

**FOSTER & KINSHIP
CARERS SURVEY
2018
REPORT**

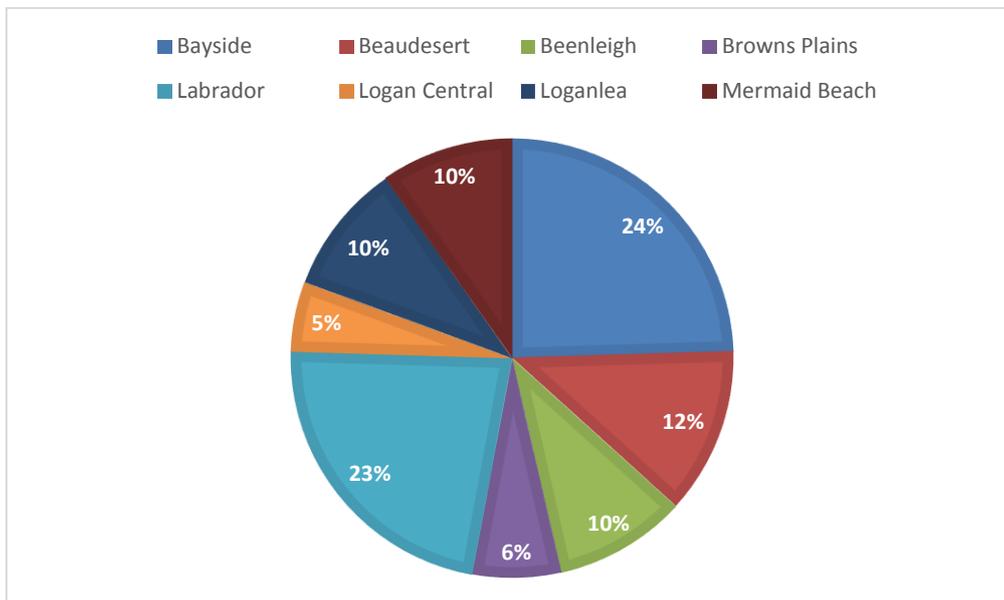
**South East
Region**

Contents

About the Carer	2
Relationship Status	3
Cultural Diversity.....	5
CALD Community	6
How satisfied are you with Relationships with Staff at Child Safety Services	7
Child Safety Processes.....	12
Standard of Care/Harm Processes	14
Confidentiality.....	15
Financial	17
How satisfied are you with local practices of CSSC.....	18
Education Support Plans	22
Child Health Passports	22
Placement Agreements.....	23
Centrelink.....	24
Support	24
Foster and Kinship Care Services	25
Foster Care Agreements	29
Training	29
Complaint/Concerns Processes	30
Foster Care Queensland.....	31
FAST Program.....	32
Partners in Care	32
Looking Forward	33

