

State of the Nations' Foster Care

Spotlight on Wales Report 2024



Introduction

In Wales, 7,200 children are looked after away from home, with around two thirds in foster care.¹ Foster families provide safe, loving homes when children need them, whether for one night or many years.

The Fostering Network conducts the State of the Nations' Foster Care survey every three years, the UK's largest survey of the fostering sector. This spotlight on Wales focuses on data from respondents across the country to provide a reliable picture of the current state of foster care, gathering evidence on what works and what must change. In Wales, the 2024 survey was completed by 276 foster carers and 11 fostering services.

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. The key UK findings, combining Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, are available in the summary report.² The full findings and recommendations broken down for each UK nation are available in the full report.³

Unfortunately, since our last report in 2021, existing pressures have worsened, compounded by a cost-of-living crisis, demographic changes in the foster carer population, and the increasing challenges faced by babies, children and young people today. Many of these findings are difficult and disheartening.

However, Wales is entering a period of opportunity, with new legislation and policy developments, offering real potential to improve children's social care.

In 2023, the Children, Young People and Education Committee launched the Radical Reform Inquiry, which resulted in several recommendations aimed at improving children's social care, some of which were accepted fully or in part by Welsh Government. Since then, we have continued to call for key areas of reform, including the development of a national register of foster carers and the review of the 'When I'm Ready' scheme.

More recently, the Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025 received Royal Assent, marking the beginning of the process to eliminate profit from children's social care in Wales.

We will continue to use the findings of this report to advocate for change - bringing the whole fostering community together to improve support for foster carers and secure better outcomes for babies, children, and young people. We remain committed to working with services to strengthen the offer to foster carers, supporting both recruitment and retention.

Part One

Starting out

Recruitment, application and approval

The number of children in care has been increasing in Wales for the past two decades,⁴ while the number of foster carers is decreasing.⁵ This means it is crucial that services are able to consistently recruit new foster carers, as well as retain the ones they already have. We have estimated around 300 more foster families need to be recruited in Wales this year to make sure every child receives the care they need and is well supported in their community.

Motivations to foster

We asked foster carers to select their motivations for fostering from a list of options. The top answers were:

- 'I want to make a difference to the lives of children in care' (84%)
- 'I want to offer children the opportunity to be part of my/ our family' (63%)
- 'I enjoy working with children' (56%)

"I love what I do and I feel so rewarded with each child I meet."

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:

- **Perceptions** people have (seven services, **64%**) – about fostering, children in care, or their own suitability to foster.
- **Finances** (four services, **36%**) – both the cost of living and the inadequacy of financial support for foster carers.
- **A lack of space** (three services, **27%**).

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 from services in Wales were **better conditions** for foster carers, including financial support; and **better marketing and visibility** for fostering in society.

Demographics of foster carers

The population of foster carers in Wales is ageing. Of those who responded to our survey in 2024, only 9% were aged 35-44, down from 18% in 2021, while the proportion aged 45-54 also fell slightly from 33% to 30%. In contrast, **the largest proportion of respondents (43%) were aged 55-64**, up from 38%, and a further 14% were aged 65-74, up from 7%. 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: 99% of those we surveyed in Wales in 2024 were white, compared to 94% of the population of Wales. 58% were Christian, compared to 44% of the population, and 39% had no religion, compared to 47% of the population. None of our respondents identified as Muslim, compared to 2% of people in Wales.⁶


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, services often lack the information they need to make good matches.

