



Our Life in Care
VOYPIC's CASI SURVEY

VOYPIC

VOYPIC is a charity working across Northern Ireland promoting the rights and improving the lives of children and young people cared for away from home. They may be living at home in care, with foster or kinship carers, in children's homes, in secure settings or in supported accommodation. They may be preparing to leave care or be care leavers.

Our Life in Care survey

Our Life in Care is a Computer Assisted Self Interview or "CASI" survey of the views and experiences of children and young people in care aged 8 to 18 in Northern Ireland. VOYPIC managed the survey to fulfil two of its key functions – to promote children's rights and to give children a voice – and we wanted to add to what is known about children and young people's experiences while they're living in care. Our first survey was completed in 2011, followed by a second survey in 2012 and finally the third survey in 2013. A total of 333 individual children and young people took part.

While the surveys reflect how well many children and young people in care are doing, *Our Life in Care* also tells us that some are not getting the level of service and support they are entitled to and eligible for. The three areas of most concern are:

- Care and pathway planning
- Relationships and support
- Education

Care and pathway planning

Care plans and LAC review meetings are critical to decision making in children's and young people's lives. Young people's understanding of the plans for their care remains lower than it should be given the significance of the care planning process.

Key findings 2011
over 12s

- 40% know "completely" about the plans made for their care
- 36% "completely" agree with decisions made in their care plan
- 29% have a copy of their care plan

Key findings 2012
over 12s

- 36% know "completely" about the plans made for their care
- 35% "completely" agree with decisions made in their care plan
- 31% have a copy of their care plan

Key findings 2013
over 12s

- 37% know "completely" about the plans made for their care
- 29% "completely" agree with decisions made in their care plan
- 27% have a copy of their care plan

When we look at pathway planning for over 16 year olds only 16% of them had a copy of their pathway plan and less than a third (31%) said they completely agree with the decisions in the plan. However it is encouraging to see that the numbers who say they can talk to their PA has increased on previous years but remains low at 44%.

Key findings 2011
over 16s

- 39% can talk to their personal advisor about what's happening in their life
- 18% don't know "at all" about their pathway plan
- 35% have a copy of their pathway plan
- 31% completely agree with decisions from the pathway plan

Key findings 2012
over 16s

- 35% can talk to their personal advisor about what's happening in their life
- 19% don't know "at all" about their pathway plan
- 24% have a copy of their pathway plan
- 24% completely agree with decisions from the pathway plan

Key findings 2013
over 16s

- 44% can talk to their personal advisor about what's happening in their life
- 22% don't know "at all" about their pathway plan
- 16% have a copy of their pathway plan
- 31% completely agree with decisions from the pathway plan

Relationships and support

As children move into and through the care system, they are likely to be allocated social workers in different services and teams eg, family intervention, LAC teams and the 16+ service. Some young people have to cope with this challenge of changing social workers and building new support relationships. All 105 participants in the 2013 survey were asked how many social workers they have had since they came into care.



This high level of change of social worker may jeopardise a child or young person's sense of feeling settled and stable. One young woman described it like this:

"Far too many changes... I know people can change jobs and want to do different things, but there needs to be more permanent social workers working with children and young people, it is quite hard to trust anyone if you have a lot of change and people coming in and out of your life"

Education

Although some do well, looked after children as a group have poor experiences of education. Reasons for poorer levels of achievement may include coping with trauma and emotional difficulties.

School can be a difficult environment for children and young people who may suffer stigma from being in care and find themselves at risk of bullying.

Most young people in our survey were active in education and reflect significant experience on their time at school - much of which is positive. Less encouraging is that getting more support to attend regularly or return to school after absence is an issue in the survey year on year.

Key findings 2011 over 12s

- 88% are currently in education, training or employment
- 60% never miss or dodge school
- 22% of over 12s had been out of school for more than three months
- 55% of them got help to return

