

Listening to foster carers: Why they leave, and how we can support retention

Findings from the Fostering
Communities Exit Interviews



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

Introduction

Between July 2023 and April 2025, The Fostering Network conducted exit interviews with foster carers who left their service between March 2023 and March 2025. This project was undertaken to identify the key factors contributing to foster carers leaving their services, and to make recommendations that support improved recruitment and retention.

This work was part of the Fostering Communities programme, funded by Welsh Government's Sustainable Social Services Grant.

About the project

All fostering services in Wales were invited to take part in this project. Eleven local authorities (LAs) (Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Carmarthenshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd*, Monmouthshire, Newport, Pembrokeshire*, Powys, Torfaen, and Wrexham) and three independent fostering agencies (IFAs) (Barnardos*, NFA and TACT) chose to participate. These services referred all foster carers who left during the project period to The Fostering Network, who then contacted individuals to offer a voluntary, independent interview.

During this time period, 193 referrals were made by participating services, resulting in 112 completed interviews. Of these, 89 (79%) were with foster carers leaving an LA service and 23 (21%) from IFAs. Seventeen foster carers declined to take part, while the remaining 64 were either uncontactable or interviews have yet to be arranged.

Alongside exit interviews, we held focus groups in March 2025 with current foster carers and fostering service team managers across Wales to present the findings from the first 14 months of data. These discussions helped shape the focus of the further findings in this report and highlight examples of good practice.

Executive summary

We are aware that the findings present one side of the story of why foster carers have left, but they remain relevant and useful in explaining the breadth of experiences across Wales for former foster carers.

This report comes at a critical time as the number of babies, children and young people in care has been increasing in Wales for the past two decades¹, while the number of foster carers continues to decline². Many of the findings make for difficult reading. We are deeply grateful to all the participants who generously shared their time and experiences. We remain committed to using these insights to drive positive change, working with the fostering community to strengthen support, improve the foster carer experience, and ultimately deliver better outcomes for babies, children, and young people.

Key findings

- Half of all participants had left their service within five years of approval, with 30% leaving within the first 1-3 years.
- A perceived lack of support was the most common reason for leaving, with 42% attributing their decision fully or partly to this. This number rises to 50% for those who left within the first five years.
- Over half (54%) of participants said their service could have done something differently to enable them to continue fostering – most commonly offering better or more consistent support.
- Issues around matching were a key theme, with 23% of respondents feeling they were not appropriately matched to the children in their care.
- Despite the challenges faced, 57% of participants said they would consider fostering again, and 80% would recommend fostering to others.
- Just under half of the former foster carers (48%) felt their termination of approval had been an unplanned process.

Recommendations

The following recommendations set out the changes we believe Welsh Government should prioritise in order to recruit and, crucially, be able to retain more foster carers across Wales. These changes will mean babies, children and young people are afforded the right care, in the right place, at the right time. Good practice recommendations for services are included at the end of the

*These services were involved in the project but no referrals were interviewed in this cohort.

¹ Welsh Government (2025) [Children looked after at 31 March by local authority and placement type](#)

² Foster Wales (2024) [Annual report 2023/24](#)

report. These recommendations should be considered alongside our 2023 research into the retention and recruitment of foster carers in England³, as many of the recommendations made in that report clearly align to the findings from Wales.

Flexibility:

- Amend regulations to ensure that services and foster carers are clear on the right to take a break from fostering, with clear timescales and what assessments or checks are required on return.

Support:

- Continue to fund the 'Fostering Wellbeing' programme to support foster carers and to grow the knowledge, understanding and respect for the role of foster carers in the team around the child.
- Explore the benefits of expanding the Mockingbird programme, currently only delivered by one LA, to improve retention across Wales.
- Introduce new measures to address social worker turnover and caseloads, which affects the consistency and support for foster families. This could include the introduction of case load legislation and shift patterns to replace the current 9am-5pm day for social workers, as well as robust out of hours support and, a review of social worker qualification frameworks and newly qualified rotational systems.
- Amend regulations to ensure all foster carers have access to an approved support person who is assessed to provide overnight care or longer term care for the children they foster.

Consistency:

- Amend regulations to ensure the implementation and monitoring of a standardised matching policy and approach across Wales.
- Scope, consult and introduce a register for foster carers in Wales to go some way to address concerns regarding status and respect for the role, make best use of the foster carers in Wales and ensure improved matching.
- Improve national fostering data collection and publicise this data to ensure continuous improvement and tangible action to improve

³ [Foster carer recruitment and retention in England, May 2023](#)

recruitment and retention of foster carers in Wales. For example, exit interview data could be collated on a national level.

- Regulate to introduce a standard fostering exit interview process and allocate staff to continue to provide this service at local level.

Support

The theme of 'support' was prevalent throughout the interviews, with some finding that their service supported them really well and others reporting a perceived lack of support.

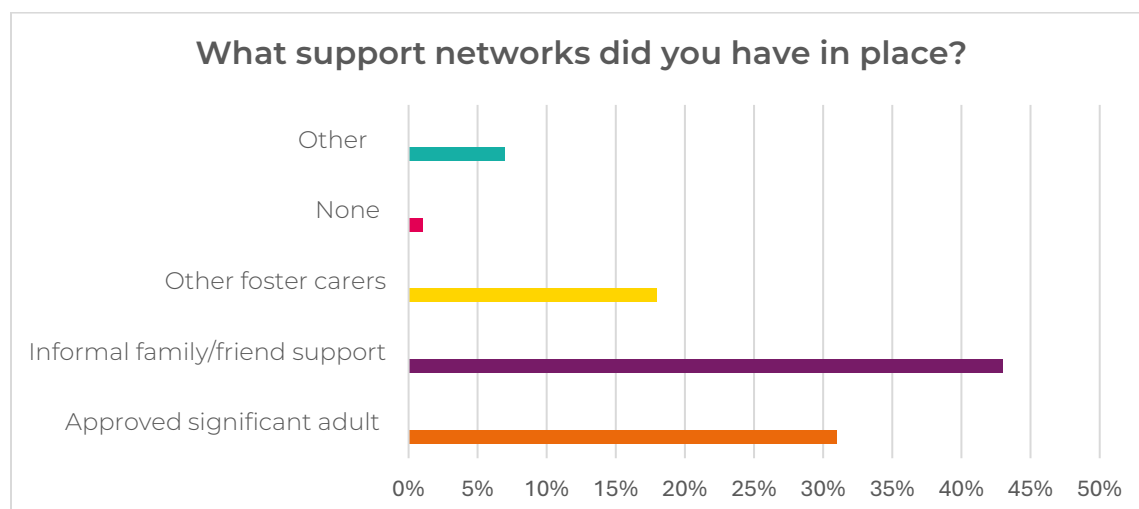
The importance of a support network

For children to thrive in sustainable, resilient fostering families, every foster carer should have access to a support network. Services can do more to ensure that their foster carers have a network of support around them. Support carers or significant adults should be assessed, approved and supported to provide regular, natural breaks. This is a child-centred way to ensure the needs of everyone in household are met, reducing burn out for foster carers and instability for children.

