

State of the Nation's Foster Care 2016

About The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. We are passionate about the difference foster care makes to children and young people. Transforming fostered children's lives is at the heart of everything we do.

We are the essential network for foster care, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children, inspiring, motivating and supporting them to make foster care better. Together, we're a powerful catalyst for change, influencing and shaping fostering policy and practice at every level.

We work to ensure all fostered children have a positive experience of family life, supporting them to have high aspirations, to overcome the challenges of their early lives and to achieve their very best. We help foster carers to improve children's lives. We champion the vital role they and their families play in helping fostered children, and work to ensure they are properly recognised, valued and supported.

About the State of the Nation's Foster Care 2016

Three-quarters of looked after children in the UK are being cared for by foster families. This means that improving the outcomes for children in care must start with improving foster care. The Fostering Network regularly conducts an in-depth survey of foster carers throughout the UK and we publish our State of the Nation report based on the survey findings.

In 2016 our survey covered key practice and workforce issues such as matching, placement stability, training and support for carers and status and authority of the workforce. We received a record 2,530 responses which has given us a unique insight into the issues currently facing foster carers across the UK.

How these findings will be used

The Fostering Network will use the survey findings to influence the agenda and create change through bringing them to the attention of national and local decision and policy makers. We will work with key stakeholders to advocate for the report's recommendations to be implemented, with the aim of ensuring all fostered children are given the best possible care.

To read the full report, please visit thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sotn

Foster Carer Profile

Total respondents: 2,530

England: 1,942 (77%)

Scotland: 359 (14%)

Wales: 122 (5%)

Northern Ireland: 107 (4%)

Gender:

Male - 444 (18%)

Female - 2,082 (82%)

Age:

18-24 - 0.4%

25-34 - 3.8%

35-44 - 15.4%

45-54 - 40.2%

55-64 - 34.2%

65-74 - 5.5%

75 and over - 0.4%

**The
Fostering
Network**

Views and attitudes

What makes you continue to foster?

Top 3 answers

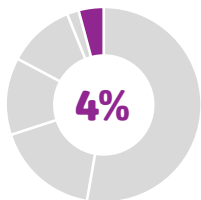
To make a difference to the lives of children in care

To offer children a positive experience of family life

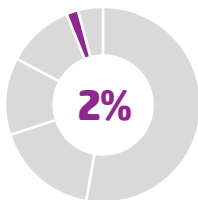
I enjoy working with children

When do you think you will stop fostering?

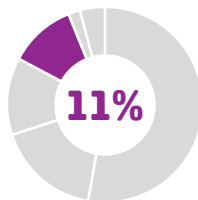
(responses from foster carers aged under 55)



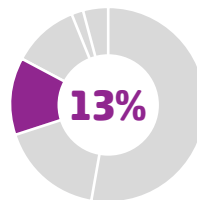
0-6 months



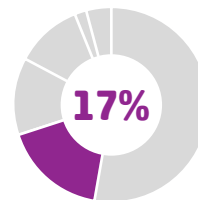
7 months-1 year



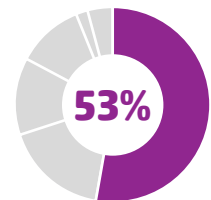
1-5 years



6-10 years



In more than 10 years



I will continue for as long as I am able

Only **55%** of foster carers would definitely recommend fostering to others

One change that would help foster carers improve the lives of children they care for

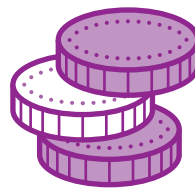
Top 3 answers



Improved communication and support from the fostering service



Being treated more as a professional



Better financial support

Key finding

Even though the majority of foster carers said they want to continue to foster for as long as they are able, only 55 per cent would definitely recommend fostering to others. The findings indicate there is dissatisfaction with the system but carers continue to be committed to the children in their care.

Workforce issues

Training and support



Just under half of foster carers did not have an agreed training plan for the next year



Only a quarter described respite support as excellent or good



A third described out of hours support as could be better or poor

Status and authority



Only 14 per cent of foster carers had moved to another service – but 12 per cent had wanted to move but had not



33 per cent of short-term placement carers felt that they were only allowed to make appropriate decisions some of the time, rarely or never



A third of foster carers felt that children's social workers do not treat them as an equal

Finances



42% of foster carers felt their allowance met the full cost of looking after fostered children – compared to 80 per cent in 2014



57% of respondents reported that they received fee payments



74% of foster carers described their retainer fees as could be better or poor

Key recommendations

A learning and development framework for foster carers should be implemented in all four countries of the UK, covering accredited and standardised pre- and post-approval training.

The governments of the UK should each create a register (a centrally held list) of approved foster carers to improve safeguarding, increase portability of the workforce, create a standardised pre- and post-approval training framework and improve the status of foster carers.

Governments should revisit the minimum levels of fostering allowances and the Scottish Government must introduce minimum recommended allowances.

Practice issues

Information sharing



31% of foster carers reported that they were rarely or never given all of the information about a fostered child prior to placement

46% of foster carers said their fostered children were not likely to receive information about independent visitors

Placement stability



49%

Just under half of respondents had experienced a placement ending when they felt it was not in the child's best interests



61%

61 per cent of foster carers who had experienced a placement ending said it had not been preceded by a review

Approval range

Almost 33%



Almost a third of foster carers had been referred children from outside their defined approval range

52%



52 per cent of those who had taken children from outside their approval range had felt pressured into it

75%



Three-quarters of those who had taken a child from outside their approval range said they had received no additional training and support from their fostering service

Key recommendations

Foster carers should always be given all of the available information they need about a child.

Responsible authorities in England and Wales should adhere to existing regulations that a placement cannot be ended unless a case review has been held.

Local authorities must conduct local needs analysis of their population of looked after children in order to determine the types of care placements required and to inform recruitment and commissioning.