

CARER EXIT SURVEY

South East Region

2016-2017



Contents

Executive Summary	1
Summary - South East Region	7
Question: About You	8
Question: About You as a Carer	11
Question: Reason for Discontinuing as a Foster/Kinship Carer	12
Question: The Experience of Caring.....	18
Question: The Experience of Caring Communication	20
Question: The Experience of Caring - Support.....	28
Question: The Experience of Caring - Financial	31
Question: The Experience of Caring – Training and Professional Development	33
Question: Overall Experience	35

Executive Summary

Information relating to End of Carer Approval Notices

This report brings Foster Care Queensland (here after referred to as FCQ) to the end of our ninth year managing the Exit Interview Program.

FCQ received a total of 654 Exit interview referrals for the period **1st July 2016 to 30th June 2017**. 319 of the total were Foster Carers, 317 of the total were Kinship Carers, 14 were Provisional Carers and 4 did not state their carer status.



137 Exit surveys were completed on survey monkey, either by the carers directly, FCQ inputting the data on the carer’s behalf from a paper based survey that the carer was sent and returned to FCQ or the carer requested a telephone interview and FCQ inputted the data on to survey monkey during the telephone interview.

The return rate this year in relation to completed surveys, is 20.9%, this is less than previous years and notably this financial year less people have provided additional information when completing the survey compared to last financial year. Survey Monkey has been slightly amended this year to present a less time consuming format but continuing to gather all the relevant information as previously.

The procedures for responding to notifications of End of Carer Approval notices is as follows;

- FCQ send a letter when they receive the end of carer approval notice from the Department informing the person/persons that FCQ has received the End of Carer Approval notice and would they like to provide information about their experiences as carers. The letter also provides a number of ways they can complete the survey, for example online, over the phone and a paper

survey can be sent to them with a returned stamped addressed envelope, which would then be inputted into survey monkey by FCQ.

- After a two week period FCQ would follow up via phone calls where possible with the past carers to acknowledge receipt of the letter and discuss the opportunities to providing their experiences. Whereby no phone contact details have been provided, FCQ would email the past carers if this was an option having been provided with the email addresses on the End of Carer Approval Notices.

Whilst these are the procedures in place for the Exit process, it has to be acknowledged that due to the amount of time that is taken up with the recruitment position, the timeframes are not always something that can be achieved, the contacts are made but not always in keeping with the timeframes outlined above.

Issues relating to the information provided on the End of Carer Approval Notices

The End of Carer Approval Notices are quite simplistic in terms of their requirements for providing information and the information required should be accessible on ICMS. It has been noted that FCQ are having to make a number of enquiries to the Department of Child Safety PSU/PSS to ask for additional information to be able to undertake our role as part of the procedures for the Exit program. Below is a list of issues that arise in regards to not being provided with the required information;

- Missing contact numbers including emails of past carers
- Ethnicity mostly left blank
- Indigenous status left blank
- Reason for cessation, either left blank or a vague response provided that does not give a reasonable explanation, for example “carer decision” “carer resigned” ‘department decision”.

Due to the limited time available to undertake the Exit program it provides less time when FCQ need to follow up with the department in regards to information not being provided in the first instance.

Issues relating to the End of Carer Approval Notices being provided to FCQ

Over a number of years it has come to FCQ’s attention that they are receiving less than 50% of the End of Carer Approval Notices. This was addressed with the department last financial year and FCQ started to receive End of Carer Approval notices this financial year for the previous year with the statement “data cleanse” written on the form, suggesting that it should have been sent the financial year prior but it wasn’t. This was also time consuming as the data for the previous year had already been processed as part of the Exit survey and the information was too late to be of any relevance to the survey.

It is noted that when you make comparisons between the End of Carer Approval notices that FCQ have received this financial year, as listed below;

- Foster Carers 319
- Kinship Carers 317
- Provisional carers 14

And compare the figures against the figures provided on the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability services website in relation to the carers that have left for the period from 31 March 2016 to 31 March 2017, it provides the following details;

- Foster Carers 575
- Kinship Carers 560
- Provisional Carers 332

The would result in a difference of approximately (due to the date discrepancies) of;

- Foster Carers 256
- Kinship carers 243
- Provisional Carers 318

As much as the dates for the data is slightly out of sync due to the difference in dates it still clearly indicates that FCQ are only being provided with 50% of the End of Carer Approval Notices which in turn provides less opportunity for feedback to be provided to FCQ by past carers and less opportunity for FCQ to achieve a higher level of responses in regards to survey monkey.

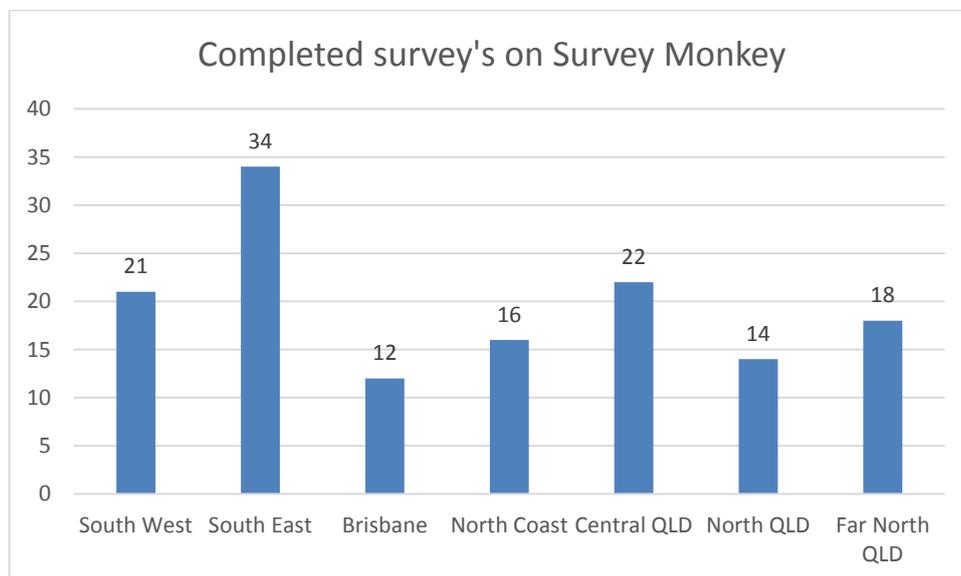
It has been noted this year that Brisbane Region provided 23 End of Carer Approval notices for this financial year, 12 Kinship carer and 11 Foster Carer, in relation to the amount of people that left their role as carers this financial year I would suggest that this is not a true reflection of the amount of End of Carers in the Brisbane Region for this financial year.

There is a lot of effort that goes into trying to convince somebody who generally has left due to conflict with the Department of Child Safety or the NGO's that their input is valuable and can make a difference. Many carers have continued to care throughout their difficulties and at the point of no longer being able to continue as a carer they feel so exhausted by trying to continue that they don't want to talk about the events that occurred they just want to forget.

Some people inform FCQ that they will complete the survey online via the link that has been sent to them when they are contacted but this does not occur on some occasions. Sending paper surveys appears to be the overall choice of most people when discussing the options with them on the phone. There continues to be an element of belief that providing the information will "make no difference"

Overall Data and Findings

The report outlines all the feedback from all 137 carers and it is sectioned into regions so that the information is specific to the feedback from each region.



Overall, across the state people identified positives aspects of their time as foster cares and these related to;

- The range of allowances provided by Child Safety to help meet the cost of caring for a child
- The allowance payment rates
- How quickly allowances were paid
- Opportunities carers were given to participate in training and professional development
- Pre-service training delivery
- Standard training modules 5,6 and 7
- Information provided about your role and responsibilities
- Information provided about Foster and Kinship Care Services role and responsibilities
- The number of children placed with carers at any one given time being reasonable.
- The manner in which the carer approval renewal process was undertaken
- The child's educational needs being met

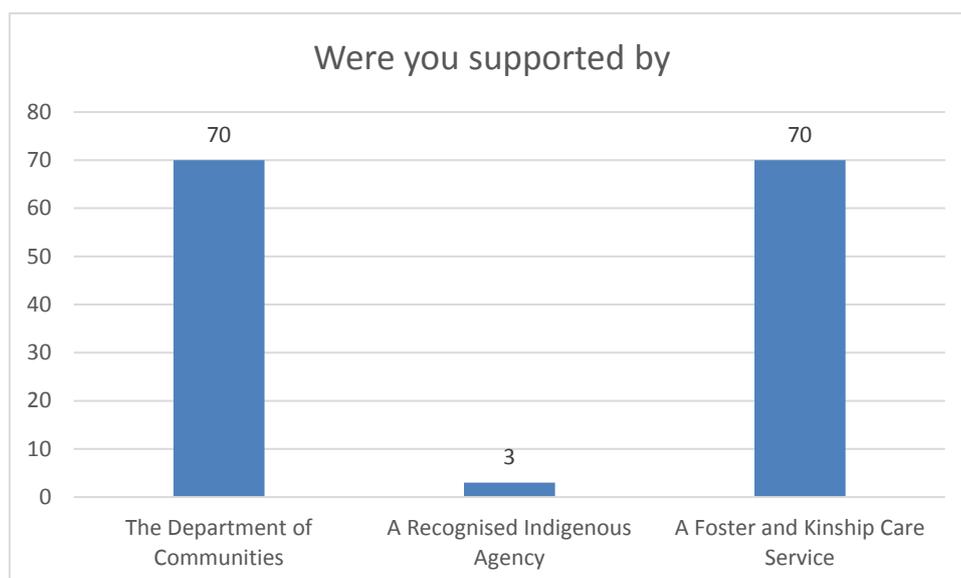
Overall it was also identified that the majority of people completing the survey were satisfied with training and development.

Overall across the state, there were similarities in terms of negative feedback provided, listed below are common themes from information provided in the 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 reports;

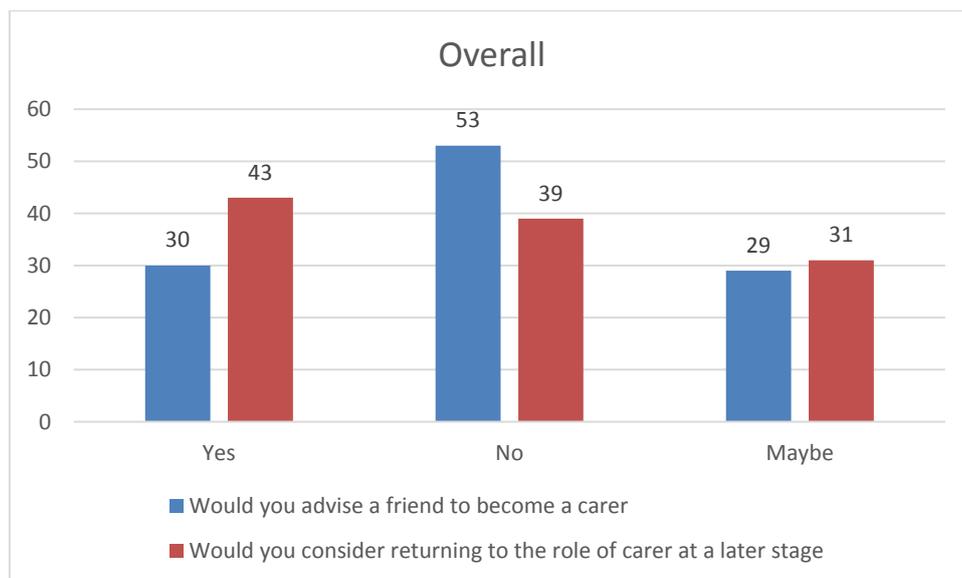
- Carers not feeling part of a care team
- Child Safety's policies and procedures for dealing with Harm Report/SOC process
- Child Safety's handling of a Harm Report/SOC process
- The carers ability to make a complaint about a service provided by Child Safety

- The carers ability to appeal a decision related to you that was made by Child Safety
- How quickly the carers were reimbursed when out of pocket expenses were incurred.
- Carers not feeling listened too in relation to the needs of the child and concerns
- Lack of consultation prior to a child being placed with carers and at times no information provided about the child
- Telephone calls and emails not being responded to by the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.
- Behaviours minimised by staff members, agencies and the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability services.
- Lack of feeling valued as a volunteer

The findings relating to what were the most challenging aspects of being a carer, have remained consistent over the years that FCQ has been undertaking the Exit Survey Report. The lack of communication and feeling part of a care team is dominated throughout the reports for each region and this would be suggestive that this is a state wide issue in regards to the feedback provided. The survey asked people to provide details in relation to who they were supported by and the responses suggested that there is still a large number of carers supported by the Department of Communities.



People completing the survey were asked if they would advise a friend to become a carer and would they consider returning to the role of carer at a later stage, the responses overall for QLD are listed below;



The majority of carers who completed the survey identified that they started fostering due to a desire to help children. This information has also been consistent throughout the years. From the extracts taken from Survey Monkey in relation to the responses from the carers who have exited the system, it is evident that their motivation was predominantly a desire to care for children but this was diminished by the lack of feeling valued or being part of a care team.

In relation to training undertaken in the past twelve months, overall each region identified a significant lack of training in the past twelve months. It was also evident from the survey that most carers struggled with attending training due to lack of child care facilities for the children they were caring for when undertaking training.

In summary, most people identified that they would consider returning to foster care at a later stage but they would not advise a friend to become a carer.

Completed by:
 Marijka Kelly
 Recruitment and Exit Co-ordinator

Presented by:
 Bryan Smith
 Executive Director

31 July 2017

Summary - South East Region

FCQ received a total of 654 End of carer approvals during the period of 1st July 2016-30th June 2017. 120 (18%) of the 654 approvals were received from the South East region. All 120 end of carer approvals were sent an acknowledgement letter from FCQ and were contacted via telephone to discuss completing the Carer Exit Survey.