Participants referenced the support given by children's social workers, their own supervising social workers and out of hours support.

"When I reached out for support and asked for help they were quick and supportive."

We asked participants what support networks they had in place as foster carers. Only 31% reported having an approved significant adult to support them.



For those who referenced a 'perceived lack of support' when describing their reason for leaving their service, 55% were referring fully, or in part, to generally within the service, often mentioning "management". 38% spoke about their supervising social worker and 23% referenced the child's social worker. A common theme, particularly relating to perceived lack of support from both children's and supervising social workers, was that they changed frequently.

"The LA did not give me enough support - they only came out every three months. When I asked for help no one helped me. Perhaps if I had more support he would still be here. I had no support from my SSW or CSW."

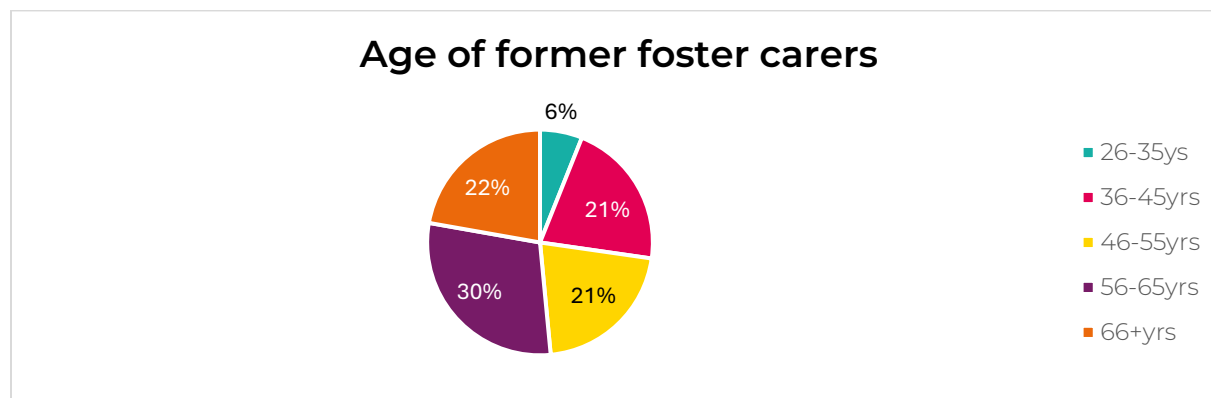
For those who noted 'support' as something their service did well, 67% were referring partly or fully to the service as a whole. This is likely to be due to the way the question is worded – 'what has your fostering service done particularly well?' - as this doesn't lend itself to be specific about teams/individuals etc. However, 30% did reference their supervising social worker as having provided good support, 7% spoke about the support network of other foster carers as being valuable, and just 2% mentioned the child's social worker.

Throughout this report we refer to support across the board, from teams, children's social workers and supervising social workers. The team around the child consists of many people - good support from one practitioner does not mitigate poor support from another.

General findings

Age of former foster carers

Almost a quarter of participants were over 66 years of age and 4 of these were leaving due to retirement. However, as the chart shows below, we also spoke to a significant number of participants who were aged between 26 and 55 years of age, showing a fairly even spread across the age ranges.

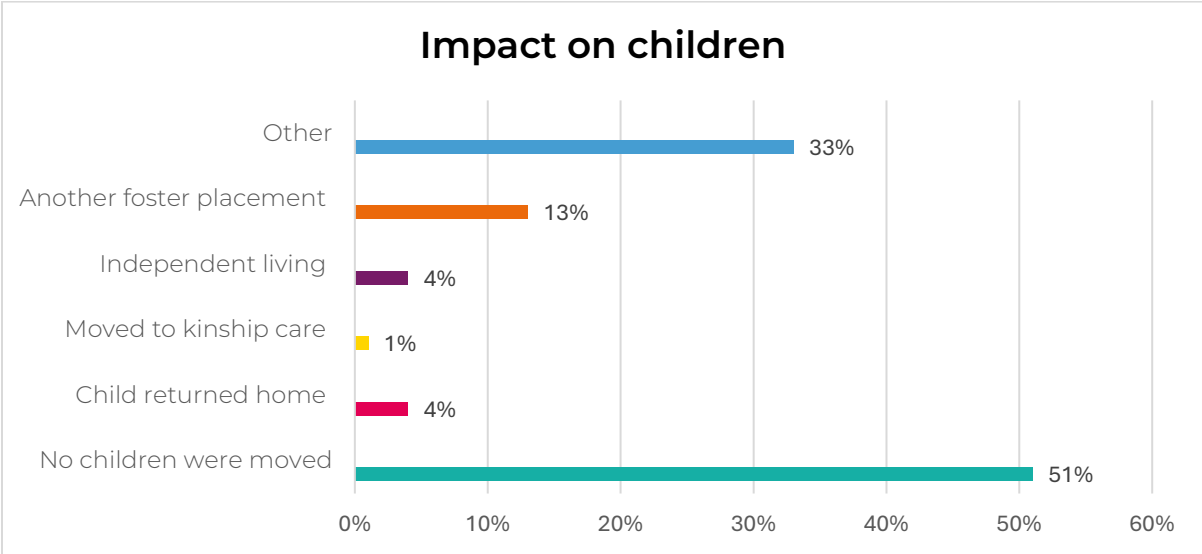


Planned or unplanned

Just over half of respondents said that their decision to leave fostering was planned (52%). The other 48% felt that termination of approval had been an unplanned process. 15% had been approved previously, with 85% ending their first and only approval as a foster carer before taking part in the exit interview.

Impact on children

For just over half of the fostering families who took part in the interviews (51%), the termination of approval did not result in children needing to be moved. For the remaining 49%, 13% of children were moved to another fostering placement, 4% were returned to their parents, 4% were moved to independent living and 1% were moved to kinship care. The remaining cohort covered a variety of other reasons including Shared Lives, When I am Ready, or moving with the foster carer to their new service.

