Your Life, Your Care:
The views of children in care on their wellbeing

The Bright Spots programme Scottish pilot

Summary

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CELCIS Centre for excellence for Children's Care and Protection

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Introduction

The Bright Spots programme

Developed with and for children and young people with experience of care, the Bright Spots Programme provides local authorities with the opportunity to methodically collect the voices of their children in care from as young as age four to hear about how they feel and what is important to them, so that local agencies can listen to and act on what children have to say about their lives.

Voice is one of five foundations on which The Promise of the Independent Care Review in Scotland (2020) was built. This pivotal report asserts that children must be listened to and meaningfully involved in decision-making about their care, and that the data collected must be improved so that the voices of children and young people who experience the 'care system' are properly represented and responded to.

Coram Voice has supported local authorities to successfully deliver the Bright Spots Programme in England and Wales since 2015, and CELCIS has partnered with Coram Voice to bring the Bright Spots Programme to Scotland. Three Scottish local authorities participated in the initial pilot in 2022, and a further three participated in the second pilot phase in 2024.

This report brings together data from all six local authorities participating in 2022 and 2024 to provide key observations and recommendations. More detailed findings can be found in the Your Life, Your Care: The views of children in care on their wellbeing report. Participating local authorities also took part in a companion Bright Spots survey to explore the wellbeing of the young people and adults in their area who had left care. The findings from this survey have been brought together in the Your Life Beyond Care: The views of care leavers on their wellbeing full and summary reports.

The wellbeing of children in Scotland is central to the Scottish Government's long-standing Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach to enable every child and young person to reach their full potential. The wellbeing needs of children in care requires specific consideration. In Scotland, information is collected at a national level which tells us how many children are in care, and what happens to children as they move through the care system. This is valuable information, but the national data tells us very little about the experiences of children in care, or how they feel about their lives. The Bright Spots programme was created to address a similar deficit in the data in England in 2013. Many children involved in Bright Spots took the opportunity to tell us more of their stories in their own powerful words. Many children wrote about positive life-changing experiences, but a substantial minority were in a much less positive place emotionally.

The Bright Spots Your Life, Your Care survey

The Bright Spots Your Life, Your Care survey is strongly evidence-based, with the initial design process led by the University of Bristol and Coram Voice involving reviews of previous research, consultation with practitioners and policy makers, and testing and piloting. The survey questions were co-produced with 140 children and young people with experience of care, focusing primarily on their 'subjective wellbeing'. Coram Voice explain that subjective wellbeing refers to children's own evaluations of how they feel about their lives. There are questions in the surveys about 'affect' (e.g. how happy a child feels now), cognitive judgements (e.g. evaluations of relationships) and the inner world (e.g. life having meaning).

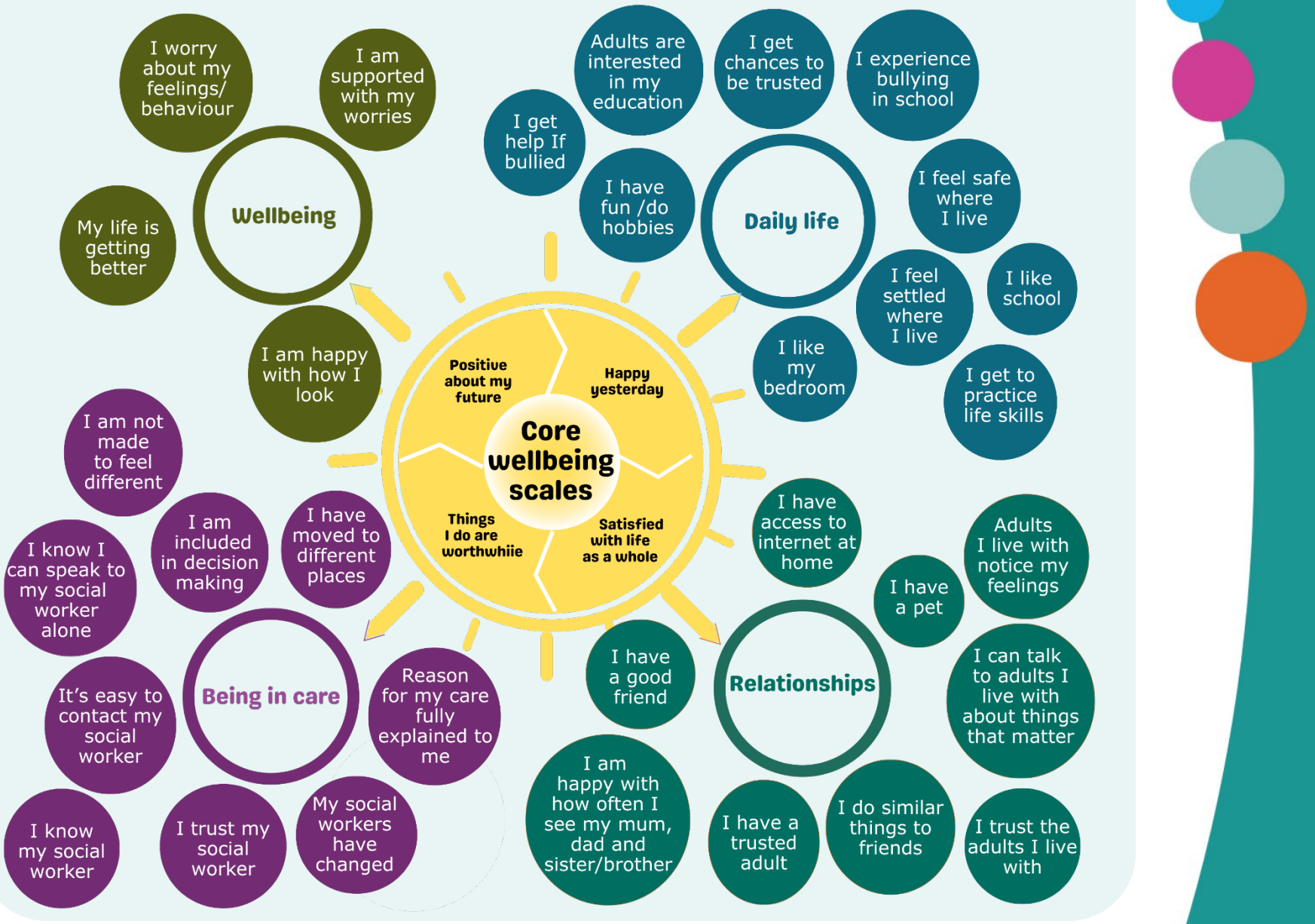
Three versions of the online survey address the wellbeing of different age groups of children. The youngest children (4-7yrs) are asked 16 questions appropriate to their age and stage of development; children aged 8-11yrs (which includes 11-year-olds of

primary school age) are asked an expanded set of 37 questions, and older children aged 11 to 17yrs (including 11-year-olds of secondary school age) are asked the full set of 51 questions.



The breadth of coverage allows local authorities to hear from a wide range of children and to reach beyond children and young people already involved in other participation activities the local authorities might be undertaking. By listening to, and most importantly acting on what children have said, the programme has led to innovative changes in England, Wales and now Scotland too, and many examples of positive practice can be found in the Bright Spots Resource Library: https://coramvoice.org.uk/resource-library/brightspots/.

Bright Spots wellbeing indicators



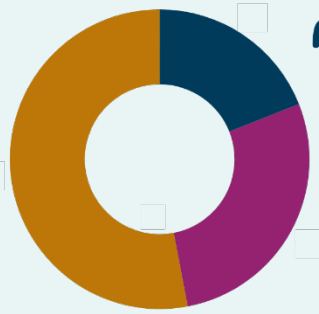
Who responded to the surveys in Scotland?