Information taken from the end of carer approvals

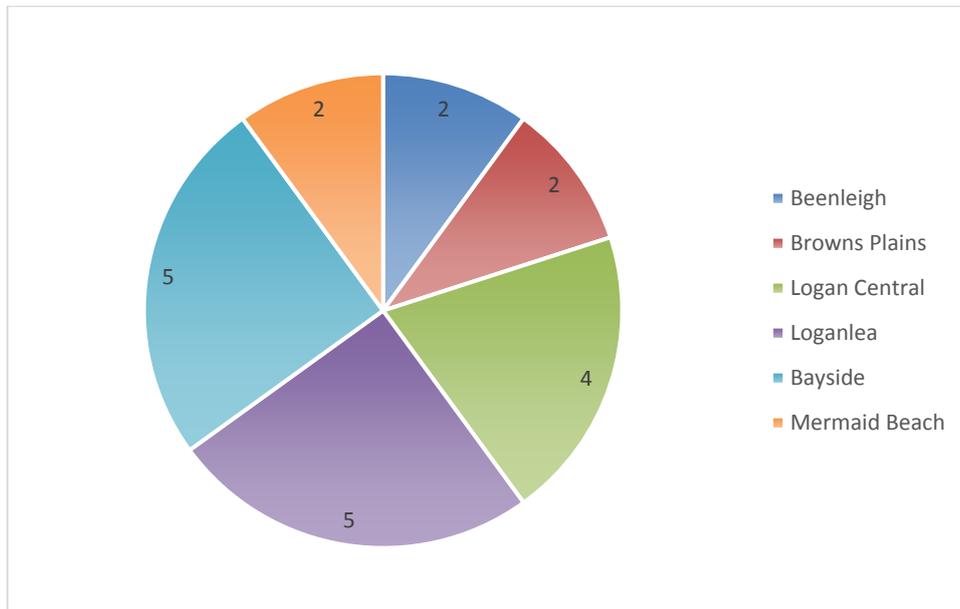
The 120 end of carer approvals consisted of:

- 1 identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- 2 identifying as Torres Strait Islander
- 5 identifying as Aboriginal
- 85 identifying as neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander
- 27 end of carer approvals did not provide this information.
- The end of carer approvals also identified that from the 120;
 - 74 Identified as kinship carers
 - 46 Identified as foster carers

There were 34 people (28%) from the South East region area that completed a Carer Exit Survey. The following details relate to the responses that have been received from the surveys.

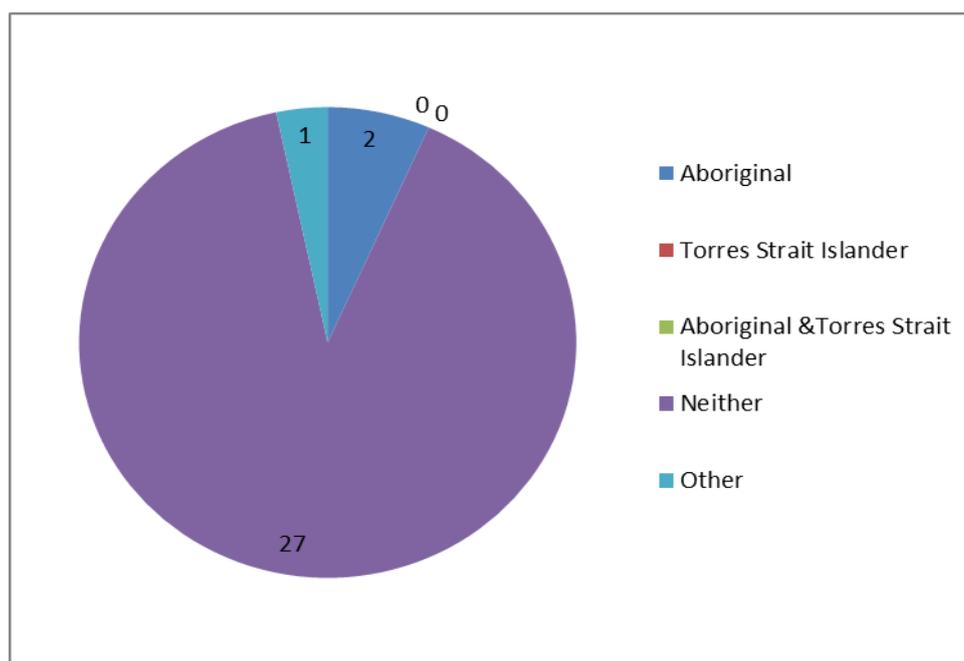
Question: About You

Information identifies which child safety office the person was attached to while they were foster carers.

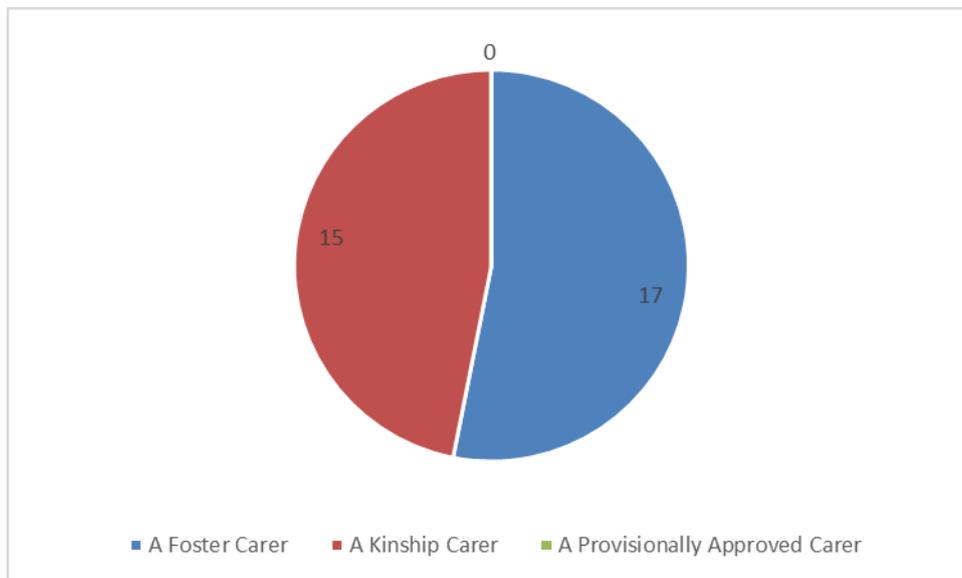


People completing the survey are asked to identify as:

- Aboriginal
- Torres Strait Islander
- Neither
- Other



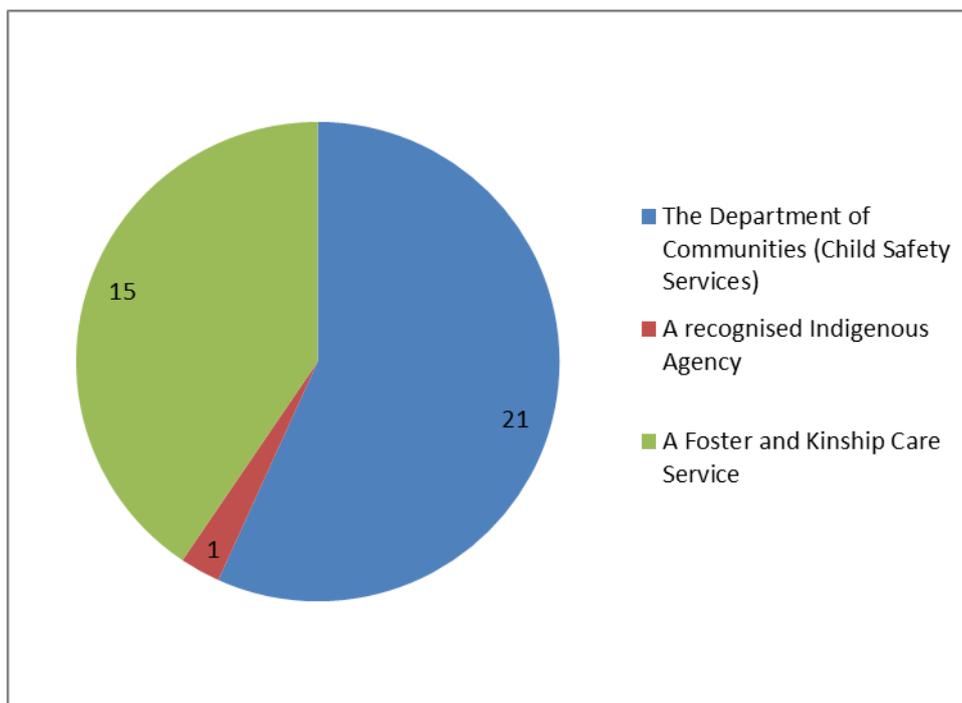
Listed below is information relating to the person’s foster carer status.



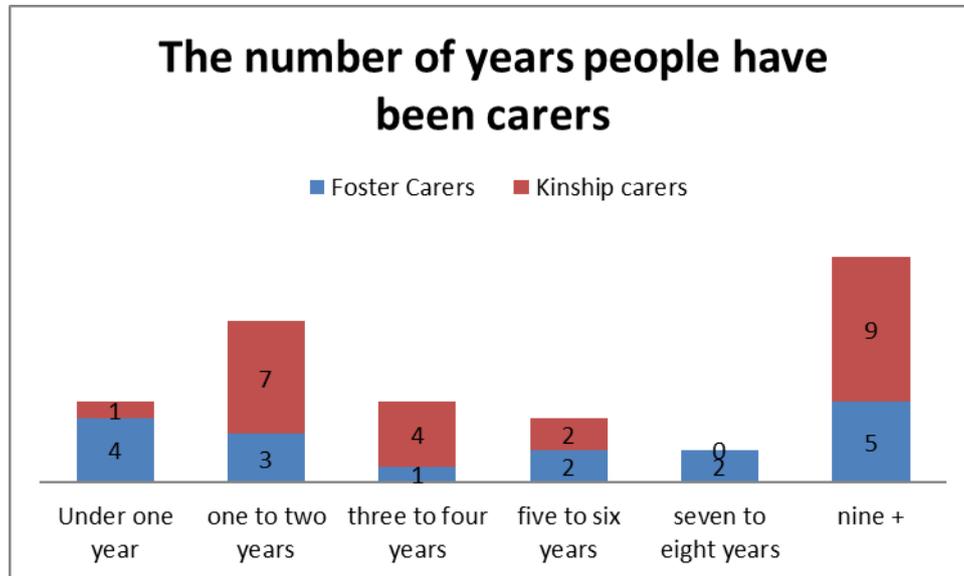
For the total of the 120 End of carer approvals received, only:

- 17 foster carers completed the survey out of 46 (36%)
- 15 Kinship carers completed the survey out of 74 (20%)
- 2 people skipped this question

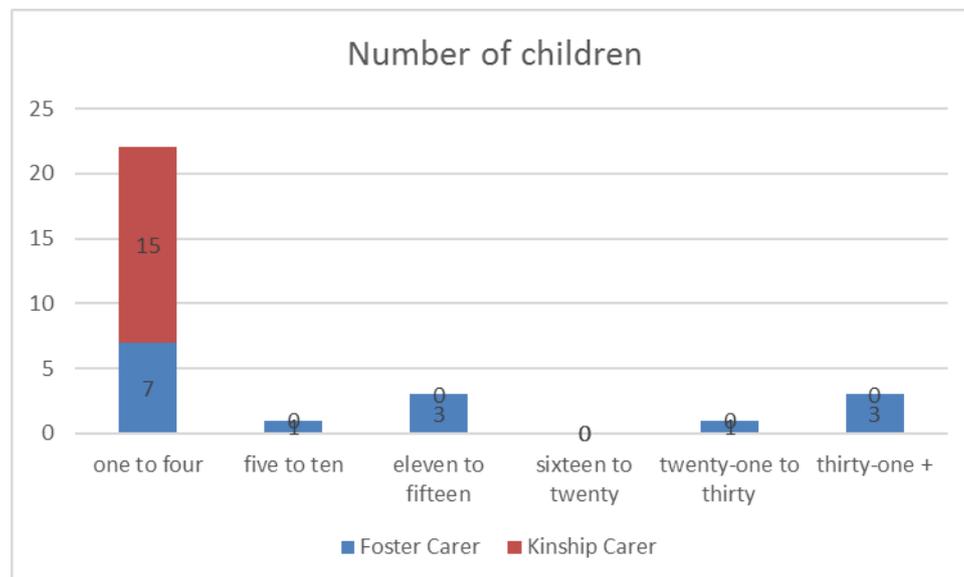
The table below identifies who the person was supported by.



Information is requested regarding the person’s time spent as a carer, identifying when they started as a carer and when they stopped. Below is a graph that identifies the length of time stated in the responses.

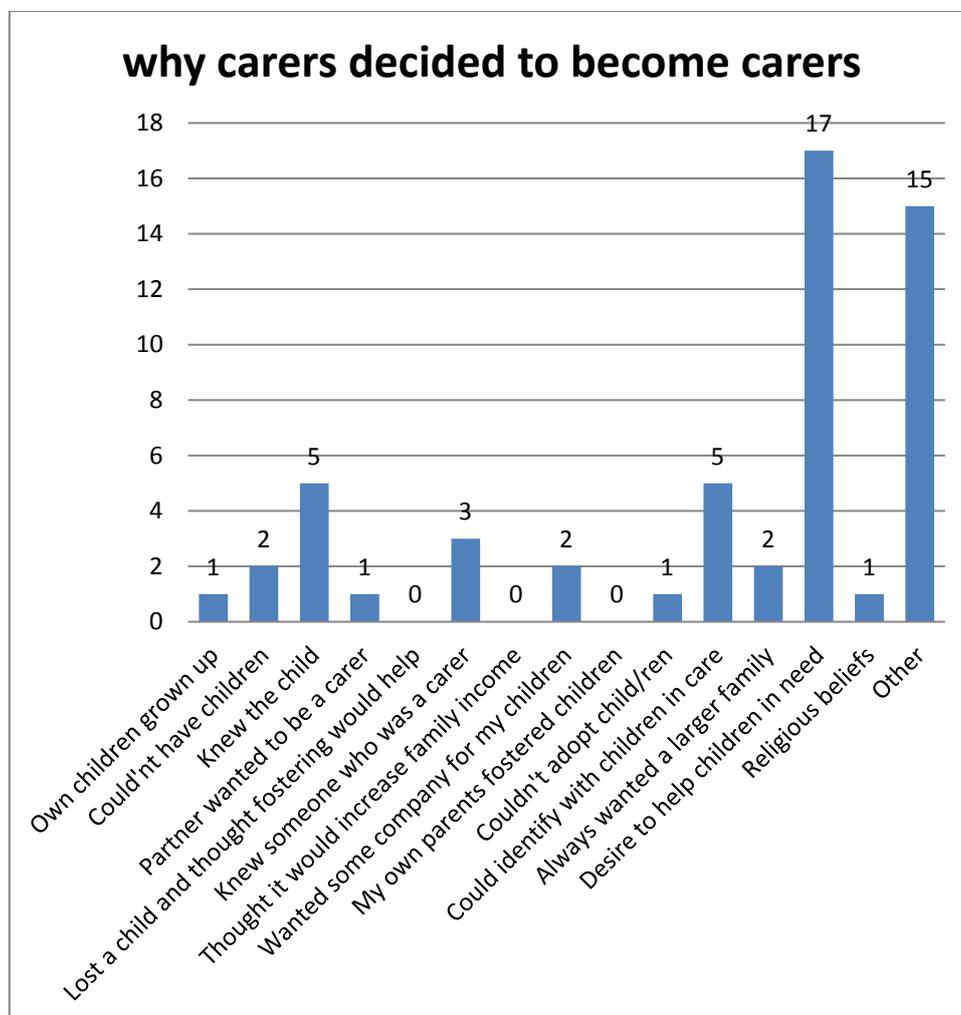


The information provided also evidences the amount of children the person/persons have provided care to.



