



**The  
Your Life,  
Your Care  
Surveys**

## Introduction

This is the third report exploring what we have learnt from the *Your Life, Your Care* surveys that are part of the Bright Spots Programme. It is an analysis of 9,472 responses from children and young people (aged 4-18 years) collected between 2016 and 2021 from 38 Local Authorities in England. The findings build on previous overview reports<sup>1</sup> and the pilot stage in 2015 that involved 611 children and young people. Therefore, by 2021 we had gathered over 10,000 voices from children in care in England.



The Bright Spots Programme began in 2013 with the aim of understanding children and young people's experience of care. The Programme uses three online surveys of well-being to capture the views of looked after children (age 4-7 years and 8-10 years) and young people (11-18 years).<sup>2</sup> The surveys were co-produced with 140 looked after children and young people and the methodology to create and validate the children's surveys has been reported elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

The co-production involved developing a series of questions to capture what was important to children and young people. Those questions became the Programme's indicators of well-being (Figure 1). Conceptually, the *Your Life, Your Care* surveys cover eudaemonic (the experience of meaning and purpose in life e.g., positivity about the future) and hedonic (pleasurable experiences, e.g. happiness) aspects of well-being.

<sup>1</sup> Selwyn, J. & Briheim-Crookall, L. (2017) *Our Lives, Our Care: Looked after children's views on their well-being*. <https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Our-Lives-Our-Care-2016-FULL-REPORT-2.pdf> & Selwyn, J., Magnus, L. & Stuijzand, B (2018) *Our Lives, Our Care: Looked after children's views on their well-being in 2017* <https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Our-Lives-Our-Care-2017-full-report-2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The surveys are often completed in school and therefore the primary/junior school survey for age 8-10yrs also includes some children who were 11yrs old.

<sup>3</sup> Selwyn, J., Wood, M., & Newman, T. (2016). Looked after children and young people in England: Developing measures of subjective well-being. *Child Indicators Research*, 10(2), 363–380. Zhang M and Selwyn J The subjective well-being of children and young people in out of home care: psychometric analyses of the "Your Life, Your Care" survey, *Child Indicators Research*, 13(5), 1549–1572.

Figure 1: *Your Life, Your Care* Bright Spots well-being indicators



The *Your Life, Your Care* surveys contain questions (indicators) that make up four well-being domains: relationships, resilience, rights, and recovery. There are 16 core questions appearing in every survey:

- 18 questions for children aged 4-7
- 34 questions for children aged 8-10
- 49 questions for young people aged 11-18

All the questions are optional to allow children to make their own decisions about which questions they answer and therefore the number of responses differs by question. There is a further survey, *Your Life Beyond Care*, that measures the subjective well-being of care leavers.<sup>4</sup> Further detail on the surveys, how they are distributed, and the method of analysis can be found in the Appendix.

<sup>4</sup> Briheim-Crookall, L. Michelmore, O. Baker, C. Oni, O. Taylor, S. & Selwyn, J. (2020) *What Makes Life Good, Care leavers' views on their well-being* <https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/1883-CV-What-Makes-Life-Good-Report-final.pdf>

The local authorities (LAs) that commission the *Your Life, Your Care* surveys are provided with a detailed report exploring their children and young people's responses. The responses are compared to the average response of looked after young people in other LAs, those of peers in the general population, and the change in responses over time for LAs who repeat the surveys. Some of the survey questions mirror questions asked of children and young people in the general population. In this report, where possible, comparisons are made with data published on peers in the general population.

### The main general population data sources used for comparison are:

**UK Longitudinal Household Survey** (known as 'Understanding Society') is a longitudinal study covering 40,000 households in the UK. A representative, random sample of households is interviewed each year with questions completed by adults and children.<sup>5</sup> The youth questionnaire contains questions on relationships with parents, subjective well-being, and other aspects of children's lives. In 2017-18, 2,800 children aged 10-15yrs completed the Youth Questionnaire. The data from 2018 was downloaded from the UK Data Archive and frequencies were calculated on selected questions.

**The Children's Society Household Surveys** Since 2010, The Children's Society has conducted household surveys with parents and children aged from 8 to 17 years. The surveys ask about children's well-being, their families, and other issues. Findings are reported annually in The Good Childhood Report and also by the Office of National Statistics in their publication of national measures of children's well-being: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/childrenswellbeingmeasures>. Data available in 2020 are used in this report.