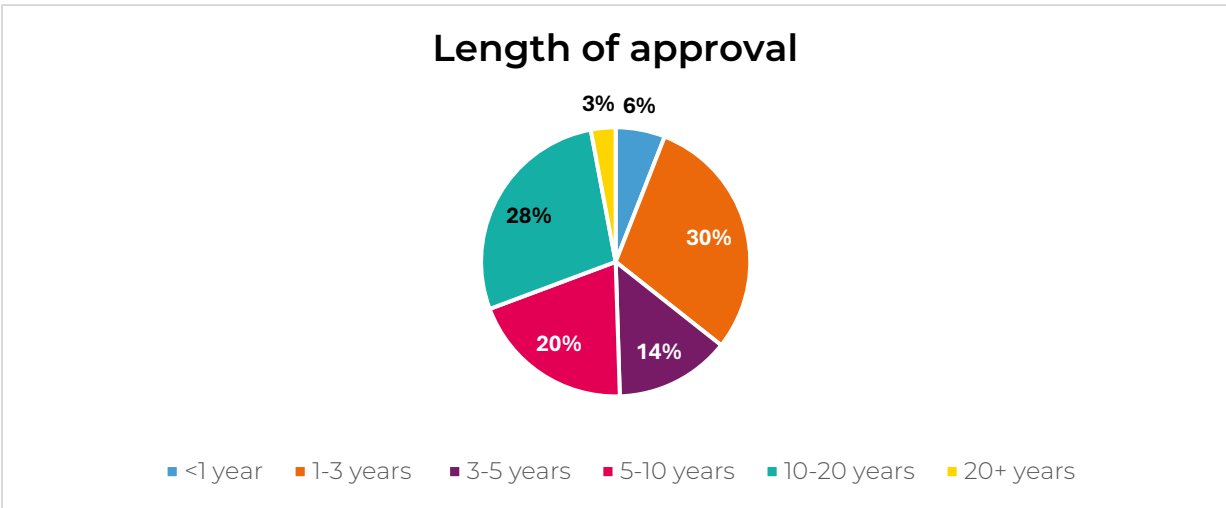


We asked the participants a wide variety of questions, covering why they decided to foster, to why they decided to leave their service.

Length of approval

The participants we interviewed had been approved as foster carers for time periods ranging from less than a month to nearing 30 years.

Of the former foster carers that took part, the most common period to choose to leave their service was between 1-3 years of approval (30%), indicating a need for strengthened support during the early stages of fostering. This is closely followed by people leaving within 10-20 years (28%).



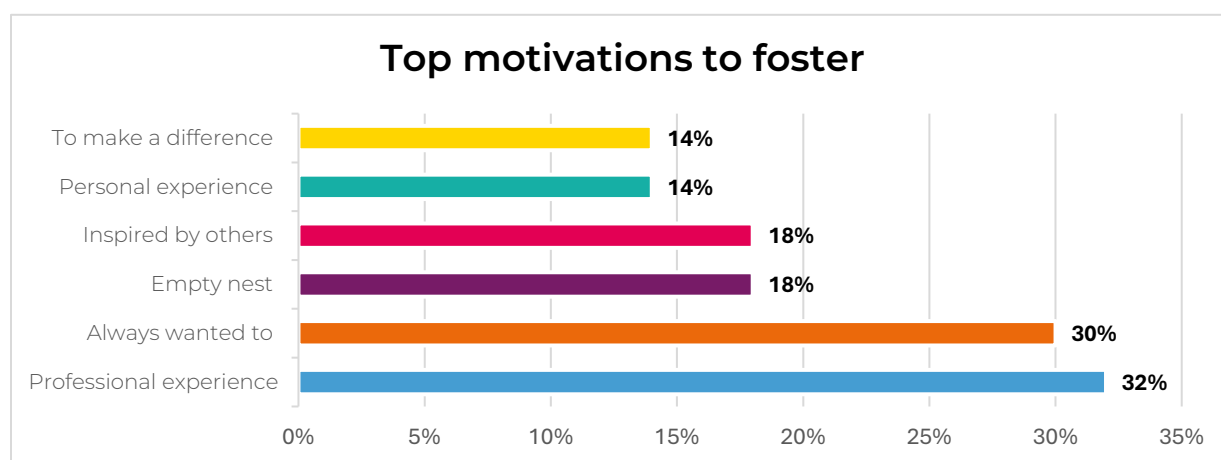
Worryingly, 50% of the participants had left before 5 years of approval, indicating issues surrounding retention. This must be urgently addressed in

order to ensure that the time, money and other resources spent on recruiting and approving foster carers is being invested appropriately.

Furthermore, it is of particular concern to find that 6% of the participants had left their service within less than a year of approval.

Motivation to foster

We asked the participants what their motivation to start fostering was and found that there was a variety of reasons, often a combination of factors rather than one singular moment or event.



The top motivation to foster was previous 'professional experience' - which included experience in professions such as nursing, teaching, childcare, children's residential care etc., and seeing the need for foster care. This was closely followed by a sense that fostering was something participants had 'always wanted to do' - often coupled with other factors such as changes in life circumstances that meant they could now take on the role.

"I wanted to give something back to children & young people - I was aware that so many more foster carers were needed and I wanted to do my bit to help."

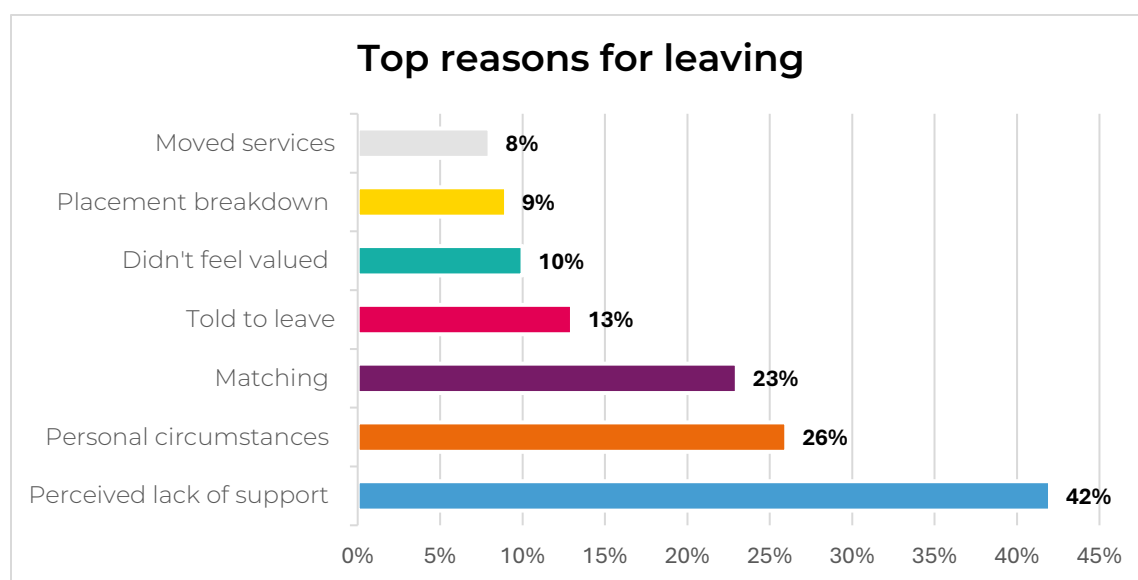
18% of participants reported being motivated by 'empty nest syndrome' now that their birth children had grown up and moved away from home. The same number were motivated by being 'inspired by others' who foster, such as friends, family members, and colleagues.