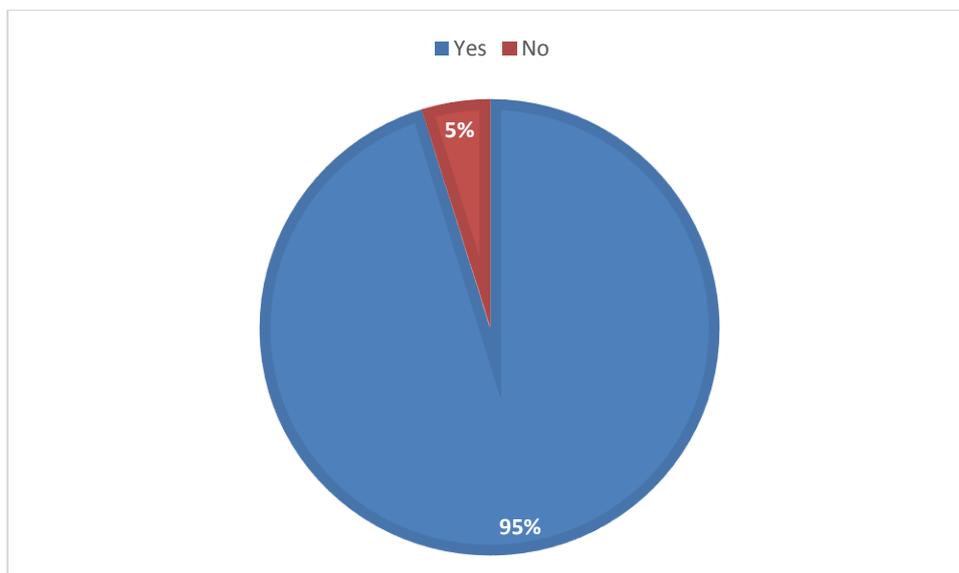
About the Carer

In South East 157 Foster and Kinship Carers completed the carer survey and were represented in the following Child Safety Service Centres, noting every CSSC was represented in the survey.

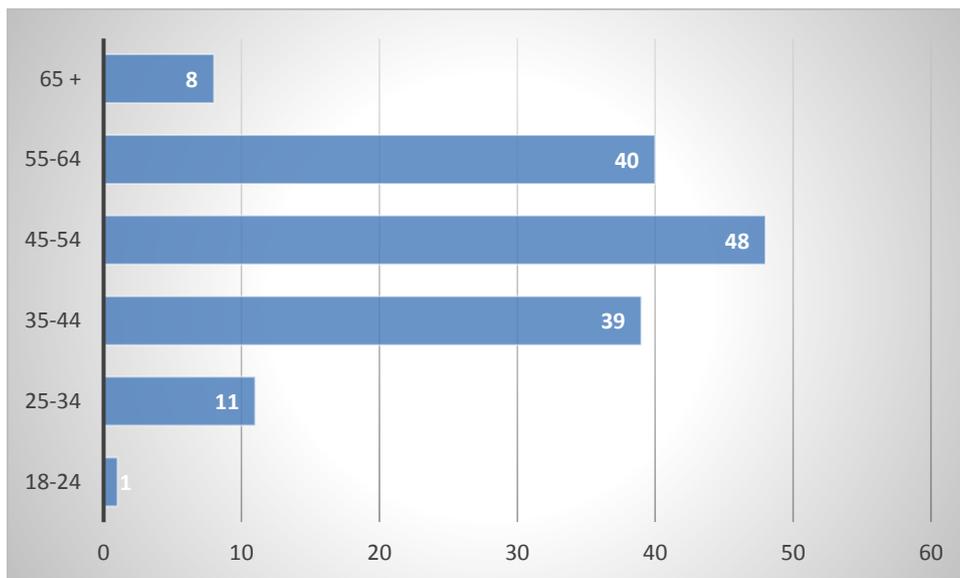


Of the 157 responses in South East Region, 119 identified as Foster Carers (76%), 29 identified as Kinship carers (18%) and 3 identified as provisionally approved carers (2%).

Carers were asked if they were supported by a fostering and kinship carer agency with the vast majority of carers in South East who completed the survey confirming they were.