**Children's Worlds, International Survey of Children's Well-being** (<https://iscweb.org/>). This project began in 2009 and has collected data from children on their well-being. Data has been collected from over 128,000 children from 35 countries. The England National Report<sup>6</sup> used data from 2019-2020 from 712 children (9-11yrs).

**The Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children** is an international study that has been running since 1997. Findings from the 2018 England report where 3,398 young people aged 11, 13 and 15 years old gave responses to questions on liking school have been used as a comparison [Reports – HBSC England](#).

**The Millennium Cohort study** (also known as Child of the New Century) is following the lives of around 19,000 young people born in the UK in 2000-2002 (<https://cls.ucl.ac.uk/cls-studies/millennium-cohort-study/>). Data were downloaded from the UK data archive on selected responses at age 7yrs and 11yrs.

We begin this report by considering the characteristics of the children and young people who completed the surveys.

<sup>5</sup> University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, NatCen Social Research, Kantar Public. (2020). *Understanding Society: Waves 9, 2017-18 UK Data Service*. SN: 6614, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-14>

<sup>6</sup> Rees G and Bradshaw J (2020) *Children's Worlds National Report England* <https://iscweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/England-National-Report-Wave-3.pdf>

## Who responded

### Number of responses

Surveys were completed between September 2016 and March 2021 by 3,905 children (age 4-10 years) and 5,567 young people (aged 11-18yrs) looked after by 38 English local authorities (Table 1).

The average survey return rate was 34%, with the return rates from individual local authorities varying between 18% and 84%. Most surveys (about 90%) were completed by children and young people before the first national Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020.



Table 1: The number of responses by year of survey completion

Age	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	Total number	Total proportion
4-7yrs	464	397	272	252	97	1,482	16%
8-10yrs	730	655	441	404	193	2,423	25%
11-18yrs	1,305	1,630	941	1,065	626	5,567	59%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,499</b>	<b>2,682</b>	<b>1,654</b>	<b>1,721</b>	<b>916</b>	<b>9,472</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Sex and age of children and young people

Boys were slightly under-represented in the survey responses: 51% in our sample compared with 56% in the national care population.<sup>7</sup>

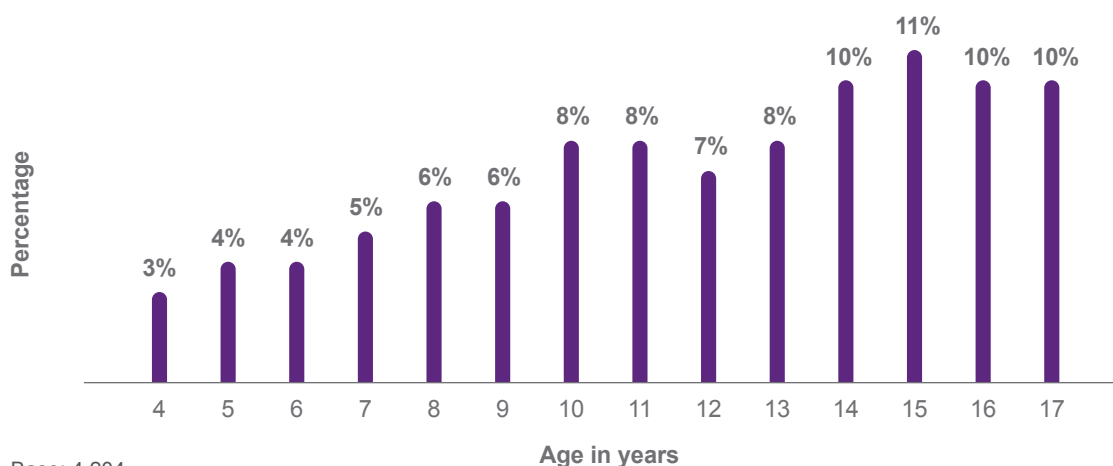
**Table 2: Children and young people’s sex by age group**

Age	Boys	Girls	Prefer not to say	Missing response	Total
4-7yrs	762 (51%)	711 (48%)	- 0%	9 (1%)	1,482 (100%)
8-10yrs	1,243 (51%)	1,128 (47%)	42 (2%)	10 (0%)	2,423 (100%)
11-18yrs	2,838 (51%)	2,576 (46%)	85 (2%)	68 (1%)	5,567 (100%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,843 (51%)</b>	<b>4,415 (47%)</b>	<b>127 (1%)</b>	<b>87 (1%)</b>	<b>9,472 (100%)</b>

The majority (59%) of responses came from young people of secondary school age, a quarter (25%) were aged 8-10 years, and the youngest group (4-7yrs) made up about 16% of the total sample (Table 1 and Table 2).