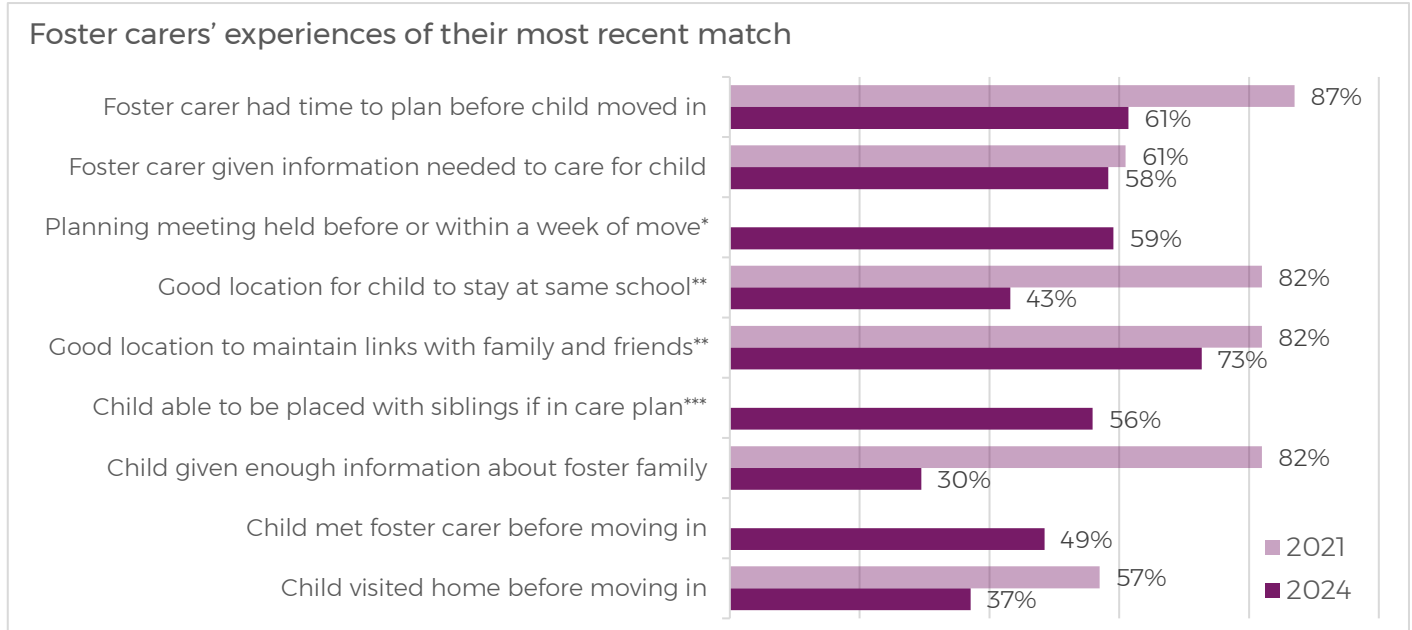
Seven fostering services (64%) in Wales said they always or usually receive all the information required from children’s social workers to inform the matching process.



Only three in five foster carers (61%) felt they had time to plan before the child they were most recently matched with moved in, down from 87% in 2021.

Five fostering services (46%) said the service always or usually seeks the child’s previous foster carers’ views to feed into the matching process, or requests these if the carer is with another service.

"The child’s team need to share vital information and help foster families to create safe boundaries."



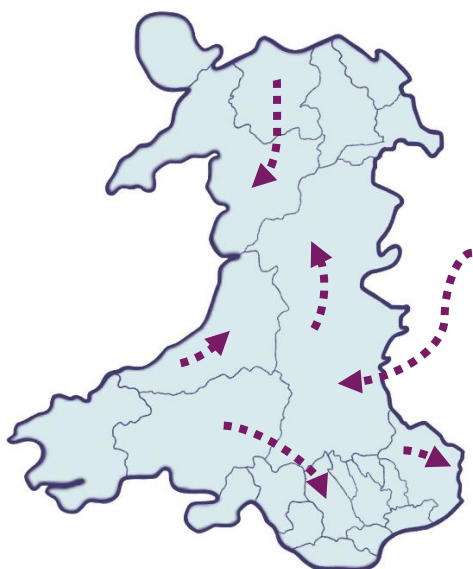
Notes: *Worded in 2021 as ‘the placement meeting was held within an appropriate time’ so figures are not comparable. Other items with no data were newly added in 2024. **Asked as a combined question in 2021 so the response (82%) is shown twice. ***Figure excludes ‘N/A’ responses.

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This lack of information-sharing carries over to foster carers, with only three in five foster carers (58%) surveyed in Wales in 2024 saying they were given all the information they needed to care for the child they were most recently matched with. This is a deteriorating picture compared to data gathered in 2021, along with most other aspects of foster carers' experiences of matching, as shown.

Staying local

Our foster carer respondents in Wales told us that **78% of children they foster are living in the same local authority area** they lived in immediately before they came into care, while 18% are living in a different local authority area, but in the same nation of the UK. 2.5% have moved to Wales from a different nation of the UK.



Vacancies

Over half (52%) of foster carers surveyed 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 given for this was that they were **waiting for a suitable match**. This points to the need for improved matching processes and for foster carers to have the right training and support to allow them to be matched with children with a wider range of needs.

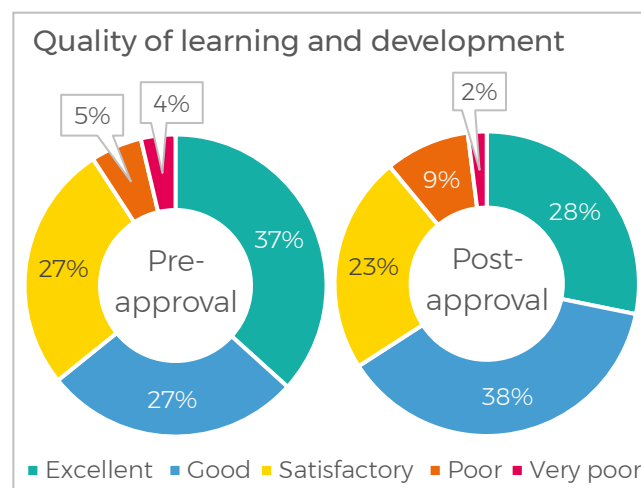
Following this, the next most common reasons for vacancies were **needing a break**, or the **needs of children** already in the home.

