



**Queensland
Foster and
Kinship Care**

CARER EXIT SURVEY

Central QLD Region

2018-2019

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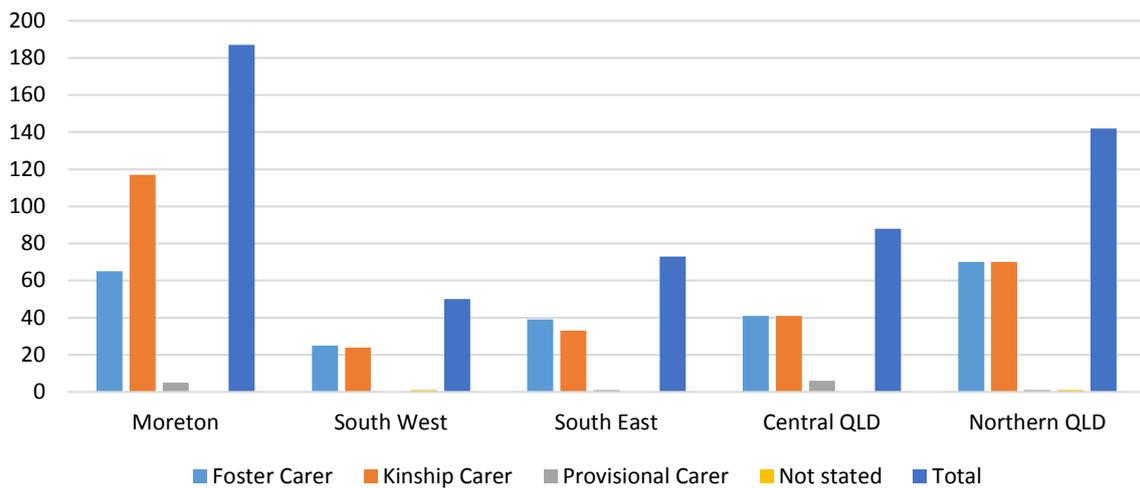
Executive Summary

Information relating to End of Carer Approval Notices

This report brings Queensland Foster and Kinship Care, formally Foster Care QLD (hereafter referred to as QFKC) to the end of our eleventh year managing the Exit Interview Program. For this report QFKC has maintained the breakdown of regions.

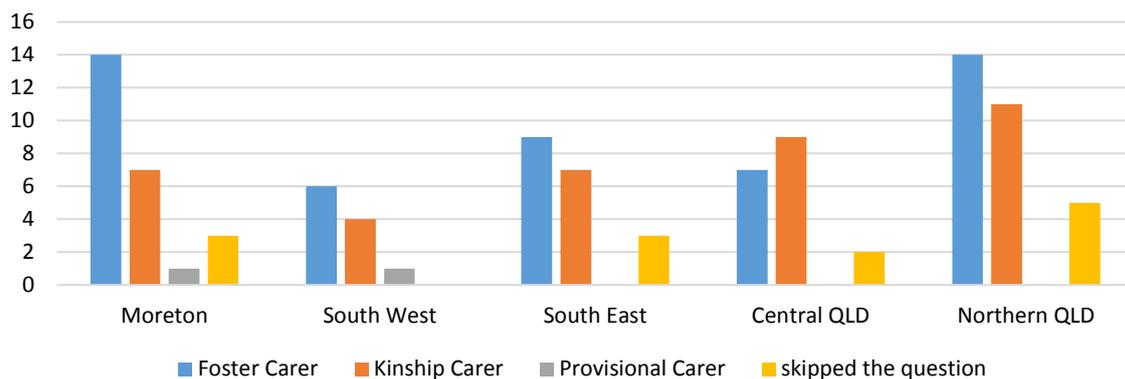
QFKC received a total of 540 Exit Interview referrals for the period **1st July 2018 to 30th June 2019**. 240 of the total were Foster Carers, 285 of the total were Kinship Carers, 13 were Provisional Carers and 2 did not state what the carer status was.

End of Carer Approval Notices received by QFKC during the period of 1st July 2018-30th June 2018



103 Exit Surveys were completed on Survey Monkey, either by the carers directly, QFKC inputting the data on the carer's behalf from a paper based survey that the carer was sent and returned to QFKC or the carer requested a telephone interview and QFKC inputted the data on to Survey Monkey during the telephone interview. The return rate this year in relation to completed surveys, is 19%.

People who completed the Exit Survey



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

- QFKC send a letter when they receive the End of Carer Approval Notice from the Department, informing the person/persons that QFKC 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, either online, over the phone, or have a paper survey sent out with a return stamp addressed envelope, which would then be input into Survey Monkey by QFKC.
- After a two week period QFKC would follow up via phone call where possible with the former carers to confirm receipt of the letter and discuss the opportunity to provide their experiences. When no phone contact details have been provided, QFKC would email the former carer/s if email details were included on the End of Carer Approval Notices.

It has been noted over the years that QFKC do not receive all the End of Carer Approval Notices that should be provided to QFKC to give the opportunity to people who would like to undertake a survey and this needs to improve to ensure equal opportunity for everybody to provide feedback.

As stated in previous reports QFKC continue to receive a number of End of Carer Approval Notices however based on the figures provided by the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women we continue to receive significantly less notifications than we should be receiving. QFKC has endeavoured to address this significant issue in previous years and it would appear that less than half of the End of Carer Approval Notices have been received again by QFKC in the year 2018-2019 when comparing the figures that are provided on the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women website. The lack of understanding by regions as to the importance of QFKC receiving all End of Carer Approval Notices has a direct impact on the integrity of the program and places a question as to whether this undertaking is viable in the future. QFKC absolutely believe the data has validity and strength however the full potential of the data cannot be reached if we do not have (all) the notices.

Overall Data and Findings

This report outlines the feedback from all 103 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 positive aspects of their time as carers and these related to;

- The range of allowances provided by Child Safety to help meet the cost of caring for a child
- Number of children placed with the carer
- Contact with the agency
- The allowance payment rates
- How quickly allowances were paid (this was separate to how quickly out of pocket expenses were reimbursed and a high number of people identified that they were not satisfied)
- Opportunities carers were given to participate in training and professional development
- Pre-service training delivery
- Standard training modules 5,6 and 7
- Ability to access additional training
- Information provided about your role and responsibilities
- Information provided about Foster and Kinship Care Services role and responsibilities
- The manner in which the carer approval renewal process was undertaken

These comments are similar to previous years and reflects the overall responses to the question, whilst some responses may differ to being satisfied we have taken a range of responses whereby the percentage rate is high for satisfaction.

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, 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and the 2018-2019 reports;

The majority of responses relating to interactions with Child Safety identified that the carer felt;

- Unsupported
- Did not feel valued
- Lack of communication

The majority of responses identifying that the carer left due to issues with the children placed with them, stated it was for the following reasons;

- Behavioural
- Complexity of issues (trauma, medical, psychological)

The majority of responses relating to leaving due to family reasons identified the following;

- Time commitments
- Partner and biological children did not want to continue
- Change in circumstances
- Cost of providing care

The findings relating to what were the most challenging aspects of being a carer have remained consistent over the years that QFKC has been undertaking the Exit Survey Report. The lack of communication and feeling part of a care team is dominant throughout the reports for each region and this would be suggestive that this is a State-wide issue in regards to the feedback provided.

Some areas of care were identified as equally satisfied and dissatisfied in their responses;

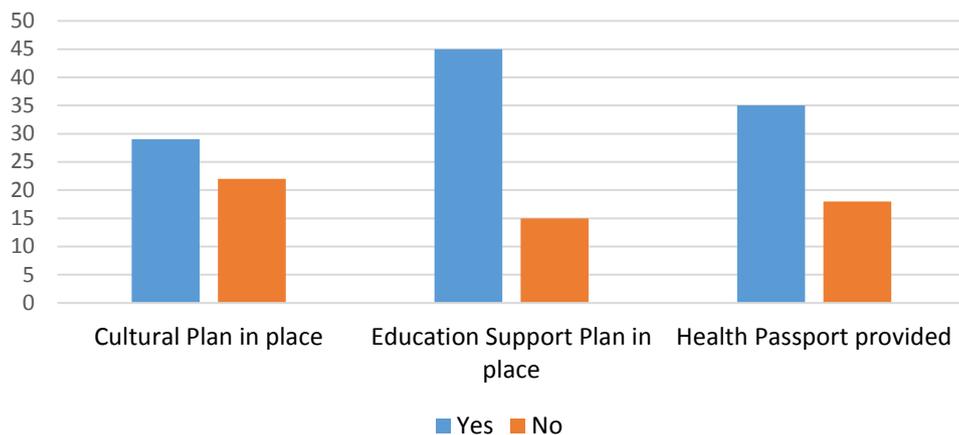
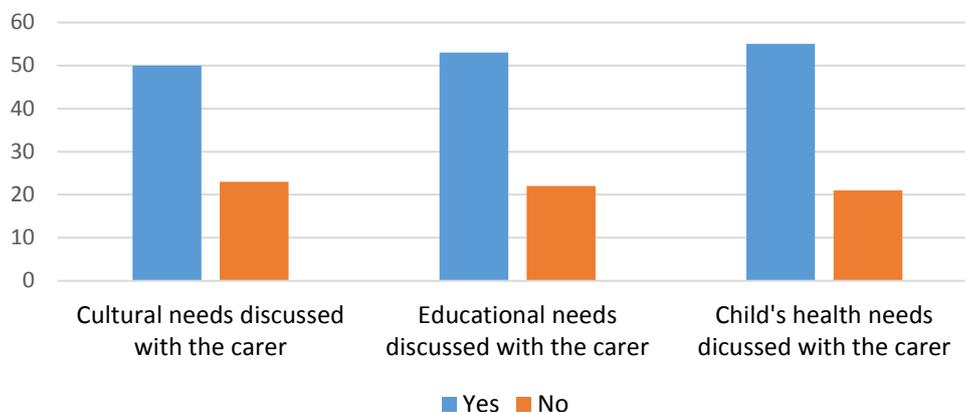
- Child Safety's policies and procedures dealing with Harm Report/SOC process
- Handling of a Harm Report/SOC process
- Outcome of discussions with Child Safety
- Discussions with FAST Reps

People were asked if they had attended training in the last 12 months, 76 people responded to this question and 20 people stated they had attended but 56 people stated they had not attended training.