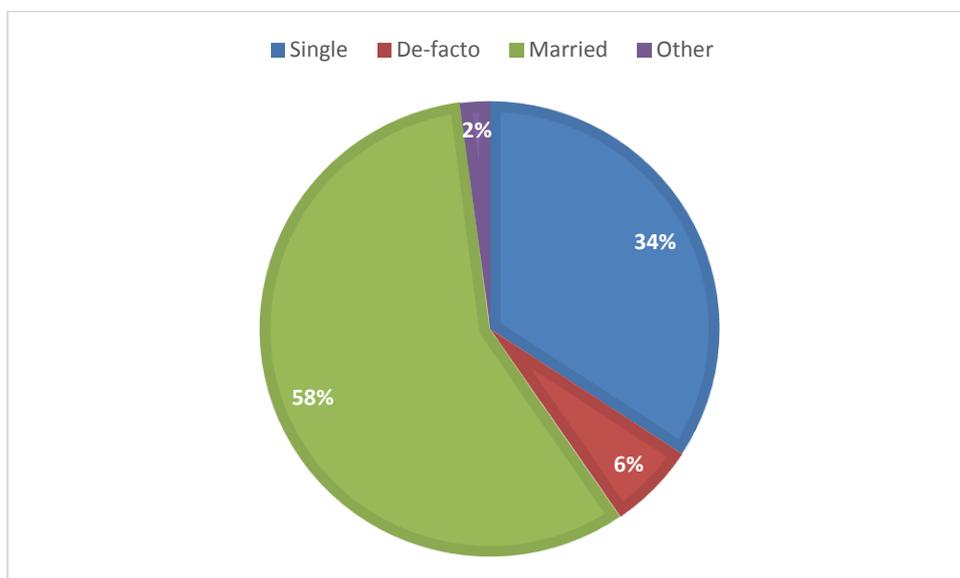
Carers were asked to identify the age group they fitted into.



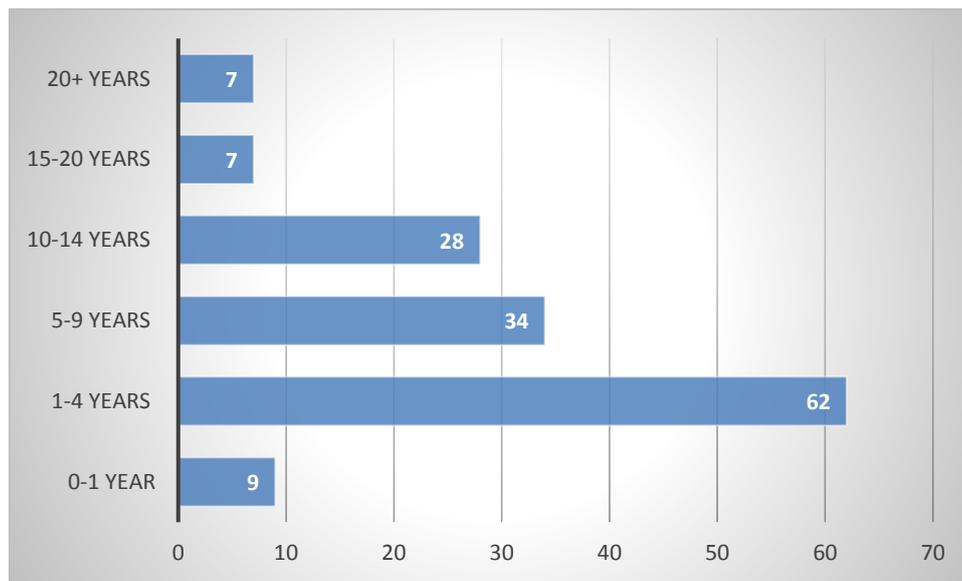
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Nine carers in South East who completed the survey identified as Aboriginal. No carers identified as Torres Strait Islander and no carers identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

