

State of the Nations' Foster Care

Spotlight on Scotland Report 2024



Introduction

In 2020, Scotland made a promise to care experienced children and young people: you will grow up loved, safe and respected.¹

Foster care is key to keeping this promise to many children who cannot live with their birth families. According to the latest data, 9,529 children and young people in Scotland are looked after away from home, and around a third of these are in foster care.² Foster families provide children with safe and loving homes when they need them, whether for one night or for many years.

The Fostering Network conducts the State of the Nations' Foster Care survey every three years to provide a reliable picture of the state of foster care across the UK, gathering evidence on what is working and what needs to change. It is the largest independent survey of the UK's fostering sector. This spotlight report focuses on the findings from Scotland, where 286 foster carers and 18 fostering services completed the survey.

The key UK findings, combining Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, are available in the summary report.³ The complete findings, broken down by nation of the UK, can be found in the full report.⁴

As in previous years, the survey covers a wide range of issues in fostering and we are very grateful to everyone who took the time to share their views.

Unfortunately, since our last report in 2021, we have seen existing pressures in Scotland's care system grow, compounded by a cost-of-living crisis, demographic changes in the foster carer population, and the increasing challenges faced by children and young people today. Many of these findings make for difficult and dispiriting reading. However, we are also entering a period of opportunity with new legislation and policy developments forthcoming, including the Children and Young People (Care) (Scotland) Bill, to improve children's social care.

We will use our findings to influence this work and continue pushing for wider change at both a national and a local level, to improve support for foster carers and deliver better outcomes for children and young people in foster care. We remain committed to working with services to improve their offer to foster carers, aiding both recruitment and retention.

Part One

Starting out

Recruitment, application and approval

The number of children in care in Scotland has been decreasing since 2012,^{2,5} but the number of foster carers is falling at an even faster rate.⁶ To fill this gap, alongside doubling down on efforts to retain existing foster carers, we have estimated that around 350 more foster families need to be recruited in Scotland this year.

Motivations to foster

We asked foster carers to select their motivations for fostering from a list of options. In 2024, the top three motivations to foster were the same as in 2021:

- 'I want to make a difference to the lives of children in care' (94%)
- 'I want to offer children the opportunity to be part of my/ our family' (74%)
- 'I enjoy working with children' (66%).

"I wanted to give a child a home where they could feel safe and cared for, and be part of my family."

Barriers to fostering

We asked fostering services what they consider to be the primary reasons preventing suitable applicants from enquiring to foster. The top responses were:

- **Finances** (nine services, **50%**) – particularly the cost of living.
- **A lack of space** (six services, **33%**).
- People's **perceptions** (five services, **28%**) – about fostering, and children in care.

Improving the recruitment, assessment and approval process

We also asked fostering services what could improve the recruitment, assessment and approval process for foster carers. The top responses were **better conditions** for foster carers, including improved financial support, and **more visibility** for fostering in society.

Demographics of foster carers

As in the rest of the UK, the population of foster carers in Scotland is ageing. Of those who responded to our survey in 2024, only 13% were aged 35-44, a very slight increase from 12% in 2021, while the proportion aged 45-54 fell considerably from 35% to 26%. In contrast, **the largest proportion of respondents (49%) were aged 55-64**, up from 43%, and a further 10% were aged 65-74, up from 8%. This creates sustainability issues as older foster carers retire and are not replaced.

There is also a lack of ethnic and religious diversity in the foster carer population. Less than 1% of foster carers we surveyed in 2024 in Scotland were Asian, compared to 4% of the population of Scotland. 49% of foster carers were Christian, compared to 39% of the population of Scotland; 48% had no religion, compared to 51% of the population; and only one respondent (representing 0.4% of the sample) was Muslim, compared to 2.2% of the population.⁷


Part Two

Caring for children

Matching

Good matching is key to ensuring children are looked after by foster carers who can meet their needs, close to home and with their siblings where appropriate. This helps avoid unplanned moves and increases stability for children.

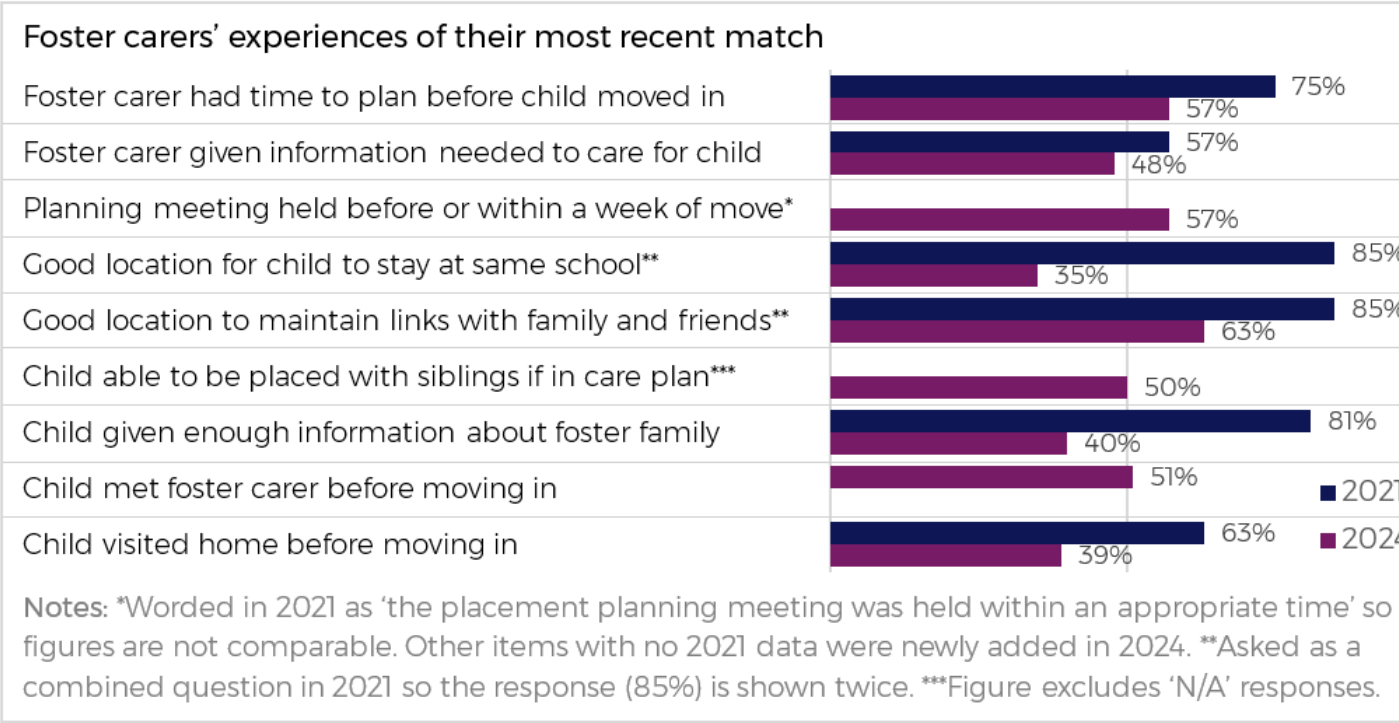
However, our findings paint a mixed picture of how well matching is working in Scotland. Positively, 15 services (83%) said they always or usually receive all the information required from children’s social workers to inform the matching process, and all but one (17 services, 94%) said they always or usually