People were also asked if they had a Foster Care Agreement in place and 56 people stated they did and 4 people stated they didn't.

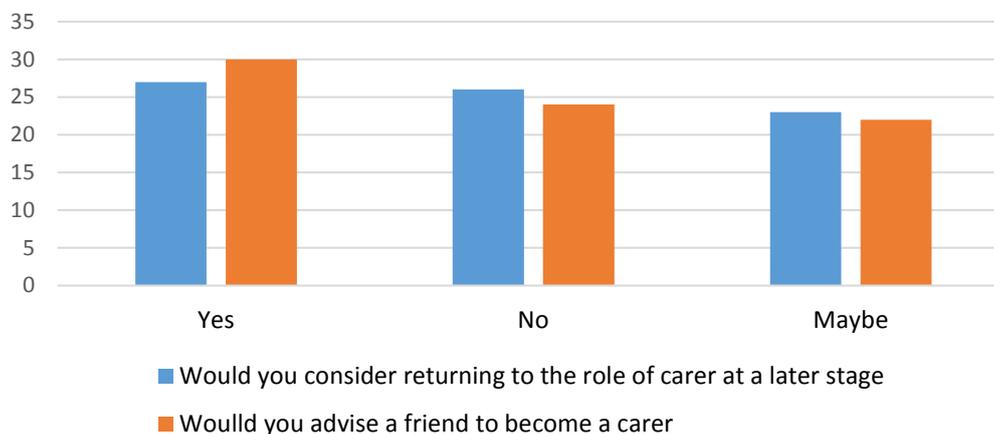
In relation to the needs of the child the following information was identified;

Child's needs



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;

Overall



In summary, an equal number of people identified that they would/wouldn't consider returning to foster care at a later stage. A slightly lower number of people identified that they may consider returning to the role of caring at a later stage. The responses are also similar for "would you advise a friend to become a carer".

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, but this was diminished by the lack of feeling valued or being part of a care team.

While reading the responses there was one response that summarised all the information relating to lack of feeling valued and being part of a care team, I have taken the extract from the responses word for word and QFKC feel that the response is very relevant to how people are feeling.

"A simple thank you at the end of placement would do wonders"

Completed by:
Marijka Kelly
Recruitment and Exit Co-ordinator

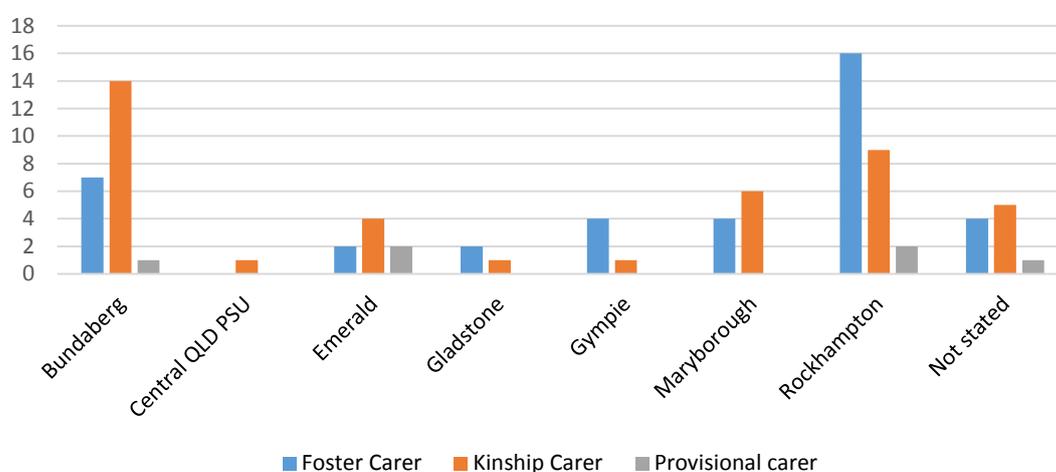
Presented by:
Bryan Smith
Executive Director

8 August 2019

Summary – Central QLD Region

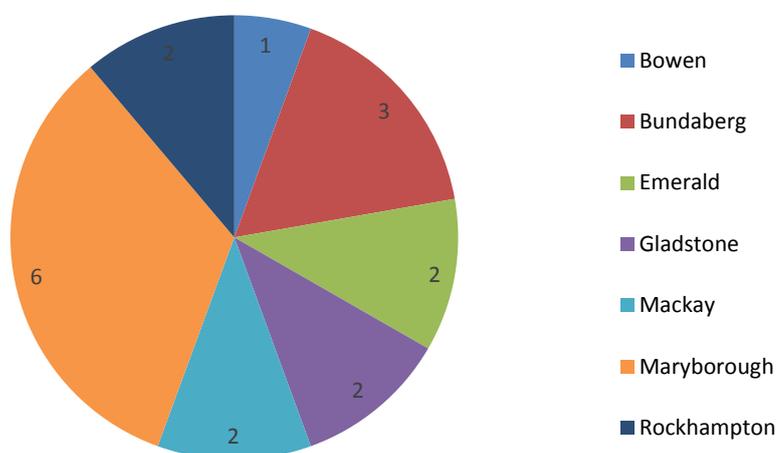
Queensland Foster and Kinship Care (hereafter referred to as QFKC) received 540 End of Carer Approval Notices during the period of 1st July 2018 to 30 June 2019. 88 (16.2%) of the End of Carer Approval Notices were received from the Central Queensland region and affiliated with the following service centres. Please note that sometimes all the required information is not provided to QFKC.

End of Carer Approval Notices

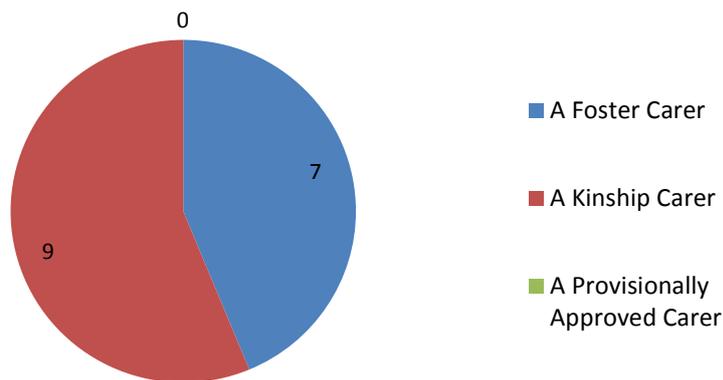
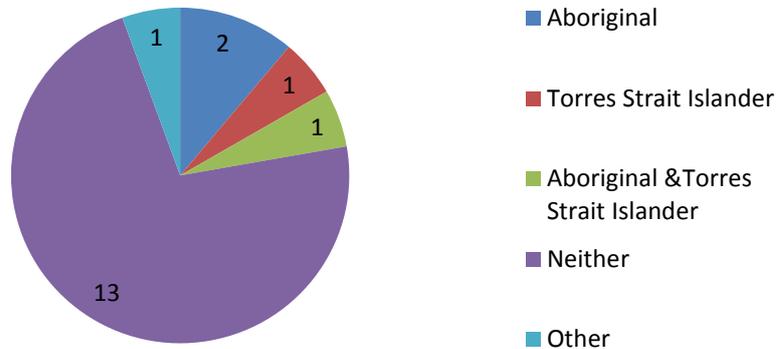


About You

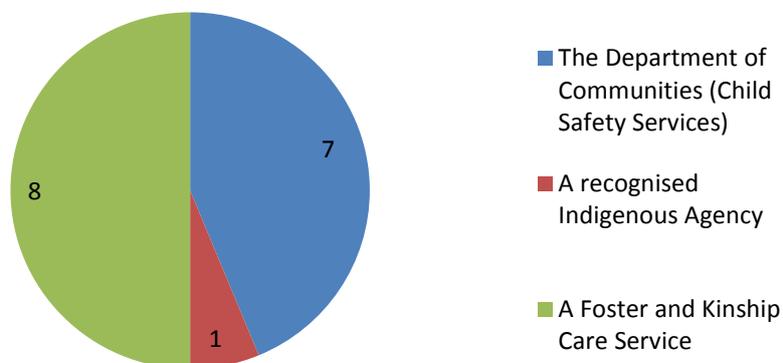
All 88 end of carer approvals were sent an acknowledgment letter from QFKC asking them if they wanted to complete an exit survey. There were 18 people who completed the survey, they were affiliated with the following service centres;



