

Rees Centre



The
Fostering
Network



UNIVERSITY
of York

The Mockingbird Family Model

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The Fostering Network's Mockingbird Programme

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What is Mockingbird?



The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an **extended family model** which provides sleepovers, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities.

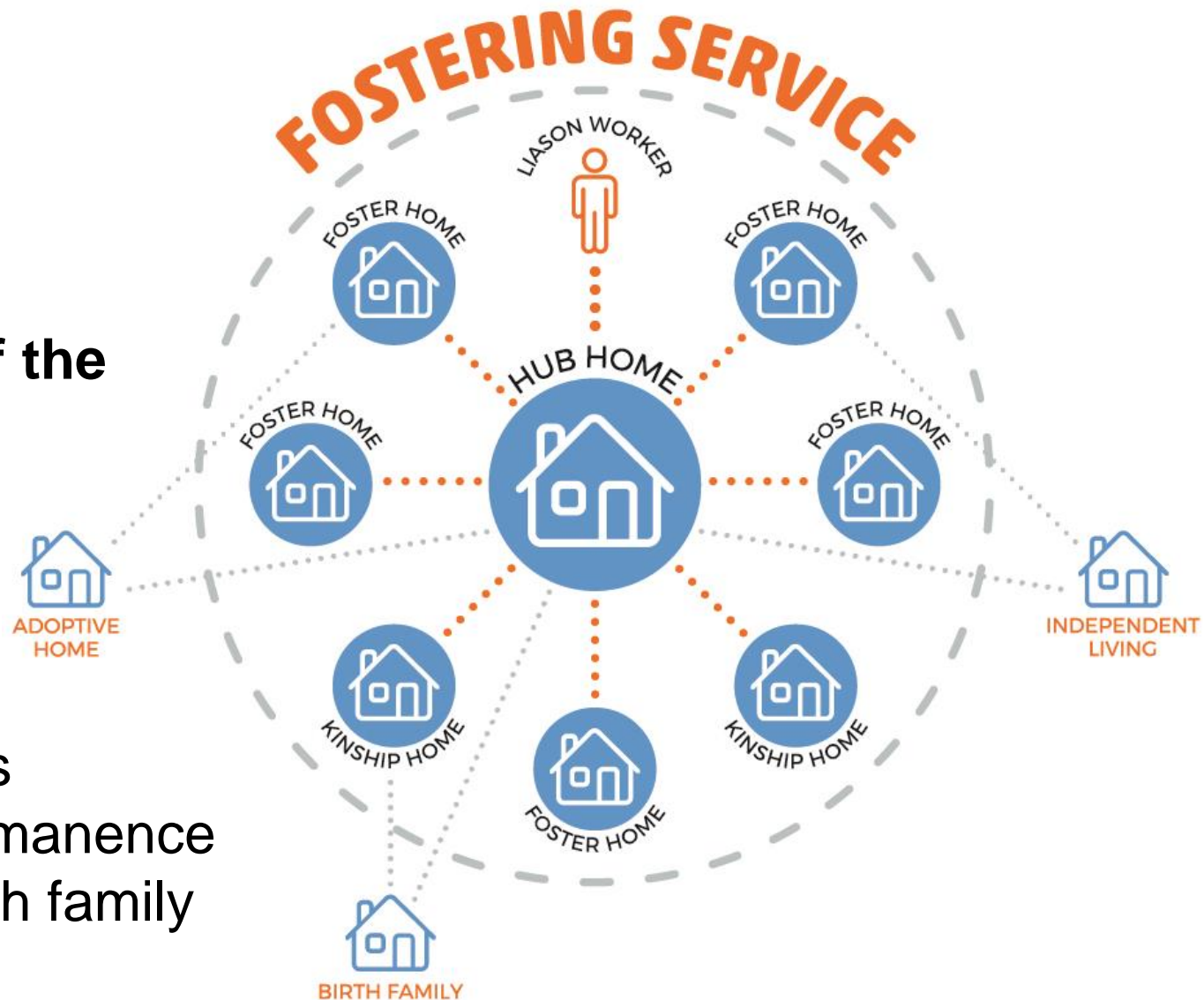
The programme improves the stability of fostering placements and strengthens the relationships between carers children and young people, fostering services and birth families.