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.

In 2024, only **64% of foster carers surveyed in Wales said they had an agreed annual L&D plan**, up from 59% in 2021. During the creation of Foster Wales, a L&D framework was developed and made available to all services, however following this is not mandatory.

Additionally, 64% rated their pre-approval training as excellent or good. In comparison, 66% rated their post-approval training as excellent or good. This has decreased slightly since 2021, when 68% of foster carers we surveyed rated their L&D (overall) as excellent or good.



In response to questions to foster carers about the types of training they would like to receive but can't access, the most common theme related to aspects of training such as its accessibility and level, rather than its content.

In terms of specific areas of training foster carers said they want, these most often related to children's needs and included the following:



Therapeutic care, including attachment.



Safeguarding, including first aid.



Mental health, particularly trauma.

"Most training about challenging behaviour focuses on the 'why' and understanding the behaviour, but we would also like training on how to manage and help children overcome it."

We also asked foster carers and fostering services whether they think there should be a standardised accredited framework for the training of foster carers, which sets out a minimum level of training all foster carers should receive. This would be different to what is already available as it would be mandatory for all services to use. 72% of foster carers and 73% of fostering services (eight services) in Wales agreed that this should be the case for both pre- and post-approval training for foster carers.

Over 70% of foster carers and fostering services support a national L&D framework.

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. **Just over two thirds (69%) of foster carers said they always or usually feel supported by their service in relation to children's time with their birth family.**

Additionally, two thirds (67%) of foster carers said they feel that current arrangements for family time are in the best interests of the children they foster.

"[when family time is cancelled last minute due to staff shortages] the upset and disappointment the children feel is overwhelming"

Day-to-day decisions

Children and young people in foster care should have the same opportunities as their peers – but foster carers don't always have the authority to make the decisions required for them to access these opportunities, or to give them permission to do so.

Just over a third (34%) 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 said they generally feel more able to make these decisions in relation to children they foster long-term (38% said they always feel able to) than those they foster short-term (32% always feel able to), but both have decreased since 2021. Less than one in five foster carers (18%) said social workers always respond to requests for decisions in a timely manner.

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When asked about the main barriers they face in making decisions for children in their care, the three most common themes were:

- Difficulties with social workers' involvement (40%) – including a lack of clarity and communication.
- Lack of consent from birth family (18%).
- Bureaucracy (9%).

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



"We are unable to be spontaneous like we would for birth children because we have to wait for the Monday-Friday working day to make requests"

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 recognised or 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** and by their **supervising social worker (SSW)**. They were less likely to feel this way about **teachers/ education professionals** and **independent reviewing officers (IROs)**, and least likely about **children's social workers**.

Foster carers who 'always' or 'usually' feel treated as an equal and valued member of the team around the child by...

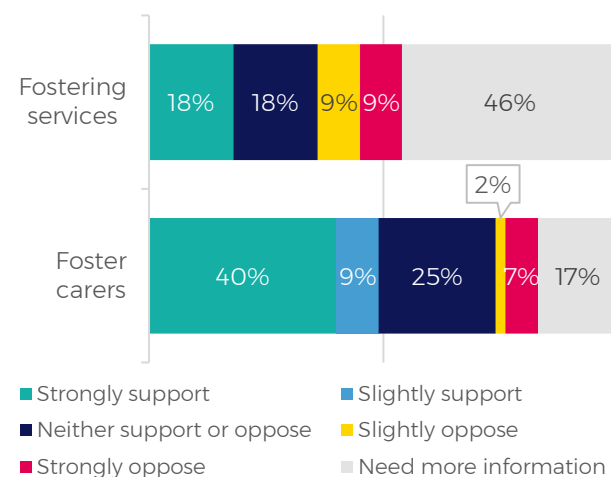


80% said they are always or usually invited to meetings with teachers/ education professionals, 87% to children's care planning and review meetings, and 89% to meetings with health professionals.

National register of foster carers

The Fostering Network has been campaigning for a national register of foster carers, similar to the registers that already exist for other parts of the children's social care sector, for several years. In their response to the 2023 Radical Reform Inquiry, the Welsh Government committed to exploring a national register for foster carers. We believe this would benefit foster carers' status, as well as improving safeguarding for children, matching, and sufficiency planning.