Less than half (48%) of foster carers said they were given all the information they needed to care for the child they were most recently matched with.

share information about the child with the foster carer in a timely manner to enable them to make an informed decision. Despite this, less than half (48%) of foster carers surveyed said they were given all the information they needed to care for the child they were most recently matched with.

This may, in part, be due to a lack of input from children’s former carers, as just over half of services (10, 56%) said they always or



usually seek the views of children's previous foster carers to feed into the matching process. This suggests that while services may feel the information provided by children's social workers is adequate, it is often missing important insights from former foster carers.

The graph on the previous page also shows that matches are sometimes rushed, with insufficient time for foster carers to plan, and a lack of information and preparation for children. Additionally, despite legislation intended to keep siblings in care together in Scotland⁸, only half of foster carers said the child they were most recently matched with was able to be placed with their siblings where specified in their care plan.

Staying local

The findings also suggest that services are struggling to keep children in their local communities. While 63% of foster carers surveyed in Scotland said their most recent match was in a good location for the child to maintain links with family and friends, only 35% said it was in a good location for them to remain at the same school. Just over half of services (10, 56%) said they always or usually ensure matches are in a good location for children to continue their education uninterrupted and stay in touch with family and friends, if appropriate.

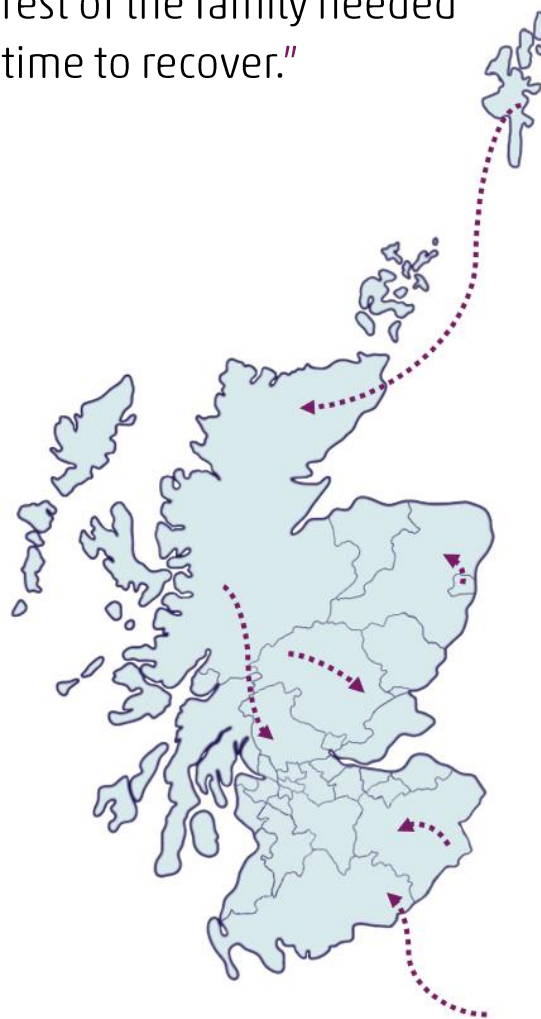
Our foster carer respondents in Scotland told us that **61% of children they foster are living in the same local authority area** they lived in immediately before they came into care, while 27% are living in a different local authority area, but in the same nation of the UK. 2.4% have moved to Scotland from a different nation of the UK, and 2.4% are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Vacancies

44% of foster carers surveyed in Scotland said they had spent time with an unfilled space for a child in foster care – a 'vacancy' – in the past 24 months. The most common reason they gave for this was that they were **waiting for a suitable match**.

Following this, foster carers most frequently reported having vacancies because they **needed a break**, or because the **needs of children** already in the home meant they couldn't foster another child or had more specific matching criteria.

"Child moved to residential care and the rest of the family needed time to recover."



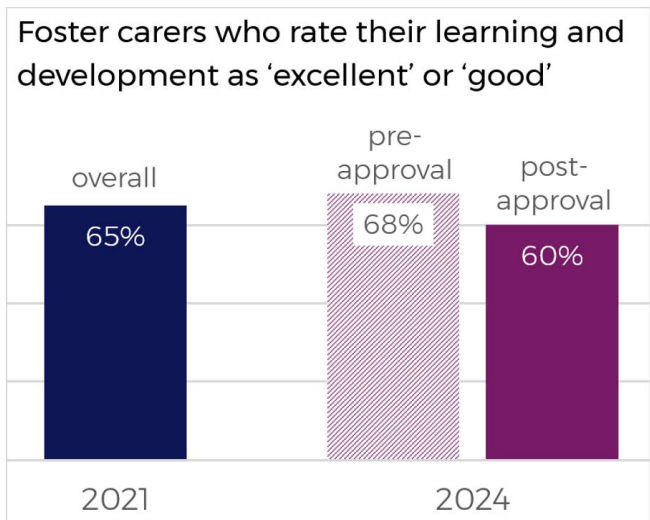
Learning and development

Foster carers are entrusted with the care of children who have often experienced significant trauma and adversity, so it is crucial that they are appropriately trained and able to provide trauma-informed and child-centred care to help children develop and thrive. This includes pre-approval training and regular ongoing post-approval training, tailored to their learning needs. This should be set out in an agreed learning and development (L&D) plan.

However, in 2024, just over half (55%) of foster carers surveyed in Scotland said they had an agreed annual learning and development plan, the same as in 2021.