From the 18 people who completed the survey for the Central QLD region the following information was shared;

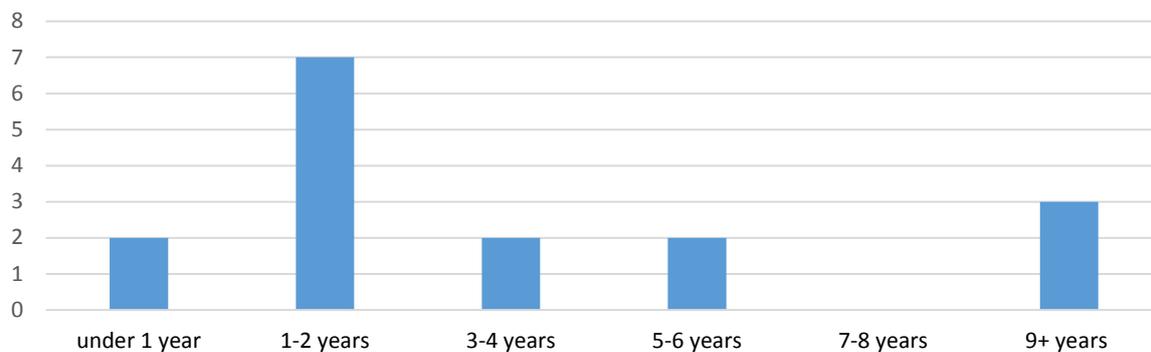


People were asked to identify who they are supported by, they answered as follows;



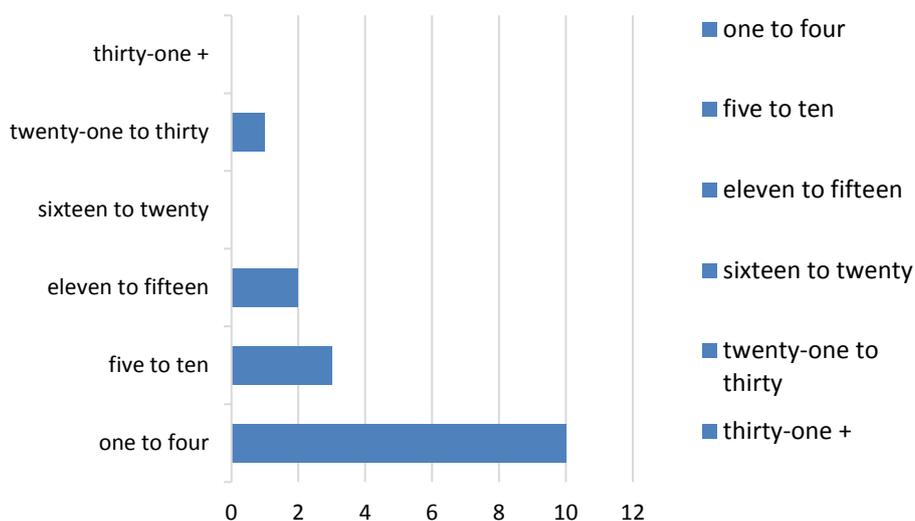
Information is requested regarding the person’s time spent as a carer; to identify when they started as a Carer and when they stopped. Below is a graph that identifies the length of time stated in the responses.

Number of years being a carer



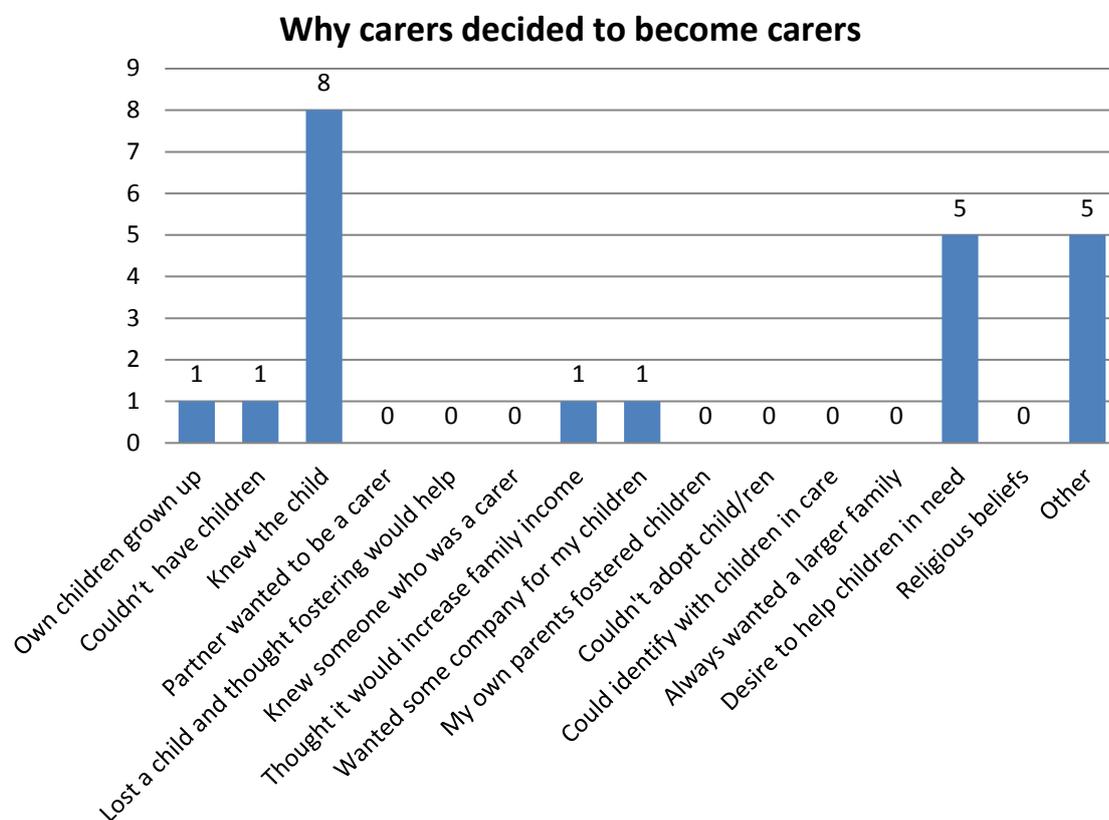
The information provided also evidences the amount of children the person/persons have provided care to.

Number of children



About You as a Carer

People were asked to identify what made them decide to become a Foster Carer.



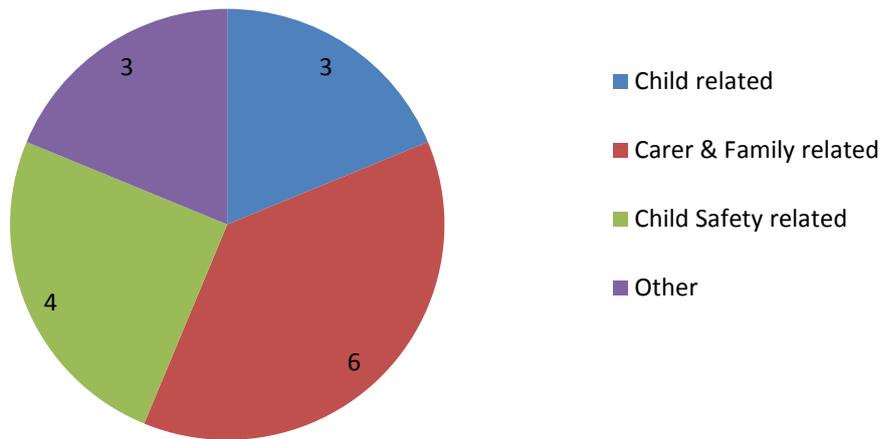
Below is a selection of some of the comments provided by the people undertaking the survey in relation to why they decided to become a carer. This information would be consistent with the section under *other* on the graph:

- Family always stay close
- Wanted to help children get the best start in life
- child self-placed into my care and I became kinship carer
- Grandchild
- They were my daughter's children
- I wanted to help care for my siblings making sure the transition went smoothly. Making sure the children where in a familiar environment
- Was my niece felt obliged to care for her
- To obtain custody of grandchild previously placed elsewhere
- They were our grandchildren and we had a close relationship with them since they were born
- We removed the child from family after some serious concerns were raised about their health and wellbeing. Initially we removed the child temporarily with the parents' permission, and then alerted Child Safety of the concerns
- Wanted child to have best possible life
- I didn't want my grandchildren to be lost in the system and my younger daughter and I were the only ones able to care for them
- I had knew the child for over 7 years and due to being indigenous could assist him to keep connections to his culture

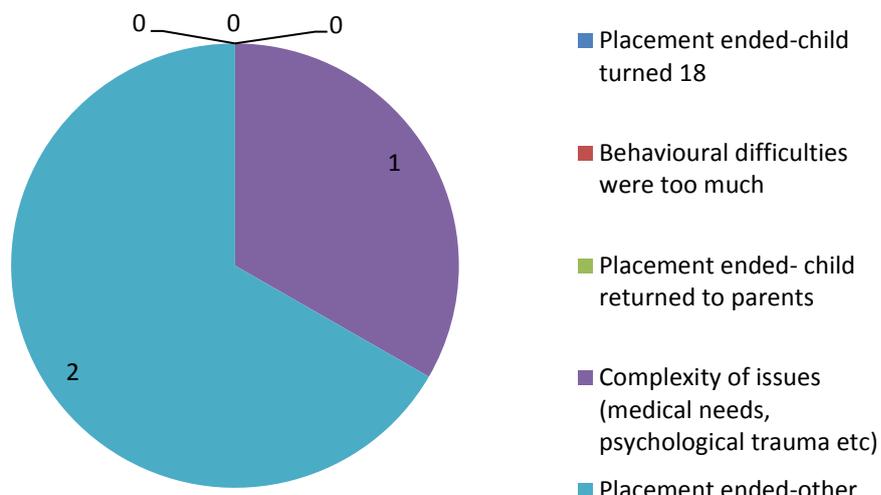
Reason for Discontinuing as a Foster/Kinship Carer

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

Main reason for deciding to stop being a carer



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.