Question: About You as a Carer

People were asked to identify what made them decide to become a foster carer.



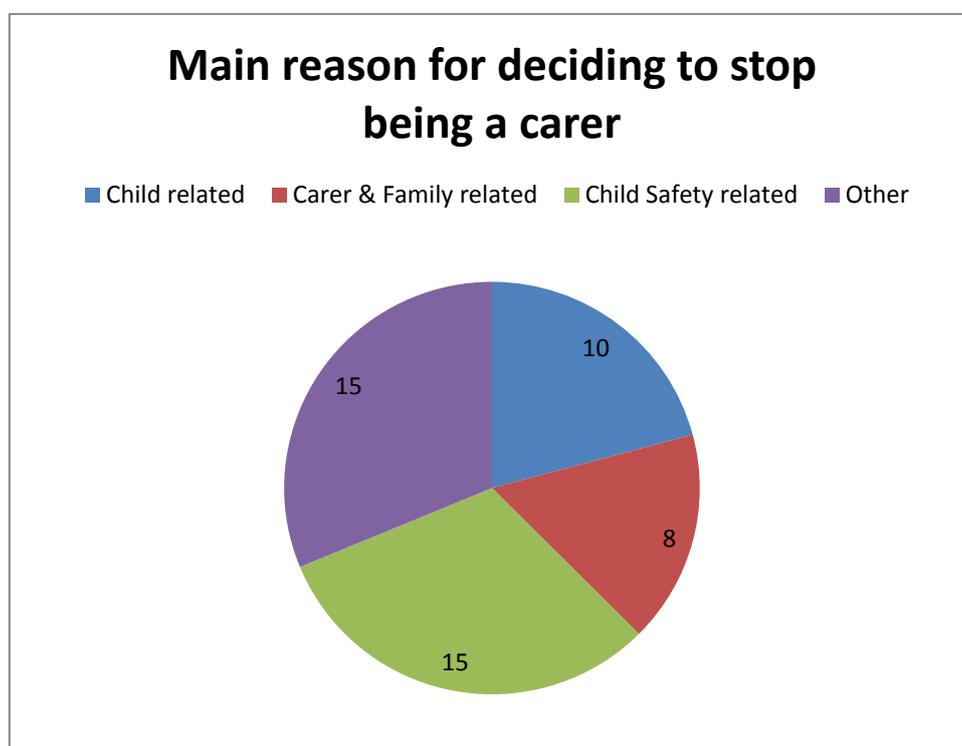
Below is a selection of some of the comments provided by the people undertaking the survey in relation to why they decided to become a carer. This information would be consistent with the section under *other* on the graph.

- My niece had no parent willing or able to look after her.
- Granddaughter.
- Parents and Child Safety asked me to take my grandson.
- Department did not take the less intrusive order.
- Was a foster kid and adopted.
- My grandchildren.
- The child's mother asked me to take him on.
- To give back to community.
- Needed to give grandchild a safe and happy environment.
- Daughter had children taken off her so I took the grandchildren.

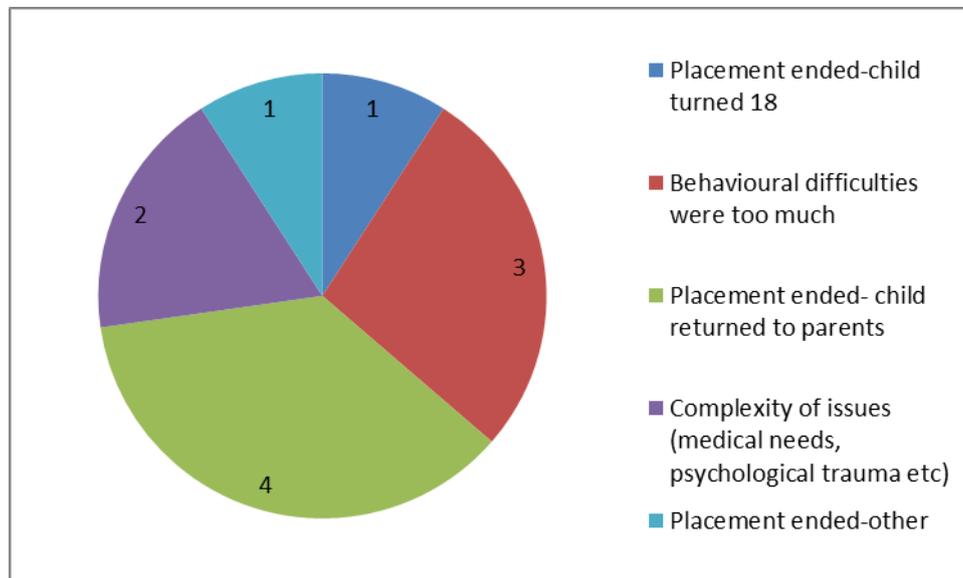
- My grandson was placed under a child protection order.
- Husband's mother was a carer.
- My Grandchildren.
- My grandson needed caring for and protection like my other 3 grandchildren. I was asked to care for grandson by DOCS.
- Couldn't see our grandchildren go to strangers - became kinship foster carers.
- My granddaughter I took into kinship.
- Granddaughter Needed Grandson Mother Grandchildren Order Foster
- Mother and father both on drugs.
- I wanted to help children in need.
- To help children.
- They were still in the family till I got ill.
- Both parents were unfit to care for a child so I stepped up.

Question: Reason for Discontinuing as a Foster/Kinship Carer

People undertaking the survey were asked to provide the reason for them deciding to stop being carers. They are provided with four options then asked to elaborate in relation to the option that they have selected.



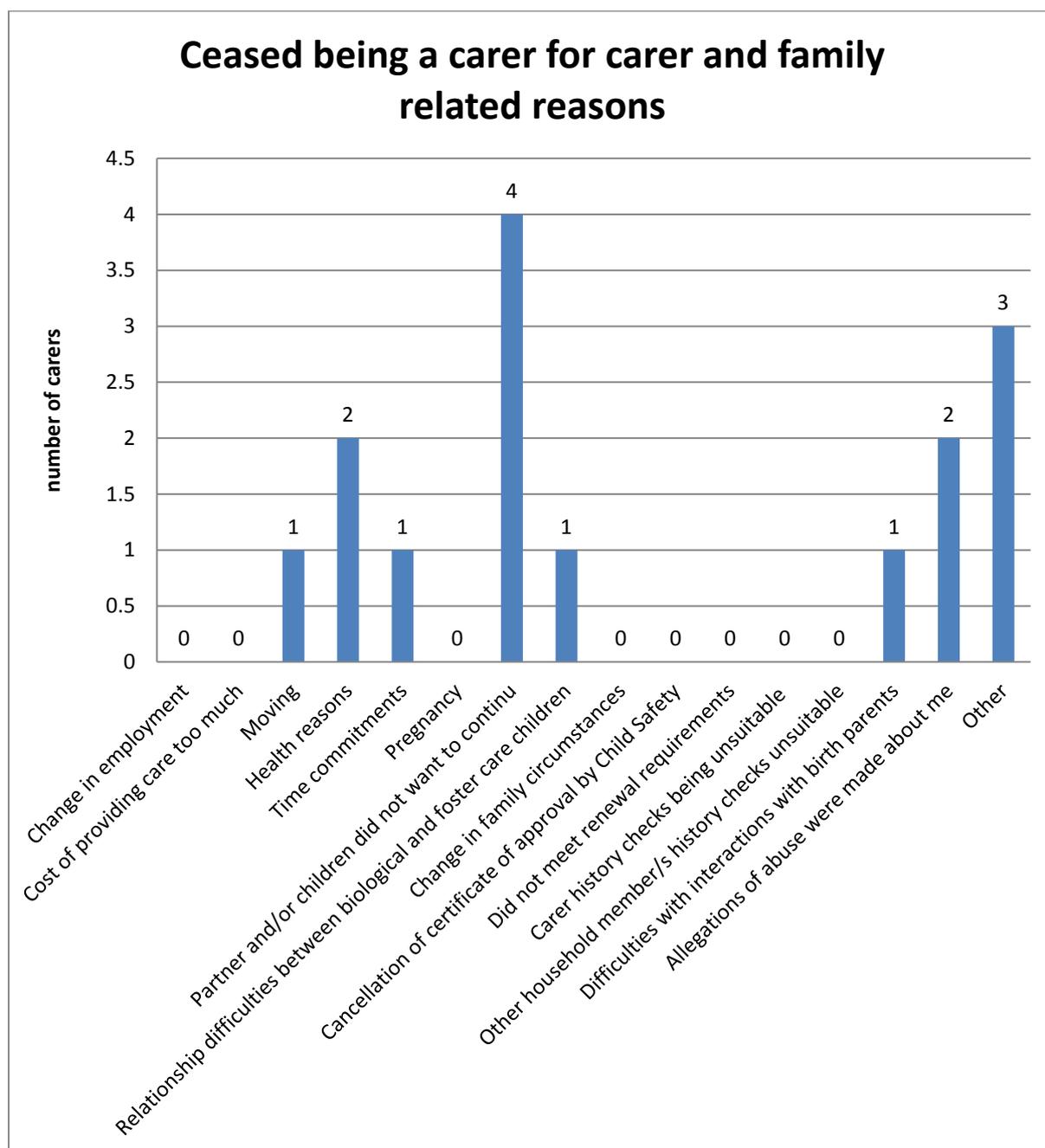
The following information will be specific to the reason that has been provided in this question. If the respondents answered that they ceased being carers due to child related reasons, they are asked to expand on the reasons, as follows.



Below are extracts of comments that were made by people completing the survey in relation to this question.

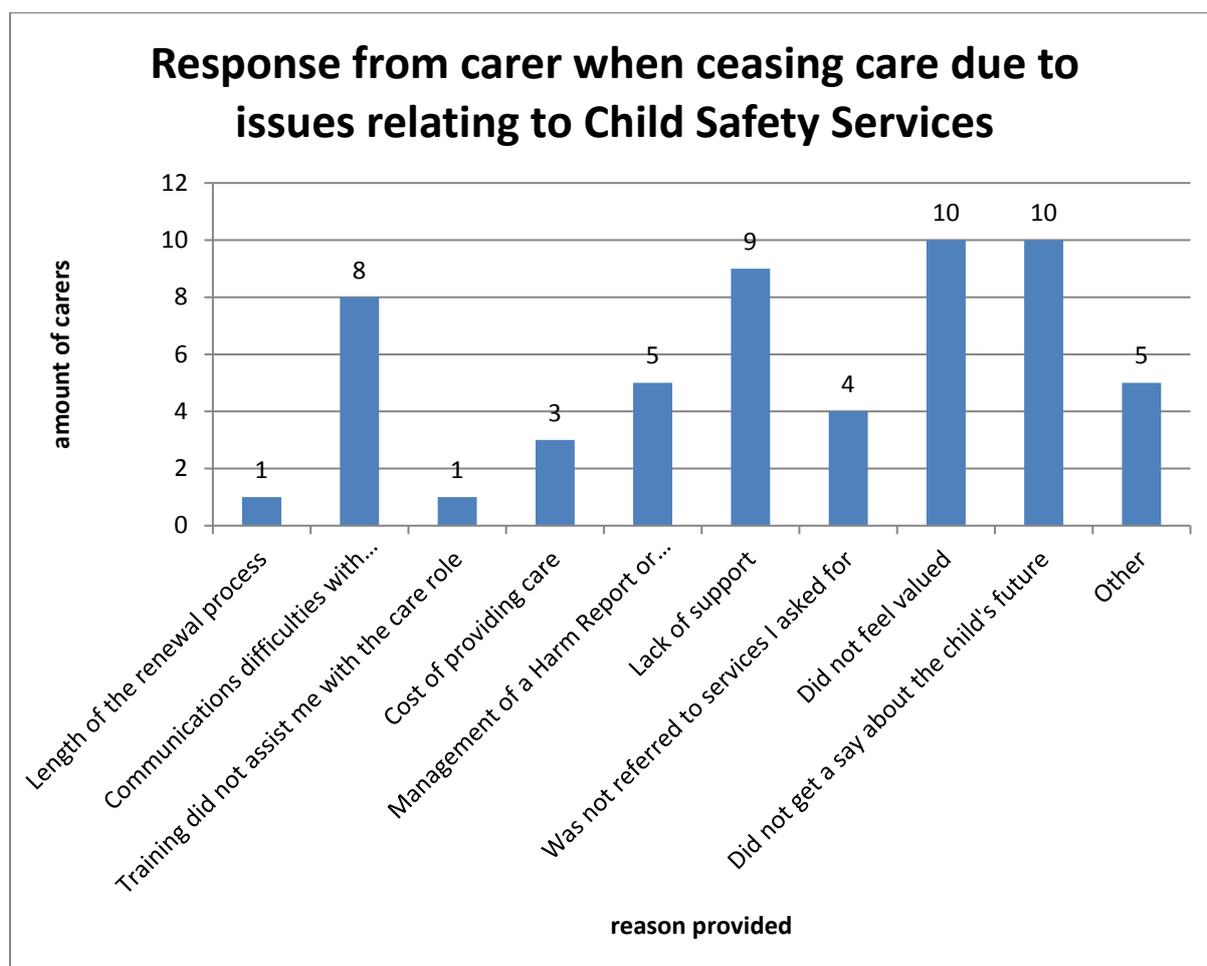
- Child returned to parent.
- Due to ill health could not keep up with looking after the children.
- We continually asked for more family support but did not receive this. Asked to transfer to complex needs agency however we were not permitted to transfer to another agency.
- Grandson returned to his mother.

For people who stated that they ceased caring due to carer and family reasons, they were asked to expand on their response.



Reasons provided

- Child went back to Mother.
- My husband was getting increasingly upset with lack of help and support we needed and didn't get in our times of need, from either the agency or Child Safety office.
- Constant threats of harm from foster children's family.
- Welfare system is not a good situation to be involved with.
- We cancelled placement.
- My granddaughter was uncontrollable.