14% of participants said that their personal experience of knowing someone who was fostered, or having social care involvement in their wider family, is what motivated them to foster. An equal percentage were motivated by their desire 'to make a difference' – this was also the top motivation to foster in Wales in our 2024 State of the Nations' survey.⁴

Other motivations to foster were: wanting to work with children and young people (8%); infertility (7%); they had spare rooms (7%); they had previously fostered (5%); they were care experienced (4%); they like a busy house (3%); they had got divorced (2%); they started as kinship carers (2%); they heard/saw an advert for fostering (2%); they wanted a career change (1%); they were an LGBTQ+ couple (1%).

Reasons for leaving

We asked participants: 'Considering all your experiences as a foster carer, can you explain the reasons why you have decided to leave the fostering service?'. The answers were extremely varied and detailed, and it was often a combination of factors that led people to leave their service. We have categorised each of these unique, and often very difficult, experiences into key themes to give an overview of why people have left their service. For those that has been fostering less than 5 years, the reasons for leaving were broadly the same, although a perceived lack of support rose to 50% of respondents.



⁴ T. Covell, S. Ellis, N. Williams (2025) [State of the Nations' Foster Care Spotlight on Wales Report 2024](#), The Fostering Network

Support

Unfortunately, the top reason for leaving was due to a 'perceived lack of support' from the fostering service, with 42% of respondents attributing their decision fully or partially to this.

"I was disillusioned and disappointed with the system. I didn't feel supported by the fostering team."

"I had no contact from anyone, I didn't see a SSW - my first one changed and then I never saw my new one."

Personal circumstances

Just over a quarter (26%) of participants had 'personal circumstances' that led them to leave fostering, such as a new relationship, birth children sitting exams, becoming grandparents, and their own wellbeing declining.

Clearly those circumstances were outside the influence of the fostering service or individual. However, some respondents had requested a short break or pause to manage a specific situation within their families and as this was not granted, they had decided to leave their service.

"I always felt supported by my SSW and then I had a bereavement and a change of SSW and this is when the dynamics changed. Panel were very supportive and understanding but my SSW told me I should resign as I couldn't take placements."

"I was too quick to leave fostering. My SSW left, I [had a bereavement] and when our new SSW came on board and asked me about this and that, I was so behind with everything, and I was so emotional I jumped the gun and resigned, which I regret now."

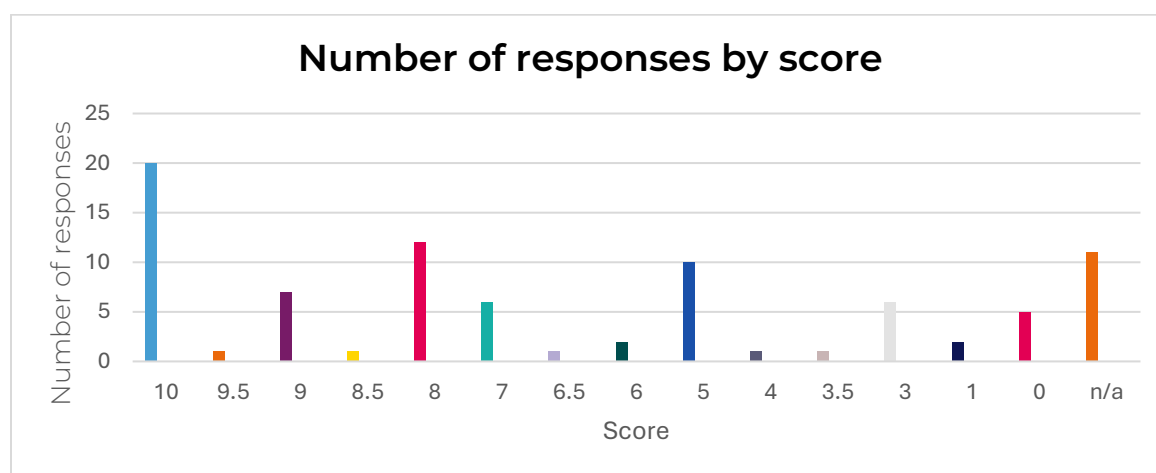
Matching

The third top reason was 'matching', where 23% of respondents felt they had not been matched appropriately to the baby, child or young person they were caring for at the time or previously. Further to this, 9% said 'placement breakdown' was part of the reason they left their service.

"We need to have all the information. To be prepared is to be pre-warned"

"I felt YP would benefit from having a male in the house as I lived alone and was a single carer..... YP did not get the support they needed and there were behaviour issues, and YP was only getting bigger and stronger."

We asked, on a scale of 1 to 10, how well do you feel the children you were asked to care for matched your family and skillset.



The most common score was 10, which suggests a large number of positive experiences.

However, when we reviewed the responses that were given alongside the numerical score to gain further insight, some who gave a score of 8 or higher said that they were thinking of a specific child, and that there were other situations where the score would have been lower.

"10 but there were a couple of times this would have been a 1."

"Our first placement was 9.5 , the 2nd placement was 0. Matching is

so important - this is where we lost confidence in the team."

11 respondents did not give a number, either commenting that they didn't believe matching had happened as there were few available foster carers, or they had never had a child placed with them.

"There was never any matching - we always seemed to have emergencies."

"Can't really comment on this - in 3 years only had two children and 1 was for day care."

Being told to leave

13% of the participants felt they were 'told to' leave fostering. Many foster carers who reported this felt they just wanted a break for a few months, however, this was not an option and they were told to leave the service if they did not accept children.

Being 'told to leave' was higher for those fostering for less than 5 years - 21% of respondents.

Our focus groups gave feedback that 'being told to leave' is unlikely to happen, but many of the respondents spoke about a lack of understanding from their service when their circumstances changed - which ended with termination of their approval.

"I had a call recently when they knew I was pregnant and they asked why I hadn't told them. and They advised me to resign as they didn't think I would manage with a new baby as I would have too much on, and they didn't think it would get through panel."

In some cases it was clear that respondents did not fully understand why their approval had been terminated.