The origins of Mockingbird

- The Fostering Network was funded by the Department for Education in 2015 to develop the programme in the UK in partnership with The Mockingbird Society USA who originally developed the Mockingbird Family Model in 2004
- 8 Pilot partners – now 35 partners across UK

Key elements of the model

- Peer support
- Sleepovers
- Training and development
- Social activities
- Support to permanence
- Sibling and birth family contact



Intended Outcomes

Better outcomes of children and young people, Safer families and communities, Better value for money:

- Improved wellbeing
- Improved placement stability
- More successful transitions to permanence
- Stronger family relationships
- Increased rates of carer recruitment and retention
- Carers have greater role and status
- Improved relationships FCs and SWs



Thank you

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The Mockingbird Family Model: Evaluating a model of care across fostering agencies

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Independent evaluation of the Mockingbird programme

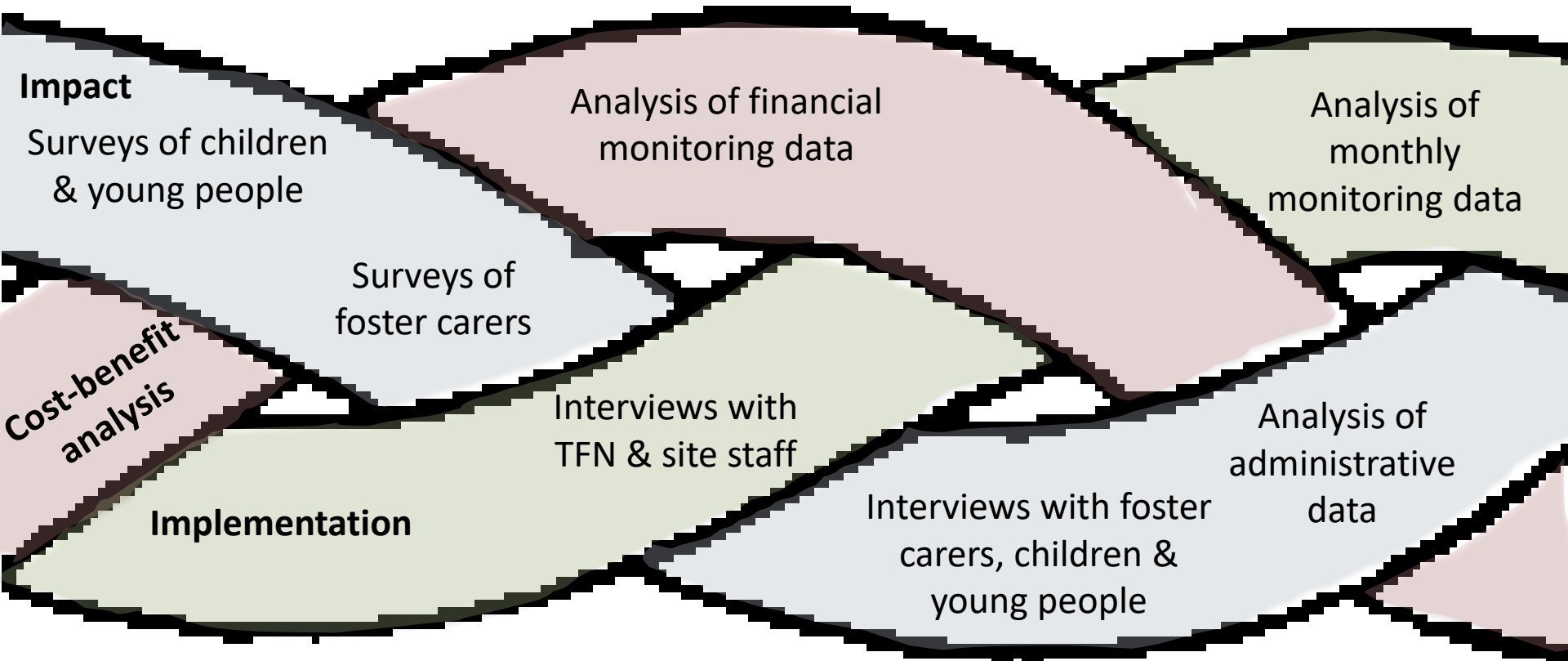
- Our independent evaluation began in October 2017.
- It involves 13 sites that received funding for Mockingbird from the Department for Education.
- It will be completed in March 2020 with a final report due for publication later in the year.
- Guided by key evaluation questions
- It includes a range of activities to gather quantitative and qualitative data from foster carers, children and young people, and staff involved in the Mockingbird programme.
- This presentation is of tentative findings.