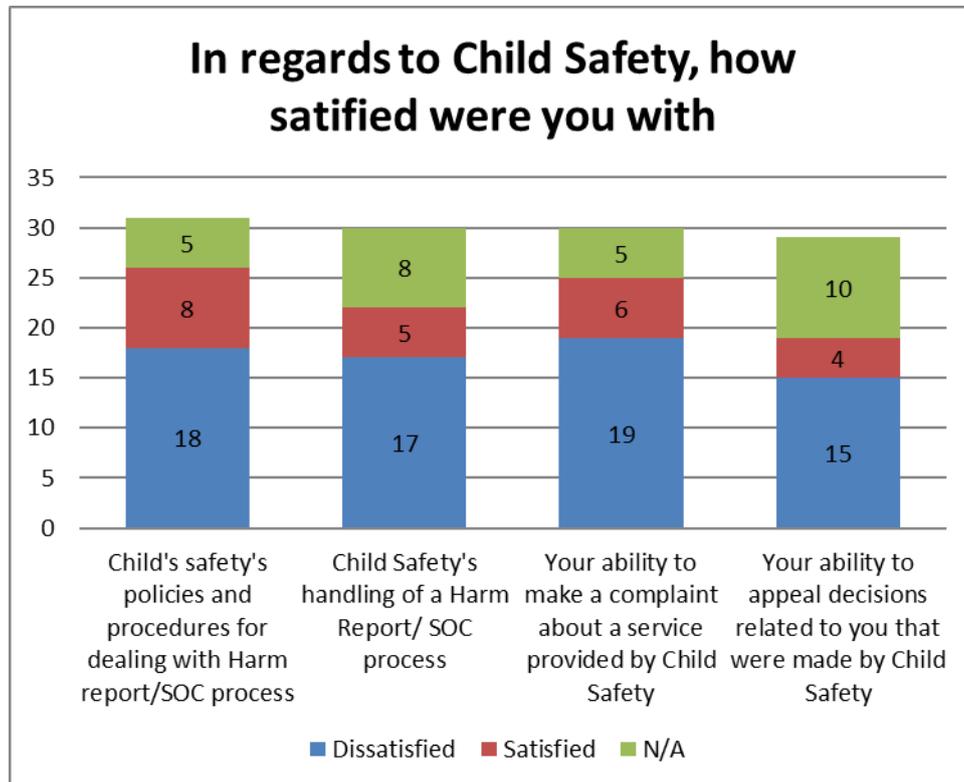


Below are extracts of comments made by carers in relation to the questions referring to why they ceased as carers if this was related to Child Safety Services.

- Caring for children of aboriginal and island decent caused difficulties with the agency. We were bullied and frightened of them and by them. We complained about a case worker and asked for her to be replaced but nothing was done. The case worker remained.
- Staff at the agency were biased and creating rifts between carers.
- Promised high care needs and complex and never paid.
- Incident was fully reported by me, I asked for help as child became unmanageable.
- Inappropriate placement.
- Child Safety lacks a lot they would throw in too hard basket and forget about ongoing issues.
- I was sick and tired of being treated like an idiot by people who were barely any older than me (24) who also did not have children. My biological children were segregated by child safety workers yet they expected the foster children to be treated as part of our family. They did not listen to my concerns regarding the children and after numerous times telling them behaviours were not normal they kept telling me they were normal until the schools said something then they listened. They never wanted to provide any support with difficult behaviours and always told me to redirect behaviours even though these behaviours did not change with redirection.

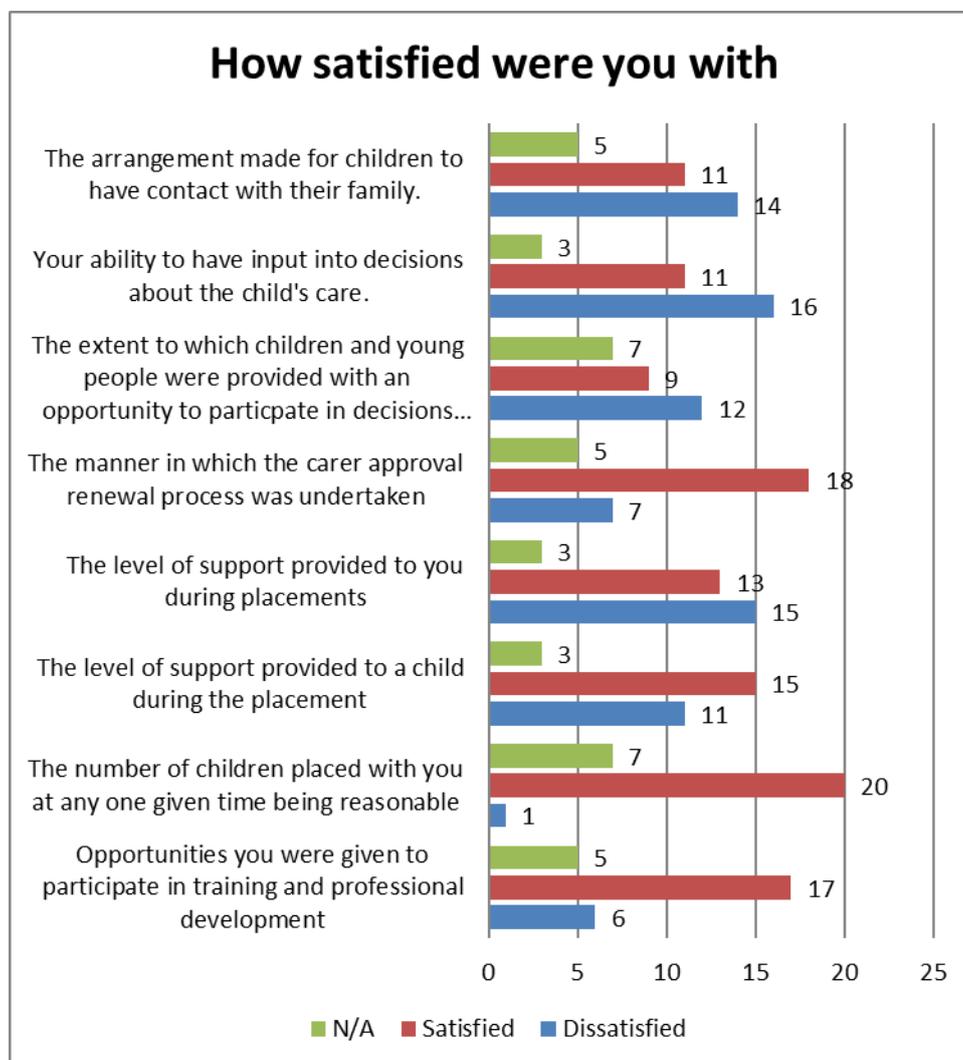
- Could not work with CSO. The boy we had would come home after she would see him and he said she would say to him I was a rude bitch. He'd say he would be upset her saying that.
- Child Safety was not interested in listening to our feelings and provided no support to our own child who was traumatised by our last foster child. Child Safety expected us to drop everything to get this last child to appointments which we would have to pay out of our own pocket, sometimes resulting in hundreds of dollars, and would not be flexible in trying to work around us and our own family's appointments or extra-curricular activities. We HAD to have the child at set place, at set time even to the point where one day every week we had to pick him up from school an hour early to get to meetings. Our philosophy on life is a child should get an education and we have school hours for a reason but Child Safety obviously didn't see it that way.
- Not able to give kids a proper stable home. Department had too much input. The wanted one rule for my daughter (who is so well adjusted) and one rule for foster kids (who are taught to rot the system).
- My niece was reunified with her parents.
- We have had the same 2 children in care for 13 years. We have suffered abuse and neglect from DOCS, and the agency. We battled on despite them for our boys. We finally became guardians of the boys on the 6/2/17 and could not wait to sever our ties with the foster care system. Now we are dealing with our own PTSD, secondary depression as well as continuing to help our boys despite their complex mental health issues.
- We often heard from other local carers that they or we had been singled out. Felt like we all were black listed.
- My grandson was returned to his parents by Child Safety.
- 65 years old and retired. There needs to be more support for carers when issues arise that Department needs to be involved in.
- Order was revoked and child placed in one parents care.
- It took almost 12 months from the time I applied to become a carer until it went through. In that 12 months, my employment situation changed and that restricted my ability to be a proper carer. If the process was faster I would have been able to be a full time carer, and would not have accepted the employment I did. Now because I am employed, I feel I am not able to be a carer, because I am too busy to give the children what they need and deserve.
- He self-placed elsewhere.
- We did not decide to stop being foster carers it was a decision made by the agency because we could not conform to their schedule. We were told they did not have the resources to waste on people like us. I thought carers were their greatest resource but apparently not so. All we were asking for was time out while we assisted our daughter who was going through a tough pregnancy. Bitterly disappointed and disgusted.
- Handled so very badly. All evidence to support me was held but not looked at.
- We had to wait 3 months for payment.
- Felt that decisions were made in the best interest of the mother not the child. Safety and well-being of the child should always come first.
- CSO back stabbers. Says one thing to your face then all hell breaks out. Never getting answers.
- Not once in the 14 months i cared for the 2 long term girls i had were my concerns listened to. Child safety always knew better and made no effort at all the support me. I am absolutely disgusted by the way child safety have dealt with myself and other carers I know and I would never ever recommend someone become a foster carer. The people from child safety I have met have never done any more than they need to help myself as a carer and the lack of support is horrendous.

- Placement ended - child returned to parents.
- It was impossible to give kids a stable loving home when the department insist on having the shit bag parents involved. Nothing good come of this. Just confused kids who follow their parents.



Question: The Experience of Caring

People undertaking the surveys were asked how satisfied they were with different elements of their involvement with the Department of Child Safety and the agency.



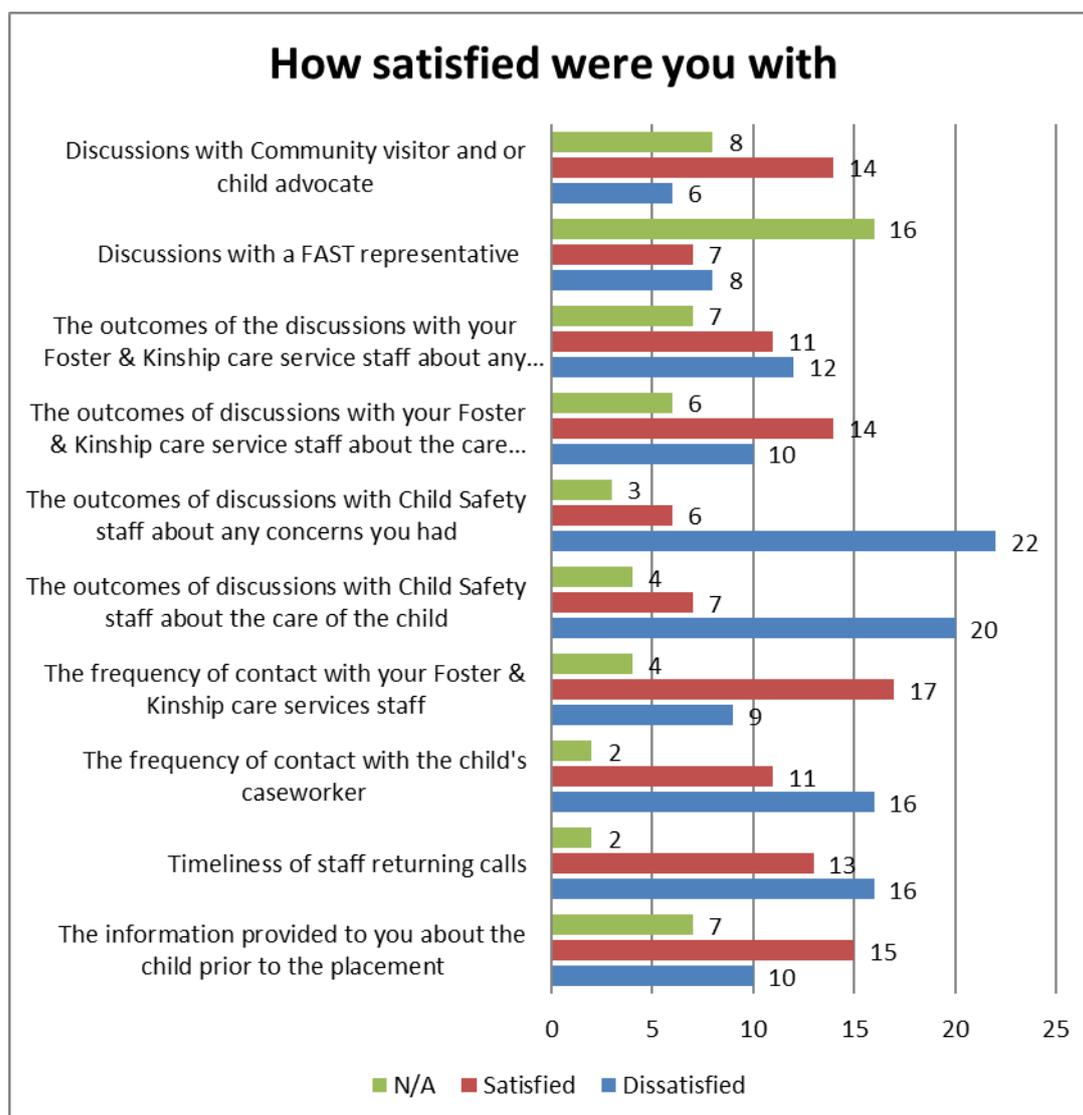
Below are extracts from comments made in reference to this question by the people undertaking the surveys.

- The children didn't want to go see their family. Especially the younger one. He covered behind the worker most visits and acted out violently sometimes for months after a dysfunctional visit. I asked if it could be done differently, supporting his anxiety but this was seen as oppositional and nothing was ever done. I had to tell him there was nothing I could do. We just had to live with his rage. This happened until he was about 11 and finally put his foot down. This caused massive problems with the agency but it did stop the visits.
- When we transferred from one agency to another we received very helpful training, advice and support. But the staff kept changing and after the first year there we felt like the whole dynamic had changed. We should have seen the signs then. Instead we stayed ... and here we are.

- You could always put your opinion to the department but the department did not take what you said on board and the child was often traumatized further due to this. Department often failed to investigate matters fully resulting in decisions that did not meet the child's needs. Complaints through the department are a waste of time and need to go higher to be heard.
- I have answered questions here in relation to our agency not Child Safety.
- Wat training! Satisfied with agency only. Child Safety no!
- The boy we had did not see CSO for 12 months. Then when I said something she was making out I was a liar.
- It was probably the age group we had but it seemed to us that Child Safety and the family chose when, where and how long a child would have appointments, family time, etc. The child never seemed to be asked what they wanted, and as for us carers we had absolutely no say in it at all. The only support we ever had was from our foster care agency and they also tried to support the child more than us by saying we needed to change our ways of parenting.
- Dad resumed contact with children after 5 years plus gap with no contact Dads visits were unsupervised. Dad was permitted to negatively influence children. Dad has history of drug abuse, domestic violence and alcohol abuse. Lack of investigation from case worker and team leader into previous abuse. Separation of sibling contact - ongoing issue Lack to mediate with family and children.

