

# Children's social care questionnaires 2015: what adults told us

This slide deck sets out what adults\* told us about children's homes\*, fostering services\* and adoption services\*.

You can find out what children and young people told us in the accompanying slide deck.



## Background

- Each year Ofsted uses online questionnaires to gather views about children's homes, secure children's homes, adoption services\*, fostering services\* and residential family centres\*.
- The questionnaires are for children and young people, parents, staff, social workers and other professionals, such as independent reviewing officers.
- These questionnaires ran from 4 February to 9 May 2015 and received responses from 27,715 individuals.

## How we use the information

- We use the responses, along with other information we have, such as previous inspection findings or any concerns, to decide when to inspect and what to focus on when we do.
- We share response summaries with providers and local authorities to help them identify areas for improvement\*. We want the sector to know about the issues that were important to children and adults. So this year, we have published a [data release](#) and produced this presentation.

# What adults told us could be better about children's social care services

23,468 adults told us what was good and what could be better about children's homes, fostering services and adoption services.\* The following slides focus on areas that adults said could be improved. The six common themes for improvement were.

- communication and influence
- environment and facilities in a children's home
- recruitment and retention of staff and recruitment of foster carers and adopters
- training for professionals, foster carers and adopters
- activities for children and young people
- provision of support for children and young people, foster carers and adopters.





# Communication and influence



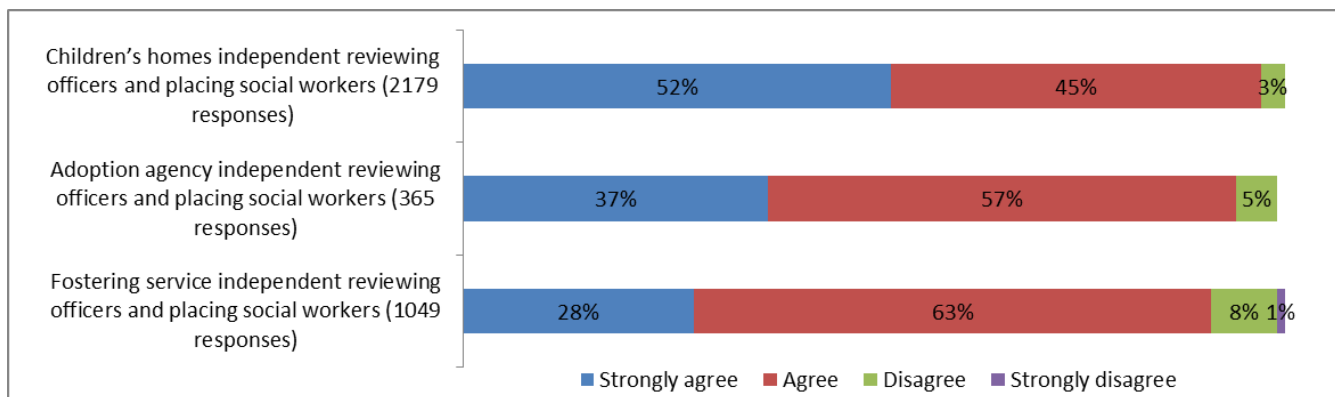
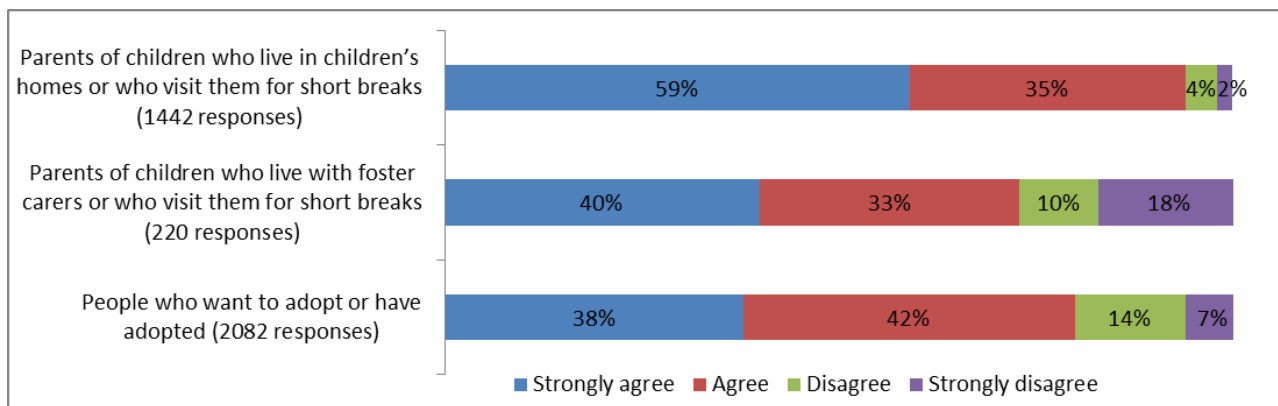
## All groups of adults say there could be improvements with communication or opportunities to have an influence