Key evaluation questions

1. How has the Mockingbird programme been implemented in England?
2. What impact does the Mockingbird programme have on children, young people and foster carers?
3. How does this impact change over time?
4. What is the fiscal return on investment associated with the Mockingbird programme?

Overview of evaluation activities

There are three main strands to the evaluation:



Interim analysis, March 2019

- The interim analysis included data from:
 - Interviews with 5 staff at The Fostering Network (TFN)
 - Interviews with 1-2 staff members in all 12 sites (*14 in total*)
 - Survey responses from 140 foster carers in 10 sites (*44% response rate across 11 eligible sites*)
 - Survey responses from 71 children in 10 sites (*30% response rate*)
- Two key areas were identified:
 - Barriers and facilitators to the implementation of the Mockingbird programme
 - Perceived impact of Mockingbird on foster carers, children and young people and services

Barriers and facilitators to implementation: Laying the groundwork

- Investing time in developing policies, procedures and tools.
- Having sufficient staff in place early on in the process, particularly liaison workers and administrative staff.

“[We] should have budgeted more funds for... another member of staff to take on the project lead role, either full or part-time, rather than added to the managers role.”

(Service manager)

Stakeholder engagement

- Gaining buy-in from senior individuals in sites.
- Spreading the word and explaining the ethos to staff by:
 - Having a Mockingbird champion
 - Setting up a working group
 - Providing information sessions, workshops, seminars, etc.

“I think one of the big things of making it work is getting the authority on board, you know, early days our head of service led it, completely got it, you know, and so did everybody from that level down, so, you know, the fostering team manager, all the staff.”

(Liaison worker)

Making use of TFN learning events and resources

- Spreading the word and explaining the ethos to foster carers:
 - Through information sessions, open evenings, roadshows, recruitment drives, one-to-one visits, etc.
 - By managing apprehension / scepticism

“We invited carers to an information session and [they said] “Are we not good enough, is that why you chose us? Are we not coping?” And we said “No, it’s actually more for support... You shouldn’t, you know, feel like we chose you because we think you’re not good carers.”

(Service manager)

Staff turnover

- Can be a barrier to both implementation and sustainability.
- Relates to senior management, staff involved in delivering Mockingbird and Mockingbird carers.
- Need to have clear succession plans in place.

“Sometimes those people are like the font of all knowledge and things can get lost [when they leave].”

(TFN staff member)

Importance of approach:

Current context

- Across the UK, 79% (63,804) of looked-after children away from home are cared for in foster placements (The Fostering Network, 2016; The Scottish Government, 2016)
- Stability is fundamental principle of practice & predictor of wellbeing, lower behavioural problems, and better educational outcomes (Conger, 2001; Rubin, O'Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007; Sebba et al, 2015)
- History of disruption correlates with future disruption and children 'giving up' (Rock, Michelson, Thomson, & Day, 2013); foster carers may leave fostering

Peer support underpinnings

Existing evidence

- Peer support (Luke & Sebba, 2013).
- High standard of 'normal' care and of normalising care.
- Improving relationships through shared activities (Gilligan, 2009; Wade et al, 2012)
- Social networks positively associated with placement stability (Sinclair et al, 2007)

Interim findings

"I felt quite isolated before Mockingbird as I didn't really know any other foster carers, but I now have an amazing support group that I class as friends and [my foster child] has a network of friends in the same position as [themselves]."

(Satellite foster carer with 3 to 5 years' experience)

"All [of the foster carers in the constellation] care about us and I have so many aunties and uncles!"