Question: The Experience of Caring Communication

Carers were asked how satisfied they were with their experiences of communication with relevant stakeholders. Below is a table that outlines the responses and extracts of further comments that they wanted to make in relation to the question.



Response Comments

- I had no contact at all with Foster/Kindship staff. Our second CSO was much better than the first. Never had a spot visit which concerned me. When my niece was reunified no one informed me. I had my sister in-law text me. No confirmation from DOCS until I emailed them asking if she was no longer in my care. No chance for my niece or us to say goodbye, pack up her belongings etc.
- After several disciplinary meetings and also another time we got put on "good behaviour" with a 3 month foster carers licence { I was trying to advocate for the boys) My husband and I took another approach. Sink beneath the waves and say nothing. Do as you have to, say what they want to hear, go where they send you and behave. This worked a bit better. Having said that

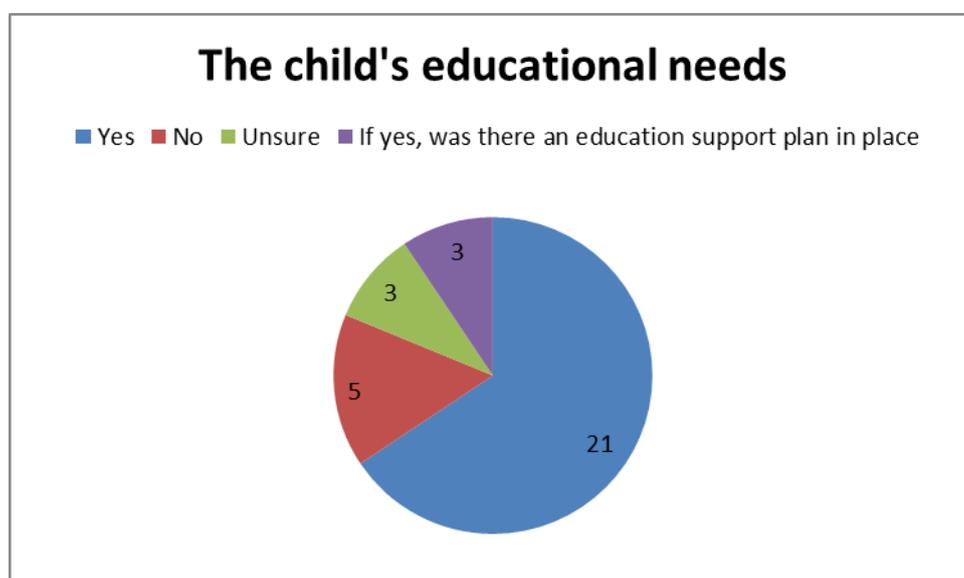
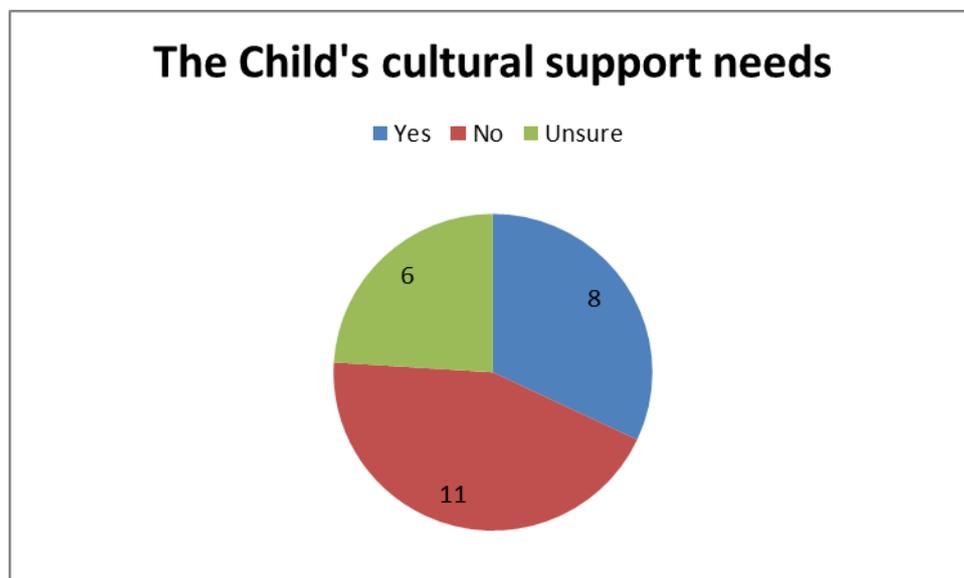
over the 13 years there have been a small number of rescuers. People that made a big difference. Just enough to help. Then as quickly as they came another worker would replace them and hell would break loose again. Fuelled by their associations or their particular beliefs. These times were hell... to be endured. They were more frequent than the moments of tranquillity with an ineffective worker (or custodian of the role while they looked for another person) or, as mentioned, leaps forward with an amazing worker only 1 really) who "got it".

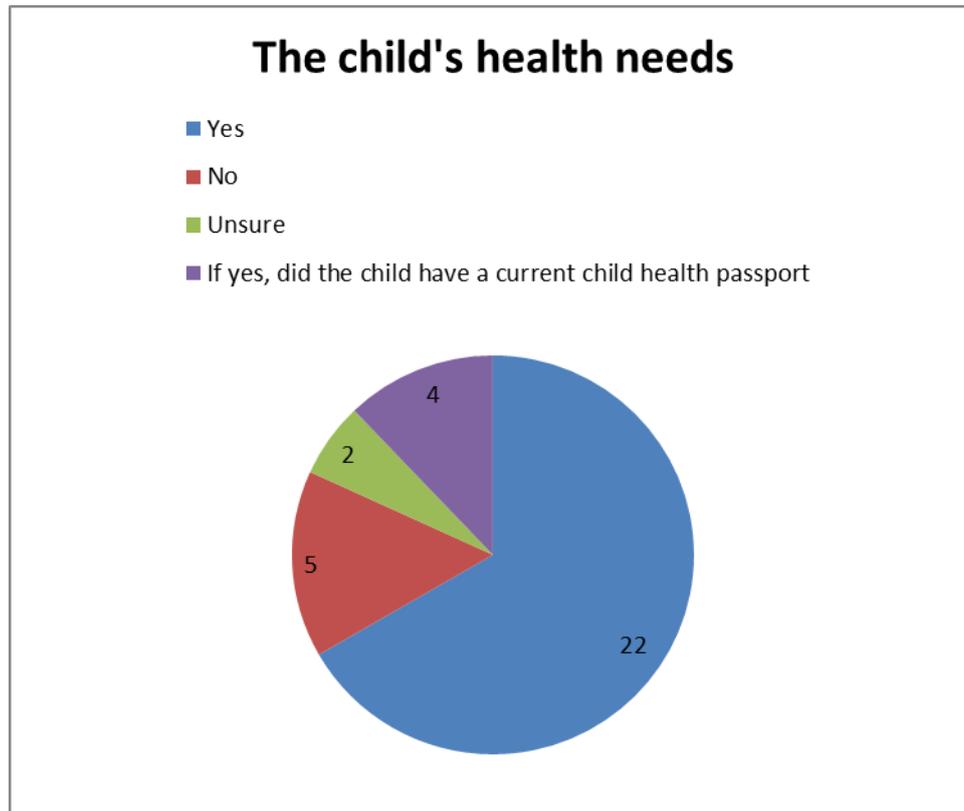
- We had no help from anywhere.
- We only had one community visitor which was when we had our full time child. She was lovely and amazing with the child!
- Too many to discuss.
- Community visitor and Child Advocate were great. The department has some great CSO's but the ones we had were either very new to the department and left shortly after (6 CSO's) or would not listen as they had their own personal agendas and ended up making fools of themselves when things did not work out as they had planned.
- Child left at school after Case Worker failed to show up or ring to tell her she wasn't coming. 2. Could never contact CSO when needed. 3. Told the carer couldn't help. 4. Told they agency couldn't help.
- Call me too numerous to detail here.
- Too many staff changes no follow up. We had no Child Safety Officer during time of allegation.
- Case Workers were changed on a regular basis and not properly informed with situation. Never kept in contact regularly and hardly ever returned calls.
- My CSO all she could ever say to me "what am I trying to say" never an answer. Was not allowed to be involved in other grandchildren, had to concentrate on the 3 I had care of.
- The only positive experience i have had as a foster carer has been with foster care service staff
- CSO Dissatisfied with her - no work or help for 2 years!
- Child Safety were not interested in our family interests and basically told us to deal with what they had booked and in place for the child. There was no compromise or assistance for us, we were just expected to drop everything at a moment's notice if they had something planned for the child even when we offered alternatives. Occasionally our foster care agency would try and see if they could arrange alternative transport for the child but 99% of the time this didn't happen due to late notice or timing.
- We only saw one CV in the last 12 months Asked for youth worker and request dismissed. Asked to transfer to agency, Team member was good at returning calls, prior and past communications have been non-existent.
- DOCS not returning phone calls days apart. The changing of case managers not knowing case. DOCS not putting the child ahead of the parent's needs.
- They believe anything the child says....Even if it's not true. Kids are constantly reminded they are in care rather than trying to fit into family. Too many important people involve and once they turn 18 "poof" they are on their own. Do you think they are able to cope with no one looking out for them? No, they were never allowed to develop adult skills.
- Too complicated to fit in this box!
- Re: Child Safety Team Leaders It is very poor when you have a problem with the child you have, and you can't get the Manager to return a phone call, because you might be emotional on the phone. Too bad we needed the support from her, all she could do was take it out on my granddaughter by increasing her first visits with her drug affected mother from 2 hrs a week to 57 hours. It is ridiculous!!
- Child Safety was great. Very helpful. Under-staffed though. Child Safety weren't often available.

- Team Leader basically ran out case not CSO's. The Team leader had no real idea of what was happening and continually put the child at risk of harm. When questioned the team leader became threatening about removal of the child and when sent a letter stating how upsetting this behaviour was the team leader did not respond.
- DOCS not listening what's best for the child nor considered. It's all about the parents getting child back regardless as to whether it's what's best for child.

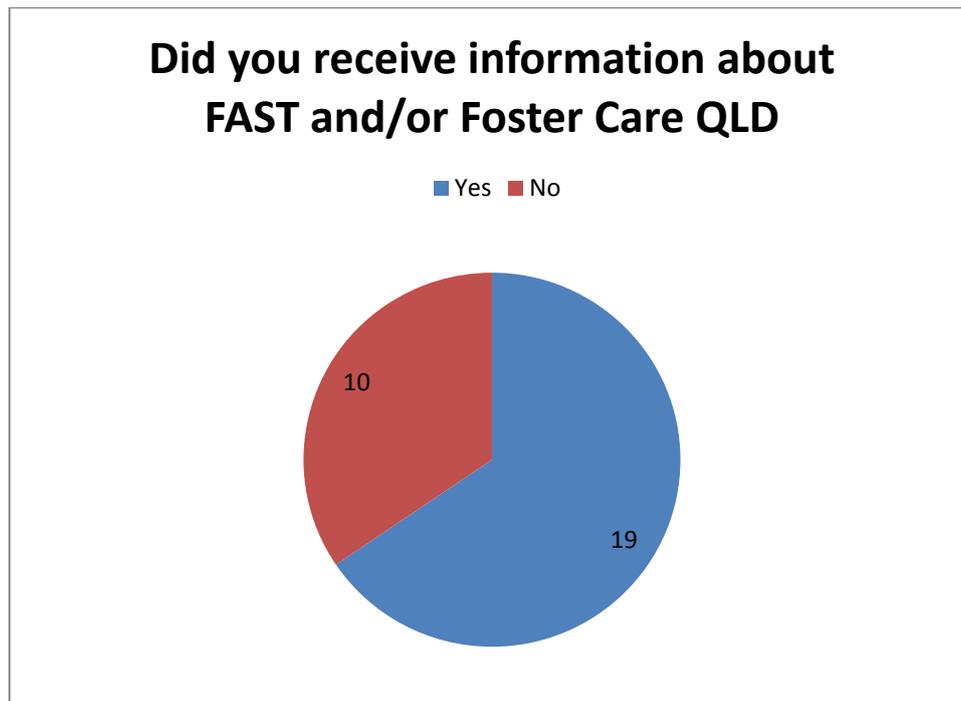
The carers were asked to identify whether Child Safety discussed the following matters with them.

- The Child's cultural support needs
- The child's educational needs
- The child's health needs
- None of the above





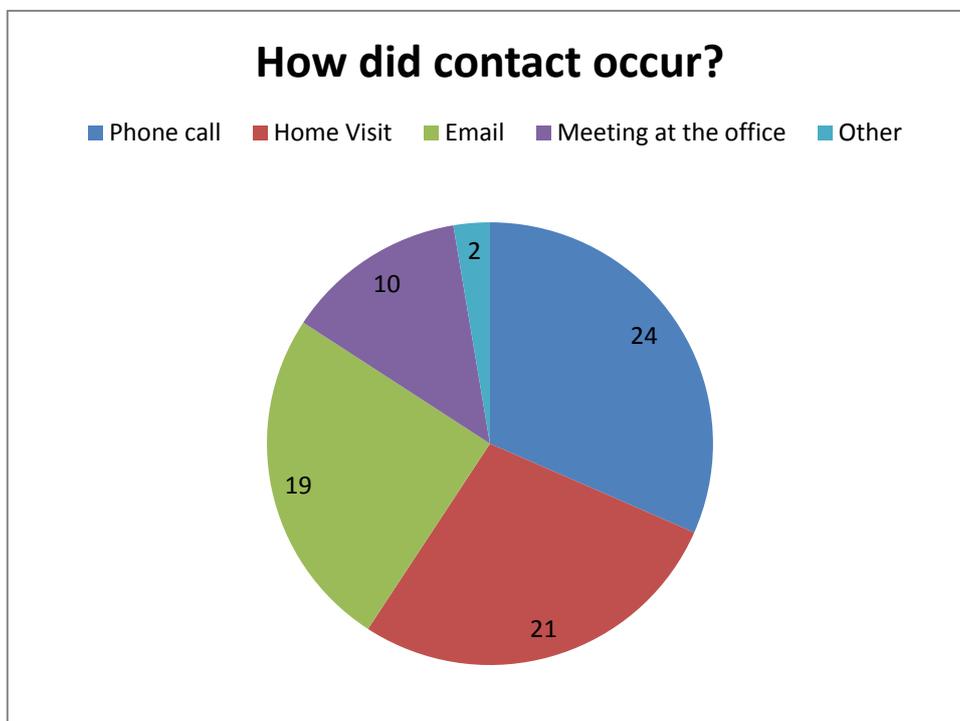
Carers were asked if they had received information regarding FAST delegates and Foster Care QLD, the table below identifies their responses. Listed is extracts from responses provided in the comments section of the question.