Quality of learning and development

We asked foster carers approved within the last five years to rate the quality of their pre-approval training; 68% rated it as excellent or good. In comparison, 60% of foster carers rated their post-approval training as excellent or good. In 2021, we asked foster carers to rate the quality of their training overall, and 65% rated it as excellent or good. This suggests that while pre-approval training fares better, general satisfaction with training has decreased.



Learning and development requested

In comments about the types of training they would like to receive but can't access, the most common theme related to children's needs (49%), and included the following:

-  **Safeguarding**, including first aid
-  **Therapeutic care**
-  **Neurodiversity**
-  **Mental health**, including trauma

"Attachment training and dealing with a combination of early years trauma and neurodivergence."

Additionally, 43% of comments related to features of training, including how accessible it is, and the levels available.

Views on a standardised learning and development framework

The Scottish Social Services Council Standard for Foster Care⁹ sets out expectations of learning and development for foster carers, but it is not widely used and most foster carers we have engaged with are not familiar with it. We believe a mandatory framework for learning and development is needed to ensure all foster carers have access to at least a minimum level of required training. We asked foster carers and fostering services for their views on this; 69% of foster carers and 72% of fostering services (13 services) agreed that there should be a standardised, accredited framework for both pre- and post-approval training for foster carers.

Family time

Most children in foster care have birth family who they can't live with but may be able to spend time with or visit. This can include parents, siblings and extended family.

A key part of the foster carer's role is often to support children to see their family members. **Less than two thirds (65%) of foster carers in Scotland said they always or usually feel supported by their service in relation to children's time with their birth family**, a slight decrease from 67% in 2021.

Three in five foster carers (61%) said they feel current arrangements for family time are in the best interests of the children they foster.

"[Family time] is always detrimental to the child (in every one of my children's experiences) and yet we still have to send them and have to help the emotionally distraught child and fix all the damage over and over again."

Day-to-day decisions

Unlike in the rest of the UK, 'delegated authority' for foster carers is not a concept that exists in Scottish law. The Scottish Government published draft guidance on decision making for foster carers¹⁰ in 2015 but this has never been updated from draft form and foster carers continue to face issues when making decisions on behalf of the children they look after.

Less than a third (31%) of foster carers surveyed said children's social workers are always clear about which decisions they have the authority to make in relation to the children they foster.

Foster carers were more likely to say they 'always' feel able to make these decisions in relation to children they foster long-term (43%) than those they foster short-term (32%), but both have decreased since 2021 (from 49% and 40%, respectively).

Less than one in five foster carers (18%) said social workers always respond to requests for decisions in a timely manner.

The main barriers foster carers said they face when making decisions for children in their care related to **difficulties with social workers' involvement (31%)**, including a lack of communication. Additionally, a quarter (24%) of comments mentioned **lacking consent from children's birth family**.

The word cloud shows the areas of decisions foster carers said they find the most difficult to make for children in their care.

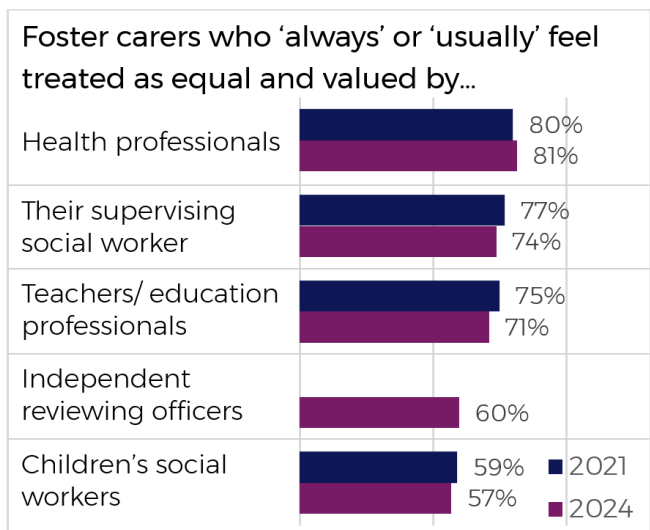


"The children wish to be treated like their peers, being able to go for a sleepover, going out to their friend's house for dinner etc, this is now not allowed unless the parents have been through the full fostering respite assessment."

Status of foster carers

Foster carers play a vital role in the lives of the children and young people they look after, but they aren't always valued for this.

As shown, foster carers were most likely to feel they are treated as an equal and valued member of the team around the child by health professionals, followed by their supervising social worker and teachers/ education professionals. They were less likely to feel this way about independent reviewing officers and children's social workers.



76% said they are always or usually invited to meetings with teachers/ education professionals, 77% to meetings with health professionals, and 81% to children's care planning and review meetings.

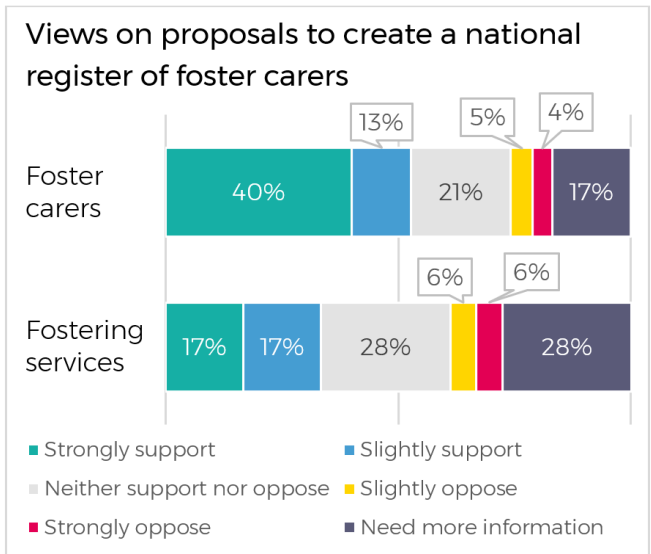
National register of foster carers

The Fostering Network has been campaigning for a national register of foster carers, similar to the registers that exist for other parts of the children's care sector, for several years. We believe this would benefit foster carers' status, as well as improving safeguarding for children, matching, and sufficiency planning. The Promise (2020) report¹ recommended that Scotland should consider a national register for foster carers, and the Scottish Government's recent

consultation on the future of foster care included questions on a national register.

Just over half (53%) of foster carers said they strongly or slightly support proposals to create a national register. Less than one in ten (9%) were opposed, and the remaining respondents were either neutral (21%) or needed more information (17%).

Most respondents in fostering services were uncertain about the idea of a national register, however, they were still more likely to support it (33%) than to oppose it (11%).