Wellbeing: How children feel about their lives

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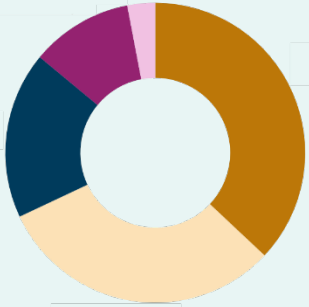
Children responded to the survey - 59% response rate

Age of children taking part



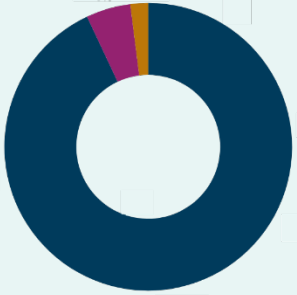
- 4-7 years (19%)
- 8-11 years (28%)
- 11-17 years (53%)

Where the children were living



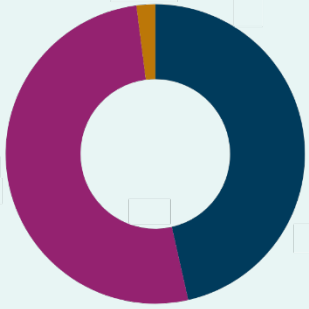
- Foster carers (37%)
- Winder family or friends (31%)
- Parents (18%)
- Residential child care (11%)
- Somewhere else (3%)

Ethnicity of children



- White (93%)
- Minority ethnic group (5%)
- Don't want to say / missing (2%)

Gender of children



- Girls (46%)
- Boys (51%)
- Don't want to say / missing (2%)

Lives were getting better

All experiences are important and while we often learn about negative experiences of being in care, as the name suggests, a defining feature of the **Bright Spots** programme is the focus to understand what is going well in the lives of children who are in care.



Four out of five children (8-17 years) said their lives are getting better

It is encouraging that most children in care of all ages said they had a good friend and an adult they could trust, and most felt safe and settled at home and liked their bedroom. Although the numbers of children who do not feel this way are comparatively small, the challenge is to ensure that every child in care has support in place that gives them the opportunity to flourish and feel good about their lives. Experiences are more positive in some local authority areas, which suggests that improvement is possible when the right support is in place.

4 - 17 year olds

- 93% I have a good friend
- 93% I have an adult I can trust
- 92% I like my bedroom
- 85% I always feel safe at home
- 74% I always feel settled at home

What children had to say

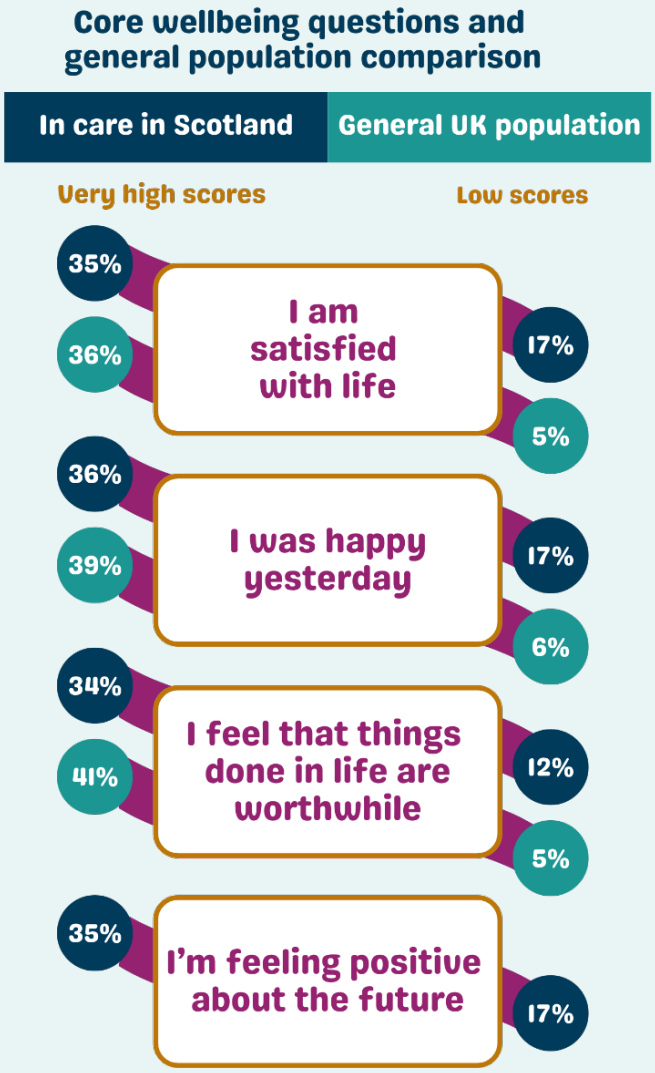
> I am happy being in a good home where I am looked after well. (8-11yrs)

> Where I live is a good place to live and I am happy. (11-17yrs)

> It's the best. The way I treat them and the way they treat us. We are family. She does everything for me and takes me places! (4-7yrs)

Understanding wellbeing

Older children (11-15yrs)



The Bright Spots survey for older children (11-17yrs) includes four core wellbeing questions which asked children to rate how they felt on a scale from zero to ten, and three of these allow direct comparison to be made to their peers in the general UK population using data published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2020). A fourth core wellbeing question asked how positive older children felt about the future.

Scores of nine or ten are considered to be very high, and scores of four or below are considered to be low. Selecting children aged 11 to 15 allows a closer comparison to ONS data which includes children aged 10 to 15. It is encouraging that the proportions of children giving very high scores were not far short of those for children general UK population, but the much higher proportions of children in care in Scotland giving low scores really stands out. The proportions giving low scores for satisfaction with life and happiness yesterday were both around three times higher than the general population, and the proportion giving low scores for feeling life is worthwhile was over double that of the general population.

What children had to say

"I know being with my mum or dad wouldn't work and my life had got better since being in care. (11-17yrs)

"I don't want to go down a bad path when I am older. I want to get a job and get a car. (11-17yrs)



Seven out of ten younger children (4-11 year olds) were happy yesterday

Younger children (4 – 11 year olds)

Many of the younger children in care (4-11yrs) appeared to be in a position to be able to thrive. A large majority had a really good friend, got the opportunity to have fun at weekends, liked school, felt safe, settled and comfortable at home, and felt supported by the adults they lived with.

4-11 year olds

- 95% I have a really good friend
- 94% I have fun at weekends
- 93% I like my bedroom
- 89% Adults notice my feelings
- 88% I trust the adults I live with
- 87% I always feel safe at home
- 83% I like school
- 81% I always feel settled at home

> I want to stay there forever and ever and all the days. (4-7yrs)

> It's really nice and steady living here. (8-11yrs)

> I love living here, they always do stuff for me. (8-11yrs)

Overall wellbeing

Older children (11 – 17 years)

The number of children and young people (11-17yrs) with very high overall wellbeing was over 2.5 times greater than the number with low overall wellbeing.

The four wellbeing scales - life satisfaction, happiness yesterday, things done in life are worthwhile, positivity about the future - are combined to identify children and young people who generally appeared to be thriving, as well as those who appeared to be doing much less well. Children and young people who gave scores of 9 or 10 on two or more of the four scales were considered to have very high overall wellbeing. Children and young people who gave low scores (0-4) on two or more of the scales were considered to have low overall wellbeing.



Having determined the children with low overall wellbeing and with very high overall wellbeing, statistical tests were then used to determine other elements of their experience which have the strongest influence on both low and very high overall wellbeing. Although the proportion of children with low overall wellbeing was comparatively small, identifying aspects of life most strongly associated with low wellbeing gives an indication of what areas to focus on for supporting children in order to improve their overall wellbeing.