"We were made to leave - we didn't want to leave, they terminated our approval....Apparently we didn't meet the criteria to look after them anymore - we don't know why, we didn't have any feedback and were not given the opportunity to put things right."

Feeling valued

10% did not feel valued by their service, contributing to their decision to leave.

"We felt looked down on and not a valued asset."

"The LA were looking for placements and I would put myself forward, but would not hear back. I didn't see the point in continuing."

It is also important to note that a small number of those reporting they were 'told to leave' were following advice from their independent fostering service, who recommended a transfer to allow a better level of in-person support.

Moving services

8% were leaving their service to move to another, either due to moving areas or feeling as though their service was not providing them with what they needed.

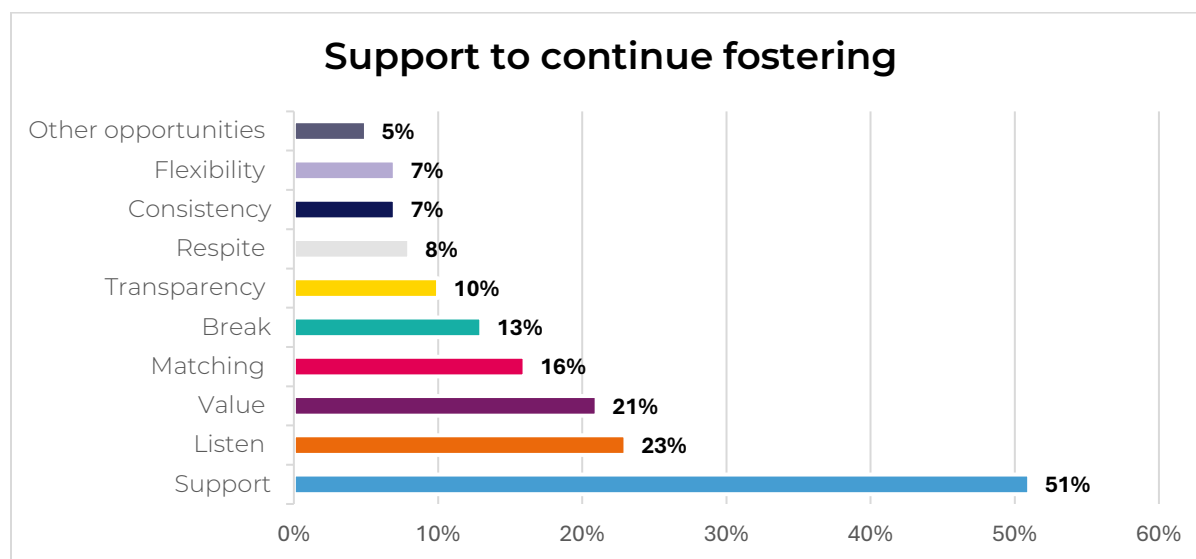
Other reasons

Other reasons included: the foster carer facing health issues (6%) or a member of their family facing health issues (5%); the foster carer facing an allegation or being unhappy with how an allegation was handled (4%); not being given any children to care for (4%); entering into adoption or SGO arrangements (4%); retirement (4%); being given other career opportunities outside of fostering (3%); entering into a When I'm Ready placement (2%); having delays in approval for a new member of the household (2%); and a general feeling of being unhappy (1%).

"The community feel of fostering is gone and there is a lack of support."

Support to continue fostering

Over half of the respondents (54%) said their service could have done something differently to enable them to continue fostering. In other words, they could have been supported to continue fostering with their service.



Over half (51%) said if they had been given more/better support from their service, they would have remained approved as a foster carer.

“SWs don't realise how attached you get to the child - they become part of your family and your heart. When they move on you need to know that they are ok and SW's don't like you asking - they see it as a weakness, but we care.”

Additionally, 23% felt their service could have been better at listening to them and 21% wanted their service to value them. This highlights that some foster carers feel they are not receiving the treatment or respect that they feel is appropriate, causing them to feel undervalued and unheard.

“They could have listened to me more - the social worker felt she knew the child better than myself - she had only met them a few times.”

16% would have stayed if the matching had been better, as they often felt they could not provide the right level of care to the children they were matched with, or it was unsuitable with the other children in the home, such as birth children, other foster children and grandchildren.

13% of the participants said they would have continued to foster if their service had allowed them to have an extended break, perhaps for six months to one

year. This was often after unplanned endings or challenging personal circumstances.

"I told the LA I will need to have a think about my future as it was very traumatic the child running off from us. I was told to hurry up with my decision - no one came around to see me and I felt rushed to sign off."

"Give us more time - we were conscious we were going back to panel and we certainly felt this pressure to take another placement even when we not ready."

Others highlighted issues within the service that could have improved, with 10% wanting better transparency from their service. This often related to sharing accurate and detailed information about the child(ren) being placed with them before arrival. This would ensure they are fully prepared to care for and safeguard the child, as well as other members of the household.

Additionally, 7% reported that they could have been retained if the consistency within their service and between services had been better. Comments in this category related to both the messaging they received from different teams within the service and the financial support/benefits offered by different services.

Some participants (8%) said that had regular short breaks from their own support network or other foster carers been available they could have continued to foster with their service.

"We need short breaks to recover and recuperate"

7% of respondents wanted more flexibility from the service, particularly around training for short break foster carers, who are required to do the same training as full time foster carers. Training is usually delivered on weekdays and so it can be difficult to access for those working full time during the week and hoping to provide short break foster care on the weekends.

Finally, 5% would have valued being given other opportunities for how their skills could be used. This included foster carers who could no longer foster full time but would have been open to becoming short break carers, or providing

support to fellow foster carers. However, this was not an option that was offered to them.

"It was not my desire to resign... we felt forced to leave."

The Mockingbird programme – good practice model

Mockingbird, delivered by The Fostering Network in the UK, is an evidence-based model of foster care structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides.