- Common themes of improving communication included:
  - giving adults more opportunity to provide their views and suggest areas for improvement to the children's home, fostering service or adoption service
  - more regular and consistent communication between all teams involved with the children, including:
    - with adopters and prospective adopters
    - with parents of children in children's homes or being cared for by foster carers, such as updates on what their child has been doing, if they're ill or about changes to staff
  - more up-to-date information about incidents involving children
- Foster carers specifically want improved information-sharing between themselves and the fostering service or adoption agency, particularly in relation to information about their foster children. They want to be treated as professionals and to be able to share their views and inform decisions about their foster children.

# Getting the right information at the right time matters to everyone involved with children



These charts show some of the responses to the statement 'communication is effective'



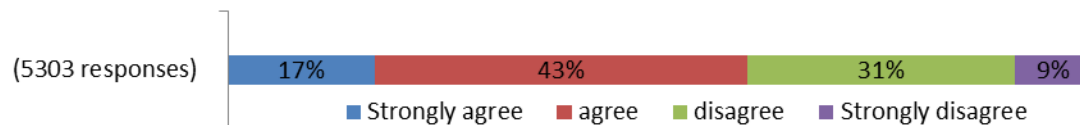
Mostly, people get this right but communication could still be improved



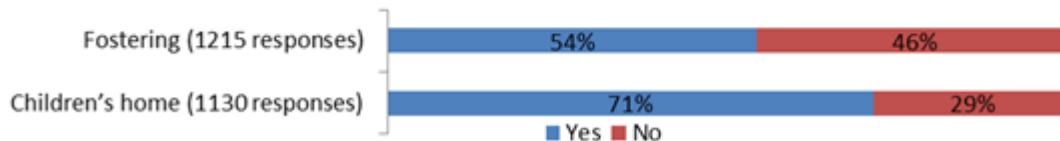
# Foster carers and foster children want more information about each other before they live with each other