What children had to say

> I would like to be out of care completely and back with my family. I don't know why I am in care - I know they didn't do anything wrong. (11-17yrs)

> …pretty much everything is perfect in my life. I would just like to see my family in [other country] more often. (11-17yrs)

> I wish there was a better system. And more life skills stuff that suits the person. Not to be restrained. There should be better ways of supporting young people. (11-17yrs)

Younger children

Younger children (4-11yrs) were not asked these core wellbeing questions, so to understand where there might be low overall wellbeing, the survey responses were looked at to identify where younger children who were unhappy the previous day also gave responses to more than one other question which together suggested they were not doing well. Just 7% gave answers suggesting that they may have been experiencing low overall wellbeing.

Aspects of life most strongly associated with overall wellbeing: all age groups

Elements of the experiences of children in care that were strongly associated with both very high wellbeing and low wellbeing were identified and can be seen in the Aspects of Life Associated with Wellbeing diagram (page 12).

Aspects of experience most strongly associated with wellbeing for children of all ages included trusting the adults they lived with and adults noticing how they were feeling, as well as feeling safe and settled at home and feeling listened to when decisions were made about their lives. A child who trusted the adults they lived with was much more likely to have very high overall wellbeing, and a child who did not trust the adults they lived with was much more likely to have low overall wellbeing. Liking or disliking school and if they were or were not afraid of bullying were also strongly associated with wellbeing for younger children (4-11yrs).

Other factors associated with overall wellbeing for older children (11-17yrs) were happiness with their appearance, worrying about their feelings and behaviour, talking to

What children had to say

"My carers are supportive. I get help with things and they are caring, (11-17yrs)

"The area where I live sucks. I don't like it. (11-17yrs)

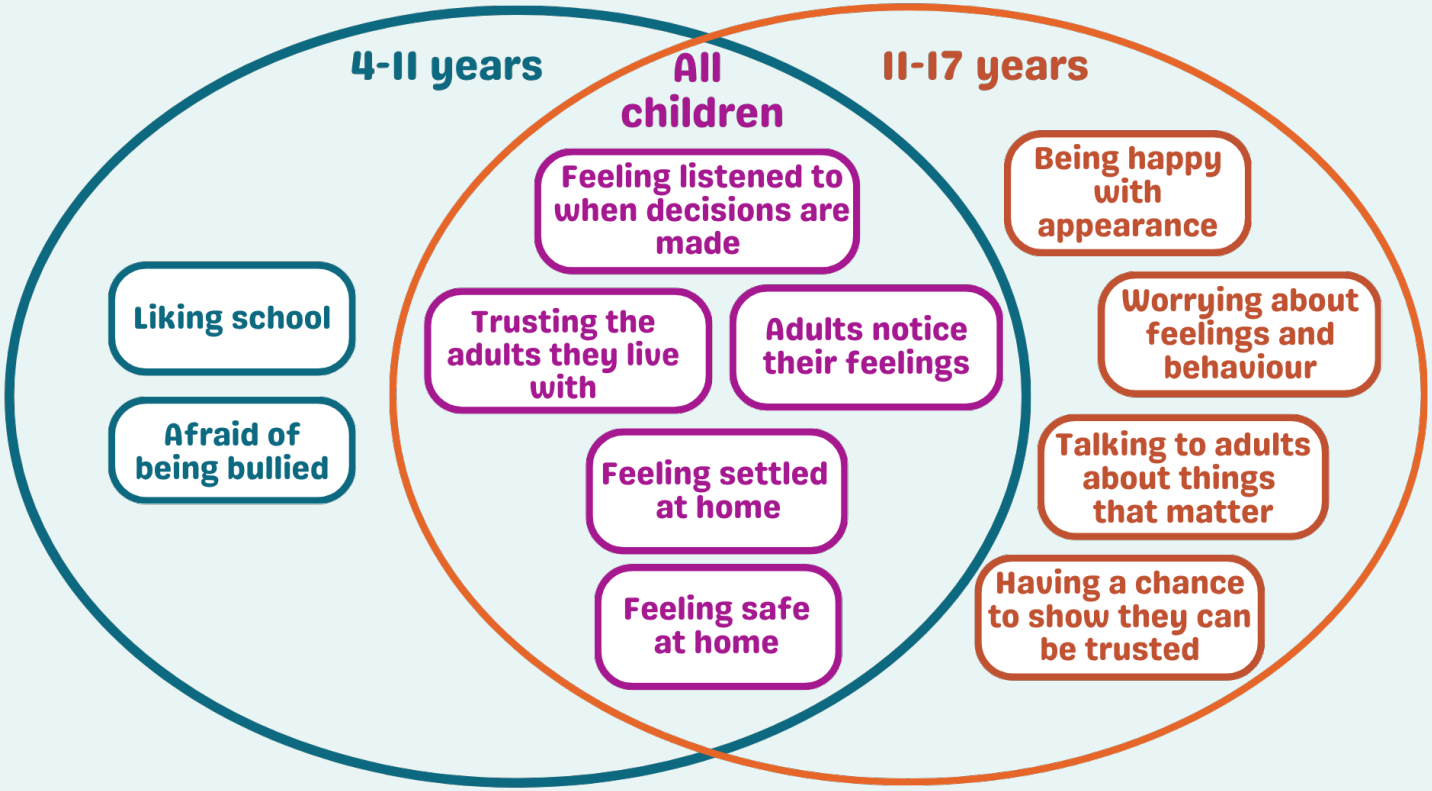
"I used to be with another foster carer, but I did not like it there. I was sad a lot, but I really love where I am now. (4-7yrs)

"When I first came in I was very nervous and didn't speak. But it got better and I started talking and it's good now. (8-11yrs)

adults about things that mattered, and getting the chance to show they could be trusted.

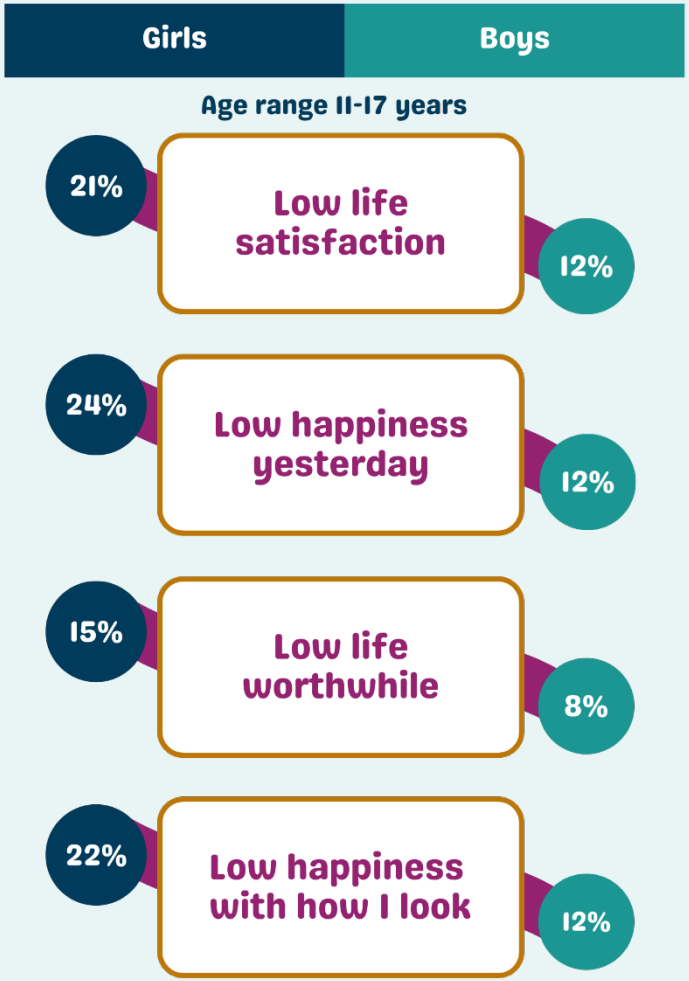
The importance of positive supportive relationships to overall wellbeing comes through very clearly, as does feeling safe and settled at home. Although just 2% of older children (11-17yrs) hardly ever or never felt safe at home, all of them had low overall wellbeing.