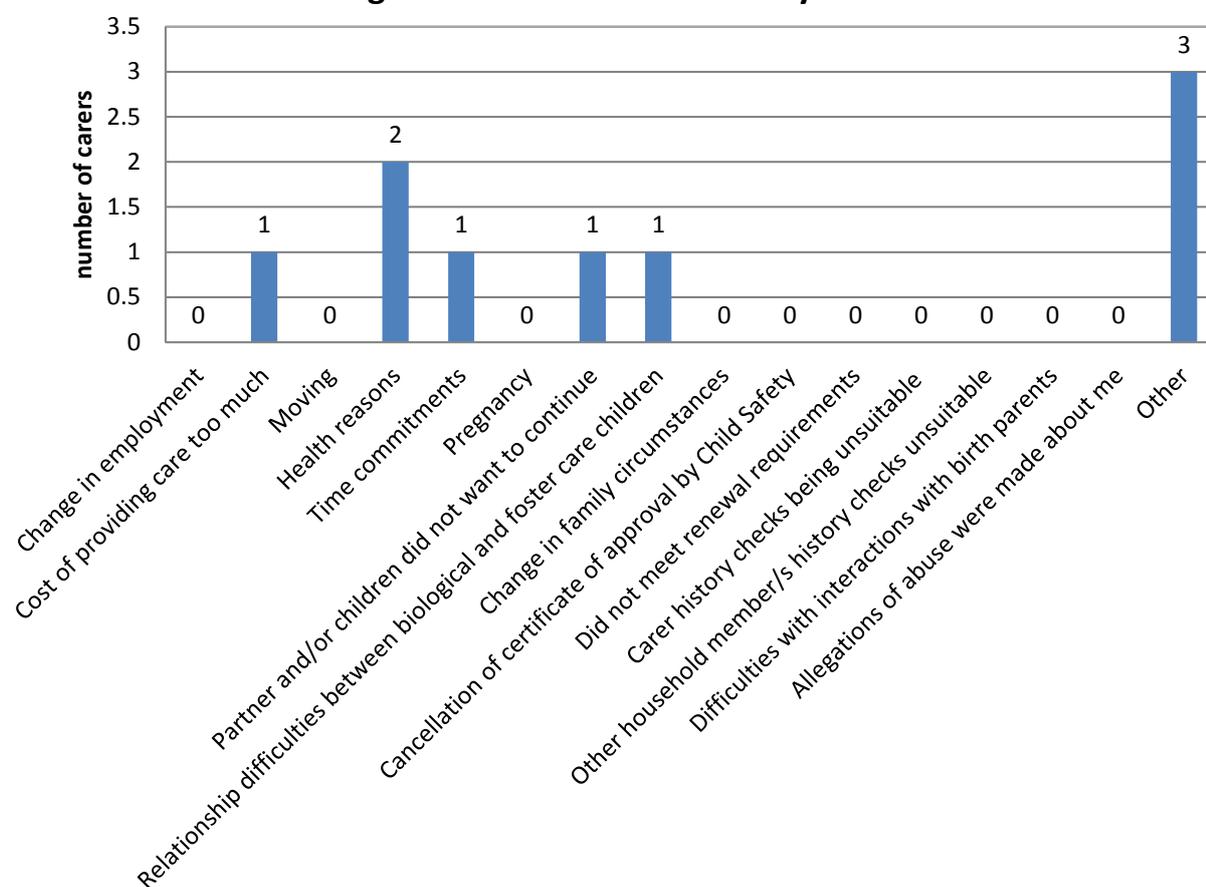


Below are extracts of comments that were made by people completing the survey in relation to this question:

- Child left home
- Children left my care
- Child was reunified - happened suddenly with no transition and was very traumatising for child and all of us involved

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

Ceased being a carer for carer and family related reasons

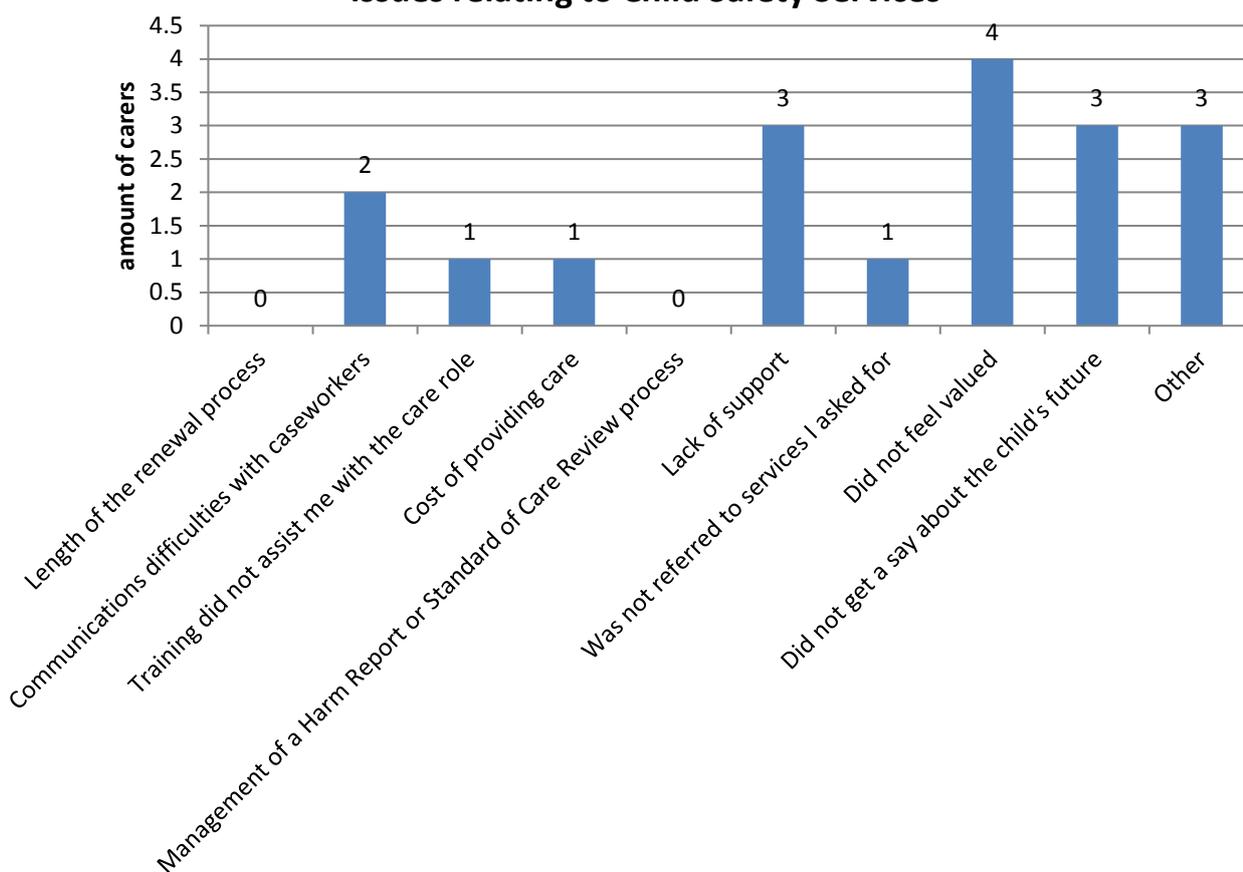


Comments provided:

- Kids are home full time
- Mother is sick (dementia) need to care for her
- Found constantly working with Child Safety challenging
- Kids are home full time now
- Personal health problems

- 2 of my adult children moved home and our initial placement ended with the child being physically and verbally abusive to our 7 yr. old
- sick mother
- Can't discipline the kids and an 8yo doesn't respond to reason. Especially not one that has witnessed and been exposed to violence and abuse
- Separation

Response from carer when ceasing care due to issues relating to Child Safety Services



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:

- Just a terrible experience for our family and our niece
- Poor decisions made for child's welfare
- requested supports over several months and nothing occurred sometimes couldn't even get a response via phone or email from the Child Safety Officer
- Child also had significant behavioural concerns which we were not initially told about
- Children's long term benefits don't seem to be a priority. LWB made stupid decisions
- child went back to her mother
- Grandchild replaced back with parents
- Re-unification with their mother through child services