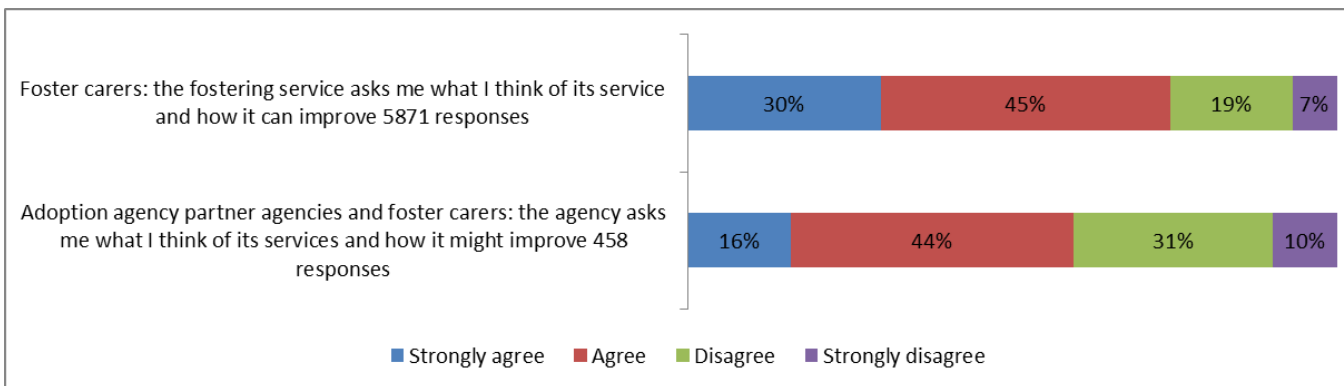
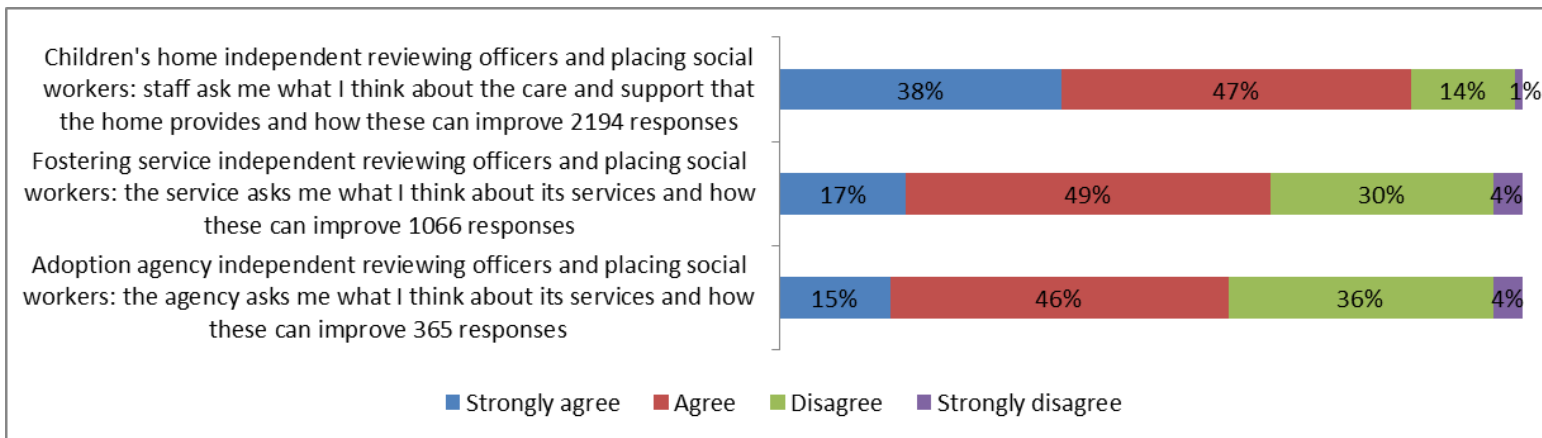
**I was able to find out lots of useful things about my foster child before he or she moved in or started coming to my home for a short break**



**I was able to find out lots of useful things about the children's home / fostering family before I moved in with them or had a short break**



# Those who aren't part of the staff team would like more opportunity to share their views



## What staff and panel members say would improve communication

More time for team meetings and discussion would promote consistency throughout the team. Shift patterns make this difficult but I do think the rota should incorporate more team time, which would lead to better communication; therefore outcomes for the YP.

At times, communication between staff isn't being met to a high standard and this can make it difficult for carers to work effectively with one another.

Could be a better way of communicating information and changes, and also consult more with staff before implementing changes. To also consider more openly staff ideas on working differently, e.g. having a duty system.

Communication is always something that benefits from being frequently reviewed, because it is easy for individuals and groups to make assumptions that everyone is involved and knows what they need to.

# What independent reviewing officers and placing social workers say would improve communication



A lot of families and professionals have had problems contacting the unit by phone and new contact numbers have not been well communicated. There have been a lot of new staff and I think families, the young people and other professionals would have been pleased to receive a picture, name and brief pen picture of each of them.