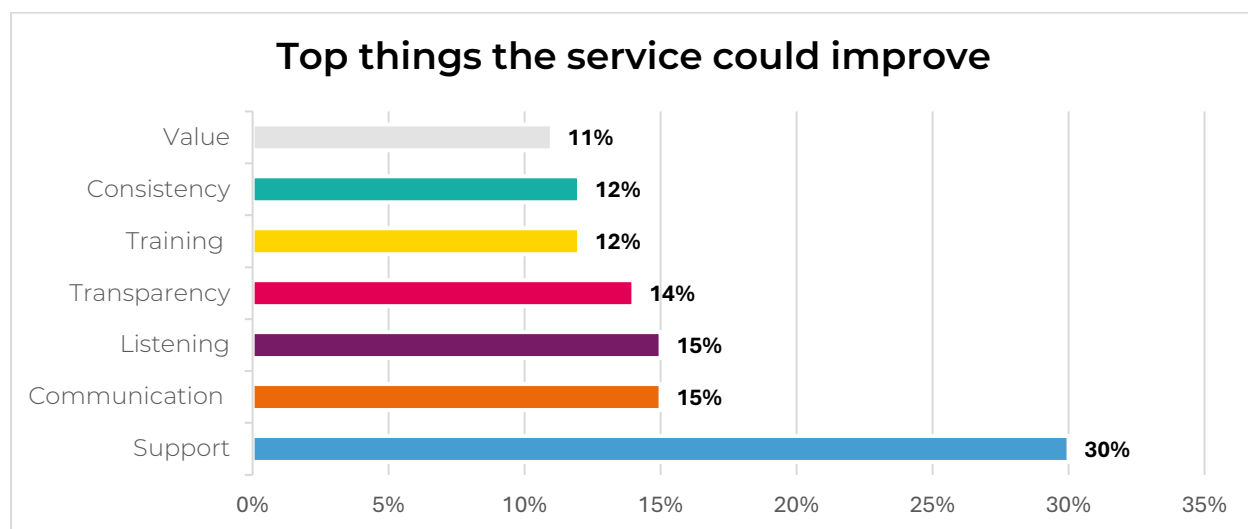
Mockingbird builds communities of six to ten foster families called constellations. Each constellation is led by a hub home carer and liaison worker. Hub home carers can then offer sleepovers as well as social activities to strengthen relationships between children and fostering families and permanence for babies, children and young people looked after.

The model nurtures the relationships between babies, children, young people and foster families, supporting them to build a resilient and caring community.

In order to ensure all fostering families have access to regular, planned breaks in a child-centred way, we would encourage Welsh Government to fund Mockingbird in local authorities across Wales.

What the service could improve

We then asked what things the service could improve. There was a wide range of answers, the top ones are shown in the graph below.



The top thing that respondents said their service could improve was 'support', with almost a third (30%) mentioning this. This was closely followed by 15% saying their service could be better at listening to foster carers and 11% saying they could improve the way they value foster carers.

Good practice suggestion - referral benefits

Given that 80% said they would still recommend fostering, we would suggest that services maintain a relationship with foster carers after they resign as they can still refer people to the service.

Additionally, 15% said their service could improve their communication. This particularly related to updates within the service, such as staff leaving/joining as well as communication between teams within the service.

"Communication needs to be better – they need to be open and honest with carers as this will help,"

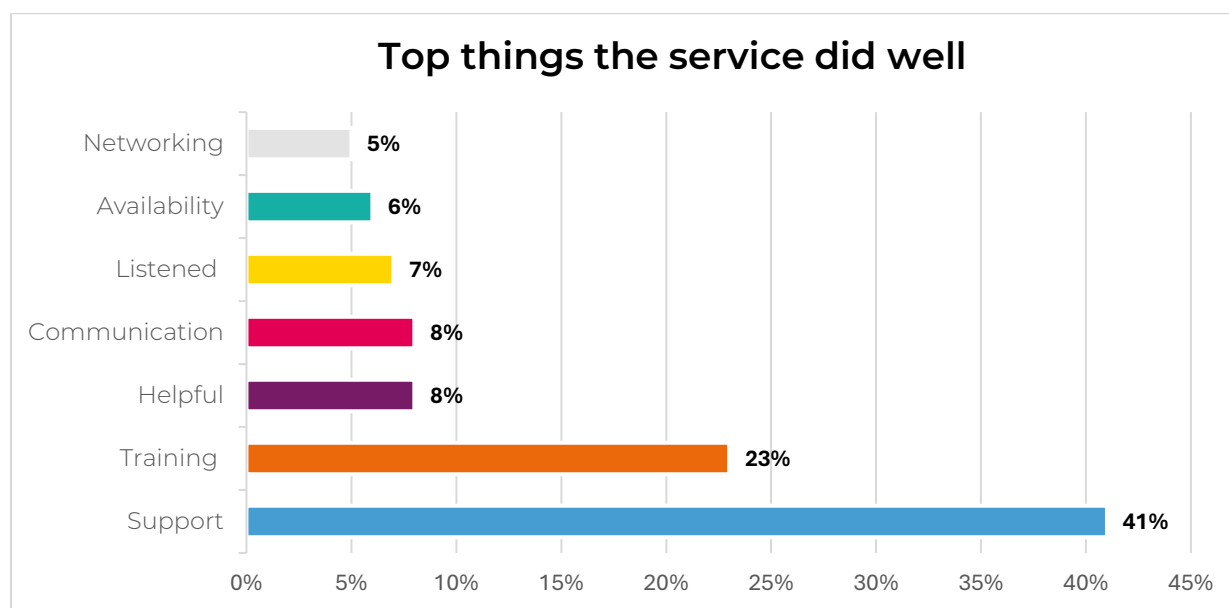
Further to this, 14% said their service could improve transparency. This mostly related to the information foster carers were receiving about a child before the child entered the home, or the expected duration of care. 12% also thought the service could improve consistency. This was both around the differences in what the babies, children and young people receive, as well as what foster carers receive between different services, and sometimes within the same

service. Being treated differently without any clear explanation is resulting in a loss of foster carers in Wales.

12% also thought that training could be improved with more specific topics being covered, as well as making it more engaging – “not death by PowerPoint”.

Other categories of things that the service could improve included: matching, breaks, the availability of social workers and teams within the service, consistency of social workers and their caseloads, the adoption process, finances, the allegations process, safeguarding, transitions and endings.

What the service did well



Many respondents were very positive about aspects of their service. Despite it being the top thing that people said their service could have improved, 41% noted ‘support’ as something their service did well. This indicates the variety of experiences across Wales.

Additionally, 8% of respondents described their service as being ‘helpful’, often relating to specific situations or individuals. 7% also said the service was good at listening to them and 6% said the availability of the service or people within the teams was done well.

"My supervising social worker was always available when I needed them. I am happy with what my service did – I had a good experience with them."

The second top thing was 'training', which almost a quarter (23%) mentioned as something their service did well. This often related to training enabling people to feel prepared for the role or a specific situation.

Good practice suggestion – contact policy

When foster carers leave their service, the service has to keep their data for a certain amount of time. Given that 57% said they would consider fostering again, we would suggest that services create a policy (in line with data protection requirements) in which, after a year, they contact foster carers to check in and see if they would be interested in returning to fostering.

5% of respondents noted the networking opportunities the service provided them to meet other foster carers locally as something that was done well.