Aspects of Life Associated with Wellbeing

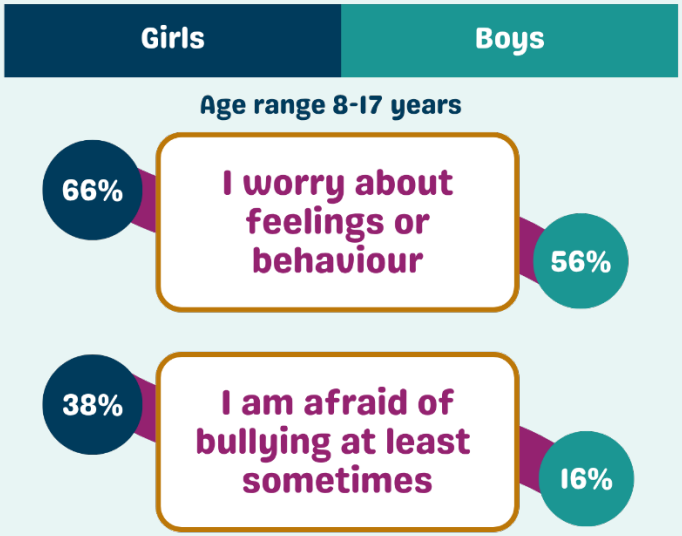


Variation in experiences of wellbeing

Gender differences



Girls consistently give lower scores on wellbeing measures than boys (Children's Society, 2024) and, although it was no surprise that this was the case for the children answering the Bright Spots surveys in Scotland too, it was evident that this difference was amplified for children in care in Scotland. Around twice as many girls gave low scores for satisfaction with their lives, how happy they felt the previous day and how worthwhile things in their lives were compared to boys.



What children had to say

"I don't want my auntie to tell me to do something and then I feel bad about it. She asked me to change my earrings, but I didn't want to. (11-17yrs)

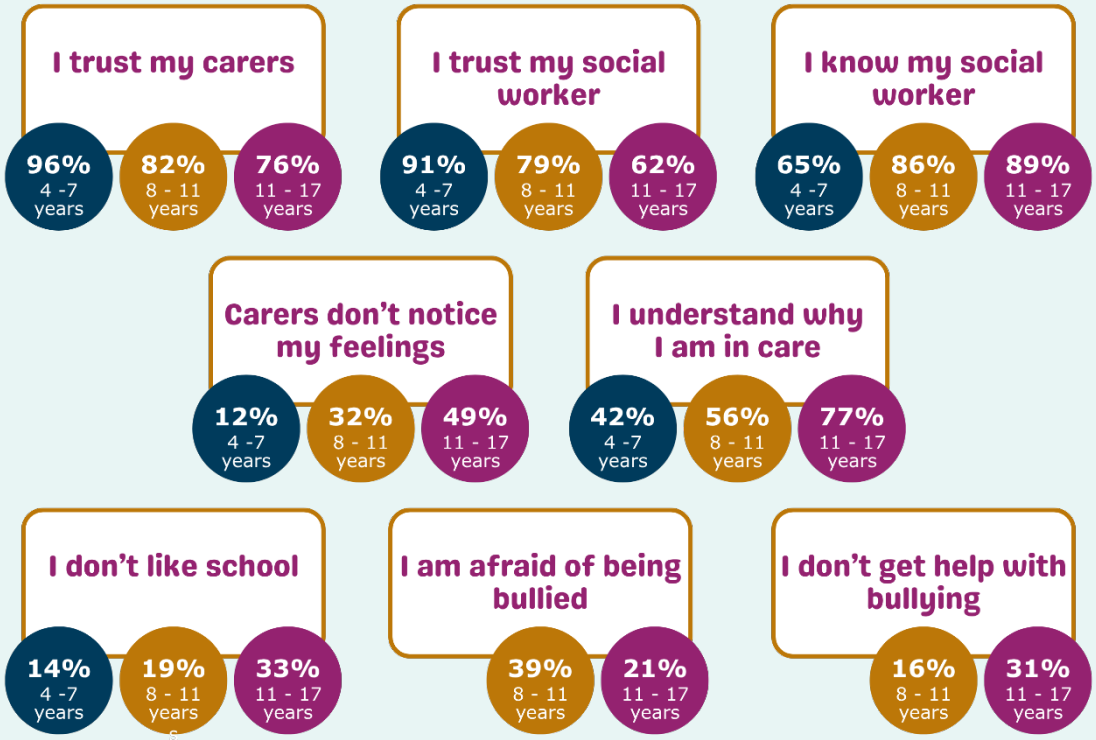
"They [residential care staff] body shame me. They tell me to stop eating and also to eat more and I am really upset about that. They say I am lazy because I am in my room. (11-17yrs)

Age group differences

As children grow and develop, they naturally become more independent and test boundaries, and their needs and perceptions change. We found that as children got older, they were less likely to trust their carers and to think that their carers noticed how they were feeling.

Younger children were less likely to know who their social worker was but were more likely to trust their social worker when they did know them. Having a full understanding of why they were in care also increased with age.

Liking school decreased with age, and older children were less likely to fear bullying at school, though they were less likely to get help when they were afraid of bullying.



What children had to say

"I am so happy and I love the grown ups that look after me. (11-17yrs)"

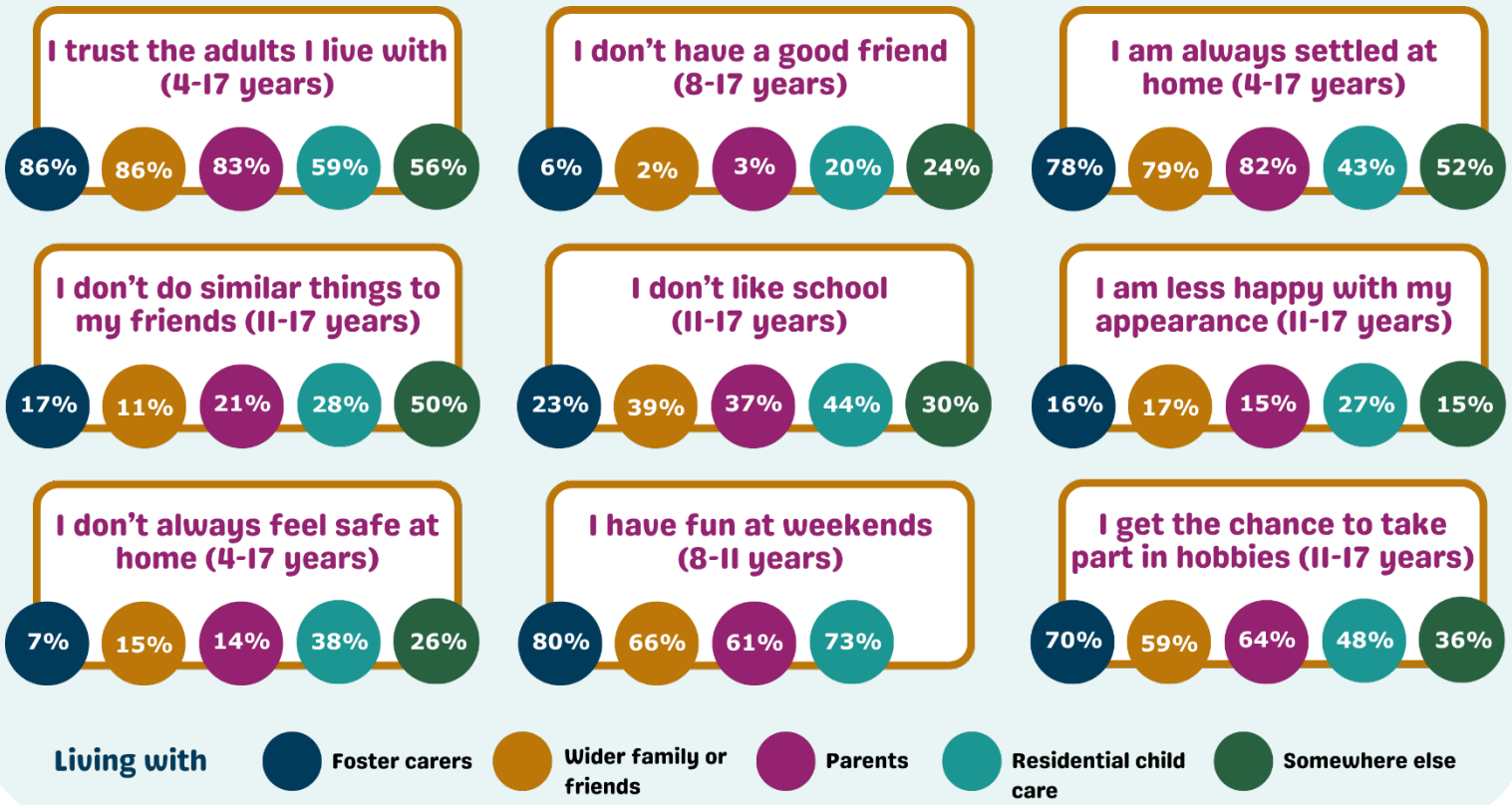
"I am glad I can stay at home with my mum and brother. I love them both and I know they love me :) (11-17yrs)"