Protections and rights for foster carers

36% of foster carers reported feeling they have no rights or protections in their role, and 38% said they don't have many. We asked what rights and protections foster carers feel they should have. The top themes related to:

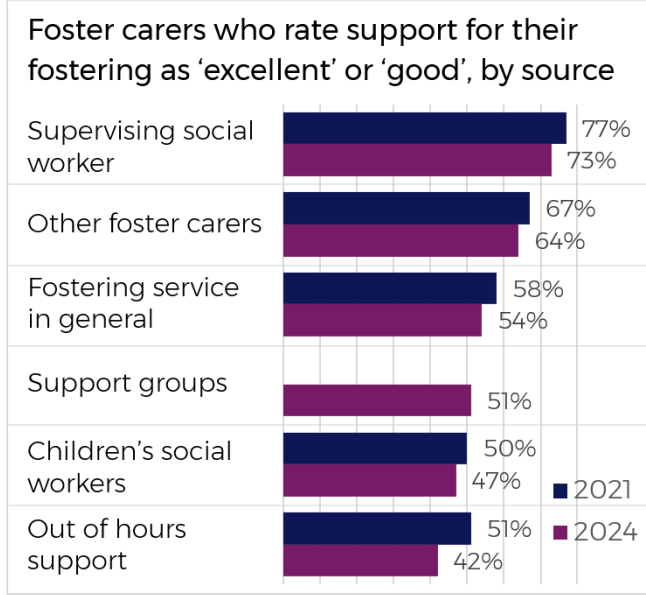
- **Conditions/ treatment (30%)**, including professionalisation and voice.
- **Finances (19%)**, including pensions and fair pay.
- **Caring for children (17%)**, including decision-making.

"We should get some sort of retaining fee when we don't have a placement as long periods can pass with no pay."

"All carers in Scotland should be seen as a relevant person in the hearing system and be able to see reports, attend and have a voice at hearings."

Support for foster carers

The Promise (2020) report¹ recognises that “foster carers may experience secondary trauma on the basis of the pain the children they are caring for have experienced”, and states that they “must have access to all the support they need to care”. Unfortunately, our findings show that this ambition is still not a reality for many foster carers across Scotland.



Support from supervising social workers (SSWs) was rated the most highly, but as with all other sources of support, this has fallen since 2021. Furthermore, less than half (48%) of foster carers said they have had one consistent SSW in the past 24 months, down from 51% in 2021.

Out of hours support was rated the least highly. Only five services (28%) said they provide out of hours support through the foster carer’s own supervising social worker.

Less than half of foster carers (46%) said they have access to an approved support network

or person who can provide overnight care for the children they foster. Importantly, foster carers with access to this were significantly more likely to recommend fostering (61%) than those without access to it (42%).

Foster carers’ wellbeing

Almost half (49%) of foster carers surveyed have experienced burnout or poor wellbeing because of their fostering role. Just over half (54%) said they feel able to ask for support for their wellbeing when they need it, without fear of negative consequences for them or the children they foster.

Unsurprisingly, foster carers who have experienced burnout were significantly less likely to recommend fostering (34%) than those who have not experienced burnout (72%). Those who said they feel able to ask for support for their wellbeing were significantly more likely to recommend fostering (68%) than those who do not feel able to (25%).

The Mockingbird programme

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. The model runs in ‘constellations’ with an experienced ‘hub home’ carer at the centre, providing support and sleepovers to the ‘satellite’ families around them.

There are currently only two Mockingbird ‘constellations’ operating in Scotland, and we did not receive enough responses from their carers to draw any conclusions about the impact of the programme in Scotland. However, our findings from the rest of the UK show that those who are part of Mockingbird were more likely to rate all forms of support as excellent or good. They were also significantly more likely to have access to overnight care for the children they foster, less likely to have experienced burnout or poor wellbeing, and significantly more likely to feel able to ask for wellbeing support.

Support for children in foster care

Children and young people in care have often experienced trauma and adversity which can affect their development, educational attainment, mental health and wellbeing. Every child in care has the potential to thrive with the right support, but too often this support isn't available when they need it, or isn't adequate.

Support for learning

Just over half (53%) of foster carers surveyed said at least one of the children they foster receives additional support for learning (ASL). This has fallen considerably from 60% in 2021, in contrast to a continuing increase in pupils receiving ASL in Scotland overall, and despite the presumption in the Education (ASL) (Scotland) Act 2004 that all children and young people looked after have additional support needs unless the education authority determines otherwise.¹¹

Of those who foster a child who is receiving additional support for learning, 54% said they think it is sufficient, down from 58% in 2021.

A coordinated support plan (CSP) is an action plan used for some pupils who need support with their education, which sets broad and long-term goals for them. All children and young people who are looked after in Scotland are entitled to a CSP. However, less than a third (30%) of foster carers in Scotland said at least one of the children they foster has a CSP.

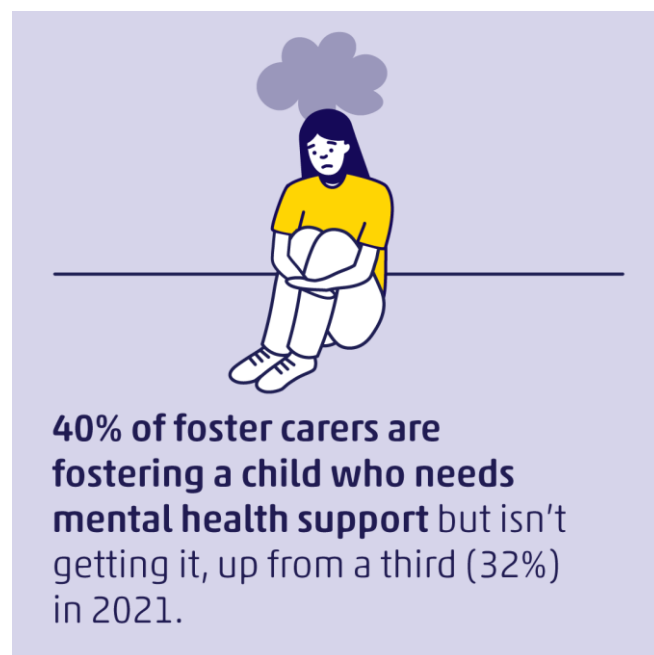
Mental health and wellbeing support

45% of foster carers said at least one child they foster is either receiving mental health or wellbeing support or is on a waiting list for support.