I would like to receive regular updates on how my looked after child is doing in placement, appointments etc.

# What parents of children who live in children's homes/visit them for short breaks say would improve communication



In an ideal world I would like a text or similar daily to know what she has been up to - because she lives so far away from home, I feel that I miss out on a lot of her life. Also there have recently been a lot of staff changes in the unit she lives in and it would be good to be kept informed of these.

I would like to be informed when staff leave so I don't keep talking about the person and promising my child that he will see the member of staff on his next visit.

# What foster carers say would improve communication



Share information about the young people, we often feel that we are not given the full picture.

Listening and respecting the opinion of the foster carer who knows the children best needs to have a stronger voice as part of the any discussions on the children's future.

Sometimes treat their foster carers a little better as sometimes you do feel you are the last to be told about decisions made.

Involve us more. Listen more and take on board what we have to say.

I would like to be treated as part of the team involved in decisions and care for the children I foster. I always feel like I'm just the babysitter.

# What adopters or prospective adopters say would improve communication



It doesn't feel like the social workers at each stage of the process communicate with each other. It felt like the goal posts were changing as I went through the process when, had things been made clearer from the outset, it would have been easier and more straightforward.

A little more communication through to approval panel would be better. It feels like a very lonely journey up until that point as you do not really know what's going on behind the scenes, so a little weekly we have not forgotten you email would help I think.

Communicate better with us - maybe a monthly email update to let us know how the process is going on. We have gone for several months at a time with no communication from the agency and it feels as though we have been forgotten.

# Environment and facilities in children's homes





## Children's homes could be 'more homely' and better equipped

Professionals and parents wanted:

- updated decorations and furnishings, and regular repairs and maintenance to be carried out
- improved outdoor space and more toys or games that can be used outside
- equipment and toys for children that reflect their age and needs
- better technology – for example, more up-to-date computers or touch screen computers for children with communication needs
- a sensory room or more sensory equipment (for homes where disabled children live or attend short breaks)
- more reliable and suitable vehicles (including those adapted to transport wheelchairs where needed) so that children can be taken to activities and on trips more often.

# What adults say would improve the children's home environment and facilities



Although staff do their best... this is difficult given the limitations of the building... Perhaps children should be consulted about this and suggest ideas as to how to improve the environment...  
(Professional)

The grounds could be nicer - there are fields and outdoor spaces where some flowers or shrubs would make the situation more homelike and attractive.  
(Parent)

Activities outside of the unit could be more varied but these are restricted by the lack of group transport.  
(Professional)

Technological advancement within the home has fallen behind the times. It would be beneficial ... to investigate adaptive technologies and update some outdated equipment.  
(Professional)

Recruitment and retention of staff and recruitment of foster carers and adopters



## Getting the right staff\* and keeping them is very important

Most adults wanted:

- better retention of good and/or experienced staff
- more consistent staff teams and fewer staff changes
- more permanent staff and less reliance on agency staff (although there were some calls for pools of bank staff who could be called on to cover staff illness, holidays, unplanned absences, etc.)
- higher staffing levels, so that more children can be taken on activities or so there is more support for challenging children; for adoption and fostering services, an increase in staff would mean more support for foster carers and adopters
- better recruitment of staff who have the necessary qualifications, skills and experience for their role – for example that the skills of staff recruited for a children's home reflect the children they are caring for.