Since 2018, the surveys have collected the child or young person’s age and the age distribution is shown in Figure 2 below. Data on ages were available for 44% of the sample.

**Figure 2: The distribution of responses by age**



<sup>7</sup> Department for Education (2021) *Children looked after in England including adoption*  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2020-to-2021>

## Ethnicity of children and young people

It is difficult to know whether children and young people of different ethnicities were appropriately represented in our samples (Table 3). National data are not published connecting the ethnicity and age of children in care. Published data shows that overall, 74% of the care population were White<sup>8</sup> compared with 68% in our total sample. However, in our sample, the percentage of children who identified as White decreased as the child's age increased: 81% of children aged 4-7yrs were White decreasing to 63% in the 11-18yrs age group. We would expect the proportion of White young people to be smaller in the older age range, as previous research<sup>9</sup> has found that Black children tend to enter care later than White children and 6% of the total care population are unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. The 'Other' ethnic group might be under-represented in the survey responses: 2% in our survey compared with 4% in the whole care population. However, we also know that the young people in the survey sometimes described their ethnicity differently than the official ethnicity categories.<sup>10</sup> For example, young people who would in the DfE statistics be categorised as 'Other' sometimes ticked the 'Asian' category in this survey.

**Table 3: Children and young people's ethnicity by age group**

Ethnicity	4-7 years		8-10 years		11-18 years		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
White	1,211	81%	1,704	72%	3,487	63%	6,402	68%
Mixed	112	8%	372	15%	805	15%	1,289	14%
Black	88	6%	186	7%	624	11%	898	9%
Asian	27	2%	62	3%	402	7%	491	5%
Other	6	-	9	-	141	2%	156	2%
Missing data	38	3%	90	3%	108	2%	236	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,482</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2,423</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>5,567</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>9,472</b>	<b>100%</b>

At the time of the survey, young people (11-18yrs) of Asian and Other ethnicities were on average older (mode<sup>11</sup> age 17yrs) compared with Black (15yrs), White (14yrs) or Mixed ethnicity (13yrs) young people.

<sup>8</sup> Department for Education (2021) Children looked after in England including adoption. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2019-to-2020>

<sup>9</sup> Bywaters, P., Kwhali, J., Brady G., Sparks, T. & Bos, E. (2017) Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Ethnic Inequalities in Child Protection and Out-of-Home Care Intervention Rates, *The British Journal of Social Work*, 47, 7, 1884–1902.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis, S. et al., 2021 *Staying Connected: children and young people's views of their contact arrangements*. Rees Centre/Coram Voice <https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/staying-connected/>

<sup>11</sup> The mode is the most frequently occurring age

## Placement types and length of time in care

Children and young people also supplied information on where they were living (Table 4).