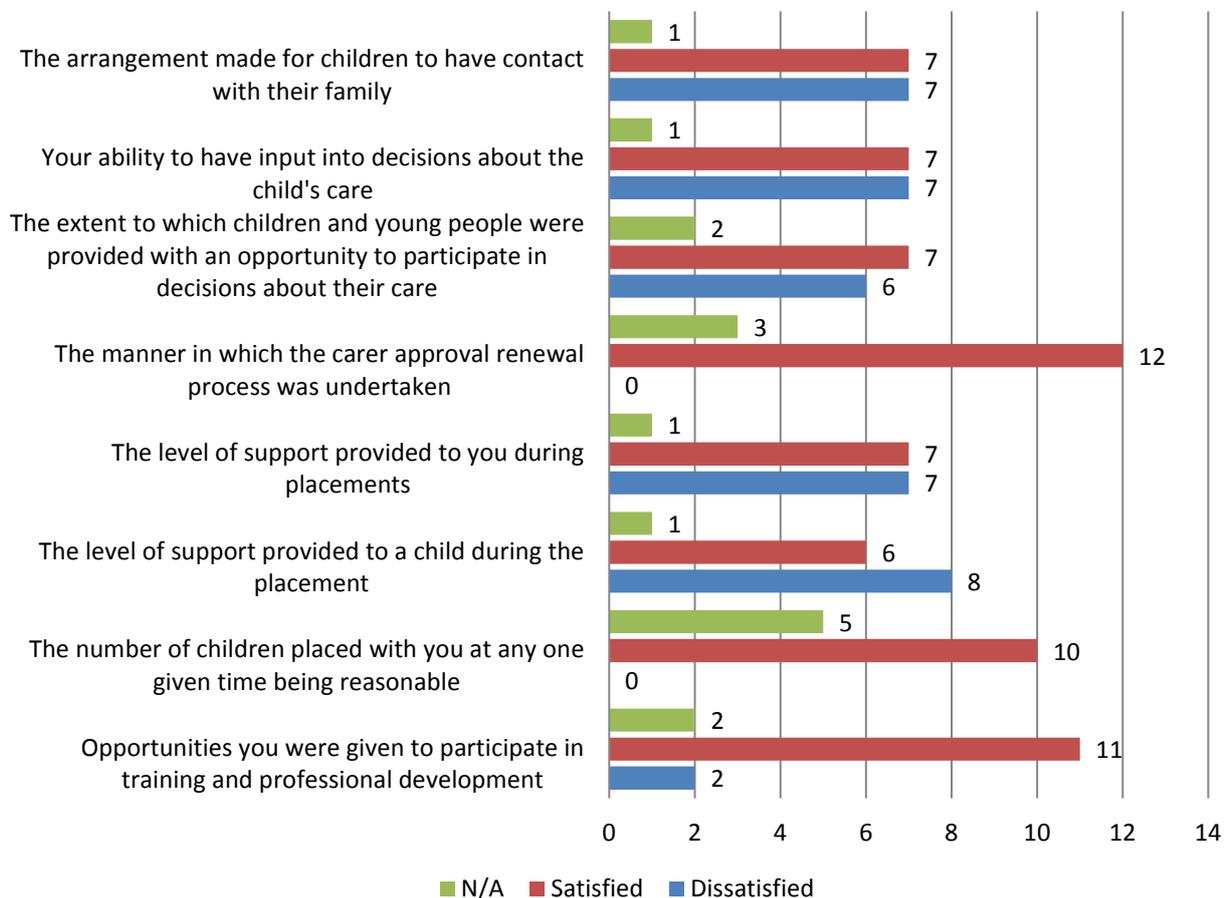
- The only reason we ceased being kinship carers was because our child was reunified. However we have considering becoming foster carers, though the idea of working with Child Safety again is very off putting. We got absolutely no support from them, barely any contact and were left uninformed about most of the case most of the time. They were unprofessional and disorganised and we felt like they brushed off serious concerns in order to get the case out of the way. they refused to offer any kind of transition period before the child was abruptly reunified and have failed to provide any support that was asked for in that time and have failed to meet the reunification conditions they said they would such as continued contact with child after reunification and updates etc. on his wellbeing. They have given us serious doubt in the Child Safety system, more than I already had which was a lot. And it honestly makes me question every Child Safety decision and the wellbeing of all children within the system.
- Poor standard of care and support. So many meetings, kids could never be kids. I wasn't the right socio economic standard for LWB kids as they were all from poor and abusive households. That's my fault - I should have chosen another service if people had been more candid with me. Deception and a lack of notes from Child Safety, they don't tell you all about the kid and then surprise you get to find out the hard way
- Marriage separation
- We found a constant lack of communication with Child Safety, reaching case officers was very difficult and the case officers were constantly changing and handovers to the new case officers were not well done so they were not aware of important info or events that effected the children
- The child was under the intensive program and behaviours got out of control for us to deal with especially when incidents occurred with the child over several months and Child Safety Service Centre did not check in with the child or us as carers. The agency was fantastic
- Too many meetings from LWB
- We worked with our fostering case worker and CSO and various counsellors and Psychs to try and find a way of dealing with the child's violent behaviour towards our small child, but it was obvious there was a lot of trauma for her to work thru and this was going to take a very long time and we were not willing to put our own child at risk any longer as she was suffering.
- Children no longer wanted to remain in my care.
- It was physically draining each time Child Safety would say no to a progression between mother and children. We were helping mother and could see her progress and my health issues but they continued to not want the children back in the mothers care. Now 8 weeks on, mum is doing really well and I see her each week still.

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



The Experience of Caring

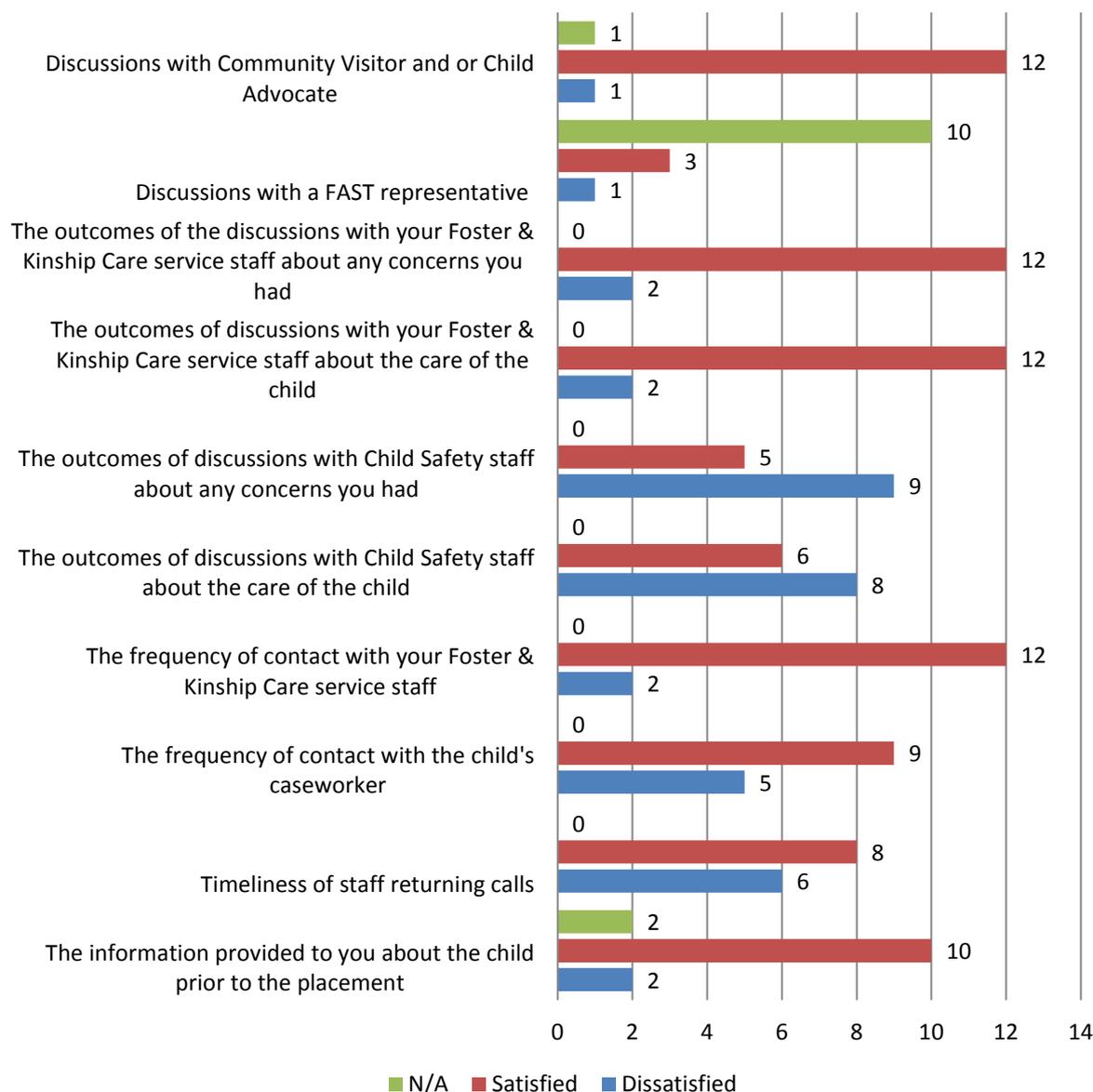
How satisfied were you with



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.