(Foster child aged 14 years)

"I have also made many adult friends in other carers... My Mockingbird family means that I am never on my own and always have someone I can go to or trust in... I always think they will be a part of my life even when I leave care."

(Foster child aged 15 years)

"Mockingbird is fantastic! Without the support of our hub carer, we wouldn't still have our [current] placement as [this foster child] has complex needs and we need extra support on a regular basis."

(Satellite foster carer providing a long term placement)

Mockingbird perceived by staff to have improved both placement stability & relationships with other birth relatives

“I don't think there's any service that I go to where I don't hear they've been told by carers that... if it wasn't for the support [from their constellation], this placement would have broken down or this carer would have stopped.”

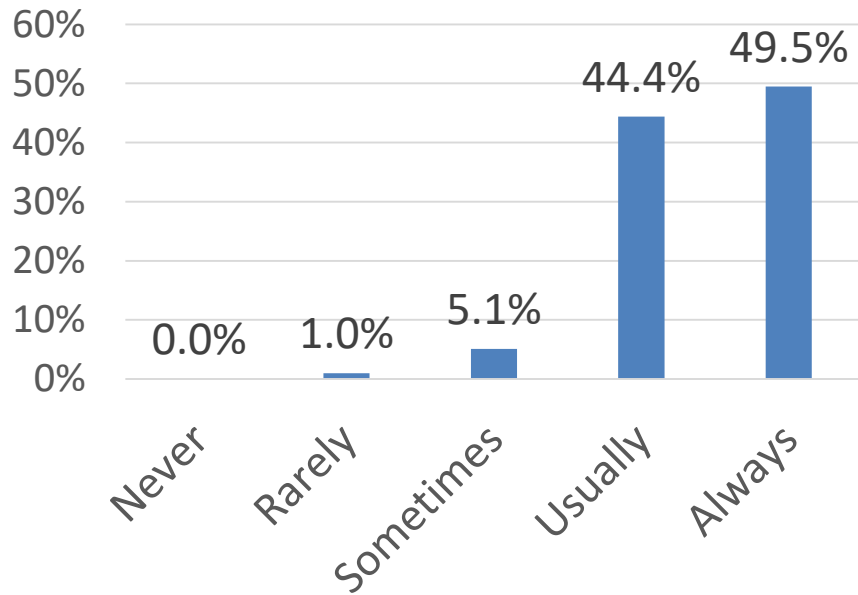
(TFN staff member)

“[One] young person's court-appointed contact time with their parent at the contact centre has shifted to the hub home carer. [They all] go out every month to have food and that's replaced the contact centre and has just become a far more normal experience of spending time with your parent.”

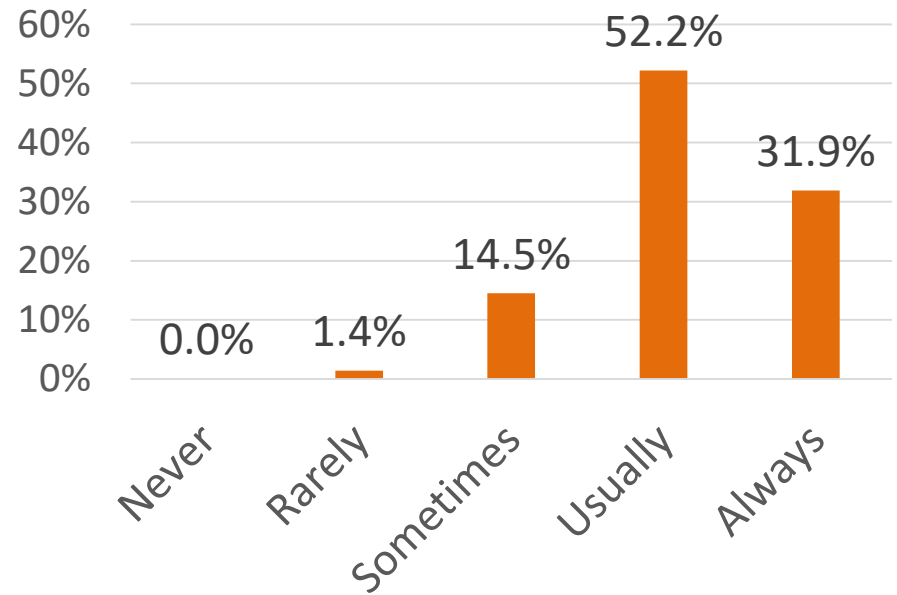
(TFN staff member)