Responses

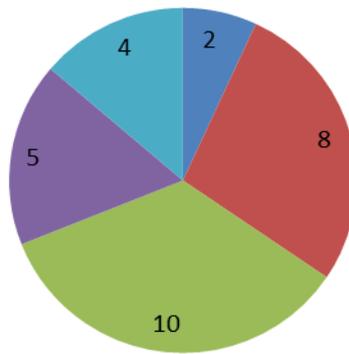
- We need Kinship care help.
- FCQ have been very helpful near the end. FAST delegates that I rang here and there were nice but didn't help me much.
- But I was aware of these - No ESP or case plan was ever completed with me.
- Don't think so.
- But got referred to agency.
- I asked about cultural support however felt dismissed, nothing was offered. I contacted school to enrol my grandchildren in the Indigenous program, however school program was no longer available. Case officer offered to start health passport and this was never supplied or started.
- Agency
- All we ever remember was calls to go to info gatherings where you get 1 day a fortnight off. I preferred to spend it with my wife.

Information relating to contact taking place and comments made in relation to the question.



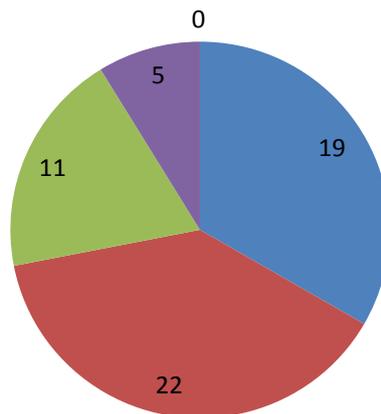
How often did you have contact with your Foster and Kinship Care Service?

■ Daily ■ Weekly ■ Monthly ■ Only occasionally ■ Not applicable



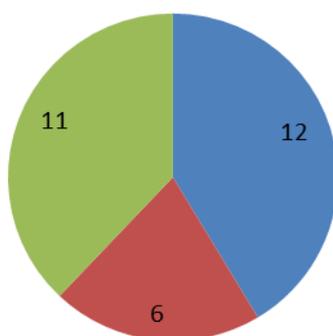
How did this contact occur?

■ Phone call ■ Home visit ■ E-mail ■ Meeting at the office ■ Other



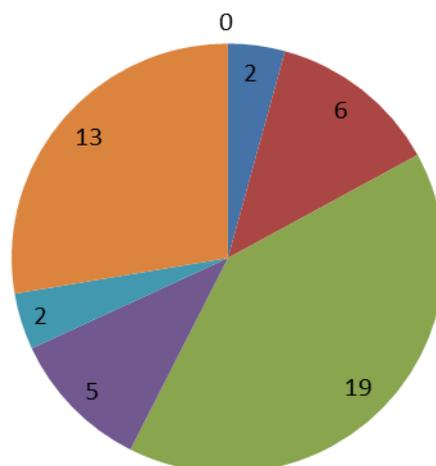
What was your preference regarding contact?

■ E-mail ■ Phone ■ Face to face



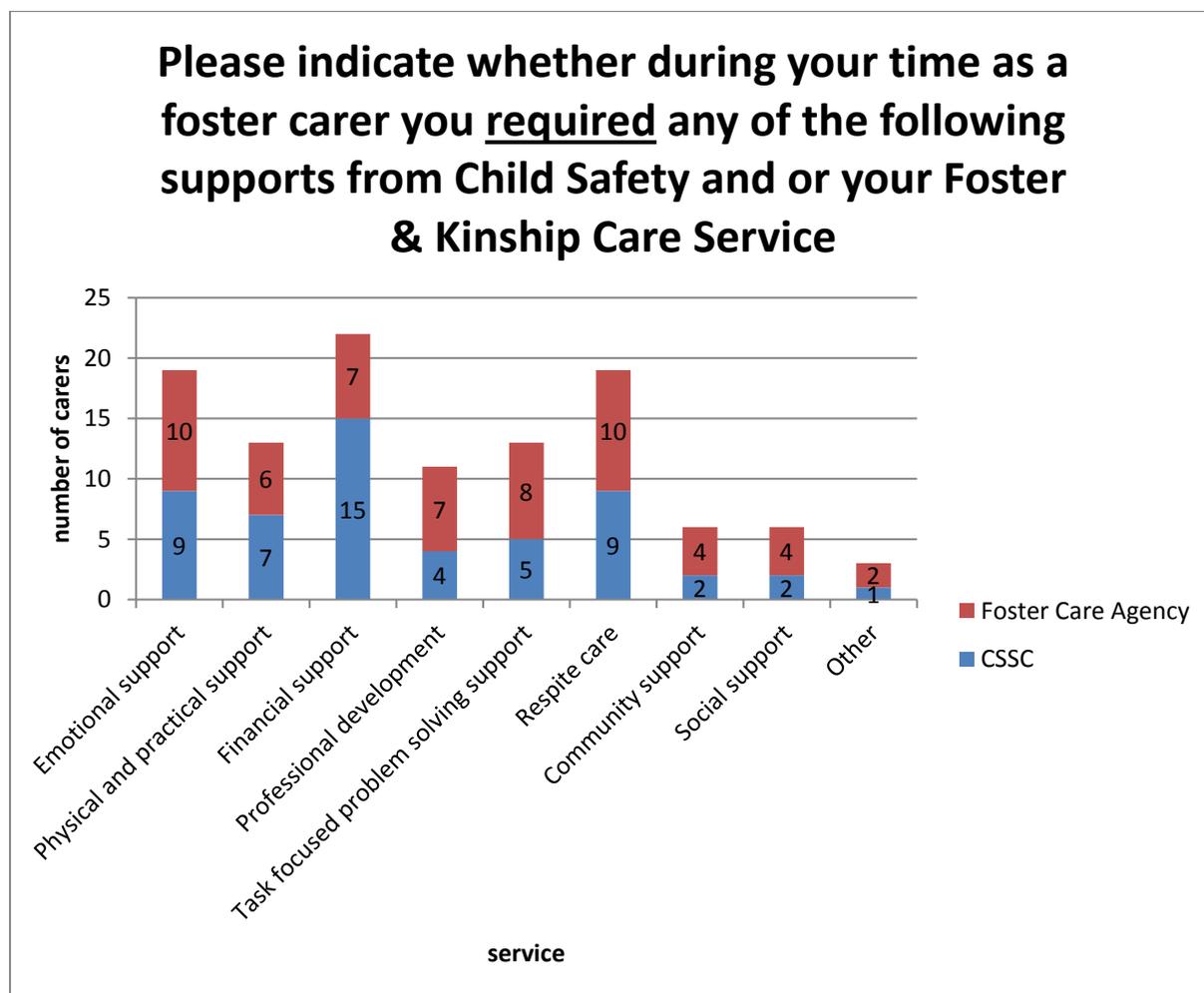
Which of the following persons did you usually have contact with?

■ Child Safety Service Centre Managers
 ■ Child Safety Team Leaders
 ■ Child Safety officers
 ■ Child Safety Support Officers (family support worker)
 ■ Child Safety Youth Worker
 ■ Foster and Kinship Care Service Workers
 ■ None of the above

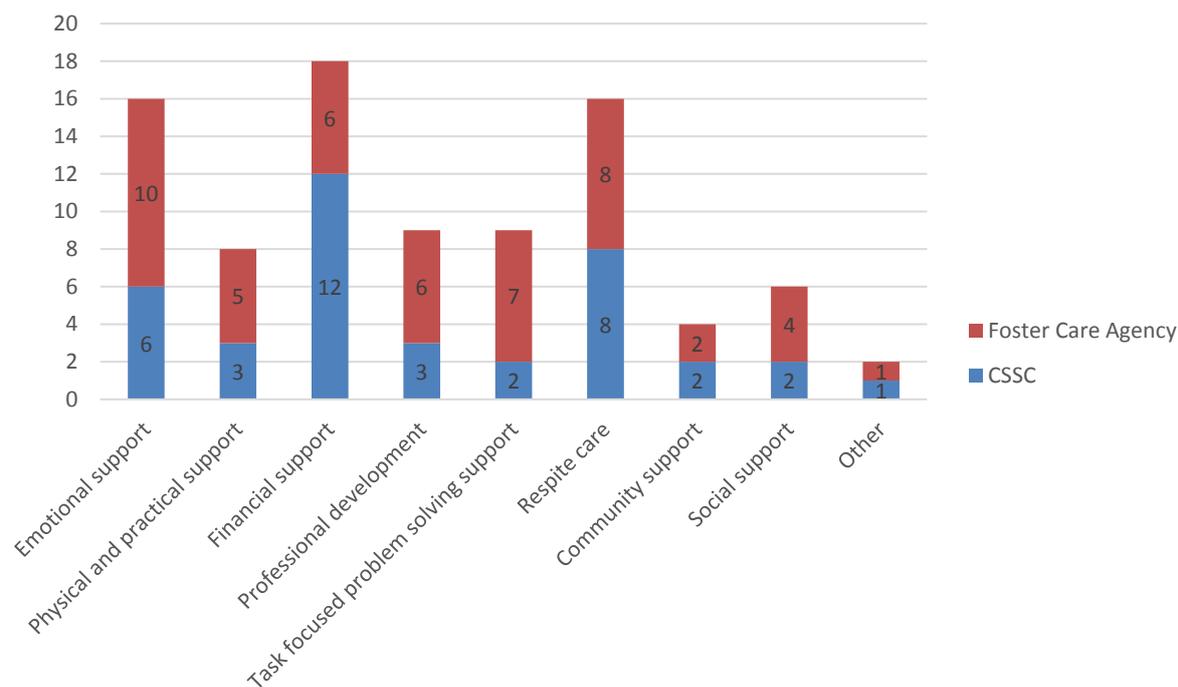


Question: The Experience of Caring - Support

This section addresses the experience of caring and support received.



Please indicate whether during your time as a foster carer you received any of the following supports from Child Safety and or your Foster and Kinship Care Service



Carers were asked to provide responses to two questions:

- Did they seek or receive any other form of support, and where was this from?
- Were there other supports you would have liked access to?

Below are the responses supplied:

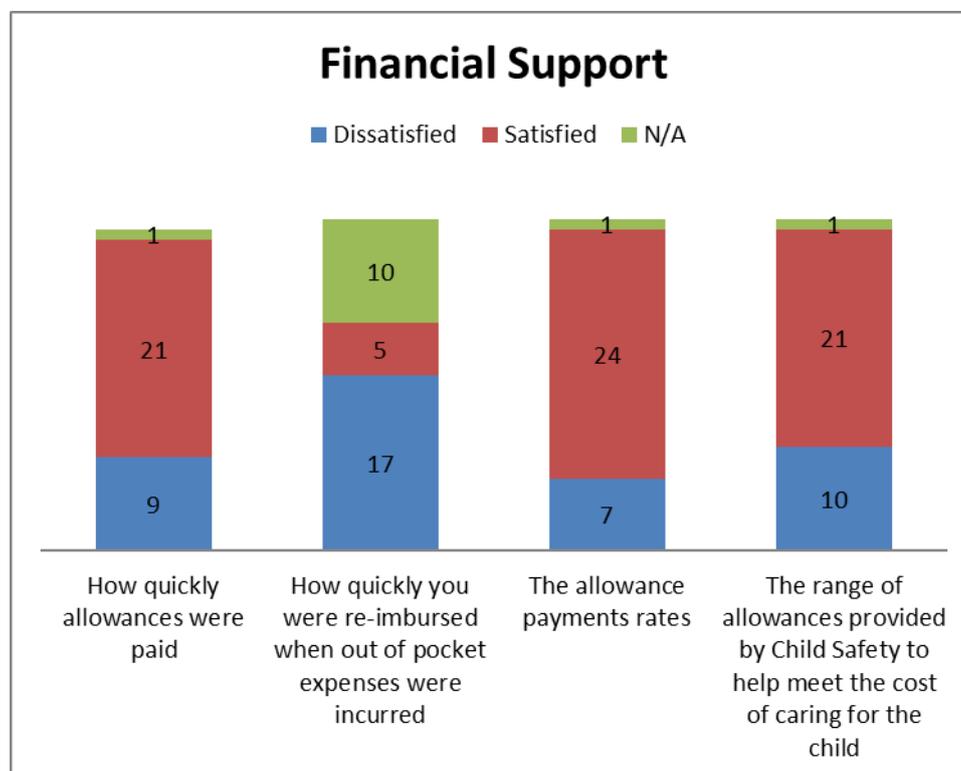
- Did not receive it.
- Following a Harm Report when children were removed, once in a 5 year period did I ever get a break.
- School/Education.
- HSNA for three months.
- Nil requested or required.
- No.
- Only from Agency.
- Respite care - once in 5 years as above.
- No.
- We organized our own. We flew our boys to America to a trauma centre for children with RAD in 2012. There we learnt about RAD and therapeutic parenting. We learnt about neuro reorganisation and paid a specialist to see the boys and set up therapy via skype. DOCS pain

none of the \$20 000 but did give us permission to go (under the blessing of the one cool worker who we loved.

- No.
- No.
- Department was aware that child was not coping with contact so insisted that child attend weekly counselling - parent and other kinship carers abusing child - department finally ceased contact.
- No.
- No.
- Medical and psychological.
- Centrelink.
- I asked for support from child safety multiple times for behaviours but was always told the children were normal and had no problems that needed help with. These children would scream for hours on end every day, break my property, throw bricks at my house, showed sexualised behaviours, and were at an emotional level approx. 2 years younger than their age at the time. Were behind at school. Showed aggressive behaviours towards other students and teachers almost daily. Defecating in parts, spit all down the front of themselves or blow snot all over themselves on purpose when i would pay any kind of attention to my biological children. Completely wrecked the inside of my car from meltdowns they would have from being told no if I would not buy them something or asked them to stop something they shouldn't do.
- No.
- The teachers at our school from the principal and guidance counsellor to the classroom.
- Children psychologist, psychologist.
- Agency
- Community Visitor
- No.
- No.
- Legal advice from a private solicitor.
- Responses to, were there other supports you would have like to access:
- I had asked for PD, support groups in my area as I was receiving ones 1.5 hours away
- I don't think they exist.
- FAST Delegates rarely answered calls or followed through.
- No.
- Other parent travelling 700 klms a fortnight for school, contact and counselling. Department would not pay kilometres or assist with transport or cost of this travel but stipulated that it had to occur. Had to go to Family Law Court to get school changed to a closer location.
- No.
- No.
- Respite Care.
- Yes - Autistic Association.
- Support for family as a whole.
- Foster Carers Legal Advice.
- Yes in hindsight.
- No.
- Legal representation.