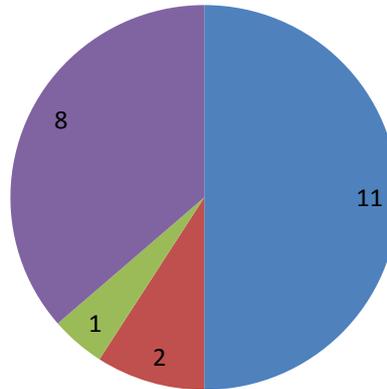
How satisfied were you with



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

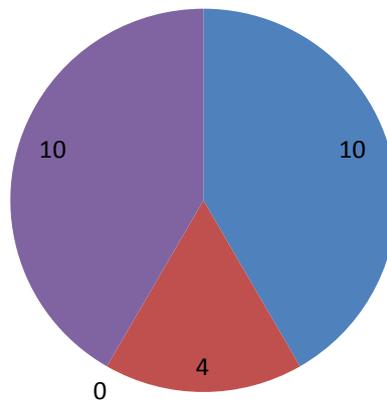
The child's cultural support needs

■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure ■ If yes, was there a cultural support plan in place



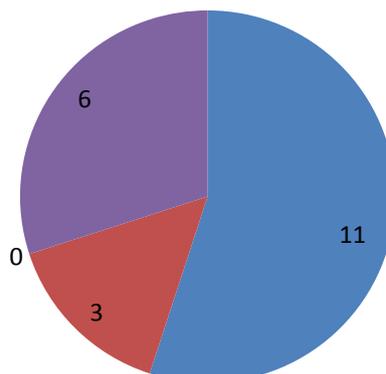
The child's educational needs

■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure ■ If yes, was there an education support plan in place



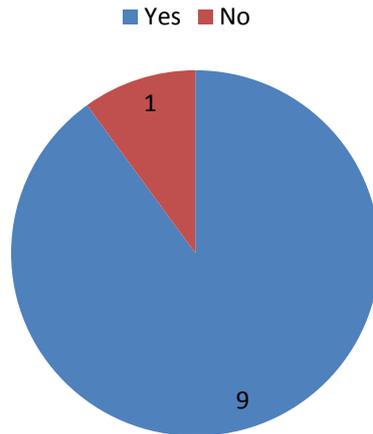
The child's health needs

■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure ■ If yes, did the child have a current child health passport



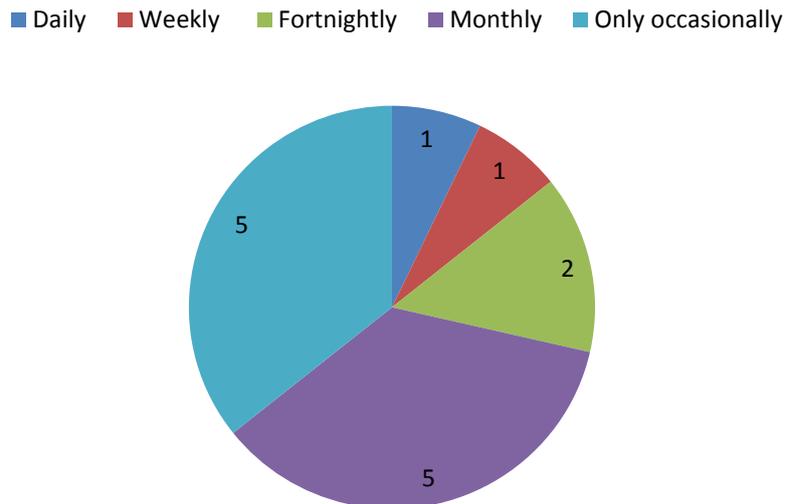
Carers were asked if they had received information regarding FAST Representatives and QLD Foster and Kinship Care, the table below identifies their responses:

Did you receive information about FAST and/or QLD Foster and Kinship Care (formerly Foster Care QLD)



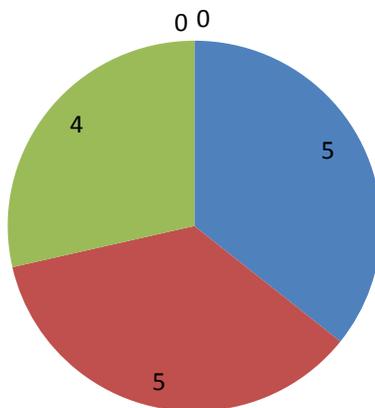
The Experience of Caring: Contact

How often did you have contact with Child Safety staff



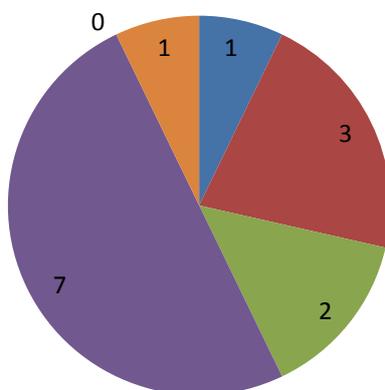
How did contact occur?

■ Phone call ■ Home Visit ■ Email ■ Meeting at the office ■ Other



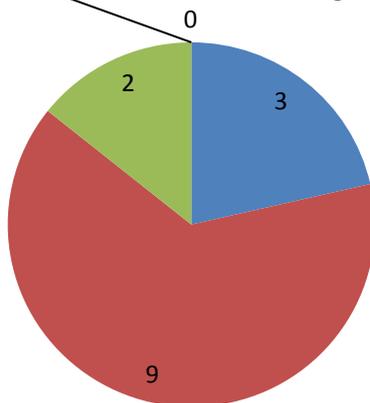
How often did you have contact with your Foster and Kinship Care Service?

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



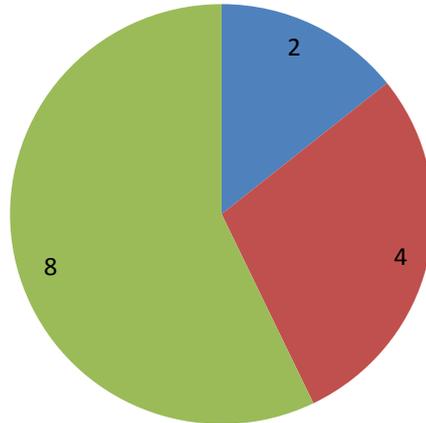
How did this contact occur?

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



What was your preference regarding contact?

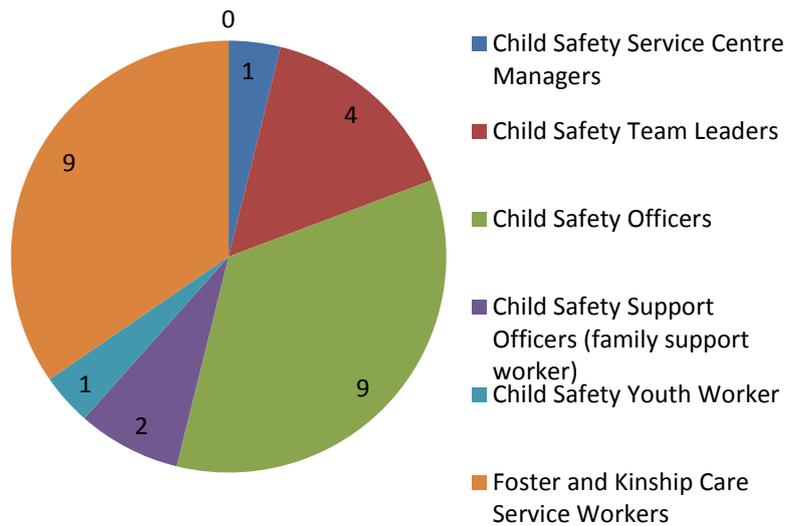
■ E-mail ■ Phone ■ Face to face



Comment provided:

- The reason for contact with Child Safety via email was to have it documented as no one would return phone calls.

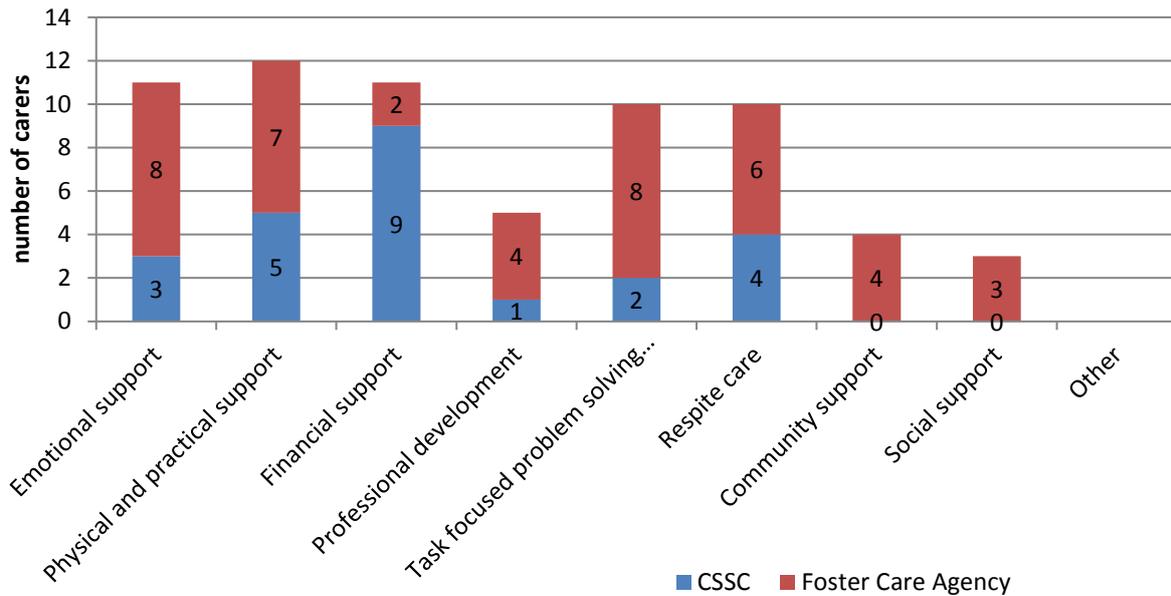
Which of the following persons did you usually have contact with?