"The waiting list is too long. This is the single greatest strain on carers and young people."

The proportion fostering a child who is **receiving mental health support** increased from 21% in 2021 to **27% in 2024**, while the proportion fostering a child who is being **referred or waiting for support** also increased, from 12% in 2021 to **18% in 2024**.

40% of foster carers are fostering a child who needs mental health support but isn't getting it, up from a third (32%) in 2021.



"He had support... and that was a lifeline for him and all the family. Social work removed this support, despite the child and us asking for it to remain in place. After that support was removed, our placement broke down."

"Asked for counselling for a child and was told she had to wait till she was adopted. 18 months later and still no nearer to adoption."

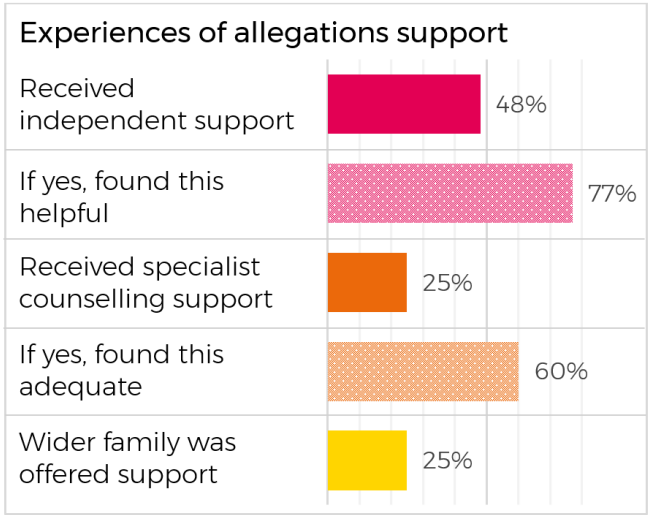
Allegations

An allegation is a claim from any person that a foster carer or another member of the fostering household has, or may have: behaved in a way that has harmed a child; committed a criminal offence against a child; or behaved in a way that indicates they are unsuitable to work with children. **7% of foster carers surveyed in Scotland said they have experienced one or more allegations in the past 24 months.**

Support

It is recognised as best practice for foster carers to receive independent support through the allegations process. However, **less than half (48%) of foster carers said they received independent support** in relation to their most recent allegation, up from 28% in 2021. Over three quarters (77%) found this helpful, up from 69% in 2021.

One in five (25%) received specialist counselling support and 60% of these found the support adequate. Similarly, **one in five said their wider family was offered support** by their fostering service. Allegations against foster carers can be extremely distressing for them and affect their whole family, so this support is vital for their wellbeing and to enable them to continue fostering when it is right to do so.



Timescales of investigations

The most common duration of allegations investigations was up to one month (48%). A further third (30%) said the investigation took one to three months, and 17% said it took three to six months. The longest duration of investigation reported was between six months and one year (4.3%, one respondent).

Removal of children

Half (50%) of foster carers said a child they fostered was removed from their home during their most recent allegation investigation, up from 38% in 2021. This time we also asked if the child was returned; only 17% of foster carers said yes.

Almost three quarters (73%) of foster carers who had a child removed said they received their usual level of foster carer fees during the allegation investigation.

Impact of allegations

We asked foster carers to share how experiences of allegations have impacted them. The most commonly reported impact was on their **fostering (33%)**.

"We feel that despite the allegations being unfounded, our professional relationships with certain professionals has changed negatively. We no longer enjoy our fostering role and continue only out of duty and affection for the child currently in our care."

We also asked foster carers what would improve the allegations experience for them. Their top priority in their comments was **better support for foster carers (47%)**.

Finances

All foster carers receive an allowance which should cover the costs of looking after the children they foster. Most foster carers also receive a fee in recognition of their role. However, our research continues to show that these are often inadequate and many foster carers have to top up their income in other ways to be able to afford to foster.

Work and benefits

39% of foster carers said they work alongside fostering, up slightly from 37% in 2021. A quarter (24%) said they receive benefits.

Allowances

Less than a third (31%) of foster carers said the fostering allowance and any expenses meet the full costs of looking after the children they foster. This has decreased from half (49%) in 2021, despite the introduction of the Scottish Recommended Allowance (SRA) for foster and kinship carers in August 2023.¹² There was no uplift to the SRA in 2024 and the Scottish Government has recently consulted on its implementation.

Most foster carers (79%) said they use other personal income, such as their foster carer fees, savings, or partner's income, to cover this extra cost. 28% of foster carers said they have to work and 15% said they have to claim benefits to cover the extra cost.

"I often use my credit cards to subsidise their life. I will probably give up fostering altogether as lack of finances is stressing me out."

Fees

Less than three in five foster carers (58%) in Scotland said they receive a fee. Of these, only 21% said they feel their fee is sufficient to cover their essential living costs, for example their bills, rent or mortgage, and food.



Most foster carers (56%) said they don't receive a retainer fee if they don't have a child living in foster care with them. This has decreased from 63% in 2021.

While allowances are set nationally through the SRA, there is no central legislation or guidance about fees for foster carers. Fees are decided individually by each fostering service provider. We asked all survey respondents for their views on this; **71% of foster carers and 13 fostering services (72%) said government should set a national fee framework to apply across all fostering services.**

Over 70% of foster carers and fostering services support a national fee framework.

Managing finances

Two thirds (67%) of foster carers said the cost of living has had an impact on their fostering.

"We have had to cut back on so much, days out, treats, holidays, the type of food we eat and unfortunately, heating."

