



**The  
Fostering  
Network**

# **State of the Nation's Foster Care 2019**

Manchester Regional Conference

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## Policy Team

- Part of the Communications and Public Affairs division
  - Campaigns, policy, comms, marketing, fundraising
- Kate Lawson, Policy Manager
- Robert Cann, Policy and Research Officer

## Why we do it: our vision and mission

- Vision: “A society where the importance of fostering is recognised, understood and supported”
- Mission: “To support those who foster, improve opportunities for children and young people who are fostered and provide expert guidance to all fostering services”

## **Why we do it: Understanding the experience of fostering**

- Unique insight into views and experience of fostering
- Influencing in 2019 and beyond
- Supporting fostering services
- Raising awareness outside of fostering community



## What we did: The survey

- Largest UK survey of fostering: 4,037 respondents
- 74% from England (c/w 84% of UK population)
- 94 questions. Typical time to complete: 22 mins
- Monitoring trends and progress (biennial survey)
- Snapshot of the experience of fostering in the UK



## **How we did it: tools and promotion**

- Online using SurveyMonkey
- Promoted via social media, campaigners email list, Members' eNews, and Foster Care Magazine
- Three chances to win £25 vouchers



## Key findings: views and attitudes

- What one thing would you change to make foster care better?
- Open answer question. Top three themes that emerged were:
  - improve pay
  - be treated more as a professional
  - receive better support.





## Key findings: views and attitudes

What one thing would you change to make foster care better?



## Key findings: views and attitudes

- Would you recommend fostering to others who may be considering it?
  - 55% said yes (same as 2016)



## Key findings: realities of foster care

- 48% of foster carers are supporting a child with mental health needs who has not been able to access support
- In the past two years 50% of respondents said they had looked after a fostered child who has either:
  - caused violence in their home 26% (5%)
  - self-harmed 28% (7%)
  - gone missing from the home 25% (2%); or
  - been involved with the police 25% (4%).



# The importance of language

## Ministerial Foreword



I am determined that children and young people who are unable to live with their own families have the best possible experience and opportunities – those that we want for all our children. Our system should not be just about keeping children safe but about being the best corporate parents we can, and offering access to the support and opportunities needed for success and happiness in later life.

I want children who live in foster care for a week, or for ten years, to experience high quality care and to reap the benefits of being in a supportive and nourishing family environment. I want to ensure that foster parents have the skills, training and support they need to help the children in their care to overcome previous trauma and to thrive. Without these dedicated people, we would not have a foster care system and to them we need to offer our greatest respect and gratitude. Foster parents play an invaluable role – supporting the vast majority of children looked after by the state.

I am hugely grateful to the many foster parents, children and young people who

## Key findings: Foster carer status

- In general, do you feel treated as an equal and valued member of the team by the following?
  - Supervising Social Worker: 79% yes (same as 2016)
  - Children's social worker: 58% yes (4% lower than 2016)
  - Health Professionals: 81% yes



## Key findings: Foster carer authority

- Has the children's social worker been clear about which decisions related to your fostered children you have the authority to make?
  - Yes: 69%
  - No: 26%
- In practice, do you feel able to make these decisions related to your fostered children?
  - Always/usually: 65% (short term)
  - Always/usually: 79% (long term)



## Key findings: Foster carer support

- Only 37% of foster carers feel they receive excellent or good short break / respite support
- Only 44% of foster carers feel that out of hours support is excellent or good
- The percentage of foster carers who rate support as excellent or good from:
  - Their SSW: 70%
  - Their fostering service in general: 53%
  - Their child's placing authority: 39%



## Key findings: Foster carer training

- 59% of foster carers have an agreed training plan for the next 12 months (2016 was 46%) 😊
- 86% of foster carers say that their training helps with their fostering (2016 was 82%) 😊
- Top five training gaps identified:
  - Therapeutic parenting
  - Behaviour management
  - Mental health support
  - Specialised first aid
  - Attachment





