

Aspirations: the views of foster children and their carers—a longitudinal research study



What research are we doing and why?

- We are conducting a longitudinal study of a group of young people in foster care with the charity Adolescent and Children's Trust (or TACT)
- We are examining aspects of resilience with a view to further improving outcomes for children in care
- We are examining 5 resilience outcomes: young people's connections with their family and friends, participation in decisions, involvement in activities, education, and life skills

What helps to develop resilience?

- Help children stay connected to key people
- Help children to get the most out of schooling
- Adults to be aware of their vital role re children
- Have stable loving placements
- Be active participants in decision making
- Develop supportive relationships
- NOT to move placements unless necessary

What research am I presenting?

Highlights of our Phase two '**Aspirations three years on**' research study about three key topics-young people's views of their connections with their family, their participation in decisions, and their education

Criteria for young people's inclusion in the research:

- In foster care with TACT, aged between 8 and 18 years and been in placement between 12 and 36 months

Phase one -2007/8 established 1st group of 56 young people

Phase two 2010/11 following up the 1st group

Phase three–2013 Establish a 2nd group of 200 young people

Characteristics of the 2011 sample?

- Average age 13 years 8 months
- 63% boys -37% girls
- 28% had been referred to CAMHS
- 18% had previously been excluded from school
- All but one now attending school full time
- 24% have a statement of special education needs
- Ethnicity-73% British and 27% other ethnicities

Key topic 1–How strong are the young people's connections with others?

- One section of the study examined the connections between the young person and their family, past and present.
- The young people were given a list of 11 different people, including: present foster carer, birth mother, and birth father, and asked to rate the strength of their current connection to each one as either 'very important', 'less important', or 'least important'

NOTE

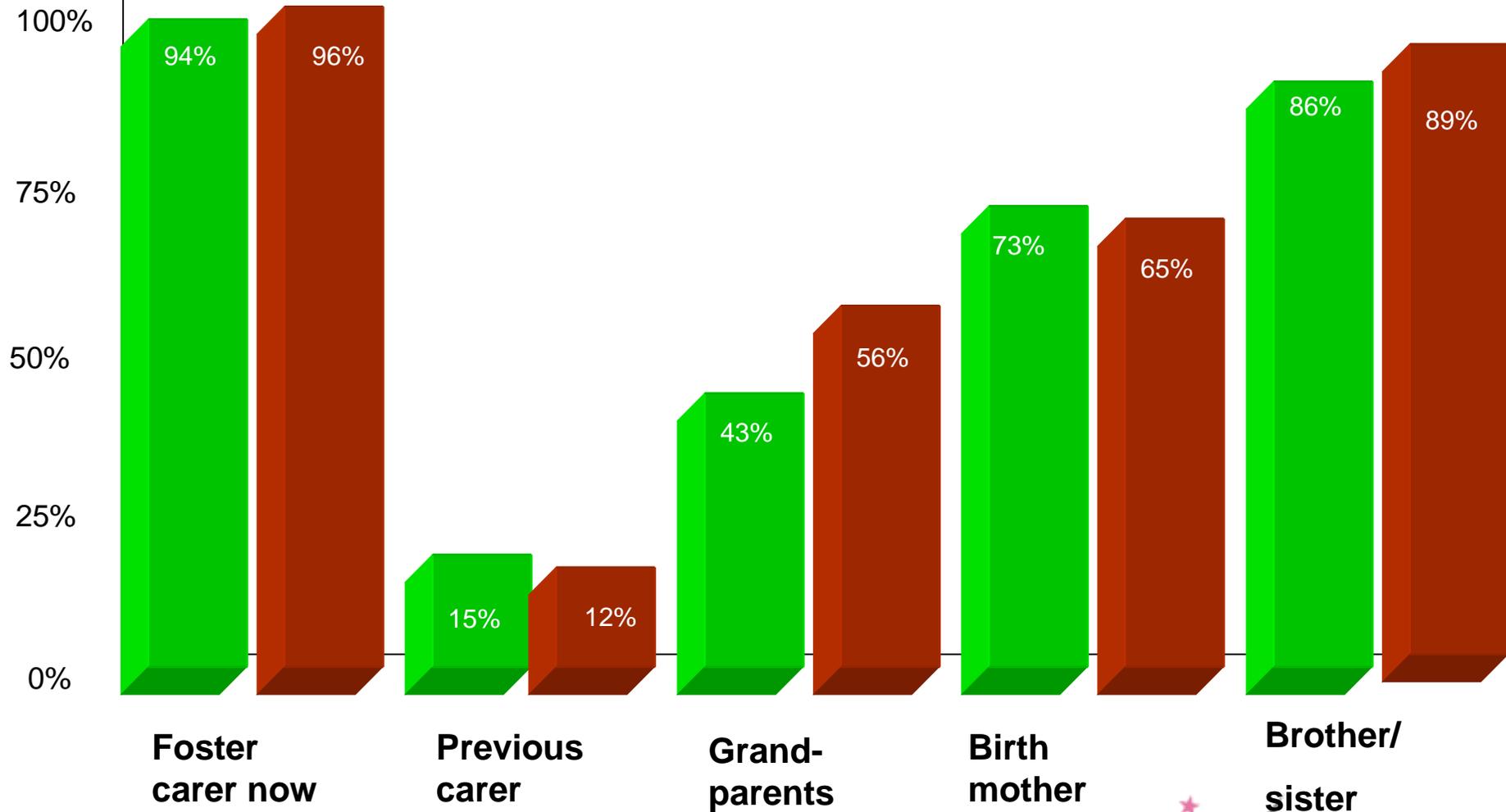
It was emphasised that all connections were likely to have been important at some stage.

