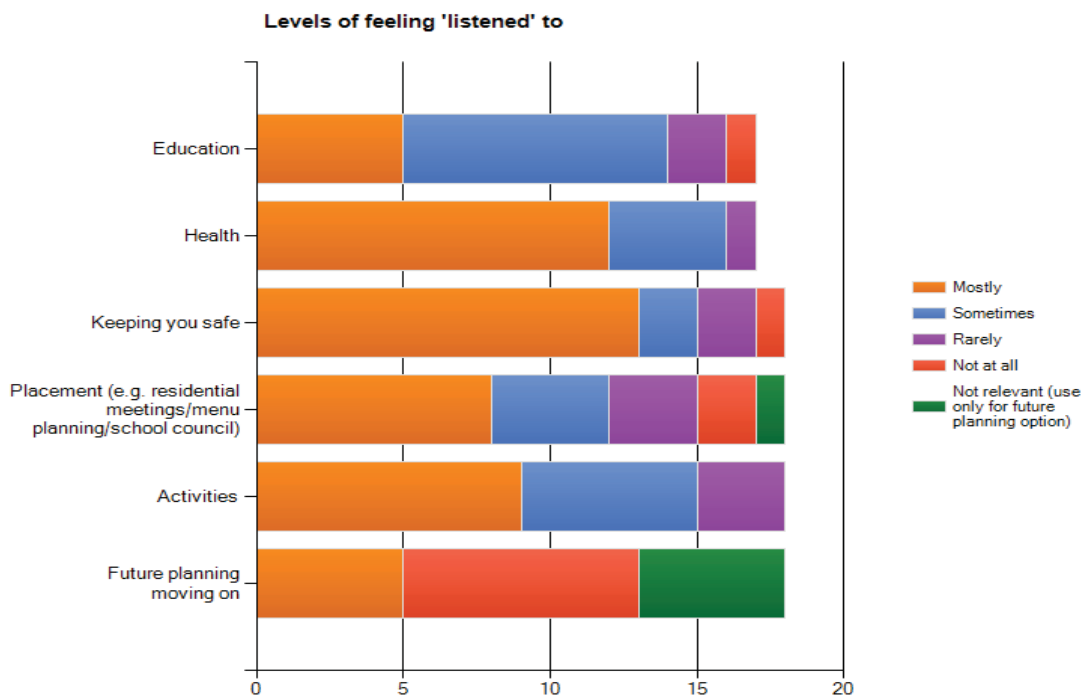


Chart 18: Young people's views on improvements made – from those who felt their current placement was having a positive impact on their life