Views on proposals to create a national register of foster carers



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Almost half (49%) of foster carers said they strongly or slightly support proposals to create a national register, while a quarter (25%) were neutral and 17% said they need more information. Less than one in ten (9%) said they oppose the idea. Respondents in fostering services were evenly split between supporting and opposing a national register for foster carers. Five of the services (46%) said they needed more information.

Protections and rights for foster carers

Two in five foster carers (43%) reported feeling they have no rights or protections, and a third (34%) 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 being treated as professionals and having a voice.
- **Finances (29%)**, including pensions and fair pay.
- **Allegations (23%)**.

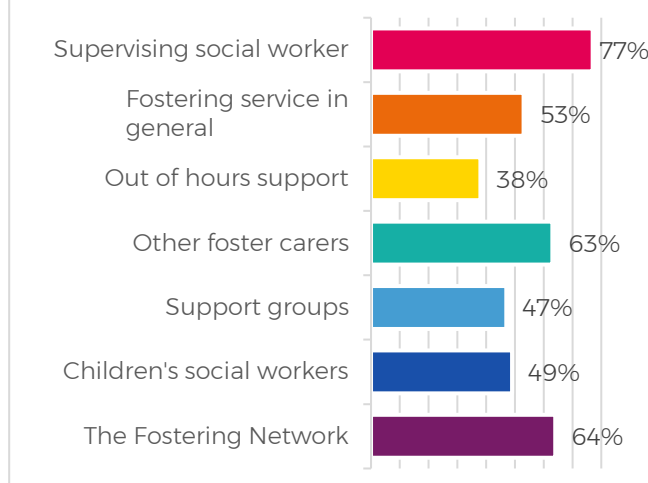
"I want our opinions to be listened to and considered when decisions are being made."

Support for foster carers

Fostering is incredibly rewarding, but it can also be challenging. All foster carers need a range of support to enable them to provide the best possible care for the children they look after, while maintaining their own wellbeing. We asked foster carers to rate the support they receive for their fostering from various sources.

Support from supervising social workers (SSWs) was rated the most highly, with over three quarters (77%) considering it excellent or good, up from 69% in 2021. However, only 43% said they have had one consistent SSW in the past 24 months.

Foster carers who rate support for their fostering as 'excellent' or 'good', by source



Support from The Fostering Network was rated the second most highly, with 64% finding it excellent or good. This was followed closely by support from other foster carers, with 63% finding it excellent or good, down slightly from 67% in 2021.

Out of hours support was rated the least highly: only 38% said it was excellent or good, down from 47% in 2021. Only two services (18%) that responded to the survey said they provide out of hours support through the foster carer's own supervising social worker.

Less than half of foster carers (47%) 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 (56%) than those without access to it (41%).

Foster carers' wellbeing

More than half (56%) of foster carers surveyed have experienced burnout or poor wellbeing because of their fostering role. Less than half (45%) 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 (35%) than those who have not experienced burnout (66%). 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 – 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. The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families, supporting them to build a resilient and caring community.

Of foster carers who responded to our survey, we found that **those who are part of Mockingbird were more likely to rate support from their supervising social worker, their fostering service in general, other foster carers, peer support groups, and children's social workers, as excellent or good.**

Mockingbird foster carers were also significantly more likely to have access to an approved support network or person who can provide overnight care for children (85%) than other foster carers (45%). They were less likely to have experienced burnout or poor wellbeing (54%) than other foster carers (58%), and significantly more likely to feel able to ask for support for their wellbeing (64%) than other foster carers (47%).

From this data, we would encourage the Welsh Government to fund Mockingbird across Wales in order to ensure foster carers feel supported and to aid recruitment and retention.

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

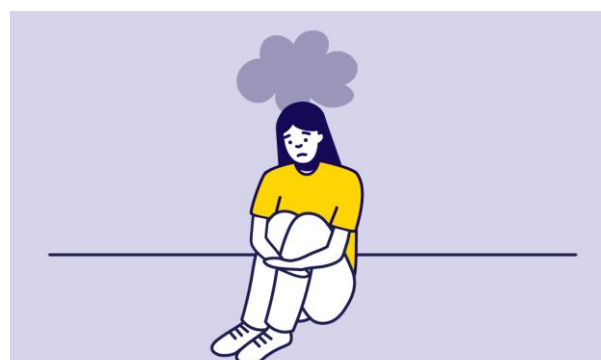
Two in five foster carers surveyed (42%) said at least one of the children they foster receives additional support with their learning, down from 53% in 2021.

Of those who foster a child receiving additional support with their learning, only 40% said they think this additional support is sufficient, down from 45% in 2021.

Mental health and wellbeing support

40% 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, up from 29% in 2021.