Q What were the research findings about their connections?

COUNT

%

Family connections described as 'very important' by children in foster care as at 2008 and 2011



What did the young people say about connections?

- 'I wish my brothers could be better behaved'
- 'I would like my friends to live nearer'
- 'I would like to be back living with my own Mother'
- 'See my mum and the rest of my family a lot more'
- 'To be able to see my Mum for longer'
- 'Make all my family members able to look after me'
- 'For my father to get along with people'
- 'To continue to feel safe and loved as I am now'
- 'Living nearer to more friends'

Summary of connections findings?

- As in 2008 and increasingly, in 2011 current carers perceived as 'very important' in their life, although friends are increasingly important as is their birth parent
- Previous carer and birth father identified as 'least important'
- Most young people want more contact with family
- The longer the placement the more important the 'current carer' and 'friends' are becoming in the young people's lives. Birth mother remains 'very important'

Key topic 2-How involved do the young people believe they are in important decisions?



There were a series of questions about the amount of influence the young people felt they had about living in foster care, including decisions about their placement and review meetings: 'a lot of say', 'some say', or 'none at all'.

Summary of involvement in decisions findings?

- High degree of participation in decisions about daily living at home
- Less involvement about placement decisions
- Even less say about review meetings (timing, venue, content, organisation)
- Age, alongside placement stability, the key factors regarding degree of involvement
- Young people participated regularly in school, more social than educational aspects of schooling

Key topic 3– how do education findings compare?

2011 Further improvements at school-for most young people

- Contributing at school
- Friendships with young people of similar age
- friendships at school highly valued, but often difficult to establish
- Having someone to talk to when not feeling well
- Taking care if people try to bully
- School attendance

2011 Outstanding challenges at school-for many young people

- Getting on with exams and tests
- Getting on with homework
- Getting on with teachers
- Behaving in school

What are some examples of reported changes?

UPON ARRIVAL	REPORTED CHANGES
<p>'Peter' aged 13 Hostile and quite argumentative/bossy/ not a lot of tolerance of others kids</p>	<p>After 21 months in placement- Integrating well no longer socially excluded /joined a drama group/has become a valued popular member of the team</p>
<p>'Alexander' aged 15 Could not relate to peers and sometimes became violent</p>	<p>After 60 months in placement- Has taken a long time but has now improved greatly. Member of local football team</p>

Any overall changes in the young people ?

- Gradual, variable and often dogged improvements for young people in foster care over time.
- The young people want to be treated as **normal**.
- Young people's self-presentation, self-care and physical health are the aspects which improved the most, whilst education & behaviour, saw the least positive changes.
- The slow pace of behavioural change probably reflects gradual improving behaviour + greater acceptance of same.
- Relationships with others –often a challenge

What are the key findings so far?

- High levels of agreement between foster carers and foster children about changes-significant factor re indicator of good relationship?
- More visible improvements between arrival in placement and 2008, than 2008 and 2010
- Young people want more help with education and keeping contact with family and friends
- Areas for further changes and improvements and ways to improve them identified

NEXT—to follow up these young people after care PLUS the new group of 200 young people

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