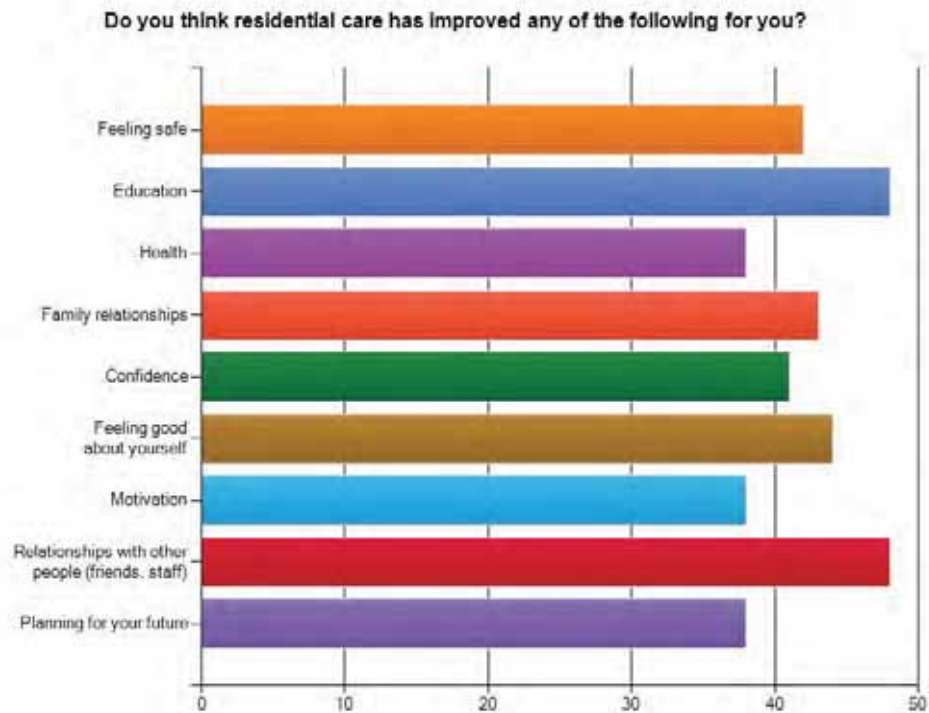


Chart 19: Young people's views on improvements made – from those who felt their current placement was sometimes having a positive impact on their life

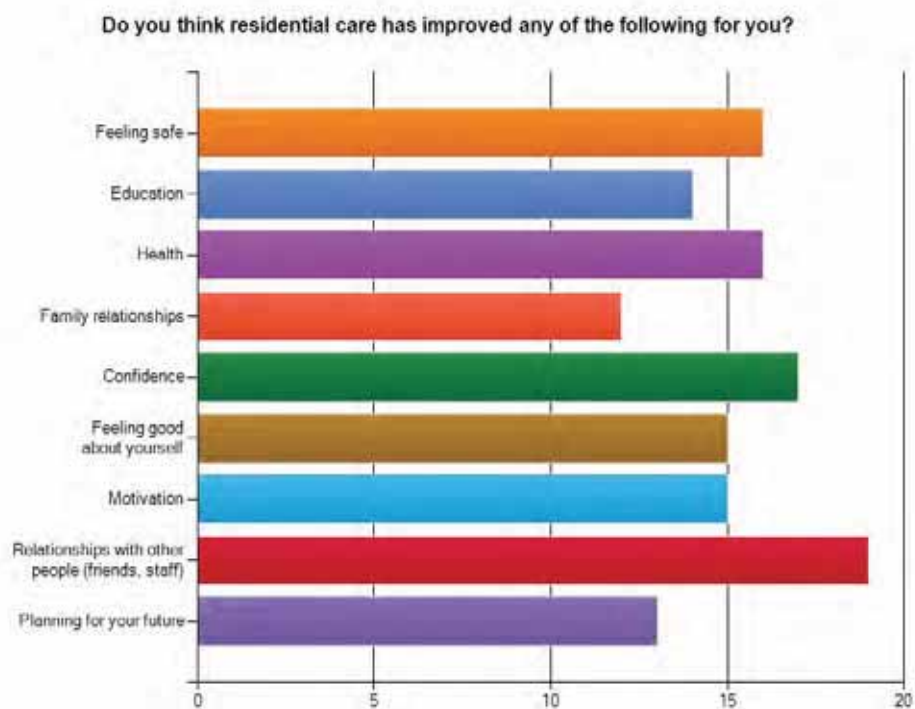
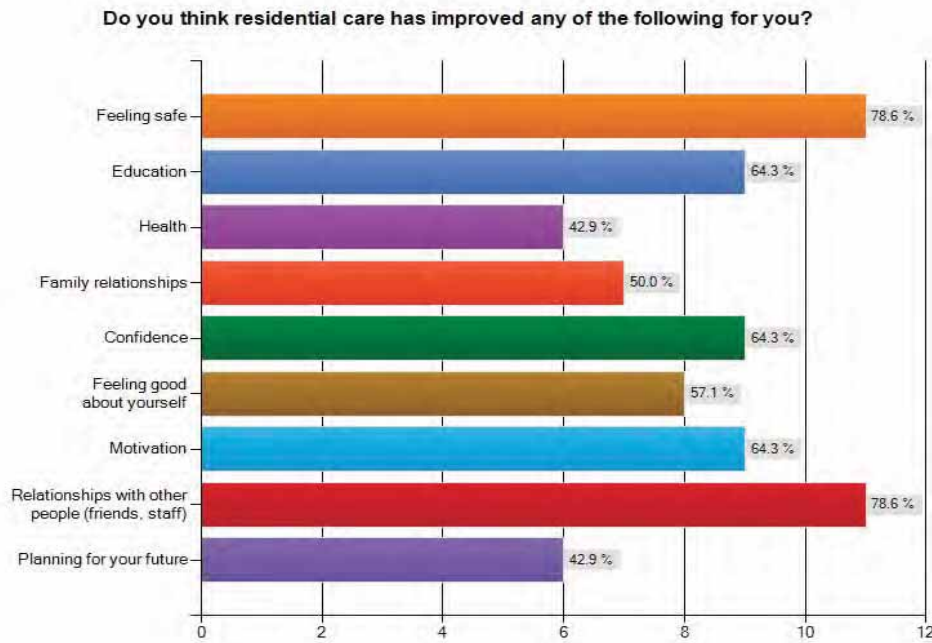