**Table 4: Children and young people’s placements by age group**

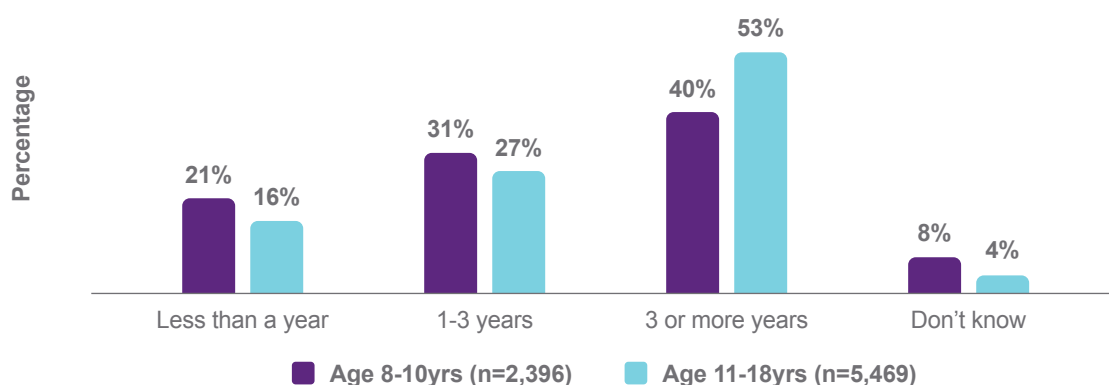
Placement	4-7 years		8-10 years		11-18 years		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Foster care	1,073	72%	1,892	78%	3,885	70%	6,850	72%
Family or friends	314	21%	386	16%	516	9%	1,216	13%
With parents *	41	3%	49	2%	105	2%	195	2%
Residential care	14	1%	63	3%	667	12%	744	8%
Somewhere else	-	-	10	-	308	6%	318	4%
Missing data	40	3%	23	1%	86	1%	149	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,482</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2,423</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>5,567</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>9,472</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*From 2018, a new response option ‘With parents’ was added to the survey. Before 2018, those living with parents were included in the category of ‘living with family or friends.’

The distribution of placement types was similar to the national DfE statistics, which reported that 72% of all looked after children were in foster care and 13% of young people in a residential placement on March 31st 2020.<sup>12</sup> Young people who responded “somewhere else” were mainly aged between 16-18 years and wrote that they were in temporary or supported accommodation, prison or hospital.

Children (8-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) were asked how long they had been in care. Just over half (53%) of young people (11-18 years) had been in care for three or more years as had 40% of those aged 8-10 years.

**Figure 3: Length of time in care**

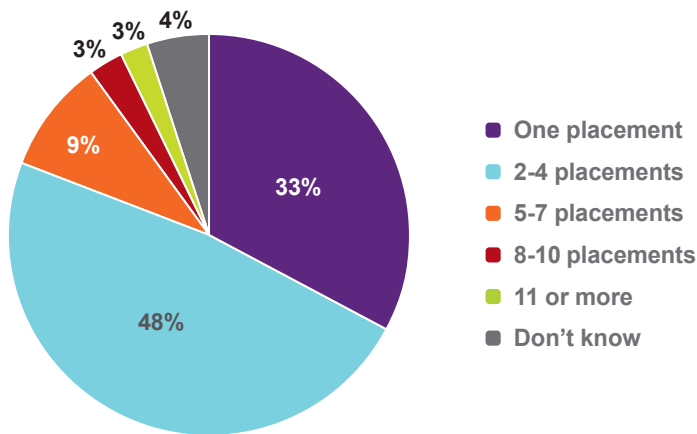


Only those aged 11-18yrs were asked how many placements they had experienced whilst in care. A third of young people had experienced a single placement, 48% between 2 and 4 placements, and 15% had had five or more (Figure 4).

<sup>12</sup> Department for Education (2021) *Children looked after in England including adoption*.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2019-to-2020>



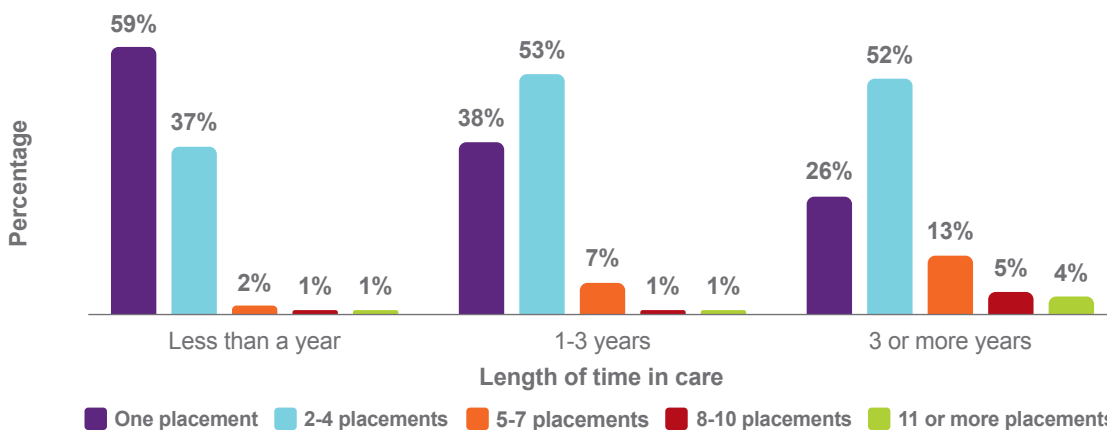
Figure 4: Number of placements since entering care for young people



Base 5,477 11-18yrs

As expected, the length of time in care was correlated with the number of placements (Figure 5).