The proportion fostering a child who is receiving mental health increased very slightly from 24% in 2021 to 25% in 2024. The proportion fostering a child who is being referred or waiting for support increased from 5% to 15% in the same time period.



37% of foster carers are fostering a child who needs mental health support but isn't getting it, up from 30% in 2021.

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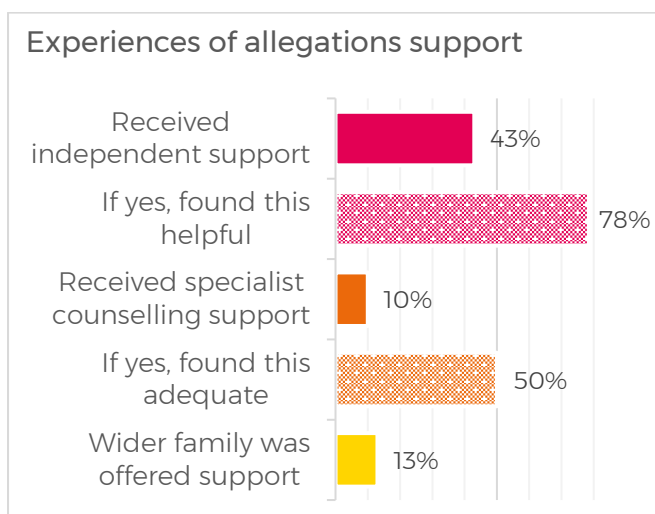
"It has taken us 5 years to obtain mental health support for the child we care for."

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. **15% of foster carers surveyed 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, **just over two fifths (43%) of foster carers surveyed in Wales said they received independent support** in relation to their most recent allegation, up slightly from 41% in 2021. Over three quarters (78%) found this helpful, up from 67% in 2021.



One in ten received specialist counselling support and half of these found the support adequate. Similarly, just over **one in ten (13%) 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 one to three months (28%). **One in ten (10%) said the investigation took over a year.**

Removal of children

Over a third (35%) of foster carers said a child they fostered was removed from their home during their most recent allegation investigation, up from a fifth (19%) in 2021. This time we also asked if the child was returned; only 7% of foster carers said yes.

Over a third (36%) 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 (48%)**, including their feelings about fostering, and fear of future allegations. Additionally, **22% described the impact on their emotional/ mental health**, and **19% discussed the impact on their whole family.**

"It was incredibly upsetting and made us question whether we wanted to continue to foster"

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We also asked foster carers what would improve the allegations experience for them. Their priorities were **fairness (42%)**; **better communication and information-sharing (42%)**; and **better support for foster carers (21%)**.

Finances

All foster carers receive an allowance which should cover the costs of looking after the children they foster. Some foster carers also receive a fee in recognition of their role. However, our research continues to show that allowances and fees 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

In Wales, 40% of foster carers said they work alongside fostering, a slight decrease from 43% in 2021. Over a quarter (28%) said they receive benefits.

Allowances

Only a quarter (25%) of foster carers said the fostering allowance, and any expenses they can claim, meet the full costs of looking after the children they foster, down from over half (53%) in 2021.



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Most foster carers (71%) said they use other personal income, such as their foster carer fees, savings, or partner's income, to cover this extra cost. 29% of foster carers said they have to work and 14% said they have to claim benefits to cover the extra cost.

Fees

Less than half (47%) of foster carers in Wales said they receive a fee. Of these, only 13% said they feel their fee is sufficient to cover their essential living costs, for example bills, rent or mortgage, and food (not for the children they foster).

Two thirds (64%) of foster carers said they don't receive a retainer fee if they don't have a child living in foster care with them, a very slight decrease from 65% in 2021.

While allowances are set nationally by the Welsh Government, 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; **three quarters of foster carers (76%) and seven fostering services (64%) said governments should each set a national fee framework to apply across all fostering services.**

Three quarters of foster carers said government should set a national fee framework.

Managing finances

Over three quarters (77%) of foster carers said **the cost of living has had an impact on their fostering**. They frequently mentioned facing higher household costs and having to cut back on spending, affecting the opportunities they can give to the children they foster.

"We have very limited finances to cover life experiences for the children."