Small numbers (>5%) of respondents also noted the following as things their service did well: providing short breaks, matching, gestures of appreciation, the assessment process, Covid response, and providing consistency across services.

Considering fostering again

We asked if the respondents would consider fostering again and over half (57%) said yes. 8% were still fostering, but for a different service, and 5% were unsure if they would. Less than a third (30%) said that they would not consider fostering again.

Recommend fostering

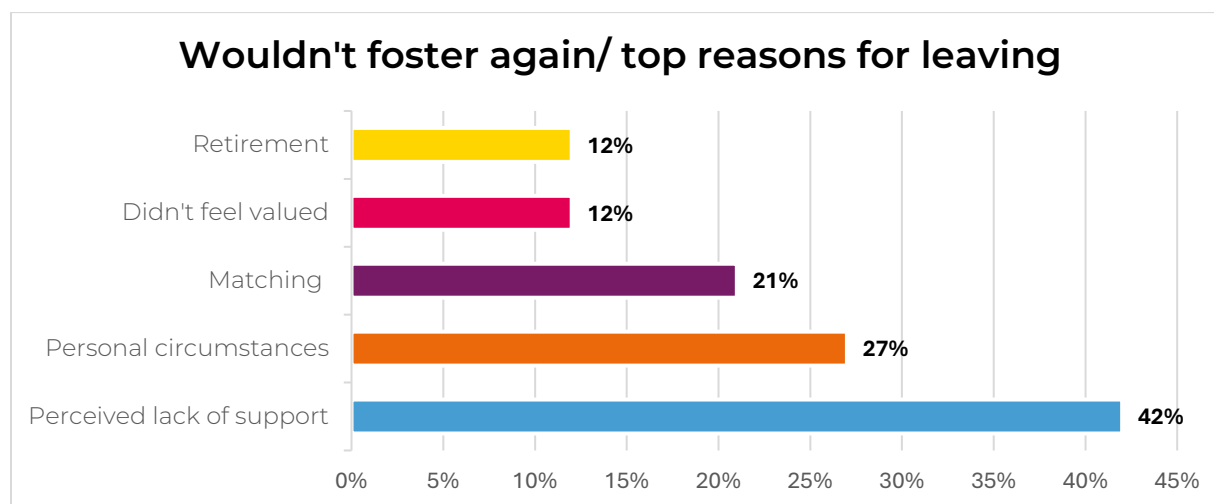
We also asked if the respondents would recommend fostering and the majority (80%) said they would. 8% were unsure and only 12% said they would not.

Further analysis

Through the focus groups we held, we identified areas to cross-examine to give a wider and more accurate picture of why people have left their service.

Reasons for leaving for those who wouldn't foster again

The focus groups also wanted to understand if there were any common themes in 'reason for leaving' that were more prevalent in the 30% who said they would not foster again.



Interestingly, the top reason for leaving in the general cohort and those that said they wouldn't consider fostering again, was 'perceived lack of support' from the service. The percentage of people who said this was the same in both groups at 42%. Additionally, 12% who spoke about 'not feeling valued by their service' said they wouldn't consider fostering again, compared to 10% in the general population of respondents.

There was a slightly higher percentage of people who had left fostering due to 'personal circumstance' who wouldn't consider fostering again, at 27% compared to 26% in the overall findings.

A slightly smaller percentage of people in this category described 'matching' as a reason for leaving their service, at 21% compared to 23% in the general population of respondents.

Unsurprisingly, 12% of respondents who said they wouldn't consider fostering again gave 'retirement' as a reason for leaving their service. In fact, all those

who gave retirement as their reason said that they wouldn't consider fostering again.

The following reasons for leaving from the main cohort of participants were not mentioned by those who said they would not consider fostering again: other career opportunities, moving services, adoption/special guardian orders / kinship arrangements, and delays in approval.

Conclusion

Over the two years of exit interviews, a number of consistent themes have emerged that help explain why foster carers leave their services. However, the range of perspectives also highlights the complexity and diversity of experiences within the fostering system in Wales.

There were many combinations of factors that resulted in people deciding to leave their service. Some of which, such as health issues or moving to a smaller house without a spare bedroom, are clearly outside of the influence of the fostering service. However, many of the circumstances described could potentially have been addressed by early and regular communication between the service and the foster carer; by the provision of a break or pause for the individuals concerned to rest and reflect; or by listening to and addressing specific concerns about the match.

According to our analysis of these exit interviews, as many as 60 fostering families that had their approval terminated during this two year period could have been retained by their service. That is 20% of the 300 foster carers⁵ currently required to meet the needs of babies, children and young people in Wales. With 50% of our interviewees leaving within their first 5 years of fostering, it is clear that government, fostering services and all members of the team around the child must consider how to implement the recommendations in this report.

This will ensure they retain fostering families who have been motivated to step forward and welcome children into their homes. We must listen to what these former foster carers have told us, so that we can improve retention across Wales and ensure that babies, children and young people can be matched with a family that best meets their needs.

⁵ Approximated by The Fostering Network, May 2025

For many respondents, the opportunity to engage in an independent exit interview, undertaken by a skilled counsellor, provided helpful closure and much needed time to reflect on what were often described as traumatic experiences. Exit interviews provide rich feedback to improve service quality and can also go some way to restore faith in fostering when it has been lost. Some of the greatest learning from this research is the overall benefit of offering a personal, independent exit interview, for both the former foster carer and the fostering service. We strongly recommend services continue this approach.

"Me and my children feel unsupported and we were not listened"

Fostering Wellbeing

Fostering Wellbeing is an innovative programme delivered by The Fostering Network in Wales and funded by Welsh Government. It aims to improve the wellbeing outcomes for care experienced babies, children and young people by influencing the way we work together to provide that care. The Fostering Wellbeing programme is primarily delivered through five themed masterclasses, during which everyone involved in the 'team around the child' can gain the skills and confidence needed to support young people to reach their full potential.

Pioneers

Fostering Wellbeing Pioneers are foster carers and kinship carers who have attended the masterclasses and wish to contribute more, over and above their fostering role, to support wider activities within the service. Pioneers provide a community of support and champion the voice of fostering throughout Wales. The Fostering Wellbeing Programme provides structured support, tools, resources and guidance to support planning, recruitment and development for the role at a local and national level. It supports a 'way' of working that values the Pioneers as equal partners in the wider 'team around the child'. The aim is for everyone involved to work together co-productively.

Recommendations for Welsh Government

The following recommendations set out the changes we believe Welsh Government should prioritise in order to recruit and, crucially, be able to retain more foster carers across Wales. This will mean babies, children and young people are afforded the right care, in the right place, at the right time. These recommendations should be considered alongside our 2023 research into the retention and recruitment of foster carers in England⁶ as many of the recommendations made in that report clearly align to the findings from Wales.