"I do not believe I meet Secure criteria and professionals need to understand I have to be allowed to take my own risks. (11-17yrs)"

"I have constantly asked for things and nothing has happened, for years my foster carers have fought to get me counselling and got nowhere. (11-17yrs)"

Where children were living

Where children were living could affect their wellbeing. Children being cared for by foster carers were more likely to always feel safe at home and to take part in hobbies and have fun at the weekend. A higher proportion of children living in residential child care felt they did not have a good friend, were less happy with how they looked, did not like school, and did not always feel safe and settled where they lived. They were also less likely to trust the adults they lived with. A small proportion of older children were living somewhere else (3%), which includes living in supported accommodation, already living independently, and living in secure care.

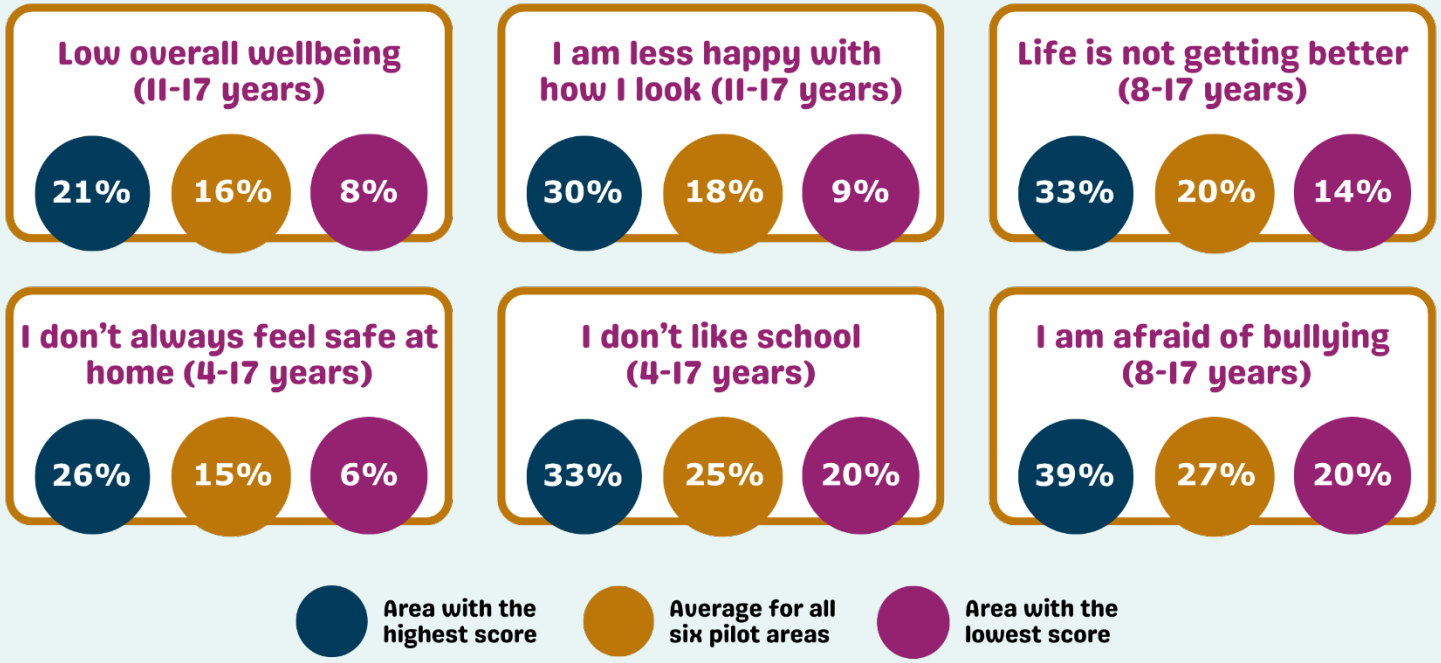


> Everything I do is recorded and I feel like I live under a microscope. (11-17yrs)

> I feel as if the staff have your best interest at heart but sometimes they get caught up with the rules and forget about real life. (11-17yrs)

Variation across local authority areas

Which local authority area children lived in also made a difference. Our headline findings, which combine all responses across Scotland, can mask substantial variation across the local authority areas. Experiences of care will vary within and between local authority areas, but children in some local authority areas appear to be faring much better in some important aspects of wellbeing than those in other areas. Different areas face different circumstances and challenges, but the extent of variation can be instructive because it provides evidence that particular experiences are not necessarily universal or inevitable. The findings lead us to question to what extent local practices and supports contribute to the differences we identified.



What children had to say

"Not to go to school every day." (4-7yrs)