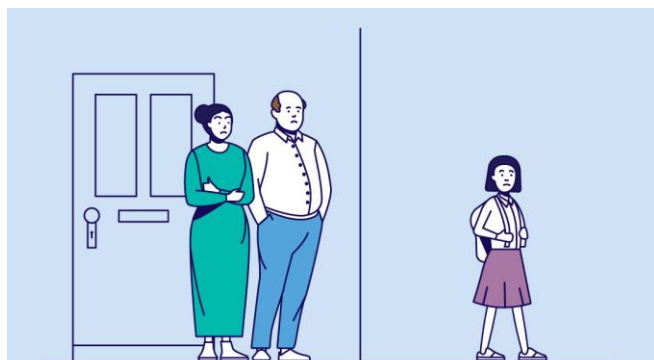
Part Three

Endings and Post-Foster Care

Children moving on in foster care

Unplanned endings

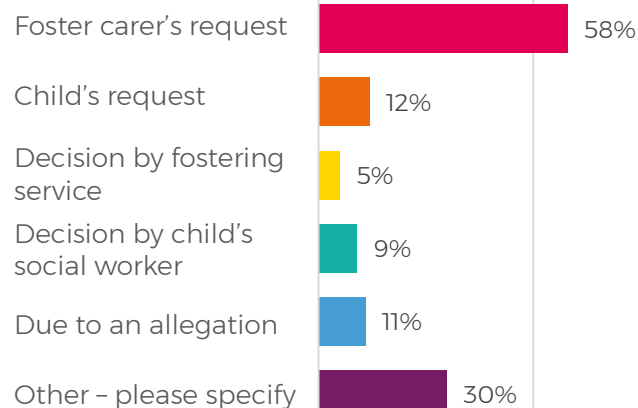
63% of foster carers in Wales who have experienced a child moving on in the past 24 months said this included an unplanned ending, up from 50% in 2021.



Two thirds (63%) of foster carers who have experienced a child moving on in the past 24 months said this included an unplanned ending, up from 50% in 2021.

The most common cause of unplanned endings was the foster carer's own request (58%). Almost a third (30%) specified another reason for their latest unplanned ending. Their comments most frequently related to **safeguarding**, often around children's behaviour or issues with their birth family.

Where a child moving on was unplanned, what caused this move?



"The young person was being abusive towards another child looked after in the house and therefore needed to be removed immediately."

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 Wales was **support** for foster carers and children, with six services (60%) mentioning this. Additionally, four services (40%) said **better matching** of children and foster carers would reduce unplanned endings.

Planned endings

81% of foster carers who have experienced a child move on in the past 24 months said this included a planned ending. Of these, **67% said their latest planned ending was preceded by a child's care plan review or a looked after child review**. 89% said they were involved in this review. Just over half (57%) 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, the same as in 2021.

Views on decisions to move children

Only half (52%) of foster carers reported feeling decisions to move children are always or usually in the best interests of the child. This has decreased slightly from 54% in 2021.

Post-foster care

Until 2016, 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 leave home aged 24 on average – and often before they are ready. In Wales, young people can stay with their foster families up to age 21, or until 25 if they are in education or training through **When I am Ready**.

Transition planning

Early planning is important to ensure smooth transitions between, and out of, care arrangements. However, **less than a quarter (24%) of foster carers said services typically start planning more than six months before a young person's transition out of care or into a post-foster care arrangement.** A further 15% said there is typically no planning.

Barriers to post-foster care arrangements

We asked foster carers to share the reasons any eligible young people didn't remain with them in a post-foster care arrangement when they reached the appropriate age. The top reasons were:

- The young person wanted to move on (44%)
- The foster carer's income would decrease (32%)
- The young person entered an alternative arrangement e.g. Shared Lives or Supported Lodgings (32%)

Finances in post-foster care arrangements

Over four in five (85%) of foster carers said they are worse off financially as a result of offering post-foster care. This has increased slightly from 83% in 2021. Respondents in 2024 were also more likely to be significantly worse off (54%) than in 2021 (47%). Almost two thirds (64%) of foster carers said the young person is expected to contribute towards their allowance.



Over four in five (85%) of foster carers said they are worse off financially as a result of offering post-foster care.

Comments on post-foster care arrangements

Foster carers had the opportunity to share anything else they would like to say about how well post-foster care arrangements are working for the young people they foster. The most common themes were:

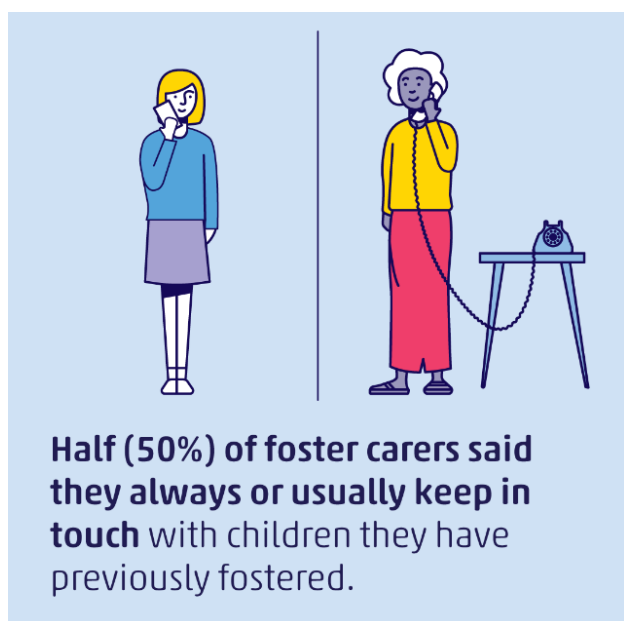
- **Finances (42%)** – including challenges accessing financial support; the effect of finances on decisions about post-foster care; and the financial impact of entering a post-foster care arrangement.
- **Timings (22%)** – covering young people's readiness to move into independence, and feeling pressured or rushed.