Chart 20: Young people's views on improvements made – from those who felt their current placement was not having a positive impact on their life



The young people, who felt that things hadn't improved for them, were asked what would make things better. In the main, this involved going home. A more homely environment, a future plan and going to a mainstream school were also identified by individual young people as things that could be improved. These are shown below:



Making a complaint

Young people were asked if they had ever made a complaint whilst living in any **residential care setting** and **55%** answered yes. Young people who said yes, were asked to comment on how their complaint had been responded to. Of the 47 young people who had been involved in raising a complaint, only 3 of them made reference to feeling listened to in the process. 24 young people indicated that their complaint had been responded to appropriately, 21 young people stated that either; nothing had been done; they had not heard anything back; they were not taken seriously; or they were not listened to. 2 young people were awaiting a response to their complaint.

“I made a complaint that was investigated but I’m not happy with the result. My Who Cares? Worker is helping me sort it out.”

“Head of service got in touch and explained it was unfounded.”

Most complaints appeared to have been dealt with verbally by unit staff or management, however 13 of the 47 young people were of the view that their complaint had not been responded to at all – as the comments below provide a snapshot of:



Those that said they had not made a complaint were asked if they had nothing to complain about, or if they didn't know how to complain or if they didn't complain for another reason. Most said they had nothing to complain about, 2 young people said they did not know how and some young people gave the following responses;

“I feel I can't complain because I am unable to use the phone sometimes”

“Because nothing ever gets done about them”

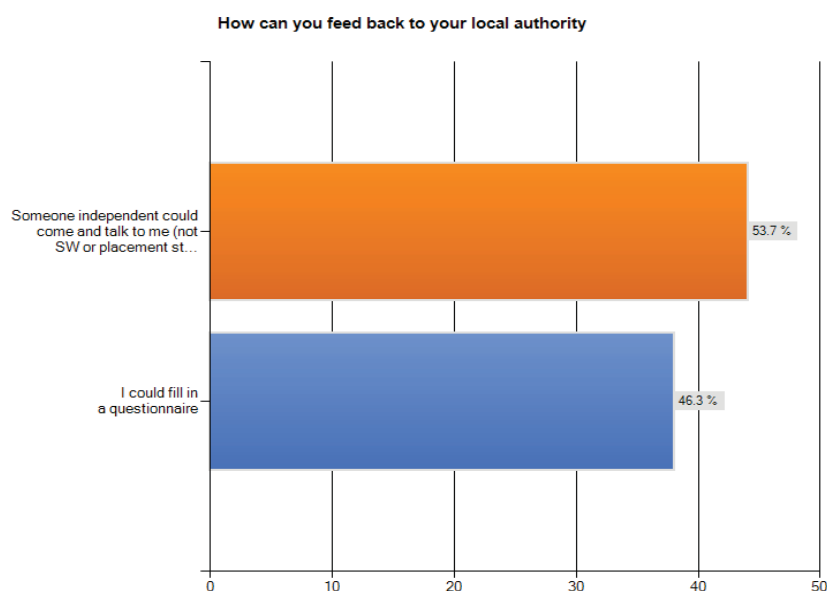
“Never got listened to in previous placement”