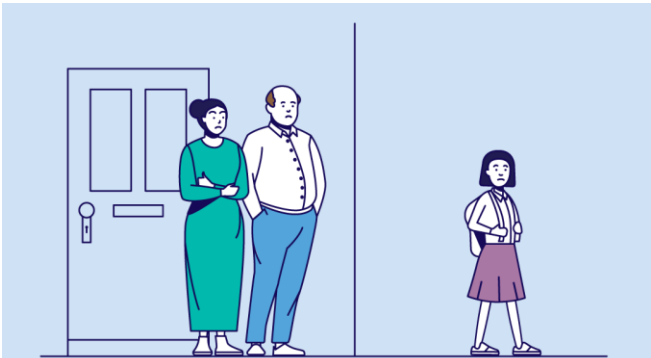
Part Three

Endings and Continuing Care

Children moving on in foster care

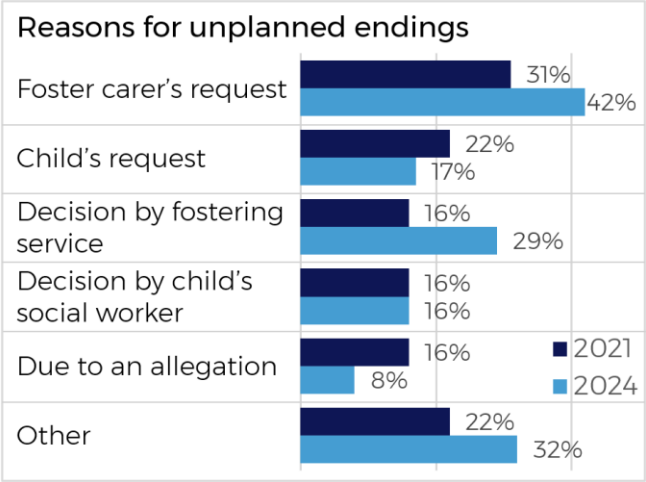
Unplanned endings

65% of foster carers in Scotland who have experienced a child moving on in the past 24 months said this included an unplanned ending, up from 50% in 2021.



Two thirds of foster carers who have experienced a child moving on in the past 24 months said this included an unplanned ending, up from half in 2021.

The most common cause of unplanned endings was the foster carer’s own request (42%, up from 31% in 2021). Almost a third (32%) specified another reason for their latest unplanned ending, most frequently related to safeguarding.



"The plan was that we would adopt but local authority was too slow to provide an adequate level of support and short breaks which led to the sad decision to move the child to specialist residential care."

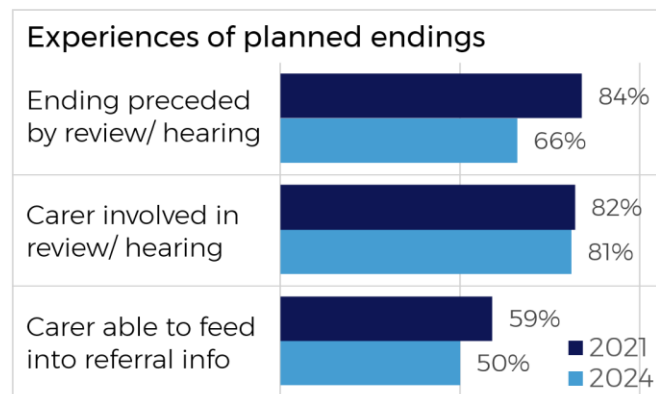
In 2024, we also asked fostering services what they consider to be the main changes required to reduce unplanned endings for children in foster care. The top theme in responses from services in Scotland was **support** for foster carers and children (eight services, **53%**). Additionally, five services (**33%**) said **better information and communication** would reduce unplanned endings. Four services (**27%**) highlighted **qualities of foster carers** such as having a better understanding of children’s needs.

Planned endings

77% of foster carers who experienced a child move on in the past 24 months said this included a planned ending. Of these, **66%** said their latest planned ending was preceded by a child’s care plan review, a looked after child review or children’s hearing, a substantial decrease from 84% in 2021. 81% said they were involved in this review, a very slight decrease from 82%.

State of the Nations' Foster Care: Spotlight on Scotland Report 2024

Half (50%) of foster carers surveyed said they were given the opportunity to feed into the referral information for the child's next care arrangement in relation to their latest planned ending, down from 59% in 2021.



Views on decisions to move children

Only half of foster carers reported feeling decisions to move children are always or usually in the best interests of the child, a slight increase from 46% in 2021.

Continuing Care

Until recently, most young people in foster care were required to leave their foster home as soon as they turned 18, far earlier than their peers not in care – who typically leave home after the age of 24¹³ – and often before they are ready. Following the introduction of Continuing Care legislation¹⁴ in Scotland, young people in foster, kinship and residential care can now stay in their care arrangement up to the age of 21.

Transition planning

Early planning is important to ensure smooth transitions between, and out of, care arrangements. However, **one in five foster carers (21%) in Scotland said there is typically no planning ahead of a young person's transition** out of care or into a Continuing Care arrangement. The same proportion said planning typically begins less than six months before the transition (21%); six months to one year before the transition (21%); or one to two years before the

transition (21%). Only 12% said planning typically begins more than two years before the transition.

Barriers to Continuing Care

We asked foster carers to share the reasons any eligible young people didn't remain with them in Continuing Care when they turned 18 (or 16). The top three reasons were:

- **The young person didn't want to stay (55%, up from 44%).**
- **The young person entered an alternative arrangement** such as Shared Lives or supported lodgings (**18%**, down from 22%).
- **The foster carer's fostering income would decrease (16%, up from 9%).**

Positively, fewer foster carers in 2024 said eligible young people didn't stay with them due to a lack of support from the fostering service (11%) or from the child's social worker (12%) than in 2021 (22% for each).

Finances in Continuing Care

57% of foster carers said they are worse off financially as a result of offering Continuing Care, a very slight decrease from 58% in 2021. One in five foster carers (22%) said the young person is expected to contribute towards their allowance.

Comments on Continuing Care

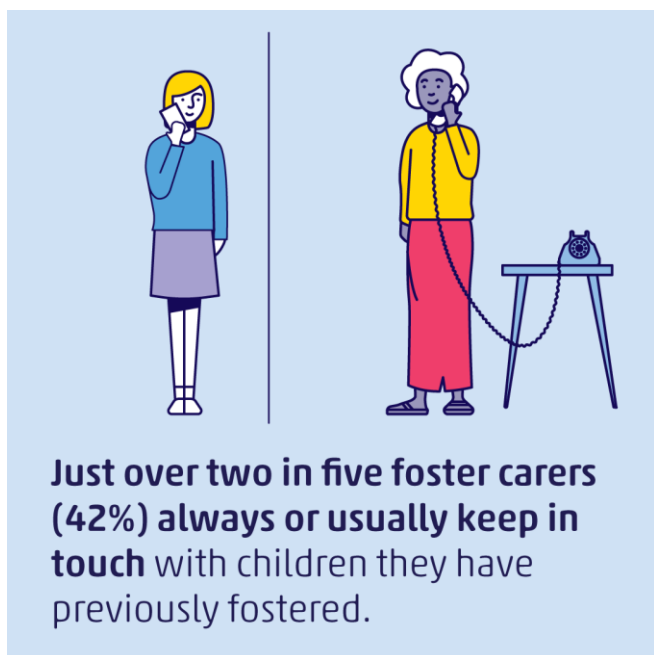
In foster carers' comments on how well Continuing Care arrangements are working for the young people they foster, the most common themes were:

- **Finances (24%)** – particularly challenges accessing financial support.
- **Timings (22%)** – covering young people's readiness to move into independence, and their continued need for support past the age of 18.
- **Benefits of Continuing Care (13%).**

"My young person has been with me 11 years, Continuing Care supports him to stay with me, he thinks of our house as his home. He feels secure and is thriving at home with his family and at college."