Foster carers were highly engaged and satisfied with Mockingbird

Participation in meetings



Participation in social activities



Foster carers felt well supported by Mockingbird

- 90% rated constellation meetings and social activities as good or excellent.
- 88% rated respite care as good or excellent (vs 33% of foster carers in general across the UK).¹
- Mockingbird foster carers reported good or excellent support from:
 - Hub carer: 93%
 - Constellation liaison worker: 90%
 - Other foster carers: 94% (vs 67% of UK foster carers)¹
 - Supervising social worker: 93% (vs 70% of UK foster carers)¹

Mockingbird was perceived to improve the professional status of foster carers

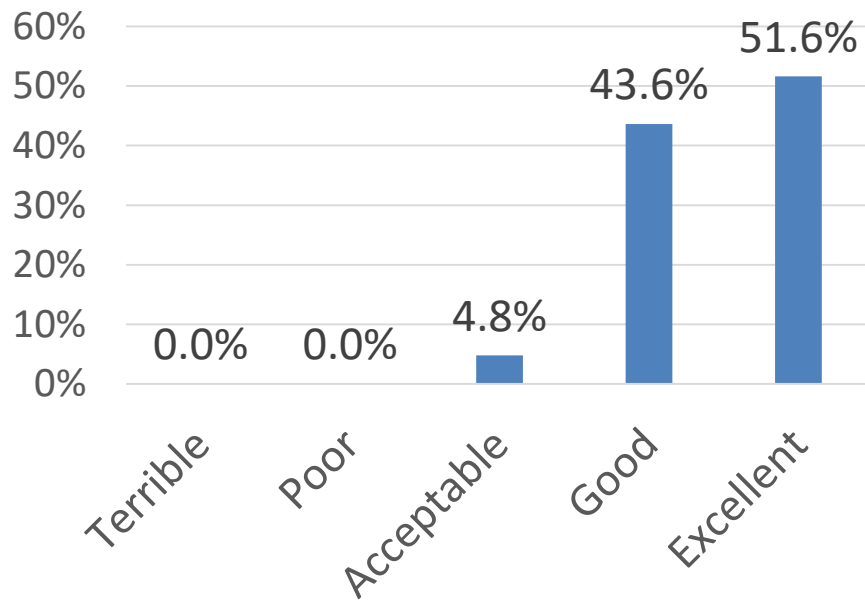
- Mockingbird foster carers reported that they were usually or always treated as an equal by:
 - Supervising social worker: 95% (vs 79% of UK foster carers)¹
 - Children's social worker: 82% (vs 58% of UK foster carers)¹

“One of the huge sort of shifts for a service is that the hub home carer really becomes vital in the team around the child. Hub home carers are invited to placement reviews, they're really part of the team structure.”

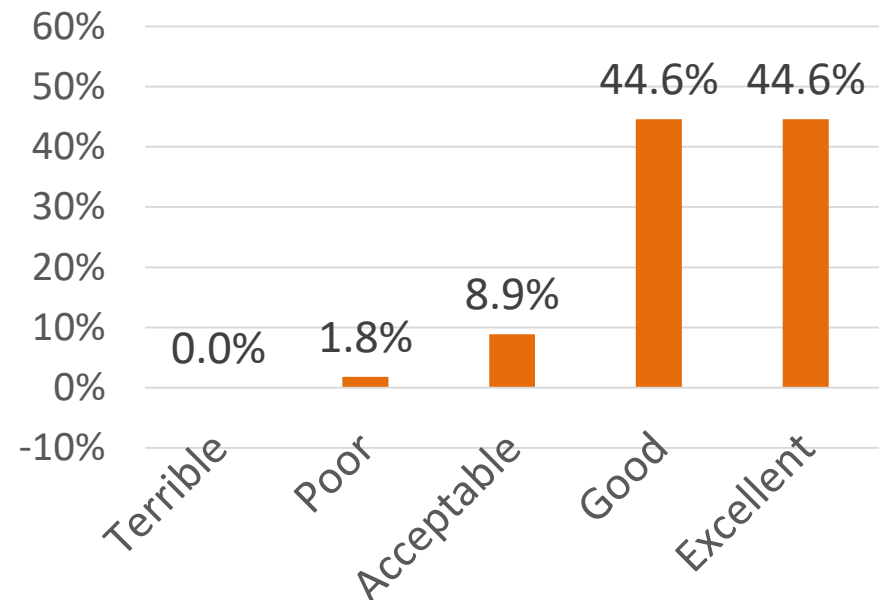
(TFN staff member)