## Key findings: Foster carer finances

- 59% of foster carers say that their fostering allowance and expenses they can claim do not meet the full costs of looking after their fostered child
- 60% of foster carers said that they receive a fee
- Only 9% of foster carers receive a fee at or above the equivalent of the National Living Wage for a 40-hour week



## Key findings: placement stability

- In the past three years, one third of foster carers have had an unplanned placement ending that they felt was not in the child's best interests
- Of those, only 21% said it was preceded by a review
- Over two thirds were not given the opportunity to feed referral information into the next placement



## Key findings: transferring fostering service

- 11% of foster carers wanted to move fostering service recently but did not do so. The top two reasons given for not moving were:
  - too much time and effort to go through the assessment and approval process again
  - their long-term placement would have to leave.
- 92% of the 318 carers who did move had to redo the whole approval process when they transferred, which took on average six months to complete.





## Key findings: Allegations support

- Only 58% of foster carers have received allegations training. Slight improvement on the 56% in 2016 but is still disappointing.
- More than a third (35%) of fostering households have experienced one or more allegation, up 2% from 2016
- Following their allegation, two-thirds (67%) did not receive independent support. This is unchanged from 2016.

## State of the Nation in action

- National media activity
  - You and Yours
  - Observer
- Policy making & campaigns
  - Staying Put
  - Keep Connected
  - Central register



# State of the Nation in action

The screenshot shows a PDF document titled "The fostering system in England Evidence review.pdf" from the UK government website. The document is displayed in a browser window. The main content is a section titled "Data" which discusses sources of information on children in foster care. It lists two primary sources: the Department for Education's (DfE) annual data collection (SSDA903) and Ofsted's annual fostering data collection. Below this, there is a paragraph discussing anomalies in the data and a reference to a survey by Lawson and Cann (2017).

**Data**

There are two main sources of data on children in foster care:

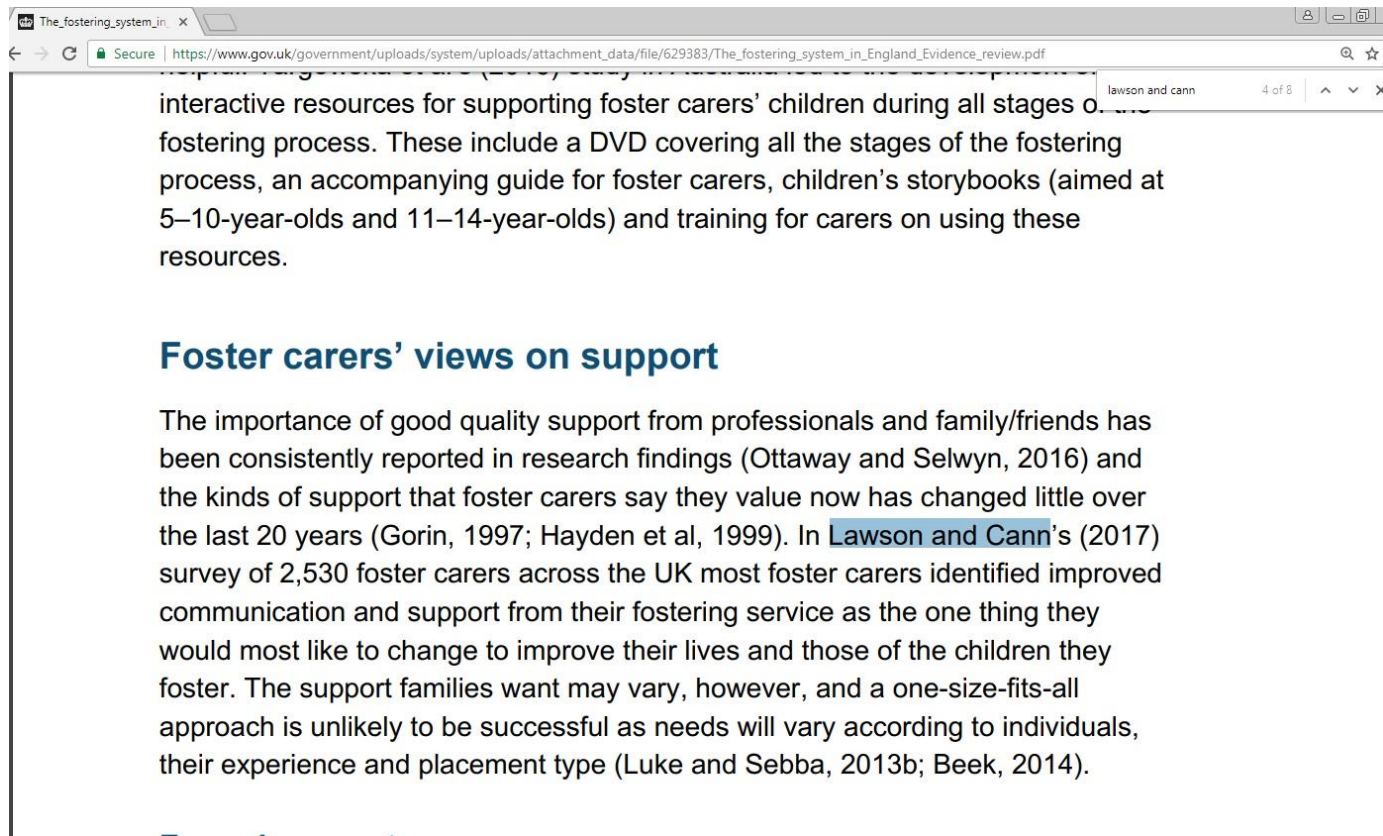
- the figures released annually by the Department for Education (DfE) based on data collected from local authorities each spring through the SSDA903 return
- Ofsted's annual release of fostering data which contains data sourced from local authorities and IFAs through its annual fostering data collection exercise.

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There are some anomalies in comparable data between the two collections, highlighting issues common to this type of data collection as well as differences in methodology. It is notable that the SSDA903 only requires local authorities to report on offending, health promotion checks, immunisation, dental checks, health assessments and substance misuse problem identification and intervention for children who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 31 March each year. Some data on foster children have been drawn from other authoritative sources where these were able to augment the key data sources.

We also used The Fostering Network's biennial survey of foster carers (Lawson and Cann, 2017) as well as Performance Benchmark Reports (The Fostering Network, 2015 and 2016). **Lawson and Cann's** survey collected responses from 2,530 foster carers in total, with 1,942 living in England, 359 in Scotland, 122 in Wales and 107 in Northern Ireland. While it is a non-stratified membership survey and, as such, it is impossible to know how representative the respondents are, in the absence of a more robust survey, it is a useful 'temperature taking' exercise. It

# State of the Nation in action



interactive resources for supporting foster carers' children during all stages of the fostering process. These include a DVD covering all the stages of the fostering process, an accompanying guide for foster carers, children's storybooks (aimed at 5–10-year-olds and 11–14-year-olds) and training for carers on using these resources.

## Foster carers' views on support

The importance of good quality support from professionals and family/friends has been consistently reported in research findings (Ottaway and Selwyn, 2016) and the kinds of support that foster carers say they value now has changed little over the last 20 years (Gorin, 1997; Hayden et al, 1999). In Lawson and Cann's (2017) survey of 2,530 foster carers across the UK most foster carers identified improved communication and support from their fostering service as the one thing they would most like to change to improve their lives and those of the children they foster. The support families want may vary, however, and a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be successful as needs will vary according to individuals, their experience and placement type (Luke and Sebba, 2013b; Beek, 2014).

## State of the Nation in action

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**The  
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**Thank you**

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