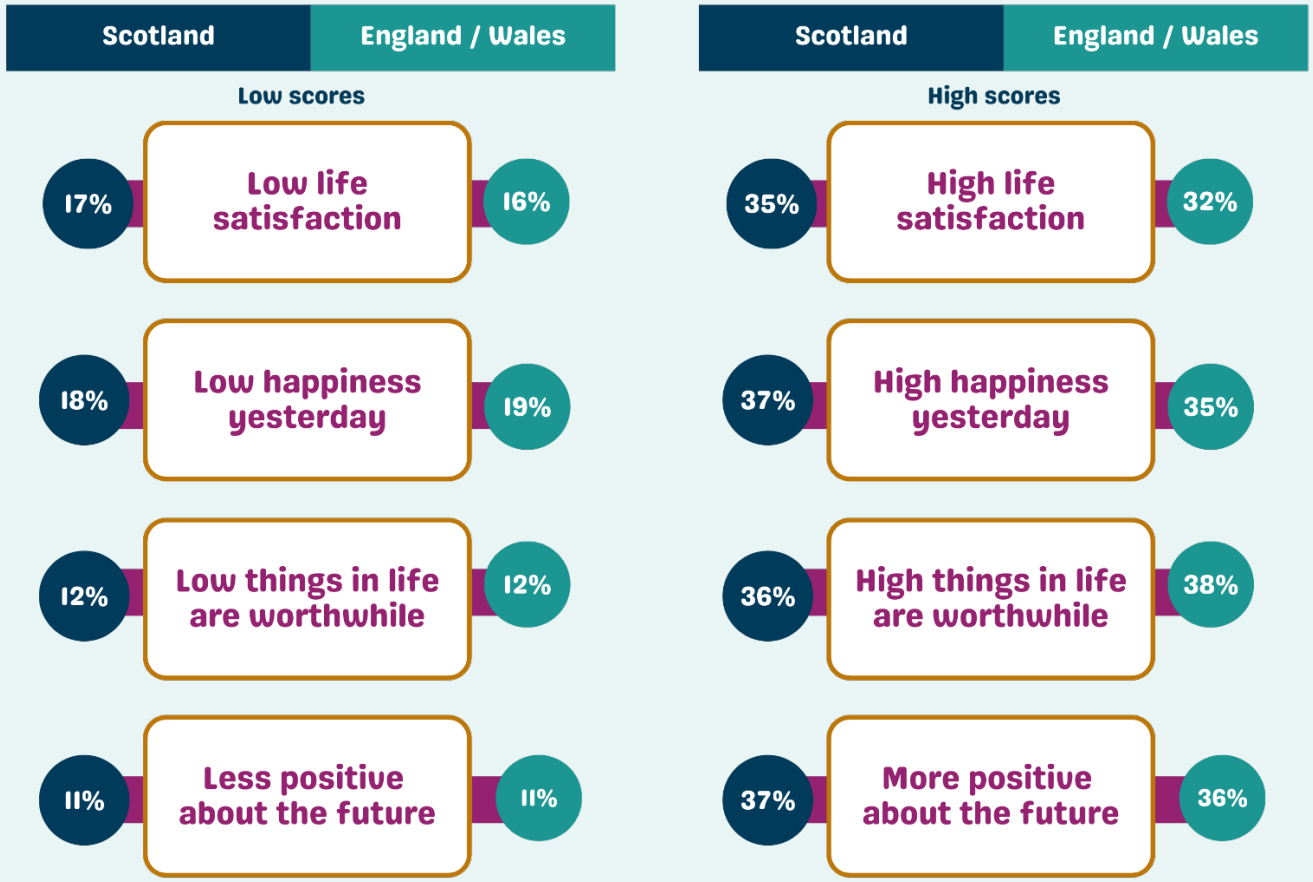
"The house is perfectly fine, the only reason I don't feel safe is my brain." (11-17yrs)

"I am really happy with my new foster carer, the placement is much better than the old one." (11-17yrs)

"Someone taking care of me. I like two families looking after me. I like being Spiderman and Batman." (4-7yrs)

Bright Spots comparator group similarities

Responses from older Scottish children (11-17yrs) to the core wellbeing questions were remarkably consistent with those from older children participating in Bright Spots in England and Wales. Very similar percentages gave very high and low scores for each question.



What children had to say

"People being kind to me. My friends help me when I am almost bullied. (8-11yrs)

"I'd like to be asked more about how I am feeling either by social workers or family. (11-17yrs)

"I would like to know some more about my family. I want to know more about why I live in foster care. (8-11yrs)

Bright Spots comparator group differences

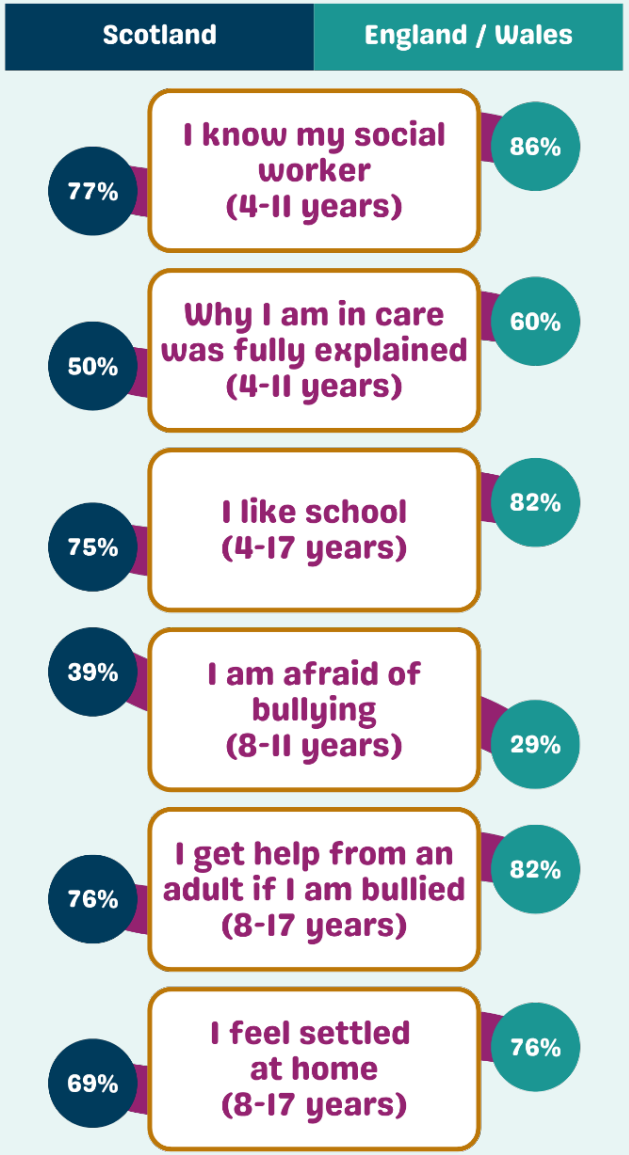
There were however some notable and statistically significant differences between Scotland and England and Wales, such as younger children in Scotland being less likely to know their social worker and to have had it fully explained to them why they were in care.

The higher proportion of younger children (4-11yrs) in care who were still living with their parents in Scotland (23%) may, in part, help explain this, as some of these children were not aware that they were formally in care or that they had a social worker.

Fewer children aged 8-11yrs in Scotland liked school than their counterparts in England and Wales and were more afraid of bullying. Children in Scotland who were afraid of bullying were also less likely to be getting help from an adult.

The surveys in England and Wales were carried out prior to the COVID-19 pandemic whereas the Scottish surveys were carried out towards the end of or after the pandemic, which may have contributed to the differences observed.

Children in Scotland were also less likely to feel settled at home.



> In school they make me feel different and get into trouble more. (11-17yrs)

> I'm not in care I'm on a CSO. (11-17yrs)

> I have had a lot of different social workers over the last few years. (11-17yrs)

Challenges facing children in care

Feeling listened to when decisions are made about life

Being informed and involved in decision making are rights children in Scotland have under Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Half of children (8-17yrs) responding to the surveys said they felt involved in decisions made about their lives all or most of the time, with one in eight feeling that they were hardly ever or never listened to. Some children felt that views they had expressed were either ignored or misrepresented.



One in eight of children (8-17yrs) hardly ever or never feeling listened to



Half of children (8-17yrs) felt involved in decisions made about their lives all or most of the time

Stigma

Children involved in the development of the Your Life Your Care survey felt that inclusion of a question on stigma was important because adults can do things that make children in care feel singled out and embarassed.
Things that caused embarrassment included actions that brought visibility and attention to children's care status which made them feel different to their peers. These included seeing workers at school, workers wearing lanyards in public, and being seen out and about with different adults.