Children were also highly engaged and satisfied with Mockingbird

Sleepovers



Social activities

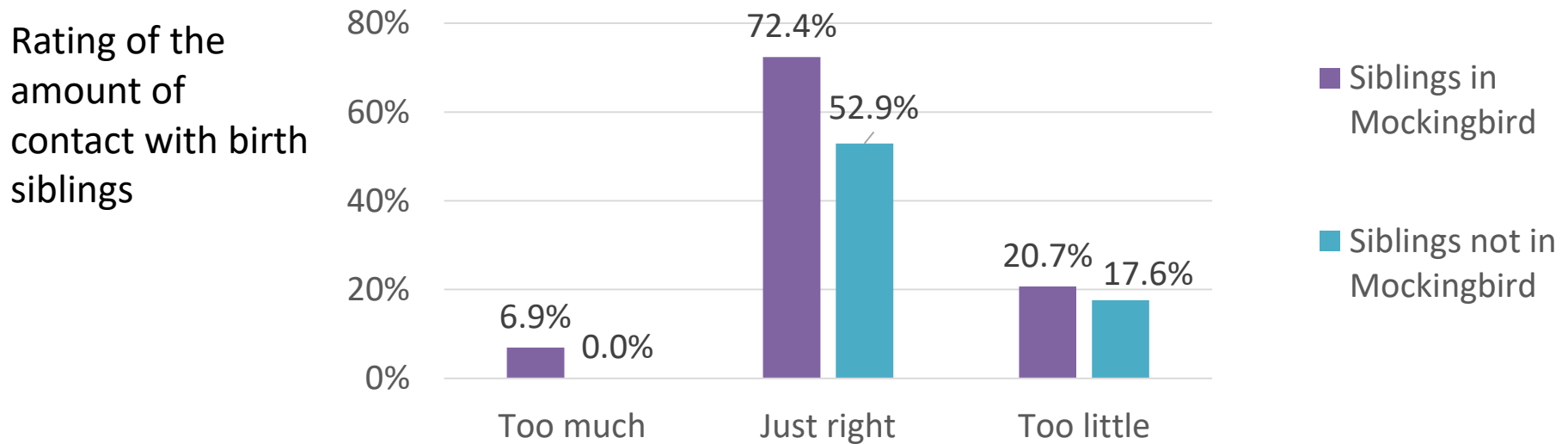


"I love Mockingbird and my sleepovers."
(Foster child, aged 9 years)

Children had good relationships with adults and a strong sense of belonging

- 65% attended social activities most or every month
- 34% had a sleepover most or every month
- 89% said that they had an adult they could go to for help if they needed it.
- 77% felt that they were an important part of their community.

Children were more satisfied with the birth sibling contact through Mockingbird



- 80% of children in Mockingbird had other birth siblings who were also in foster care.
- Children were more likely to be satisfied with the amount of contact they had with their birth siblings if they were also part of Mockingbird.

Summary

- Foster carers, children & young people are highly satisfied and engaged with Mockingbird.
- Compared to other foster carers, those in Mockingbird report to be more satisfied with the support they receive.
- Being part of a Mockingbird constellation appears to improve contact between birth siblings in foster care.
- The final evaluation will examine the impact of the Mockingbird programme over time and estimate the fiscal return on investment for the programme.

Further Info

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