Flexibility:

- Amend regulations to ensure that services and foster carers are clear on the right to take a break from fostering, with clear timescales and what assessments or checks are required on return.

Support:

- Continue to fund the 'Fostering Wellbeing' programme to support foster carers and to grow the knowledge, understanding and respect for the role of foster carers in the team around the child.
- Explore the benefits of expanding the Mockingbird programme, currently only delivered by one LA, to improve retention across Wales.
- Introduce new measures to address social worker turnover and caseloads, which affects the consistency and support for foster families. This could include the introduction of case load legislation and shift patterns to replace the current 9am-5pm day for social workers, as well as robust out of hours support and, a review of social worker qualification frameworks and newly qualified rotational systems.

⁶ [Foster carer recruitment and retention in England, May 2023](#)

- Amend regulations to ensure all foster carers have access to an approved support person who is assessed to provide overnight care or longer term care for the children they foster.

Consistency:

- Amend regulations to ensure the implementation and monitoring of a standardised matching policy and approach across Wales.
- Scope, consult and introduce a register for foster carers in Wales to go some way to address concerns regarding status and respect for the role, make best use of the foster carers in Wales and ensure improved matching.
- Improve national fostering data collection and publicise this data to ensure continuous improvement and tangible action to improve recruitment and retention of foster carers in Wales. For example, exit interview data could be collated on a national level.
- Regulate to introduce a standard fostering exit interview process and allocate staff to continue to provide this service at local level.

Recommendations for services

The following recommendations set out the changes we believe fostering services should prioritise in order to retain and recruit more foster carers in Wales.

Preventative and supportive practice:

- Ensure that 24/7 support is available to foster carers through making changes to the working patterns for social care staff and the provision of high quality out of hours support.
- Provide consistent support for all foster carers during a concern or investigation, regardless of experience, commission advocacy and mediation services, to ensure this support is independent and high quality.
- Undertake proactive outreach to foster carers considering leaving to explore alternative fostering options and/or make best use of a relationship-based approach when foster carers are considering

resigning. Too many foster carers had no contact from their fostering service at all or felt pressurised to leave.

- Monitor expected carer losses through annual recruitment and retention strategies and build in preventative action planning. Ensure every foster carer has an approved support network, or access to Mockingbird, to support carers with short breaks and wrap-around support.

Training and development:

- Widen the topics of training available to foster carers and monitor quality and consistency.
- Hold annual inductions for newly qualified social workers on fostering.
- Utilise supervision to reflect on matching, and take learning to embed into the service.

Communication and operational improvements:

- Produce monthly or quarterly service updates from senior management to build connection and respect.
- Share full and honest information about children prior to placement, including clarity on the limitations of matching.
- Ensure the agreed 'all Wales matching templates' and best practice guidance is embedded in service delivery.
- Introduce improved mechanisms to support stability for children and foster carers when this is at risk of breaking down. Implement AFKA's guidance on improving placement stability⁷.
- Make foster carers aware of The Fostering Network's transfer protocol⁸ and ensure it is followed.

Good practice

⁷ AFKA Cymru, [Improving Placement Stability for Children Looked After in Foster Placements](#)

⁸ [Transfer of foster carer protocol Wales \(English\)](#)

The following actions were highlighted as effective by focus group participants and reflect current or potential good practice. This includes a variety of initiatives that services can implement to enhance and personalise support for foster carers.

Recognition and engagement:

- Hold monthly in-person or newsletter-based recognition awards.
- Ensure there is personalised recognition through calls, visits, or written thanks.
- Prioritise face-to-face engagement over written communication where possible.
- Hold inclusive celebration events for key holidays to create opportunities for social and community engagement.
- Hold monthly social activities, such as coffee morning, including foster carers and service staff to strengthen relationships.

Reconnection and recruitment:

- Services should reconnect with former foster carers to explore return opportunities after a year.
- Allow former foster carers to have access to the benefits for referring people to the service.
- Offer alumni programmes to maintain connections and peer learning. Offer flexible fostering options to foster carers considering leaving, such as becoming 'short break carers'.

Appendix 1

Exit Interview Questions

*Required

Section one

1. Name*
2. What date did you attend your exit interview*
3. What is your age?*
4. Date of approval*
5. Date finished fostering*
6. What was your motivation to foster?*
7. Name of service*

Section two – Terms of Approval

8. Age range*
9. Number of children*
10. Permanency*
11. Were you happy with the terms of approval?*
12. Any previous approval as foster carer*

Section three – Who were the members of the household at time of fostering

13. Number of adults*
14. Number of under 18's*

Section four – Prior to ceasing fostering who was in your care

15. Number of children*
16. Were they related or not*
17. What were their ages*
18. What were their genders*
19. Did any children move on as a result of ending fostering*

20. What support networks did you have in place*
21. Considering all your experiences as a foster carer can you explain the reasons why you have decided to leave the fostering service*
22. Was your decision to leave fostering planned or unplanned*
23. Decision to leave fostering extended answer*
24. On a scale of 1-10 did fostering match your expectations*
25. On a scale of 1-10 how well do you feel the assessment process prepared you to become a foster carer*
26. On a scale of 1-10 how well would you say that the preparation training you attended prepared you to become a foster carer*
27. On a scale of 1-10 how well do you feel the children you were asked to care for matched your family and skillset*
28. Did the service offer any of the following support to you as a newly approved foster carer*
29. How many different social workers from the fostering team were allocated to work with your family during approval*
30. On a scale of 1-10 overall, how well would you rate the experience you had with the fostering team*
31. On a scale of 1-10 how well would you rate the experience of working with the children's social work team*
32. Could your service have done anything different to enable you to continue fostering*
33. Please expand on previous question*
34. What has your fostering service done particularly well*
35. What could your service do to improve practice for future foster carers, their families, and fostered children*
36. Would you consider fostering again*
37. Would you recommend fostering to others*
38. Any other comments that you would like to share about your fostering experience*

Section five – contact details

39. If you would like to keep up-to-date with our upcoming training, work and services via our quarterly e-newsletter and emails, please provide us with your email address



The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity and membership organisation. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of children in foster care.

We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice.

We work to ensure all children and young people in foster care experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change so that foster care is the very best it can be.

We have been leading the fostering agenda for 50 years, influencing and shaping policy and practice at every level.



thefosteringnetwork



@fosteringnet



@thefosteringnetwork

thefosteringnetwork.org.uk



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

Registered office 87 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HA

Registered charity in England and Wales 280852 and in Scotland SC039338

Registered in England and Wales as a limited company no. 1507277 VAT Registration 231 6335 90