# What adults say would improve the recruitment and retention of staff



Staffing can be an issue and children's placements can get cancelled at the last minute leaving children upset and unsure of their routines. (Professional)

More consistency in staff members being available when child has formed good bonds and trust. (Professional)

Have more staff to manage the current workload, so what we do can be improved on - more time for training, more time for reviewing our processes and practice. (Professional)

## What adults say would improve the recruitment and retention of staff (continued)



We have had 3 different support workers in 6 months and will have yet another one at the end of this month, due to using bank staff. We have found this very difficult and it means we have support workers who don't really know us or our child and who haven't been on the adoption journey with us. (Adopter or prospective adopter)

The home could inform applicants at interview, just how challenging the young people they will be working with are. I feel this could in some cases help to stop a high turn over of staff, which would provide stability for our young people. (Professional)

## Fostering professionals want more foster carers who meet specific needs

They wanted:

- recruitment of more foster carers and foster carers who can meet the needs of particular groups of children, for example children with complex needs, sibling groups or older children.
- recruitment of more ethnically diverse foster carers.

# What adults say would improve the recruitment of foster carers



Targeted recruitment for carers who can meet the needs of children with additional or more specific needs and challenging older children and young people.  
(Professional)

Explore further ways of informing the general public about fostering as there is an acute shortage of foster carers to meet the demand.  
(Professional)

Being able to recruit more foster carers with the appropriate skills to meet the needs of very complex children is a key area for the agency to continually address.  
(Professional)



# Adoption professionals want more adopters who can meet specific needs

They wanted:

- recruitment of more adopters and more adopters who are able to adopt harder to place children, such as those with complex needs, sibling groups or older children
- recruitment of ethnically diverse adopters
- promotion of the adoption service more effectively to increase awareness amongst potential adopters and consider innovative ways to try and recruit more adopters.

# What adults say would improve the recruitment of adopters



I feel the agency could do more to promote themselves, locally and nationally. I am aware that other neighbouring local authority adoption agencies place adverts/have events to promote themselves.  
(Professional)

The majority of children who wait seem to have very complex needs which most typical adopters aren't equipped to deal with. People considering adoption should be made aware of this national situation, and educated in the special medical/emotional issues the majority of children have so they know earlier on whether they can manage this before they even start. (Adopter / prospective adopter)

Training for  
professionals, foster  
carers and adopters



## Better training\* would make a difference to children and young people

Most groups of adults wanted:

- More training to be provided and on a more regular basis, for it to be varied and updated and to be provided by external sources.
- Specialist training that reflected the specific needs of the children for foster carers, children's home staff and adopters.
- More career progression opportunities and training that leads to formal qualifications for staff.
- Training for foster carers and adopters to be offered at more flexible and convenient times, for example, during evenings and weekends and for training to be provided at locations closer to where individuals live.
- Foster carers to have the option to complete some training online.

# What adults say would improve training

More training for foster carers especially for the second carer who often works outside the home as so is not available for the training presently provided. More weekend & evening training opportunities are required.  
(Professional)

More team training and building, so that we are all hearing the same thing at the same time and enabling us to make a more unified approach to some situations.  
(Professional)

I strongly feel that the agency should invest in training and professional development opportunities for all teams rather than just for social work/management roles.  
(Professional)

## What adults say would improve training (continued)

Ensure that there is more advanced training on offer in order to help work with the more complex placements that are coming through. (Foster carer)

Ensure that training is more targeted, especially carers' who have been foster carers' for a long time and may have become complacent with how to deal with all children and their needs. (Professional)

It can be some months before the initial training and placement and some kind of refresher training would be good... (Adopter or prospective adopter)

Activities for  
children and  
young people



## Opportunities and encouragement for children and young people to take part in fun activities is important

Professionals and parents wanted:

- more – and a greater variety of – activities, both inside and outside the child’s home; more organised events where children living with foster carers could meet with other foster children
- more activities that all children can take part in or activities that children and staff or foster carers can do together
- more day trips and holidays for children
- greater encouragement for children to take part in activities
- more options for children to get involved with the community – for example, attending youth clubs or sports clubs
- activities that reflect the needs of the children, such as older or disabled children
- activities to be planned in advance or to be more structured.
- activities that encourage children to keep fit and healthy.