"Young people are made to leave before they are ready... this is sad as we do not put an age limit on our biological kids to live independently."

Keeping in touch



Children and young people's relationships with their foster families are central to helping them feel safe and supported when they can't live with their birth family. When a child moves on from a foster family, they should be able to maintain their relationship with them for as long as they want.

Despite this, just over two in five foster carers (42%) surveyed in 2024 said they always or

usually keep in touch with children they have previously fostered. Just over half (51%) said these relationships always or usually last long-term, for example, into the children's adulthood.

Only a quarter (24%) of foster carers said they feel very or quite supported to keep in touch with former foster children where appropriate.

Reasons for not keeping in touch

The most common reasons for not keeping in touch were that local practice didn't allow it (25%); the child's birth family (23%) or adopters (21%) didn't want them to; or it was in the child's best interests not to keep in touch (19%).

Comments on keeping in touch

The most common themes in foster carers' comments on keeping in touch were:

- **Wanting to keep in touch (32%)** – these foster carers often said they see former foster children as part of the family.
- **Obstacles to keeping in touch (22%)** – including that services don't encourage or support keeping in touch, or new carers prevent it.
- **Benefits of keeping in touch (19%)** – including for children's understanding of their life story.

"I want every child to know that they are still important to us and we still think about them."

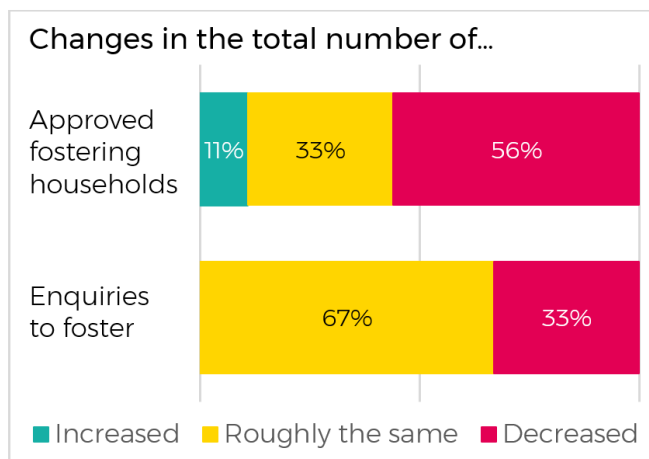
"Staying in touch is dictated by social workers and parents. Children are never heard in their wishes on this and their long term wellbeing is not considered."

Part Four

The System

Shortages of foster carers

The year-on-year decline in fostering household numbers in Scotland⁶ is arguably the clearest indicator of a sector in crisis. The findings of this survey further demonstrate this decline, as shown in the graph below. Most fostering services that responded to the survey in Scotland said the total number of approved fostering households in their service has decreased in the last year. All services reported that enquiries to foster have either decreased (one third) or stayed roughly the same (two thirds).



All 18 services said there is a shortage of foster carers to meet the needs of the children in their local population.

Retention

The retention of foster carers is just as important as recruitment, if not more so, to address the current shortages of foster carers in Scotland. We asked fostering services to share the most effective thing they do to

retain foster carers. The top three themes in comments were:

- **Support** (16 services, **89%**), including therapeutic support, foster carer events and short breaks
- **Training** (six services, **33%**)
- **Finances** (five services, **28%**)

Over half (55%) of foster carers said they will continue fostering for as long as they can, up from 46% in 2021. Notably, in response to the question 'what motivates you to foster?' (see the section on Recruitment for discussion of motivations to start fostering), 71% of foster carers selected 'I am committed to the children I am currently fostering' as a key reason.

However, 55% of foster carers said they have either considered (41%) or are still considering (14%) resigning from fostering, most commonly due to:

- **A lack of respect** from other professionals in the team around the child (**55%**)
- **Burnout or poor wellbeing** related to fostering (**54%**)
- **A lack of support** from their fostering service (**53%**)

Additionally, 28% of foster carers who have considered resigning selected financial difficulties as a contributing factor. 27% of all foster carers we surveyed told us that their fostering income is an essential part of their household income, further emphasising the importance of financial support to allow foster carers to continue in the role.

Sufficiency planning

Of fostering services in Scotland that completed the survey in 2024, 13 (72%) said they have a fostering recruitment and retention strategy. Concerningly, almost half (8 services, 47%) said they are rarely or never involved in any local or regional sufficiency planning for the looked after children population. Only five services (29%) said they are usually involved, and no services said they

are always involved. 16 services (89%) said they agree or strongly agree with proposals to create a national fostering recruitment and retention strategy in Scotland, while the remaining two services (11%) said they neither agree nor disagree.

Views and attitudes on fostering

Sadly, the number of foster carers who would recommend fostering to others has decreased. Just over half (51%) of foster carers said they would recommend fostering to others who may be considering it, down from 58% in 2021. On average, foster carers in 2024 rated their experience of fostering as 7.1 out of 10, down from 7.3 out of 10 in 2021.

We asked foster carers and fostering services what they think currently works well in fostering. The top themes were as follows.

What one main thing do you think currently works well in fostering?	
Foster carers’ top responses	Fostering services’ top responses (from 15 respondents)
Positive relationships with social workers (19%).	Support for foster carers (eight services, 53%), including peer support.
The foster care community (13%).	Relationships (four services, 27%), particularly between foster carers and social workers.
The impact of fostering on children and young people (10%).	Training for foster carers (three services, 20%).

We then asked what they would like to see changed.

What one main thing would you like to see changed to make foster care better?	
Foster carers’ top responses	Fostering services’ top responses (from 15 respondents)
Finances (23%), including financial support for foster carers and funding in general.	Foster carers’ status and respect in the team around the child (six services, 40%).
Foster carers’ status and respect in the team around the child (18%).	Finances (five services, 33%), including foster carer fees.
Support for foster carers and children in foster care (13%).	Support for foster carers (three services, 20%).