Question: The Experience of Caring - Financial

Experience of caring in relation to financial support.



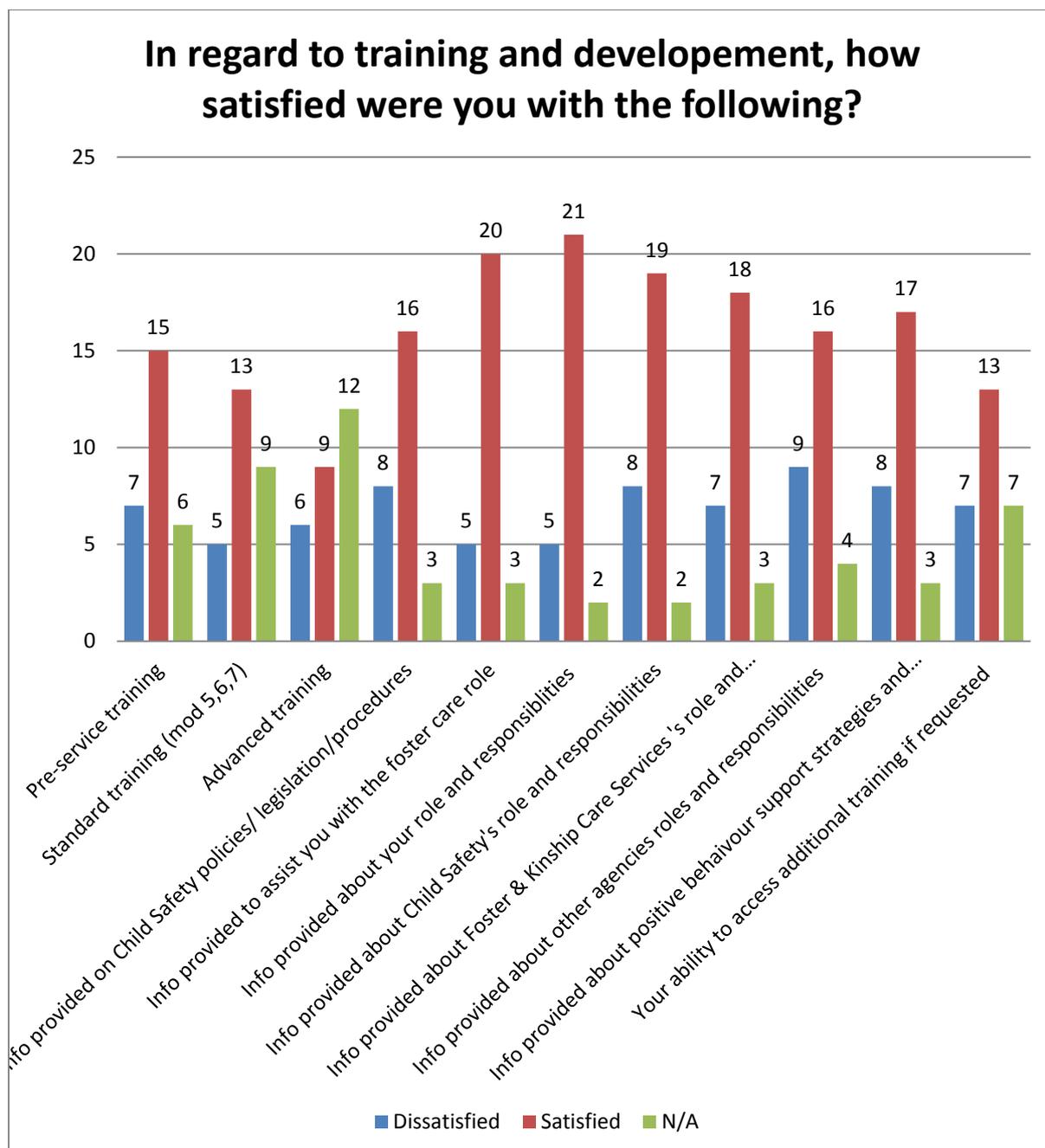
Responses from carers in relation to financial support.

- I had to wait months with no CCB - as I worked full time, I paid \$400 per week with no assistance. Finally I received CCB which helped.
- It takes tens of thousands of dollars to house criminals in prison. It is disrespectful to remove children and then not pay for them to deal with their trauma and get world class help for their many problems. In addressing these needs at our own great cost both financially and emotionally I know we have robbed prison of 2 future in mates. Our boys have problems but they are not offenders. I acknowledge that they may yet be through misadventure and seeking out their families as they become adults but even so they now have a conscience and that will help.
- We had one full-time child once. It took 6 weeks to get any financial help. It was terrible and cruel thing to do to families.
- Did not get first payment until December 2015 although child placed in September 2015. No kilometre rates due to parent doing departmental requested transport.
- It is not about the money at all, but all things considered, when you have children in your care, and you are a single mum, that has been offered paid employment, the payment received is too low in order to have that as your sole income and the child I had was extremely time consuming and there was no room for anything else.
- I am still waiting for seven months of high care and complex needs payments.
- I had a child in my care 4 months ago and had to put him in kindy for 3 days. I am still waiting for child safety to pay for the kindy fees they agreed to pay when he was in my care.

- Still out of pocket due to boy breaking handle on fridge and DVD player. Also the boy's height went from 145cm to 187cm in 12 months and never got help with growth spurt.
- Took 18 months for a reimbursement because they lost/form/receipts.
- During our time as carers we spoke to other carers and they managed to get Child Safety to pay for everything they reimbursed on the child. We started caring for children to show them a better life and didn't ask for many reimbursements but in hindsight we should have claimed for everything. The only other reason for not making too many claims was due to the procedure for trying to get money back. It took numerous emails and phone calls to get reimbursed for school uniforms let alone try for anything else.
- Not about the money is the love I received from the boys and I share our house with my first boy who is 24 yrs old.
- Only asked the once for a new cot as grandson had broken the one I had on loan and needed to replace it so he had a bed. I got fortnightly allowance for grandson and DOCS were not really forthcoming with any other funding.
- Too slow to reimburse.
- Change of staff caused delays in payment and poor communication.

Question: The Experience of Caring – Training and Professional Development

Experience to training and development.



Responses to the question.

- I had NO support at all. Was an extremely hard time.
- The paperwork is clear and well published. Our boys' needs were well above PPP. We went to and were discharged from the best teams around. Agency even said "There's nothing we can do for you" We didn't ask for extra training. We were told frequently there was no money "good luck" they would say. We just got our own. Paid for it by our-self. My husband went to Uni and

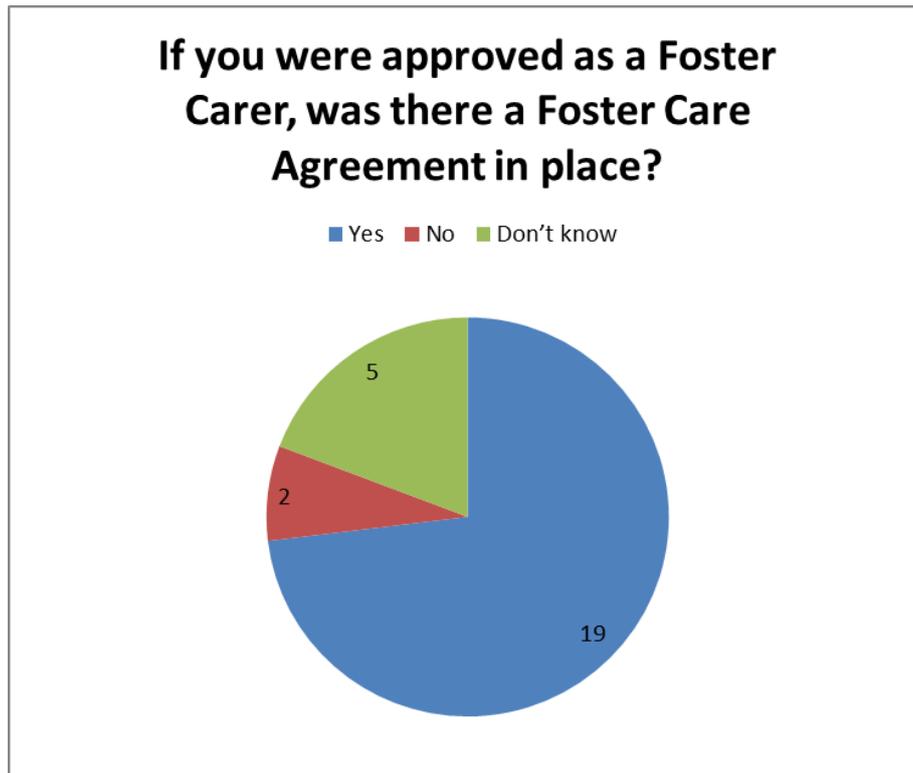
got a psychology degree. We've attended FASD conferences, trauma resolution conferences, indigenous healing conferences and countless podcasts, we have read books by leading authorities on trauma, parenting and RAD and FAS. We continue to do so.

- I would like more face-to-face sessions with Child Safety so we could understand more of what's going on.
- I did not require training as I am aware of all of the above.
- It seems there is a lot of demand on a carer's time - having to do training on a regular basis as well as looking after children. I had just completed training and was told I needed to do more... It was all so very overwhelming but it took almost 12 months for it to start.
- Our Agency were fantastic.
- Almost impossible to access further training when child care is never offered.
- Never had any training. When first taking children they flew them up from NSW, met at airport, spoke with CSO's for not even 5 mins then off they went.
- A few days of training is definitely not enough preparation to become a foster carer.
- Kinship carers don't get the same training which is absurd.
- Counselling for children was great - we had nothing.
- I didn't have any training.



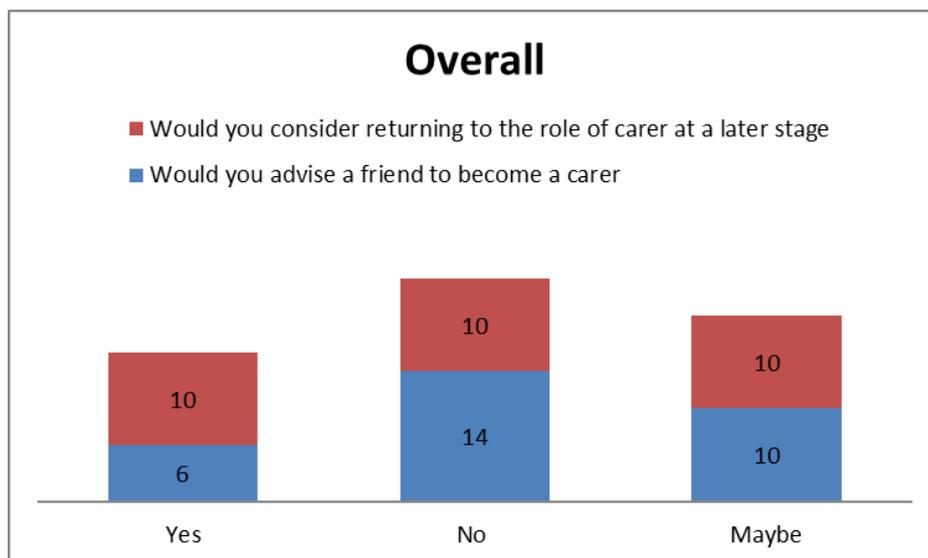
Response Comments

- Not formally. I read and study.
- It was the same session's repeated or low numbers and cancelled.
- CSO training.
- Modules 5 6 7.
- 'caring for culture'.
- Indigenous training. Cannot remember the name.
- 17/11/15 - HLT AID 004 First Aid response 24/11/15 - Triple P Online.



Question: Overall Experience

Overall experiences.



Responses in relation to returning to the role as a carer at a later stage and advising a friend to become a carer.

- Most of our friends and relatives would never consider fostering after living with us over the last 13 years. If anybody asks about fostering and wants to know my opinion I tell them not to do it. I say "The children are what you thought they would be; their parents are what you thought they

would be but the department and the support is at best neglectful and at worst predatory. Until the system is totally overhauled I cannot recommend the experience.

- I would because of the children I can help. I don't want to deal with DOCS.
- Possibly. I don't feel that our last agency was the best advocate for carers. More so themselves first, child safety too.
- Only if my grandson was to be returned to me for some reason.
- I am 65 years old and retired.
- I would not like to become a kinship carer again but I would possibility consider foster care but I would need a different team leader.
- Again it is very time consuming and I would have to reconsider when I am not working and my child has moved out of home.
- Too old now.
- Never in a million years, will I tell as many people as possible to never do foster care.
- CSO's made this whole case from start to finish a nightmare. CSO promise of keeping in touch for the children was a lie as I have never seen the kids since removed.
- This has been the most stressful time of my life, the lack of support and the continuous bad treatment from child safety have turned me off ever wanting to foster another child again
- I would still love to do respite.
- When we were originally respite carers everything went well, it was when we became primary carers that our feelings were not considered.
- Support is all for the kids to learn to run the system. The just grow up to think people are just there to serve them.

Carers were asked to provide comments in relation to their overall experience as a carer, the responses were as follows:

Q2. Did your experiences of providing care meet the expectation you had when you decided to become a carer?

- Not at all. Although I wouldn't change it for the world as I didn't want my niece to be in foster care.
- No.
- Yes.
- Yes and No. We originally signed up with an agency. They were great. Another agency lead to our demise.
- No definitely not. But in saying that my time as a kinship carer with my grandson was and always will be special. The parents and Child Safety made my time as a carer very difficult at times.
- Nothing could prepare you for your experiences.
- I did not decide to become a carer - it was a necessary choice due to department decisions.
- No, it was very full-on with requests, and it took a lot of time away from my family.
- Yes.
- Yes... but much bigger than that!
- No way.
- Yes.
- Did know what to expect, but they were my grandchildren.
- No, I had no idea the dramas child safety would create. They are a terrible department to have to deal with on a regular basis and I know the other carers who currently and previously foster feel the same way.

- Much more difficult.
- No.
- In some ways we felt we helped which is why we joined up. Seeing the improvements in a child both physically and mentally.
- Yes.
- Yes.
- Yes. When grandson came into my care at 8wks old he was unresponsive they all thought he had brain damage. I woke his brain up; all he needed was love cuddles + kisses. He is now above average toddlers his age 3.
- No. We wanted to give a child a stable home. But too many people were constantly involved making decisions we could have made. Our daughter turned out fine the kids didn't...Just a thought for you all.
- No.
- Yes.
- They did for the first 6 years, and then the last 12mths were pure hell. Wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy.
- Not really. I only did respite care so didn't feel like I was making a difference to a child in care.