One in seven of children (11-17yrs) in care away from their parents felt that adults did things that made them feel embarrassed about being in care

What children had to say

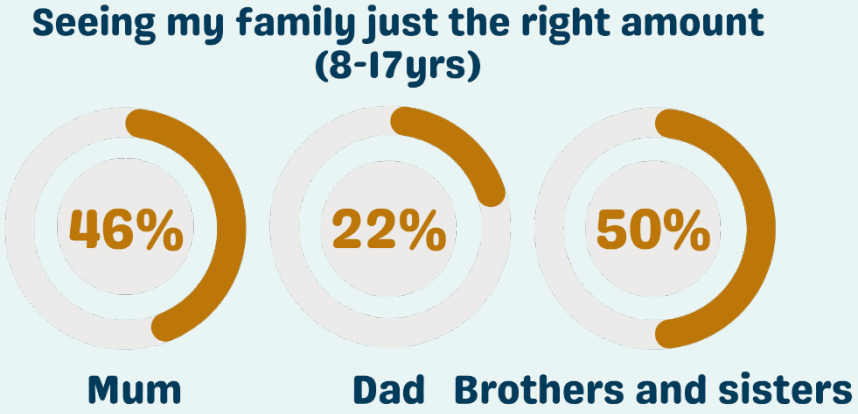
"Having workers work with me can be embarassing when I'm at school as it can be too obvious and makes me different from other kids. (11-17yrs)

"I feel people listen to my decisions, however, I feel they take time to happen. (11-17yrs)

"Grandma keeps me safe by looking after me, by helping me and listening to me when I am telling her something. She always makes sure that I have breakfast and snack for school. (8-11yrs)

Seeing family

Half of the children (8-17yrs) felt that they saw their brothers and sisters just the right amount, and almost half felt that they saw their mum just the right amount. Just 22% felt that they saw their dad the right amount, and just over 60% of children did not see their dad.



However, the questions in the surveys about seeing family the right amount do not capture the complexity of family relationships that came through strongly in the comments made by children (8-17yrs), particularly in relation to seeing their siblings. For instance, some children only see some of their brothers and sisters and not all of them, sometimes they would like to see family members individually and not all at the same time, and sometimes they would like to see some family members less, and others more.

The surveys ask only about seeing parents and siblings, and do not explore how children keep in touch with other family members who they do not live with and do not see in person.

The youngest children (4-7yrs) are not asked the questions about seeing family, but these relationships are also important to them and they often shared how they felt about seeing their family in their comments.

What children had to say

> I see my brother more often because they go to my school but I don't see my sister as much. (11-17yrs)

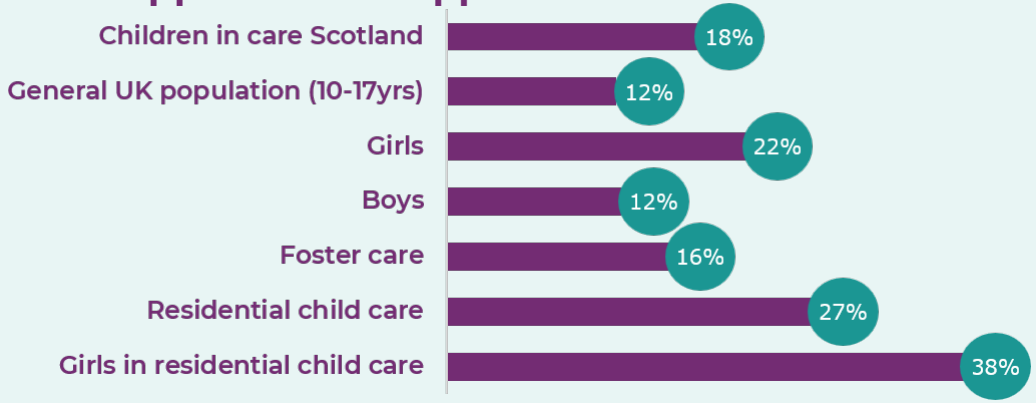
> I like that I get to see two of my siblings who I am in care with, but I would like to see my other siblings as I don't get to see them. (11-17yrs)

> I see my older brother when I can. Don't see my little sister bacause they are adopted. I have Letterbox set up with my sisters and mum. Don't reply to my mum. (8-11yrs)

Happiness with appearance

Happiness with appearance goes far beyond a superficial assessment of looks. It is an aspect of wellbeing that is very important to children, relating to confidence, self-esteem and self-worth, and how children think others perceive them. External factors and pressures influence how children feel about their looks, and unhappiness with appearance is a predictor of unhappiness with life as a whole (The Children's Society, 2023). We found that how happy older children (11-17yrs) were with how they looked was one of the elements most strongly associated with their overall wellbeing.

Low scores for happiness with appearance



The percentage of children in care in Scotland who were less happy with how they looked was higher than that of the general UK population (The Children's Society, 2024). This aspect of wellbeing particularly affects girls, and the difference between girls and boys seen in the general population was evident in our survey findings too, with almost twice as many girls giving low scores. We also found that one in four children living in residential child care were less happy about their appearance compared to just one in six living with foster carers, and that girls living in residential child care were particularly likely to have negative feelings about their appearance.

> I don't get to do the same things as my friends, for example dying my hair with a semi-permanent colour. (11-17yrs)

> I love it. Like I enjoy living here, it's boosted my confidence, I have developed into a beautiful young lady. (11-17yrs)

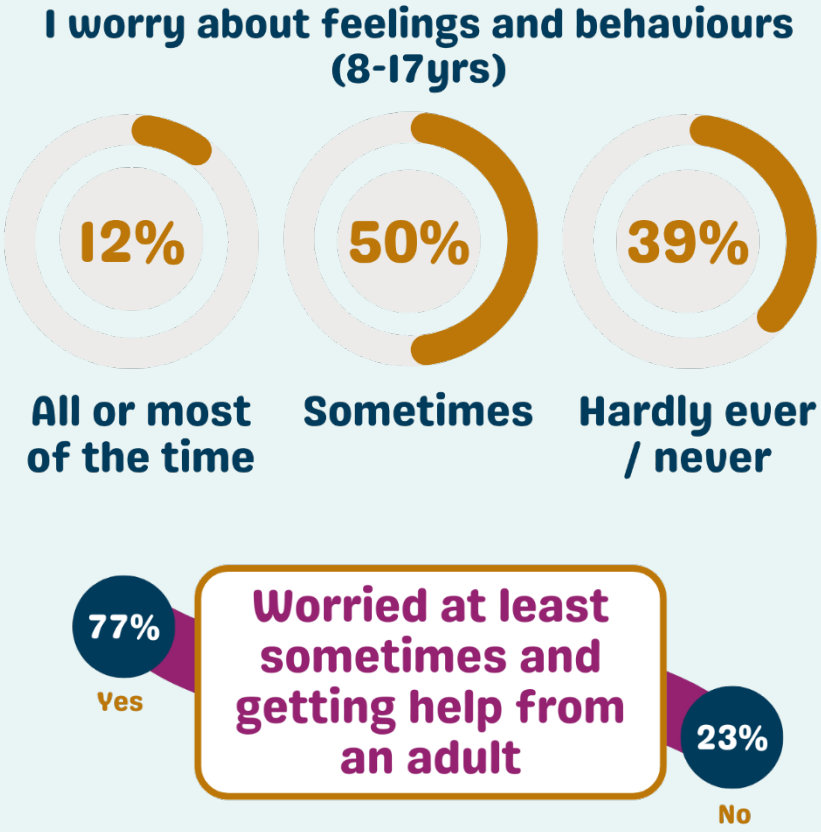
> A friend I can trust because I can't trust the boys who are in care with me and live with me. (8-11yrs)

Worrying about feelings or behaviour (8-17yrs)

Care experienced children and young people have consistently been found to have much higher rates of mental health difficulties than the general population (Sanders, 2020). Bright Spots does not ask specifically about mental health, rather it includes questions about worrying about feelings and behaviour, an aspect of wellbeing originally identified as important by the children and young people involved in the development of the Bright Spots programme. Children aged 8-17yrs were asked how often they worried about their feelings and behaviour and, if they did worry, whether or not they were getting help from an adult.