"The support for young people drops drastically and although they live here, we are kept out of all information and planning...it's quite uncomfortable and we don't feel it is helpful for the young person."

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, **only half (50%) of foster carers in 2024 said they always or usually keep in touch with children they have previously fostered.** Just under half (48%) said these relationships always or usually last long-term, for example, into the children's adulthood.



Only a fifth (19%) 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 adopters did not want them to (22%), local practice did not allow them to (21%), the child's birth family did not want them to (21%), the child did not want to keep in touch (19%), and it wasn't practical to keep in touch (17%).

Comments on keeping in touch

The most common themes around keeping in touch were:

- **Wanting to keep in touch (46%)** – foster carers value keeping in touch and see former foster children as part of the family.
- **Benefits of keeping in touch (17%)** – including for children's understanding of their life story.
- **Obstacles to keeping in touch (15%)** – primarily that services don't encourage it.
- **Poor experiences with keeping in touch (12%)** – foster carers described a lack of support to keep in touch, and the impact this has on them and the children they have fostered.

"We didn't get to say goodbye and we still feel the grief as a family. It must have been very traumatic for the little girl moving on and we still worry about her."

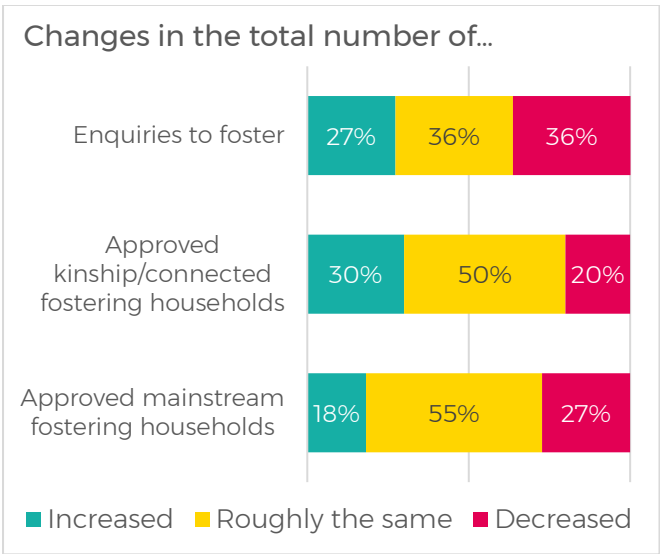
Part Four

The System

Shortages of foster carers

The longstanding shortages of foster carers in Wales are arguably the clearest indicator of a sector in crisis. Every year we lose more foster carers than we gain, and the findings of this survey support this; most fostering services that responded to the survey said the total number of approved mainstream fostering households and enquiries to foster for their service has decreased or stayed roughly the same in the last year, as shown in the graph below.

However, they were more likely to say the total number of approved kinship/connected fostering households in their service has stayed roughly the same or increased than decreased in the last year, potentially reflecting a shift towards prioritising kinship care for children where possible.



In Wales, all 11 services who responded to the survey said there is a shortage of foster carers 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 each nation. We asked fostering services to share the most effective thing they do to retain foster carers. The top themes were support, relationships, and valuing carers.

Around half (55%) of foster carers said they will continue fostering for as long as they can, up from 50% in 2021. Notably, in response to the question ‘what motivates you to foster?’ , 65% of foster carers selected ‘I am committed to the children I am currently fostering’ as a key reason. (See the section on Recruitment for discussion of motivations to start fostering.)

However, 56% of foster carers said they have either considered (45%) or are still considering (11%) resigning from fostering, most commonly due to:

- Burnout or poor wellbeing related to fostering (56%)
- Lack of support from the fostering service (55%)
- Lack of respect from other professionals in the team around the child (53%)

Additionally, 26% of foster carers who have considered resigning selected financial difficulties as a contributing factor. 23% of all foster carers we surveyed in Wales 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 Wales that completed our survey in 2024, all 11 said they have a fostering recruitment and retention strategy. Seven fostering services (64%) said they are always (55%) or usually (9%) involved in any local or regional sufficiency planning for the

looked after children population, similar to 2021.