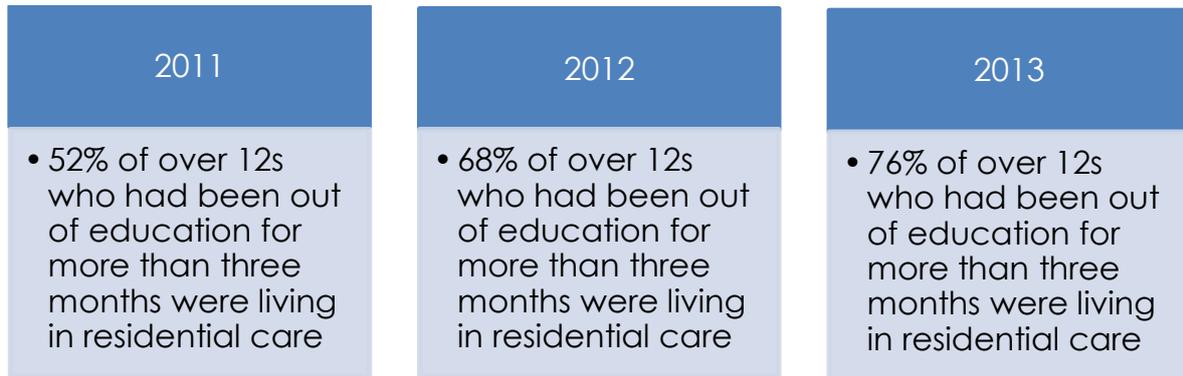
Key findings 2012 over 12s

- 97% are currently in education, training or employment
- 76% never miss or dodge school
- 14% of over 12s had been out of school for more than three months
- 63% of them got help to return

Key findings 2013 over 12s

- 90% are currently in education, training or employment
- 69% never miss or dodge school
- 22% of over 12s had been out of school for more than three months
- 41% of them got help to return

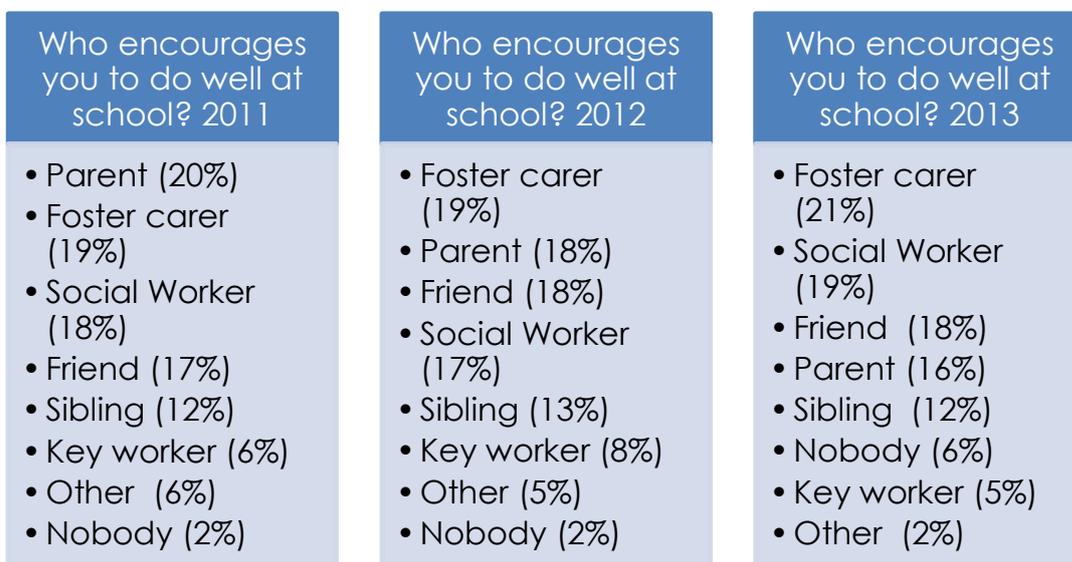
This is of particular concern for young people living in children's homes in all three years of the survey.



Despite the small sample, these findings do point to a need to explore how we can better support children and young people living in children's homes with their school attendance and education.

In 2011, the DHSSPS and DENI issued guidance for Personal Education Plans (PEPS) for looked after children and young people. Their primary aim is to ensure they are supported to reach their full educational potential. We hope that they will be comprehensive and inclusive of all the educational needs and plans and be a key part of the review and planning for children in and young people preparing to leave care

In our survey we asked children and young people if they could identify someone who encourages them to do well at school. It is positive that a range of people encourage children and young people in care to fully realise their potential and achieve in education and elsewhere.



Every year, we invited participants to feed back on the experience of completing the survey. Responses show that young people value the survey and are managing the range and number of questions well.

Read the full survey and watch the supporting DVD and related videos on www.voypic.org or register with VOYPIC's Library in the Sky www.libraryinthesky.org to see Our Life in Care reports and more publications about children and young people in care and care leavers.