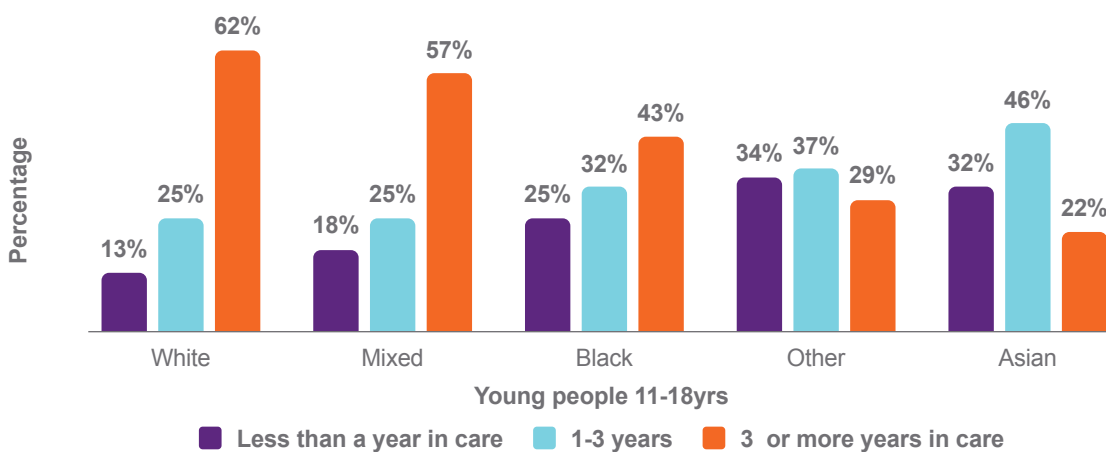
Figure 5: Length of time in care and number of placements



Base 5,017 11-18yrs

The young person's ethnicity was also associated with the length of time in care and the number of placements. On average White and Mixed ethnicity young people had been in care for longer compared with young people of Asian, Black, or 'Other' ethnicities (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Young people's ethnicity and their length of time in care



Base 5,162 11-18yrs

We would expect that because White and Mixed ethnicity young people had, on average, been looked after for longer they might have had more placements and Asian young people fewer and that was the case (Table 5). Asian young people had fewer changes of placement whilst young people of Mixed and White ethnicity had the most.

**Table 5: Number of placements by the young person's ethnicity**

Number of placements	White %	Asian %	Other %	Black %	Mixed %
1-4	84%	96%	88%	85%	82%
5 or more	16%	4%	12%	15%	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base 5,183 age 11-18yrs

The next chapter reviews how children and young people recorded their feelings about their relationships.

## Summary - who responded

- ▶ Surveys were completed by 9,472 children (4-10yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) from 38 English local authorities between 2016 and 2021. About half (51%) were boys, 48% were girls and 2% preferred not to say or skipped the question. Boys were slightly underrepresented compared with national statistics.
- ▶ 72% were in foster care, 15% living in kinship care (including those living with parents), 8% living in residential care and 4% were living somewhere else, usually in supported or temporary accommodation; similar proportions as reported in the national DfE statistics.
- ▶ Nearly a third (32%) were of Black, Asian, Mixed or Other ethnicities. At the time of the survey, young people of Asian and Other ethnicities were on average older (mode 17yrs) compared with the Black (15yrs), White (14yrs) or Mixed (13yrs) ethnicity young people.
- ▶ Just over half (53%) of young people (11-18yrs) had been in care for three or more years as had 40% of those aged 8-10yrs. On average, White and Mixed ethnicity young people had been in care for longer compared with young people of Asian, Black, or 'Other' ethnicities.
- ▶ More years in care were associated with more placements. A third of young people (11-18yrs) had a single placement, 48% had between 2 and 4 placements, and 15% had experienced five or more placements. A larger percentage of White and Mixed ethnicity young people had experienced five or more placements.