Conclusion

Across many areas of fostering – including matching, support from services, and finances – the evidence from this survey shows that foster carers' experiences, and by extension, those of the children and young people they foster, have worsened since 2021. On other issues such as allegations in fostering families, the findings continue to paint a challenging picture.

However, we've also seen examples of where the right support, particularly from supervising social workers and other foster carers, can help foster carers to change children's lives. Respondents also shared their strong support for practical changes that would make a real difference for foster carers and children and young people.

We welcome the Scottish Government's foster carer recruitment campaign, which we hope will help to recruit the additional 350 foster families needed in Scotland this year. But more needs to be done to retain the carers we already have and turn the tide on the rising numbers of carers leaving the role.

The following recommendations set out the key changes we believe the Scottish Government, placing authorities and fostering services should prioritise.

The Scottish Government should:

- Create a national **recruitment and retention strategy** for foster care.
- Include a drive to recruit more **'short break' carers** in the national foster carer recruitment campaign.
- Commission the development of a **standardised framework for pre- and post-approval training** for foster carers.
- Introduce statutory **'opt-out' maximum delegated authority** for foster carers to make day-to-day decisions on behalf of children.
- Introduce automatic **'relevant person' status** for foster carers in the children's hearings system.
- Introduce a **national register of foster carers** to increase foster carers' status, improve safeguarding of children, and support better-informed local matching of children and carers. Responsibility for decisions about the removal of foster carers' approval should be moved to this body to increase independence.
- Address sufficiency issues within children and families social work teams, prioritising and financing targeted **social work recruitment** and regulation of caseloads.
- Invest in children's **mental health services** and **additional support for learning**.
- Update the 2013 **allegations guidance** and place it on a statutory footing, with a requirement for fostering services to provide foster carers with independent support, counselling, full fees and regular communication throughout investigations.
- Increase the **Scottish Recommended Allowance** to meet our recommended rates¹⁵ and introduce and fund a **national fee framework**, with fees paid 52 weeks a year, and a **national pension scheme** for foster carers.
- Legislate and provide funding to increase the maximum age for **Continuing Care** to age 25 and introduce a **right to return** to Continuing Care.
- Produce statutory guidance to support children and young people's **ongoing relationships** with people who matter to them, including their former foster families where appropriate.
- Fund **innovative fostering programmes** that focus on prevention, retention and support, such as Mockingbird and Step Up Step Down.

Placing authorities should:

- Ensure children's profile information is collated by everyone who knows them best and is shared with fostering services to inform **high quality matching**.
- Put the views of children and young people at the centre of decisions on **family time** and **keeping in touch** with former foster carers.
- Ensure all children coming into care receive a **mental health assessment**.

Fostering services should:

- Ensure all necessary **matching information** about children is shared with potential carers, and children are informed about and have the opportunity to meet their new foster family, well in advance of any move.
- Provide **training** in a range of formats and at different times to increase attendance, focusing particularly on increasing access to safeguarding training, and providing opportunities for more advanced training.
- Include detail on **day-to-day decisions** in care planning. Ensure foster carers are invited to, and supported at, care planning and review meetings.
- Prioritise improved **support for foster carers**, including therapeutic, peer, and out-of-hours support. Ensure all foster carers have access to an approved support network or person who can provide overnight care for the children they foster.
- Sign up to our **Keep Connected principles** to support children and young people's relationships with their former families where appropriate.



About the data

The 2024 State of the Nations' Foster Care survey was completed by 286 current foster carers and 18 fostering services in Scotland.

The current and former foster carers' surveys contained very similar questions, largely about individuals' experiences of fostering, while the services' survey focused more on practice within services. All three surveys were open from 2 May to 14 July 2024 and hosted online using Qualtrics. The surveys were shared with all The Fostering Network's members and promoted through our website, magazine, social media and e-newsletters. Findings were analysed with the support of two independent consultants.

About the foster carer respondents

73% of respondents in Scotland said they foster for a local authority and 27% said they foster for an independent voluntary fostering provider. Local authority foster carers were therefore slightly overrepresented compared to the two thirds of fostering households in

Scotland who are registered with a local authority service.⁶

Additionally, 9% of respondents were Continuing Care carers.

About the fostering service respondents

11 services (61%) were independent voluntary fostering providers and seven (39%) were local authorities. Independent providers were therefore overrepresented compared to their approximately 45% share of Scotland's fostering sector.

The total number of fostering households approved by services that completed the survey was 1,309, which represents approximately 44% of fostering households in Scotland.

Five respondents (28%) who completed the fostering services' survey on behalf of their service were team managers; three (17%) were fostering service managers, and three were heads of service. The remaining respondents had a variety of related roles.

References

¹ Independent Care Review (2020) [The Promise](#)

² Scottish Government (2025) [Children's Social Work Statistics – Looked After Children 2023/24](#)

³ Ellis. S and Williams. N (2025) [State of the Nations' Foster Care: Summary Report 2024](#), The Fostering Network

⁴ Ellis. S and Williams. N (2025) [State of the Nations' Foster Care: Full Report 2024](#), The Fostering Network

⁵ Scottish Government (2015) [Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland, 2013-14](#)

⁶ Care Inspectorate (2024) [Fostering and adoption statistics 2019/20 to 2023/24](#)

⁷ Scotland's Census (2021) [Flexible table builder](#)

⁸ [The Children \(Scotland\) Act 2020](#) and [The Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Amendment Regulations 2021](#)

⁹ Scottish Social Services Council (2017) [Standard for Foster Care 2017](#)

¹⁰ Scottish Government (2015) [Decision Making Guidance for Foster Carers](#)

¹¹ Audit Scotland (2025) [Additional support for learning](#)

¹² Scottish Government (2023) [New national allowance for foster and kinship carers](#)

¹³ Scotland's Census (2021) [Table view](#)

¹⁴ Through [part 11 of the Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#) and subsequent Continuing Care orders

¹⁵ The Fostering Network (2025) [Fostering allowances](#)



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.

Report authors:

Sioned Ellis

Natalie Williams

Supported by



 [thefosteringnetwork](https://www.facebook.com/thefosteringnetwork)

 [@fosteringnet](https://twitter.com/@fosteringnet)

 [@thefosteringnetwork](https://www.instagram.com/@thefosteringnetwork)

thefosteringnetwork.org.uk

For more information on the report, please contact policy@fostering.net

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