“Could not be bothered”

6. Feeding back to the Local Authority

Embedding rights and user involvement in commissioning processes would ensure that young people are involved meaningfully in their care and their aspiration of care being done 'with' them could be realised. As identified in the Strategy for children's residential care developed by Scotland Excel, future policy drivers may require young people to be afforded with greater choice in terms of placement processes should a focus on self-directed support be extended to this group of young people. Young people were asked what would be the best way to feed back to their local authority on how their current placement is meeting their needs. They gave the following response to the 2 options presented in the question.

Chart 21: Young people's preferences on how they can feedback their views to the local authority



Provision for listening to young people's views and experiences of their placement

Stability is a key factor in achieving positive outcomes for young people and is strongly linked to attachment, resilience and positive health and educational outcomes for children and young people looked after away from home: The provision of an independent person to talk to children and young people would allow them to make their needs and wishes known at an early point and voice any concerns regarding their placement or other aspects of their care experience. Over half of the young people we spoke to said they would want to speak to someone independent to feedback to commissioners on their placement.

Just under half of the young people who responded said they would fill in a questionnaire, this indicates that a mix of using a questionnaire and providing an independent person to talk to the young people about their experience would allow the majority of the young

people to give honest feedback. A small number of respondents (5) said they would talk to their social worker, care staff or a member of their family who would feedback to the Local Authority.

7. Conclusion

Children and young people clearly feel that they benefit from their residential care experience, citing a range of areas in which they feel they have improved. The greatest benefits appear to be around safety, improved engagement with education and personal development. Young people describe feeling more confident and motivated, as well as supported and cared for by residential child care staff. In line with SHANARI indicators, the children and young people who participated in the consultation describe feeling safer, healthier and more active. They believe they are achieving more and are nurtured and cared for by residential staff. However, the two weakest areas appear to be around inclusion and respected and responsible. This was evident in young people's responses to the sections on

- Moving to a new placement
- Feeling Listened to & Improvements made – Specifically In relation to Future Planning/Moving On
- Making a complaint

In these areas, young people's levels of inclusion appear variable, and largely dependent on the decision making of the adults who have responsibility for them. For example some young people had no involvement at all in planning to move placement, whereas others had the opportunity to visit the prospective placement before being placed there. The area where improvement was least evident and young people did not feel so well listened to was young people's involvement in planning for their future. The transition from their care placement is an important one, just as important if not more so than their transition into their care placement and requires careful consideration and their active involvement to be successful.

For young people who had made a complaint, some felt their complaint had been responded to; some felt that it hadn't; some didn't know. What appeared to be lacking – in terms of planning to move placement, future planning, and making a complaint – was any level of independent process which allowed young people to participate in a way that was meaningful and relevant for them. Undoubtedly there are processes in place for transition planning and dealing with complaints, however these processes tend to be adult led, with decisions being made in young people's best interests.

These are the types of situation in which young people feel that care is **“done to them”**. They are scenarios in which young people are not included; not seen as responsible and not treated with respect. In such instances young people are at their most powerless and reliant on adults to **“do the right thing”** for them.

Furthermore, as highlighted in our earlier consultation findings presented to the NRCCI 'It is crucial that we never lose sight of the circumstances surrounding young people coming into care and the impact this has on their care experience.' In order for any placement to be successful it must address the reasons that brought the young person into care and seek to involve them meaningfully in this and in shaping their future. It is well documented that young people can overcome past trauma with the right supports and their active involvement in this is crucial to obtaining a successful resolution and more positive outcomes.