Six of the fostering services (55%) said they agree or strongly agree with the idea of creating a national fostering recruitment and retention strategy in each nation of the UK.

Views and attitudes on fostering

Sadly, the number of foster carers who would recommend fostering to others has decreased. Less than half (48%) 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 7.0 out of 10, down from 7.4 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Positive relationships with social workers (18%).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Fostering services' practice and processes (five services, 50%), including assessment, approval, matching, and teamwork within the service.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The impact of fostering on children and young people (16%).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Foster carers meeting children's needs (three services, 30%).
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The foster care community (14%).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Positive relationships, including between foster carers and social workers (three services, 30%).

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Foster carers' status and respect in the team around the child (23%).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Processes within the system (four services, 40%), such as matching.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Finances (22%), including financial support for foster carers and funding in general.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Finances (three services, 30%), including allowances and fees for foster carers, and funding for the service.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Support for foster carers and children in care (14%), including access to short breaks and mental health support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Foster carers' status and respect in the team around the child (three services, 30%).

Conclusion

Across many areas of fostering – including matching, learning and development, 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 in Wales. On other issues such as allegations in fostering families, the findings continue to paint a challenging picture.

However, we've also seen examples across the UK of where the right support, particularly from supervising social workers, other foster carers, and through programmes like Mockingbird, 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. The following recommendations set out the key changes we believe Welsh Government, placing authorities and fostering services should prioritise.

Welsh Government should:

- Reestablish the National Fostering Board to maintain essential oversight and progress in respect of improvements to fostering provision in Wales.
- Create a national **recruitment and retention strategy** for foster care, and fund national foster carer **recruitment campaigns**, encompassing the third sector, to align with The Health and Social Care Act 2025 to increase the pool of available carers.
- Invest in the implementation, continuous review and monitoring of the **standardised framework for pre- and post-approval training** for foster carers (Learning and Development Framework), and bring it into statutory footing.
- Introduce statutory 'opt-out' **maximum delegated authority** for foster carers to make day-to-day decisions on behalf of the children and young people they foster.
- Introduce a **register of foster carers** in Wales to increase foster carers' status and support matching of children with foster carers. Move responsibility for decisions about the removal of foster carers' approval 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**.
- Fund **independent support services**, legal protection, representation and advocacy for all foster carers subject to an allegation, concern or complaint.
- Increase the National Minimum Allowance to meet our recommended rates⁷ and harmonise allowance rates in all fostering services across Wales.
- Introduce and fund a **national recommended fee framework**, with fees paid 52 weeks a year.
- Introduce a **national pension scheme** for foster carers.
- Provide funding to increase the maximum age for post foster care arrangements to age 25 (regardless of being in education or employment) to enable young people to stay with their foster families for longer, improving **transitions**.
- Produce statutory guidance to support children and young people's **ongoing relationships** with people that matter to them, including their former foster families where appropriate.
- Fund **innovative fostering programmes** that focus on prevention, retention and support, such as

Fostering Wellbeing, Mockingbird,
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** and **access to the services identified**.

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** for foster carers in a range of formats and at different times to increase attendance, focusing particularly on increasing uptake of training on trauma-informed care, 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, for example, through a Fostering Wellbeing pioneer.

Fostering Wellbeing – good practice model in Wales

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.

About the data

Our 2024 State of the Nations' Foster Care survey was completed by 2,883 current foster carers, 169 former foster carers, and 114 fostering services across the UK. In Wales the 2024 survey was completed by 276 current foster carers and 11 fostering services and this briefing focuses solely on these responses. The 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

88% of respondents in Wales said they foster for a local authority. The remaining respondents said they foster for an independent fostering provider, either for-profit (9%) or not-for-profit (4%).

80% of respondents were mainstream foster carers and 21% were approved family and friends/ kinship foster carers (or pending approval). Additionally, 5% of respondents were supporting young people in post-foster care arrangements.

About the fostering service respondents

Eight services (73%) were local authorities. The remaining respondents were independent fostering providers, either for-profit (two services, 18%) or not-for-profit (one service, 9%).

Three (27%) of those who completed the fostering services' survey on behalf of their service were fostering service managers; one (9%) was a team manager; two (18%) were registered managers; and the remaining respondents had a variety of related roles.

References

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

² Ellis. S and Williams. N (2025) [State of the Nations' Foster Care Summary Report 2024](#), The Fostering Network

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

⁴ Welsh Government (2025) [Children looked after at 31 March by local authority and placement type](#)

⁵ Foster Wales (2024) [Annual report 2023/24](#)

⁶ Office for National Statistics (2024) [Census](#)

⁷ The Fostering Network (2025) Fostering allowances. thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/policies/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.

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Registered charity in England and Wales 280852 and in Scotland SC039338

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