Q3. What were the most challenging aspects of being a carer?

- Initial financial aid with Childcare, challenging behaviours. First CSO was difficult to work with and I was totally unethical.
- Apart from the trauma of living under the whim of the department I had no knowledge of RAD. In 2012 we took the boys to America where there is amazing help. Just in the nick of time we were able to address their attachment issues and trauma and save their hearts. Today our boys show empathy, joy and LOVE. They are amazing brave guys. We love them.
- Putting up with all the bullshit from DOCS.
- Not being trusted. Everything you say is scrutinised. If only they screened the foster children's parents as much as the carers.
- The parents' constant harassment and Child Safety not supporting me as a kinship carer. I felt the parents whilst continuing their abusive and belligerent behaviour over many months child safety were not there for my family and I. The parents got so much attention time and assistance I did not I just got excuses and reasons why the CSO'S were doing what they were doing with the parents. I found this very daunting upsetting and incredibly frustrating.
- Managing children with ASD/ADD/ADHD/TT.
- Being treated and threatened as though I was a CSO by a bad team leader who was not following departmental policies of procedures and believed she knew what was best for the child and our family. I know many team leaders and most of them do really good work but there are others who should not hold this role.
- Trying to be everything to everyone and adapting to having a young child in the house and the whirlwind of child.
- Starting with a 1 year old at 45 years old myself.
- Dealing with Doc's.
- That we were used and abused.
- Trusting that the case workers for the agency would place a child with you that meets what you have discussed. Unfortunately an inappropriate placement was made with us and it still troubles me.
- Trying to deal with DOCS.

- Behaviours. ADHD. Autism wasn't prepared for.
- Dealing with child safety.
- Dealing with CSOs - one minute they would say this is your job, next they would say you're only a volunteer.
- Children's behaviour the reunification process Changeover of CSOs - had approx. 12 CSOs and they didn't know me or the children.
- CSSC have no respect for carers, to say the least.
- Keeping our daughter safe was highest on our list, which in some ways we felt we had failed in the end. The other challenges we found were dealing with Child Safety and getting our voice heard and dealing with behavioural problems of children we had not encountered with our own family.
- Lack of holistic support.
- The boys become teenagers.
- Dealing with the parents when they were not doing the right thing. Letting grandson go when I knew it was not what was best for him but I have no say. It's all down to DOCS.
- Dealing with the department "Not letting" us parent. One rule for our kid, but their rule for the "foster kid". That's not a positive environment for both sides.
- No sleep.
- My granddaughter on drugs.
- Dealing with incompetent individuals that hide behind inadequate performance measures.
- Small home, no backyard. Dealing with a teenager.

Q4. What was the most positive aspect of being a carer?

- Seeing my niece grow and be happy in a safe and secure environment.
- The knowledge we have gained about RAD and FASD and friendships we formed in America.
- How wonderful our granddaughter grew up. We did everything to assist her.
- Working with lovely kids and other carers. Feeling like you're making a difference.
- Providing a loving home for my grandson. Watching him grow every day into a wonderful healthy little boy.
- Knowing that you are helping to shape a young life and that you are giving them hope for the future.
- Appealing and getting the order revoked.
- Knowing we were able to make a difference in the child's life - even if for only a very short time.
- Watching the children grow up to be decent people.
- The children.
- Before this incident we loved being carers.
- Watching a child behave like a child when you are having fun and not dealing with grown up concerns.
- Seeing my grandchild return to her happy little self.
- Knowing I did the best I could on my own.
- At this point there was none.
- Seeing the kids happy and content.
- The child and the joy they bring.
- Seeing the initial changes in the child from when they are 'drugged' up with the system allowing kids to be diagnosed with ADHD, ASD, ADD, to getting them off the 'drugs' and allowing them to become 'normal' children. Managing to keep them in school daily, and seeing them shine in extra-curricular activities. Watching them laugh when before it was just a scowl.

- Time with my grandchildren being a family. The good times and the hard times.
- Loving what I was doing and I would change for anything.
- My grandson being alive for 1. Grandson growing into an above average toddler. Happy well behaved little boy.
- Some of the little kids were cool. Before they figured out how to manipulate the department.
- Love the children.
- Dealing with genuine caring individuals that see people. Not statistics. It's about kids and families not your gov. EO level or career aspirations.
- Winning a battle over shower length and eating meals.

Q5. What helped you feel supported in your role as a carer?

- My family; community worker.
- Nothing.
- No-one. There aren't enough case workers for the kids. The agencies are snowed under. CSO's take weeks to get back to you.
- The overwhelming support and love from my family friends.
- Family, Support Workers and CSO.
- My work associates and my manager.
- My case worker.
- When a child says I love you.
- One Lady in particular was outstanding.
- Our Agency.
- The child safety officer.
- My support from my family, not so much from DOCS.
- Agency was more supportive than Child Safety.
- My support agency and another foster carer I communicated with
- Going over to another agency.
- Workers that actively listen to the carer and maintain regular contact.
- Being able to contact our foster care agency 24/7 was a big help, especially when we had dinner or bedtime issues.
- Education I accessed at university our CSO. Agency sometimes my friends and family.
- Make sure they had clean clothes & food on the table.
- Agency contacts with my officer. Family/support for respite.
- Nothing. The department makes all the rules. We just provided the roof and food apparently.
- Nothing.
- I didn't.
- Individuals who understand people and families.
- Knowing help was available.

Q6. What could be improved to assist carers in their role?

- Definitely more contact, asking how are things going etc.? Support groups Updated info on changes to visits etc. Therapy for children (my niece had 3, 45 min sessions which didn't help at all.
- I can only speak for me/us. That is not fair. Maybe others don't have indigenous kids with RAD and FASD. I have ideas like therapeutic respite and therapeutic family contact as suggested, but truly I don't think my opinion matters. We are safe now with our family and boys. That's all that matters for now.
- No lying to us.
- As mentioned above and more Child Safety Laws that advocate more for the kids rather than the biological parents.
- More feedback on carers roles. The distinction between parents and carers. Boundaries where the parents are concerned when there is constant conflict abuse and threats toward the carers from the parents. Consequences for parent's actions when they have made poor choices with carers. More support and input across the board with Child Safety and carers.
- Just by meeting the needs of the carers for the children especially for Assessment for Disabilities and Education.
- Educated CSO's and good team leaders our first CSO was wonderful but it was all downhill from there. Child's siblings current CSO has only been with the department a few weeks and is in her early twenties and has no idea how to deal with parents on ice. Life skills are very important.
- Speed up the process, so when they apply they are accepted sooner and their lives are ready for children.
- A lot.
- Focus on the kids needs not the B.S (this directed at Doc's)
- To believe them and read case notes on history.
- Listen to the carers as to what issues they feel they can work with and not just place a child with them, tell them a 'pretty' story and hope for the best.
- Able to have opportunity to have a say in the care and welfare of said child.
- Training. CSO's listening more to carers. Meeting with carers needs.
- The way they treat carers like idiots. Like they could not possibly know these children after a year even though they've lived with them 100% of this time and these child safety officers have met them a handful of times.
- For CSO and team leaders to respect carers. The carers are the ones that do all the work with kids.
- Get rid of CSSC altogether, they completely disregard the opinions of carers.
- Child Safety listening to the carers more and not being so rigid.
- A more holistic approach. All members of a family need the same supports especially with complex needs children.
- More training and help carers role because some of us English is second language.
- Be told upfront the truth about the child in care. Easier access to DOCS when calling.
- Keep out of it and let them raise a child. You already raped the cares life. I'm sure they are capable of doing the job since you already approved them.
- Big change need in education of child safety officer's ability to read a situation.
- More info and talking.
- Stop employing idiots. To you it's a job, to me and the kids and our families - it's our lives.
- For new respite carers shorter placements to start with. (Eg: weekend)

• **Q7. Do you have any additional comments, suggestions or concerns?**

- No.
- My husband and I have had 6 Case Workers, 5 of them were good.
- We never wanted to resign. We both feel we were ignored/pushed to do so. We tried to see if we could transfer to a different agency that other carers from agency were going to and it seemed like no one wanted to help us and other agencies couldn't take us until we had left our current one. We put our heart and soul into being carers. We were huge advocates for it in our community and always encouraged friends or anyone that asked to look into being a foster carer. We honestly thought someone would come to our aid, even in the latest time. Once we had posted the resignation letter in. Nothing.. No one cared. 5 months later we still have heard nothing. We have been dumped. Yet when they needed us we were there. VERY DISAPPOINTING. Please feel free to contact me as I have run out of room.
- My experience being a Kinship Carer was positive as far as raising my grandson went. We as a family went above and beyond for him we always will. I did the very best I could in raising my beautiful grandson which was acknowledged by Child Safety many times over the 12 months I had him although acknowledged I felt let down so many times with Child Safety. I feel I was not supported by them in many areas as much as they could and should have. In my opinion the parents constantly got rewarded for bad behaviour. I was left dumbfounded and at a loss for words many many times during my time as a carer. There should be more effective discussion regarding Child Safety and carers more availability to CSO'S there should be more assistance for the carers apart from respite. Emails and constant phone calls from CSO'S is not the answer it's so informal I found it really inappropriate especially when you're busy attending to the child or children you are caring for. My grandson was a sick little boy with a pacemaker he already had two open heart surgeries before he was 6 months old. I was attending Physiotherapy Occupational therapy and Speech therapy so I was a very busy nana with my grandson. I feel there should have been more support for me and my family with Child Safety.
- You need to listen more to the carers of the children as they know them the best.
- That this team leader is now employed at CSSC since the change to the office. That these team leaders cannot be moved from their positions as they are permanent. That these team leaders are treating their CSO's abusively and the CSO's leave.
- I am very sad I am unable to help children in need. I know they would be loved if they were with us, but time restraints and the financial compensation do not allow it.
- No. Thank you.
- Extremely frustrated and disappointed by the termination of our carer renewal merely because we could not fit in with agencies timeline. Neither could they waste there "valuable resources" in a visit to ascertain why we unable to take a placement. All of this was done by phone.
- I want an investigation as to why Child Safety never looked at the file.
- We were aware that we would be out of pocket financially, and as the decision to foster was not financially motivated this was not an issue. But to have to wait 3 months for respite payments is just wrong.
- My grandchild had 5 Case Workers in the short time she was in care. This needs to be reviewed as not in the best interest of the child to go through extra upheaval.
- Child Safety damages families. Rips families' apart, stopping the grandparent from interacting with other grandchildren. Stops families from the right to see other family members. Stopping me a parent, grandmother and carer the right to still be a mother to my own grown up children.
- This was just a downright poor decision. I went into this to help these sweet little children who don't have a loving capable family and I end up having to walk away from them because of this terrible department. This is why there are a lack of carers, they cannot continue to operate this

way and expect carers to put up with it. Fix the problems with child safety and more people will care for these children long term.

- I would like a royal commission into Dept. and CSO, she has caused a lot of stress to our family and I am thinking of taking legal advice. She gave me a brown paper bag that more or less says when I open my mouth open the bag for the shit to run in, and there is heaps more. Three years ago we were asked to take a child, he had been taken to 3 carers and they didn't want him, so a week after taken him we had a meeting and they put him on complex 1. So in the first six months he had to have tests done, we had trips twice a week for months, trips to disability services, trips to his specialists and he had sessions, after all test were done they put us down as complex then 6 months later high needs but at the end of the day he still is and was a complex child. We had paid all specialists fees still paid them the 3 years we had him. Not once did we get help. Report said he was to go to a special school. A report said same but CSO said no.
- Some CSOs were not helpful and were judgmental! More concerned with tribunal matters than the overall picture of the stable environment provided. Too much weight given to a teenager's wishes instead of her well-being in a safe home of 5 years. Made me feel betrayed and questioned my skills as a carer the entire system seems to favour the children being reunited with abusive parents, which is disruptive for the children and carers. The system teaches the children to play 'the system' to get as much as they can from people.
- The Harm Report we have received from Child Safety states we were responsible for 'substantiated harm-standards not met'. This shows that our family, and in particular our child, were not important in the whole scheme. We understand these children in care are special and need love and support but they also need good parenting - someone to show them right from wrong, not just diagnose them with a behavioural issue and put them on medication. We took the child we had off the medication, gave him daily schooling and activities, but apparently we did wrong by him because we were upset with what he had done to our child. The other lesson we learned was to not be as honest about our emotions and feelings. We poured our hearts out about our past with our foster agency so they were well aware that we understood a lot of where some of these children have come from. We also poured it out to Child Safety at the investigation of this last child. The thing with emotions and feelings are they are your own, and we never voiced them to any child in our care, they were just in our thoughts and things we discussed in adult time. Child Safety took these feelings at face value and turned them around on us saying we had not met the standards of care. We can now see why the foster system has such a high turnover of carers and it seems that it's the good ones that really do care about the children and not the money are the ones that get mistreated by the system. The carers that don't care as much and are in it for the money are the ones that stay in the system, under the radar until they physically do something to a child in care.
- I am concerned for my grandchildren ongoing health, education, safety and wellbeing. I will always be there for them, however I feel the system failed our family. We will be the children support system throughout their lives. Through childhood, teens, adolescents and adulthood. Support needs to be about the whole family.
- Children in care for lengthy times in Kinship foster shouldn't be removed and given back to parents. It's not what's best for the child. I had my grandson being raised with his brother + 2 sisters for 3 years then he was handed back to mother. So wrong for all concerned. He's not coping to wellbeing away from what he knows and no one seems to care about what he's wanting. I see changes in his manner every time we have contact not good changes, he want to come to Nana's house. I see the way the mother treats him and I can't say anything. It's so wrong her level of care is accepted by the Dept. of Child Safety at a 5 when what he's gotten for 3 years is a 10. I am seeing he's sad, that's before he sees me then all smiles running to me not leaving my side for too long. The mental health of children in care is never considered, and it

should be. I was in foster care as a newborn til 4yrs then again when I was 8 til 12. Not something you ever get over being taken from a loving family to one not so loving (being returned to the family) You never really bond with parents like you should, they don't either. The feeling of not belonging or being part of the family never goes or the abuse it keeps coming back. The bond my grandson and I have is down to me raising him for nearly 3 years and this bond should have been with parents. It never will now, it's too late he was in my care for so long he should have been left in my care. There needs to be updates on legislation of time lengths parents have to sort it out or loose children fulltime. Child to be adopted by carers after 1 year in care. It's all about the children not dead beat parents getting them back.

- Good Luck. The kids are getting worse by your own doing.
- Yes.
- No.
- 6 years of loving this cause of the positive outcomes. Takes one fool and her managers to destroy the whole lot. Extremely disappointed and still very raw to think back on that last year.