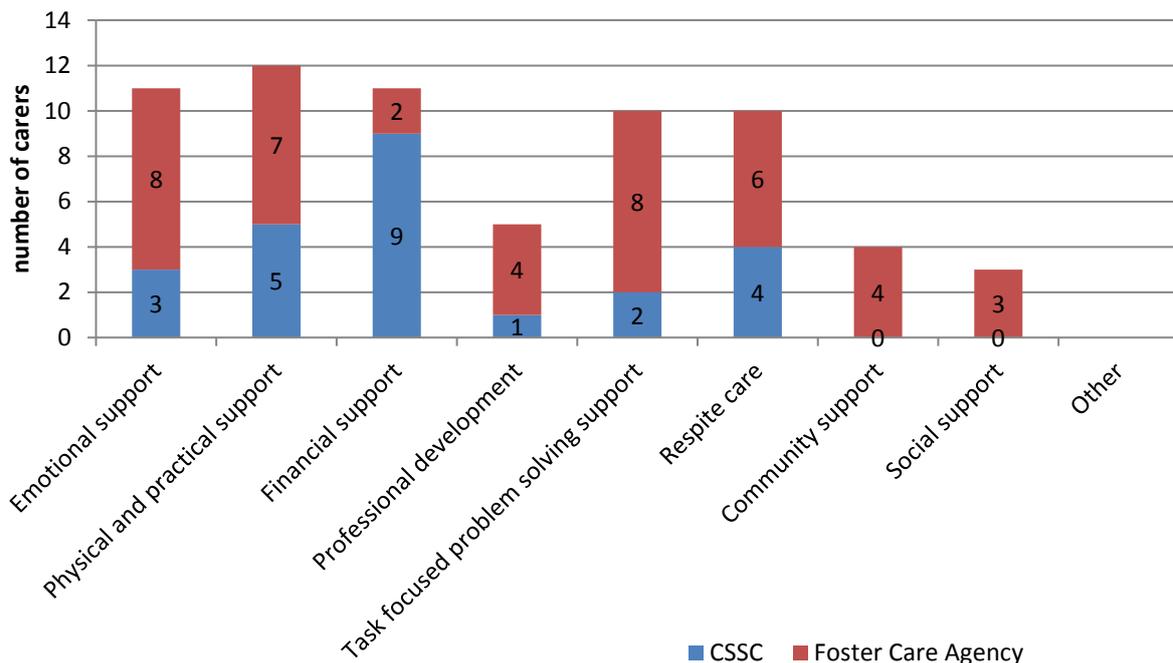
The Experience of Caring: Support

This section addresses the experience of caring and support received.

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



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

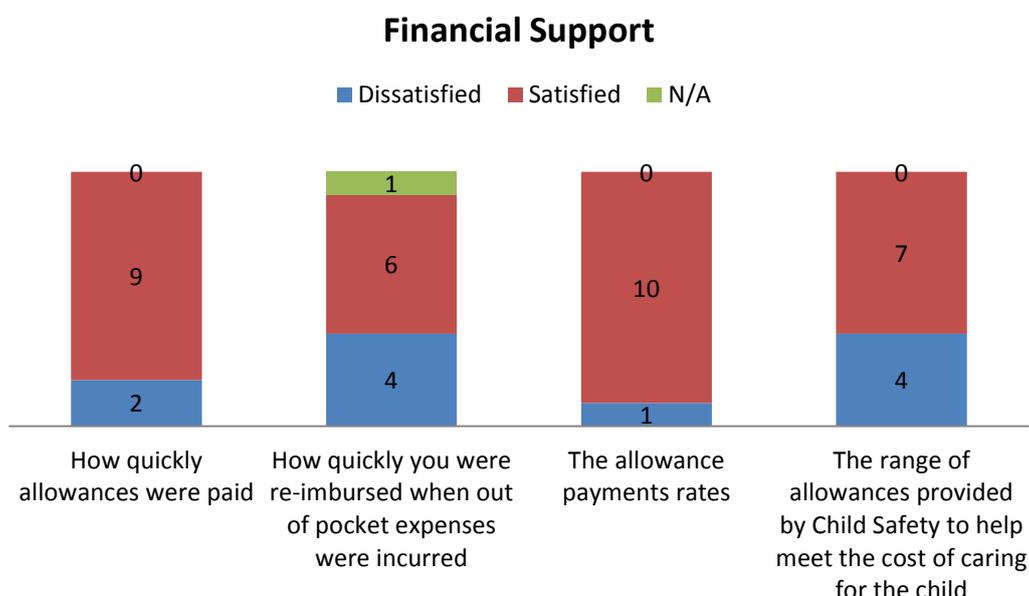
Below are the responses supplied:

- family and friends for emotional support and practical
- I sought support from a health clinic in regards to the child health and his developmental delays. I sought support from a psychologist who specialises in early intervention for families at risk - he did the Triple P parenting program with us and also got us a referral to the paediatrician.
- Community visitor
- Child has therapies so also use the professionals for support
- Church group and family

Responses to, were there other supports you would have like to access:

- Supports provided by Child Safety were inadequate and requests for support were difficult and often unresolved
- We asked for counselling support for ourselves and family and also the child. We wanted counselling for the child in regards to the trauma he had experienced and the behaviours of self-harm and over sexualised behaviours and also over-eating and other behaviours. We also requested counselling support for the child and ourselves when Child Safety informed us he would be reunified with no transition period or any support - nothing was offered or even acknowledged

The Experience of Caring: Financial Support

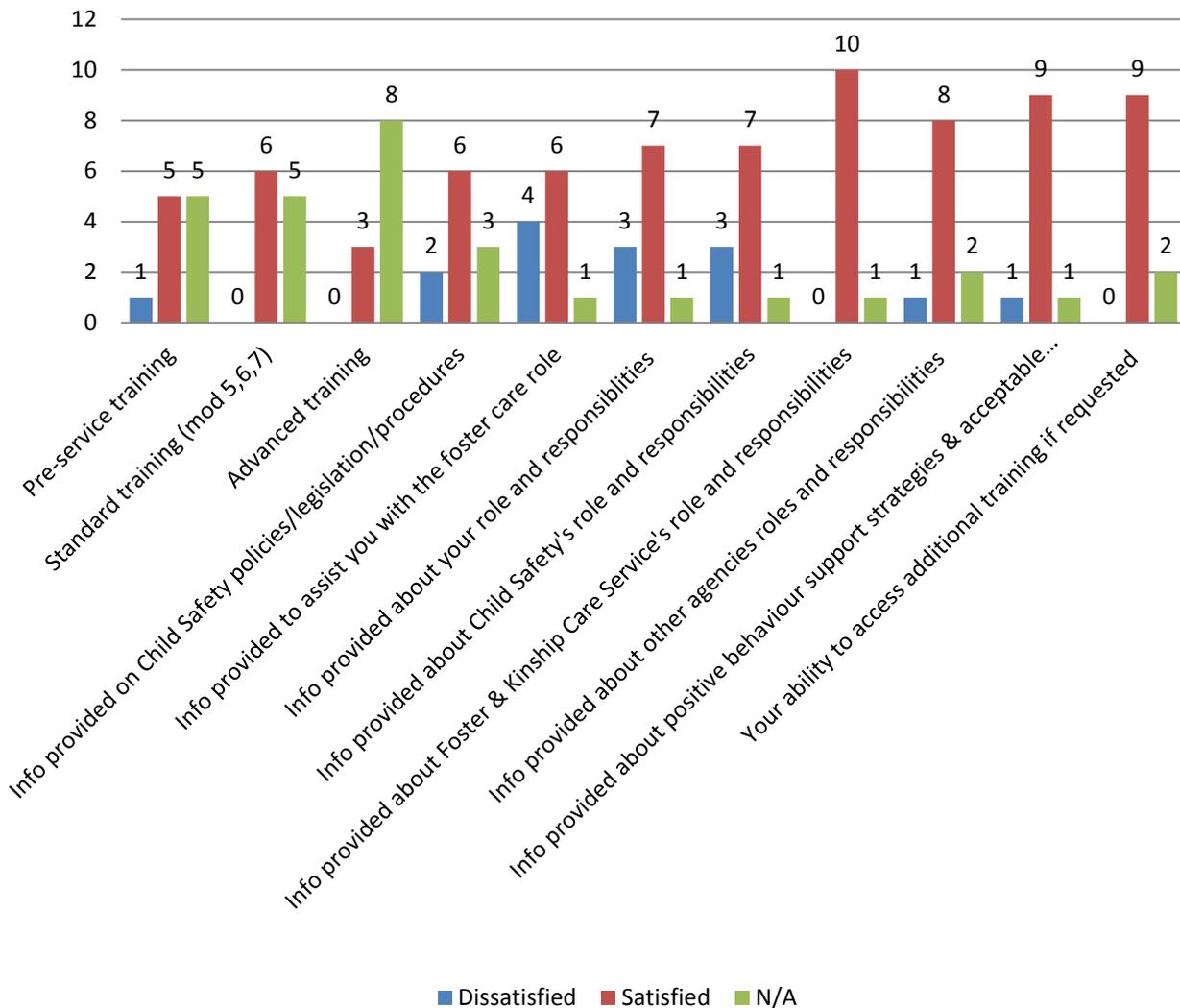


Responses from carers in relation to financial support:

