

Children in care in Wales are happy and settled – new survey shows

The “Our Lives, Our Care” pilot survey on the experiences of looked after children was conducted by the charity Coram Voice and the University of Bristol in six Welsh local authority areas earlier this year.

Commissioned by the Welsh Government and supported by the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, it was completed by 686 children and young people – approximately 28% of all looked after children in Wales aged between 4 and 18 years old.

The survey was conducted as part of the Bright Spots Programme to help local authorities, as corporate parents, to better understand what matters most to the children they are looking after and their thoughts and feelings about the care they receive.

The survey found:

- 96% of children (4-10yrs) trusted their carer and only 4% did not, while 71% of young people (11-18yrs) trusted their carer ‘all or some of the time’ and only 7% did not trust at all
- The vast majority of children and young people did feel safe in their placements. In fact, a larger proportion of looked after children ‘always’ felt safe in comparison with children in the general population
- 94% of children and young people (8-18yrs) thought that their carers showed an interest in their education

Later today, the Minister will attend a national event in Llandrindod Wells to celebrate the work being done across Wales to improve the outcomes for looked after children.

Welcoming the results of the survey, Minister for Children, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“Improving outcomes and life chances for care experienced children is a priority for me as Children’s Minister and of the Welsh Government as a whole.

“Recognising and listening to children and young people, and being responsive to their views and experiences is fundamental. So I want to thank all the children and young people who have given their time to participate in this survey.

“There are areas where we are doing well but also others where we can do better. We must now learn from what children and young people are saying matters to them most – in their relationships with their carers, families and friends, how they are supported and the opportunities they are given to flourish.

“I want local authorities to use the information wisely so it can influence how services are developed and delivered to meet children and young people’s needs and expectations.”

“My message to the children in care in Wales is – we will listen to you, and we will act to ensure your concerns are addressed.”

The Children’s Commissioner for Wales, Sally Holland said:

“Speaking to children and young people face to face is very important, but a survey does something different. It gives them the chance to give anonymous, honest feedback on their experiences, and provides the opportunity for those in charge of their care to pinpoint areas they may need to work on to improve experiences.

“The questions in this survey focused on children’s rights and well-being, and it is the first time such a survey has been conducted in Wales. I championed this survey being undertaken here in Wales to make sure that ‘bright spots’ of practice can be highlighted and celebrated, and that the concerns of care experienced children here in Wales can be heard and, more importantly, addressed.

“I look forward to seeing the concrete changes and actions that come from this important piece of work, reflecting what each local authority as the corporate parent will take forward for their own children in their care.”

Brigid Robinson, Managing Director of Coram Voice, said:

“We are pleased to work in partnership with the Welsh Government so that the views and experiences of more children in care can be heard, and its commitment to act on these findings is very encouraging.

“We hope that further local authorities will get involved in the programme so that we can build a wider picture of how children and young people feel about their care, address any variation in support, and most importantly act upon what they tell us.”

The co-author of the report, Professor Julie Selwyn CBE, Director of the University of Bristol’s Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies, said:

“I am delighted that the Welsh government has today published the views of over 600 looked after children and young people in Wales on how they feel their lives are going.

“Most children felt that their lives were improving, felt safe in their placements and trusted their carers but about one in six young people (11-18yrs) had concerning low levels of wellbeing. Girls were twice as likely as boys to have low wellbeing as were those who had experienced many changes of placement. Children who had an adult in their life who they trusted, had at least one good friend, understood why they were in care, and liked their appearance were more likely to have good wellbeing.

“We are pleased that the local authorities who took part in the study have already begun to make changes in response to the findings.”