# What adults say would improve activities for children and young people in children's homes



More outings and activities particularly based on individual interests. (Parent)

Be able to access more clubs and hobbies so as the young people have more to entertain themselves and improve their self-esteem. (Professional)

Staff team to be more proactive in terms of suggesting new hobbies, activities to do, promoting healthy eating and healthy lifestyle. Also to research local programmes, voluntary work or programmes that the young people can get involved in. (Professional)

I think more activities on offer whilst there. Pre-planned almost so that child knows before going for their break that a certain trip out is organised. (Parent)

# What adults say would improve activities for children living with or visiting foster carers



Where young people choose to not engage or be involved in activities, I would like to feel that more is being done to re-engage them.  
(Professional)

Provide more culturally sensitive activities to promote children's identity.  
(fostering service staff or panel member)

Do more events for older children so that they can meet other foster children of their own age.  
(Professional)

Possible organised residential trips for lac, which we feel would benefit them by socialising with others who can really relate to their emotions. (Foster carer)

Provision of support  
for children, young  
people, foster  
carers and adopters



## Children and young people need better support

Most adults want:

- more support to prepare for independence (for children living in or visiting children's homes or foster carers)
- more post-adoption support that can be accessed quickly and easily, and in particular for those children and young people with complex needs (for adopted children).

# What adults say would improve support for children



Staff could work with young people to prepare them better for life outside the home, in particular to encourage realistic expectations of life when they move on from the home. (Professional)

Provide school support for every adoptive child. Automatically hold assessment/planning meetings at key stages throughout a child's life so support is always planned and available rather than begged for when a crisis hits. Be more willing to provide 'out of house' support/therapy when the case warrants it. (Adoptive parent)

## Good support for foster carers is critical

Professionals and foster carers wanted:

- more support, understanding and listening to foster carers
- better out-of-hours support
- more opportunities to meet with other foster carers
- more timely support to avoid placement breakdowns.

# What adults say could improve support for foster carers



More understanding of day-to-day strains and practical support offered before it is asked for. (Foster carer)

It could give newly qualified carers help to meet up with more experienced carers to gain help and support. (Foster carer)

Support carers better in a positive way listening to our opinions about the child or children in our care. (Foster carer)

More support for foster carers with difficult placements. (Professional)

Support foster carers and their families more. Act quicker when foster carer needs support. (Foster carer)

## Good support for adopters is critical

Professionals and adopters wanted:

- more support and specialist support that relates to the adopted child
- ongoing support that can be accessed at any time after adoption
- more timely support that can be quickly accessed
- opportunities to meet with other adopters.



# What adults say would improve the support for adopters



People are frightened to go back to social services as they feel they will be judged etc BUT most children who go onto to be adopted have had very bad experiences in their birth homes and therefore will need more support etc. (Adopter or prospective adopter)

Support for adoptive parents adopting older children 6+. Adopting older children comes with different challenges to those of younger children and I feel there should be more research and specific training provided to cater for this. Many adoptive parents shy away from adopting older children but if we were better educated about the pros and cons and how to overcome the challenges then perhaps more older children would be adopted and not be in long term foster care. (Adopter or prospective adopter)

## What adults say would improve the support for adopters (continued)



Perhaps speed up the access to post adoption support - from our initial enquiry for support to occurring was 3 months - this may not sound like a long time - but when dealing day in, day out with your child's behaviour, it can feel like a long time. (Adopter or prospective adopter)

Opportunities to build ongoing supportive links with other adopters at a similar stage of the process were missed... we do feel that new adopters struggle to form the sort of support network that many new birth families have. (Adopter or prospective adopter)

To give more information regarding support to adopters after they have adopted the children as a lot of adopters feel they are left alone once they have adopted. And it's usually when the children become a little older that the support is needed. (Professional)

## Glossary

- **Independent reviewing officer (IRO):** The IRO's primary focus is to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration.
- **Panel members (adoption and fostering):** Legislation requires each fostering or adoption service to appoint people to act as a panel, to review applications and recommend which people should be approved as adopters and foster carers.
- **Placing social worker:** This is the child's social worker.
- **Supervising social worker:** This is the social worker who supports and supervises foster carers.



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