Three in five children worried about their feelings or behaviour at least some of the time, and three out of four of those who did worry were getting help from an adult.

Overall, one in seven worried at least sometimes and felt they were not getting help from an adult. For older children (11-17yrs), worrying about feelings and behaviour was strongly associated with overall wellbeing.



> They should listen to me more, it makes me stressed and upset. (11-17yrs)

> I don't really tell anyone my problems, I solve them myself. I've always done that. I feel like being in care has made me grow up quicker. It has toughened me up. (11-17yrs)

Discussion and recommendations

The primary purpose of the Bright Spots programme is to enable corporate parents and partner agencies to improve the services and support they provide to children in care and care leavers, based on the evidence provided by responses to the Bright Spots surveys. Each of the local areas that took part in the Bright Spots Programme pilot in Scotland received the responses to the surveys and the analysis of these shortly after the end of their phase of the pilot. The areas have been working to address the feedback the children and young people they care for, and their care leavers, have given them, through their local services to support them. By bringing together the survey results from all six local authority areas that have participated in Scotland in 2022 and 2024, in this analysis and report on the full Bright Spots pilot, we also have a new, broader knowledge base that complements and often reinforces other sources of information about the wellbeing of children in care and care leavers in Scotland in recent years. There are key learning points and general recommendations for corporate parents and agencies supporting children in care based on this evidence and this knowledge base can also be used to inform ongoing policy development to improve support for children in Scotland.

Enable all children in care to thrive

Many children in care who took the survey appear to be thriving, with the level of very high scores on wellbeing indicators being similar to the proportion of their peers in the general population who record positive wellbeing. Concerningly however, too many children in care appear to be struggling compared to their peers, with much higher proportions of children in care giving low scores on wellbeing indicators, that cannot be explained by the more universal or more commonly shared experiences of growing up, such as disliking school or being less trusting of the adults a child lives with. For example, while it is not unusual for children to find the behaviour of adults embarrassing at times,

when the behaviour of adults draws attention to a child being in care, this can make children feel different to their peers and experience stigma that is very specific to their circumstances.

More can be done to address key factors that should enable all children in care to thrive. Relationships with adults who were responsive and supportive were strongly associated with low and very high overall wellbeing for children in care in Scotland. Other key factors influencing wellbeing were how happy children were with how they looked and the extent to which they worried about their feelings and behaviour. Feeling safe and settled at home strongly influenced wellbeing too. For younger children, how they felt about school and fear of bullying were also strongly associated with wellbeing. Addressing these factors is key to support children in care in ways that are likely to have a positive impact on their wellbeing.

Recommendation 1

Every child in care needs and has a right to a safe and comfortable home and the supportive relationships that enable them to develop and learn and give them every opportunity to thrive. Learning from and responding to what children have shared through

the Brights Spots Programme is key here and there must always be opportunities for children's voices and experiences to be heard and be listened to. Children should be regularly asked about their views, feelings and wellbeing by support practitioners. This is an essential component of how corporate parents from all agencies, across Scotland, can work to ensure that there is sufficient and equitable support for all children.

Relationships

Although a large majority of children who shared their experiences through the Bright Spots surveys in this Scotland pilot experienced supportive relationships that are so critical to their sense of wellbeing, this was not the case for every child who responded. Children living in residential child care and others who were living somewhere else other than with parents, wider family or friends or with foster carers, were less likely to have a good friend, to trust the adults they lived with, or to feel that these adults noticed their feelings or talked to them about things that mattered to them compared to those living with families.

Recommendation 2

Particular attention must be paid to the need for children being cared for in residential child care and other non-family environments to have the same opportunities to develop and maintain supportive relationships as children who are being cared for in family environments. All corporate parents have a responsibility and a part to play in creating the conditions where all children are able to feel that they can trust those they live with, in an environment where they feel they can safely share their thoughts and feelings. Specific emphasis must be placed on children having every opportunity to be able to maintain their existing friendships and to develop new friendships.

Rights

All children have a right to feel safe, settled and listened to. Through their survey responses, some children shared that they did not feel safe or settled where they lived,

felt that adults around them made them feel embarrassed about being in care, and felt that their views were not always listened to or taken seriously.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child (UNCRC) (1989) asserts that all children have a right to feel safe where they live, to be listened to and their views taken seriously, and to not experience stigma. The UK ratified the UNRC in 1991 and it was incorporated into Scots Law in 2024. For some children, it appears that they do not feel that these rights are being upheld.

Recommendation 3

Every effort should be made to ensure that all children in care are aware of their rights under the UNCRC in a way that is appropriate for their age and stage of development, and these rights must be understood, respected and promoted by everyone providing care for children and young people. Our findings suggest that there is a particular need for corporate parents to consider further how the rights of children living away from a family setting can be upheld and how these are explicitly discussed with children so that they are more able to explore and exercise their rights.

Families

As with all children, children needing care and protection can often experience complicated family situations and have complex feelings about their relationships with other members of the family. Relationships can be particularly complex for children in care who live apart from parents and siblings.

The surveys ask only about seeing parents and siblings, and do not explore how children keep in touch with family members who they do not live with and do not see, although

some children did mention other arrangements to keep connected such as letter writing in comments they made. These alternative arrangements to keep in touch are very important for everyone concerned, but the surveys provide very limited information on how children felt about them.

How children who did not live with their family members felt about how often they saw them varied. Some of the children saw some of their siblings but not all of them; some of the children would have liked to see family members individually and not all at the same time; and some children wanted to see more of some of their family members and less of other family members

Recommendation 4

The views of children about which family members they would like to see and how they would like this to happen must be considered and reviewed regularly to reflect changing circumstances, changing feelings and the nature of human relationships. Children must be supported to navigate their family relationships and understand the reasons for decisions that affect these relationships.

Geography

Across the six local authority areas participating in the Bright Spots pilot in Scotland, there was substantial variability in different aspects of experiences based on the local authority area that the children in care lived in.

Recommendation 5

To support every child and young person in care well, the services, opportunities and their experiences of care should not depend on which local authority area they live in. There

needs to be continued, concerted effort by national and local government, and multi-agency networks, to ensure there is equity across Scotland. Key to this is sharing and spreading positive practice, new ways of working and models of delivery and implementing improvement and change that can be shown to be making a difference to the lives of children, young people and their families.

Understanding

Many of the younger children whose views and experiences were collected by the Bright Spots surveys felt that why they were in care had not been explained to them by an adult and many did not know who their social worker was. Most of the children who felt why they were in care had not been explained to them were living with their parents or with wider family or friends, and some of these children were not aware that legally they were actually 'in care'. This does not necessarily imply negative action: it may be to protect some children from undue stress and uncertainty.

Recommendation 6

Particular sensitivity is needed when talking to the youngest children in care to ensure that they have the information they need to understand and make sense of their situation. This needs to reflect an understanding of each individual child in order to ensure this is done without causing undue distress. Assumptions about what a child knows and understands should not be made, particularly as they grow and develop greater awareness.

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About Bright Spots

To find out more about the Bright Spots Programme see: https://coramvoice.org.uk/bright-spots-programme/

About CELCIS

CELCIS is a leading improvement, innovation and research centre for children and young people's support, care and protection, based at the University of Strathclyde. We work with local, national and international partners to improve the lives of children, young people and families by strengthening the systems, services and practices that support them, helping to address their needs and realise their rights. Working alongside people and organisations responsible for their care and protection, we bring together evidence, lived experience and practical insight to facilitate and enable change, support the implementation of policy into practice, and drive meaningful and lasting improvement.

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