- Fortnightly carer allowance was sufficient for basic needs, but we were not able to provide the finances for the extra day care that we and the children required out of it, but child services expected us to fund this. The new childcare subsidy from July 1 2018 would have been very helpful to our situation, but our grandsons had returned to their mother by then. It would have been immensely helpful if Child Safety had been more supportive of paying the one extra day/week day care that was required for the placement to be better supported
- we had 6 weeks of no CSNA payments and paid for everything out of our own pocket

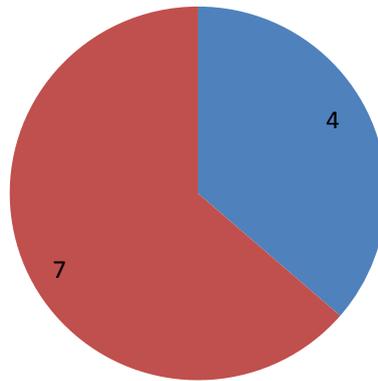
The Experience of Caring: Training and Professional Development

In regard to training and development, how satisfied were you with the following?



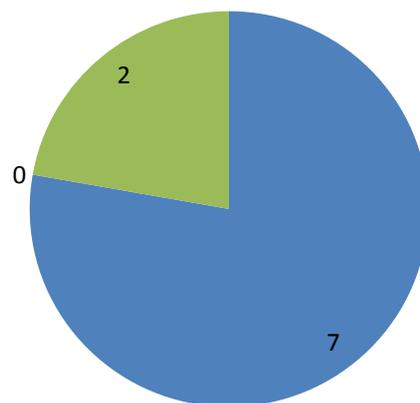
Have you attended any training in the last 12 months

■ Yes ■ No

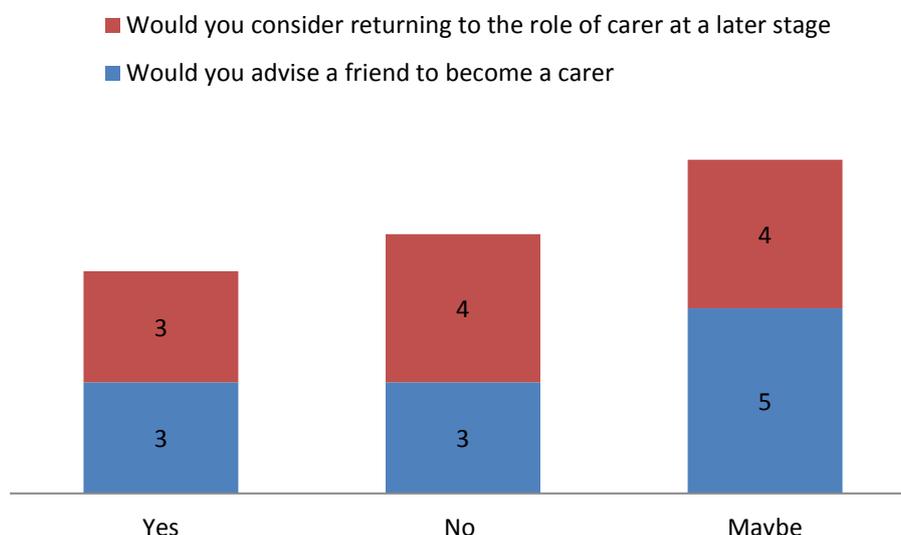


If you were approved as a Foster Carer, was there a Foster Care Agreement in place?

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know



Overall Experience



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

- With fore-warning that it's not easy dealing with the Child Services Dept., and how the system works (i.e. help is weighted towards the parents rather than the children... i.e. the parents' rights come before best interests of the child). Would counsel them to not believe everything child services says/promises
- Because it appeared due to knowing the child when placed it was like Child Safety wiped the hands of it. Over 18 months Child Safety Officers attended our home 4 times only
- We are in the process of applying for approval to offer short break and emergency care
- Once our child is grown up
- Only for one little boy who still needs our love and support

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

1. **Did your experiences of providing care meet the expectation you had when you decided to become a carer?**
 - Dealing with child services was stressful and frustrating
 - More than what I thought
2. **What were the most challenging aspects of being a carer?**
 - The lack of training about the complexities with kids experiencing violent trauma behaviour
 - Nil
 - Caring for a 2-3 year old at a later stage of life
 - Lack of support... for the 1st 3 months we didn't have a foster and kinship support agency dealing with Child Safety was difficult and the system is flawed...best interests of the child doesn't seem to occur
 - Dealing with the biological parents -lack of support and information from Child Safety - losing all contact with a child who I loved like my own
 - Teenagers... sex, drugs, alcohol etc.
 - Dealing with the lack of support from Child Safety and difficult biological parents

- Communication with the Service Centre and requesting supports went on deaf ears
- Working with a system that did not always have the child and families best interests at heart, policies seemed to be more important and ticking boxes

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

- The children thriving
- Still friends with some of the ones cared for who some are now adults and still stopped down the street to say hello
- Helping a young person
- The love from a child
- closer bond with our grandchildren that were in our care, watching them grow more confident and thrive
- Loving a beautiful child unconditionally, helping them grow through all the trauma, watching their milestones that you thought were nearly impossible. Just all the love
- Seeing improvements
- Giving kids a loving home
- Providing a happy place where the kids felt at home and comfortable and safe
- Our Foster Care agency Foundations Care was so supportive and understood where we were coming from in regards to receiving no communication from the Service Centre
- Seeing a mum reunited with her two children

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

- Churches of Christ foster care agency
- Help was provided as soon as it was asked for. We were able to handle nearly all of our day to day issues but they were there if needed
- Foster care agency
- knowing it was helping my grandchild emotionally to be able to cope returning back to her parents after a long absence
- Uniting Care. Our foster and kinship support service, they were amazing, and the carer allowance to provide for the children's needs
- My kinship care support worker offered support in dealing with challenges. My own family were the most support to us as carers. and the outside support I accessed myself was the most beneficial since Child Safety were useless in any support
- My agency
- Foster care support worker, always there if needed
- Foster Care Agency (Foundations Care)
- The mum who kept thanking us for supporting her

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

- More training about tools to help kids deal with violence and aggression
- Nothing that I could see because we were happy with how we were assisted
- Nil
- Listening to the carer's advice in regards to allowing FaceTime & telephone calls to parents. helping the child to begin to bond back with her/his parents
- Better communication from child services, better decision making that supports the best interests of the child, better funding for child services to do a better job of protecting the children, and more commitment from child services to the individual children in placements, and not for them to just

be a number that the aim is to just get them off their books (i.e. case closed, so that their stats look good).

- Child safety system - carers are the closest people to the children. Their voices about the child's needs should be most valuable and the children in the system should have a voice on their own life and their own placement. Every single carer and child should be offered free counselling and emotional support as a given!
- Support from Child Safety. More rights for the carer. If the child is going to live with you they have to be allowed to do what the family does! Our life was greatly disrupted because of parental control and Child Safety not standing up to mum.
- More consistency and better communication with Child Safety.
- More easily access communication to the Service Centre.
- Allow them to voice their concerns and help them help the parent if they have a relationship with them. Don't limit them and hinder the progress of a parent when a carer is willing to work with them.

6. Do you have any additional comments, suggestions or concerns?

- Child Safety need to be more flexible in each case they manage, and listen to the Kinship Carers advice in regards to reunification back with the child's family/parents.
- Child services has too many levels involved for decision making e.g. extra funding for day care day needs to go to child service case worker, who then goes to team leader, who then goes to manager and decision is made.... the carer and the case worker are the ones who are best informed as to what the child really needs, not the manager! It just becomes funds not in their budget. More respect for carers role from Child Safety, often left feeling used and manipulated by workers, when we are the ones doing the front-line hard yards trying to provide healing to traumatised kids.
- Child Safety were never appreciative of the extra things we would do to make things easier for them, and at times even demanded we go above what our caring obligations were.
- Due to knowing the child we organised everything in regards to the child and Child Safety were just not interested. Even now we are still receiving emails from the Service centre in regards to things like child's normal GP, appointments etc. when even though this has all been provided to the Service Centre. Disappointed with how long it took to receive complex allowance and then once it ran out and evidence was provided still had not received even though paid for services. We really enjoyed caring for the child and we are hopefully going to keep in contact with him as he was a part of our family even though it was for only 18 months that was 18 months we provided a safe and stable home environment for him.
- Keep carers and family involved as much as the child needs when they are reunited back to parents or sent onto family. Cutting the child from the carer when they have been a significant other only adds immense trauma to the child.