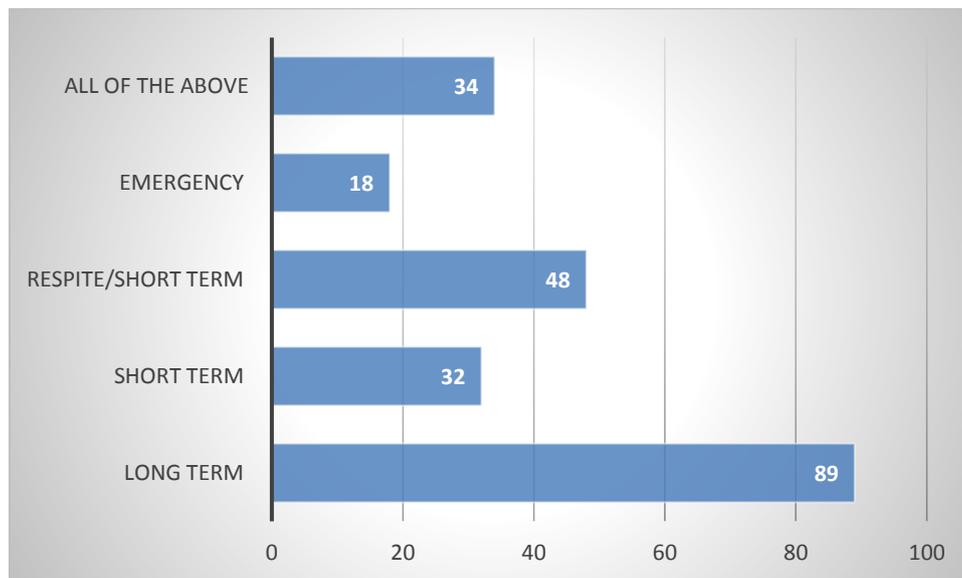
Relationship Status



Carers were asked how many years they had been providing care for.



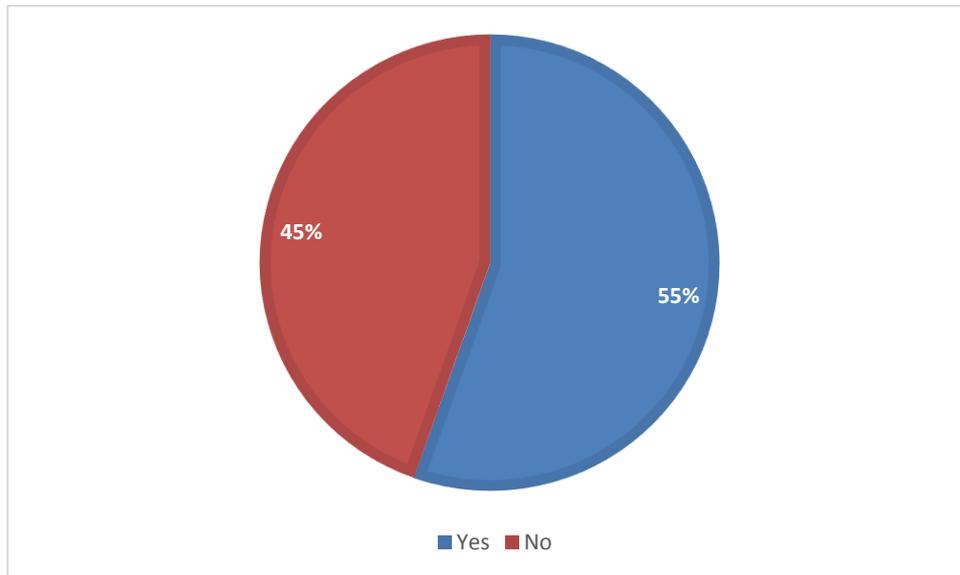
Carers were asked which type of care they provide, please note that carers were able to tick more than one type of care.



Cultural Diversity

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as follows:

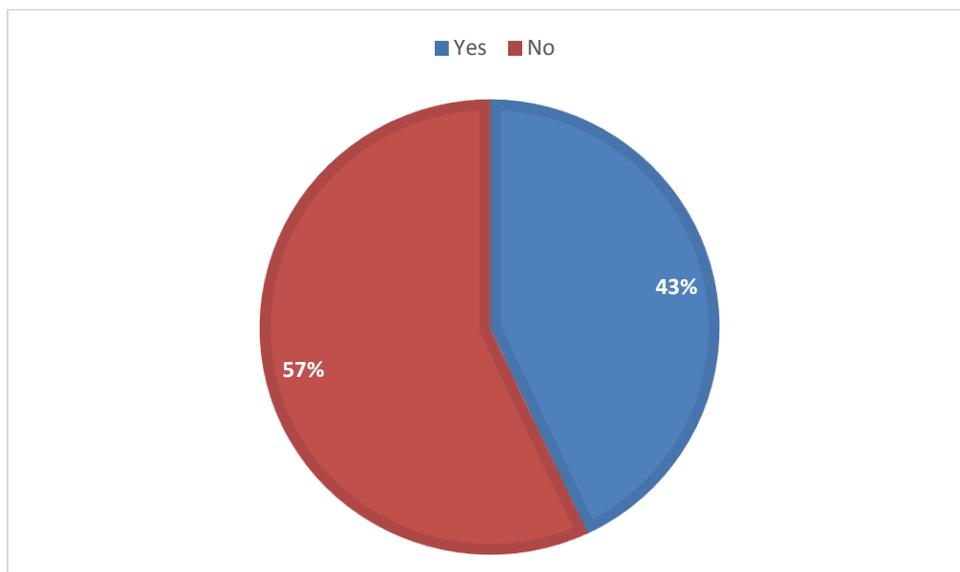
Are you caring or have you ever provided care for an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child?



Given that only 9 carers identified as Aboriginal in this survey, the majority of those carers who have responded yes to this question would not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Carers were then asked if they had answered yes to the above question, whether they had a Cultural Support Plan in place. Only 44% answered yes to this question, leaving 56% of children placed in care where they identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander either without a Cultural Support Plan or where the carer had no knowledge of its existence.

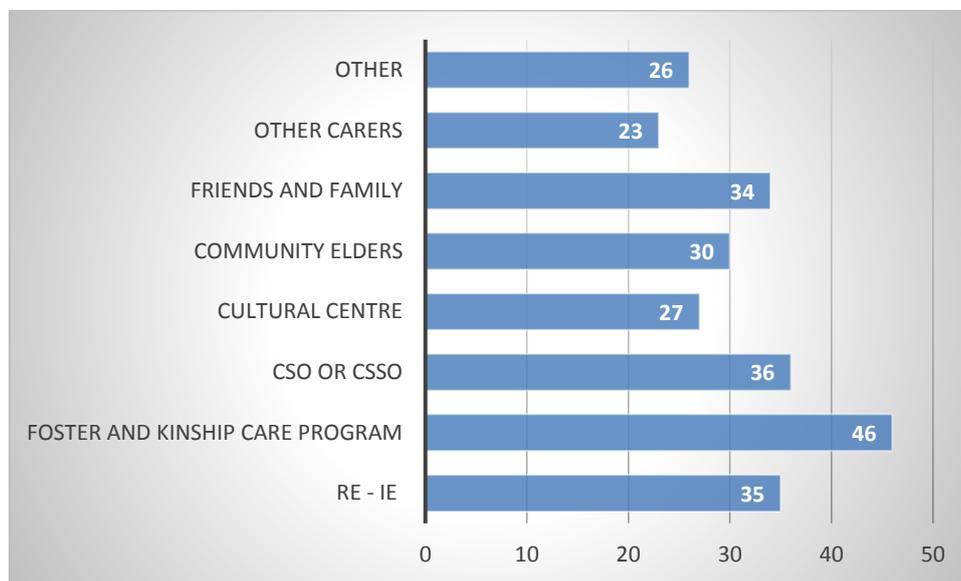
Carers were then asked if they were provided with cultural awareness training to assist them to care for a child who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.



As evidenced above, more than half of the carers who responded identified they did not receive any training to assist them in building their cultural knowledge in their care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Carers were asked whether they understood the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principle. This principle is explored with Foster Carers in the Pre-Service Quality Training, however it must be noted that carers are inundated with information during this training and if this is not followed up with further education and information, it is likely it won't be retained by carers. The majority of carers reported understanding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principle with 73% confirming understanding and 27% identifying not understanding the principle.

Carers were then asked where they accessed their cultural information from. Please note that carers were able to tick multiple boxes as sources of information for this section.



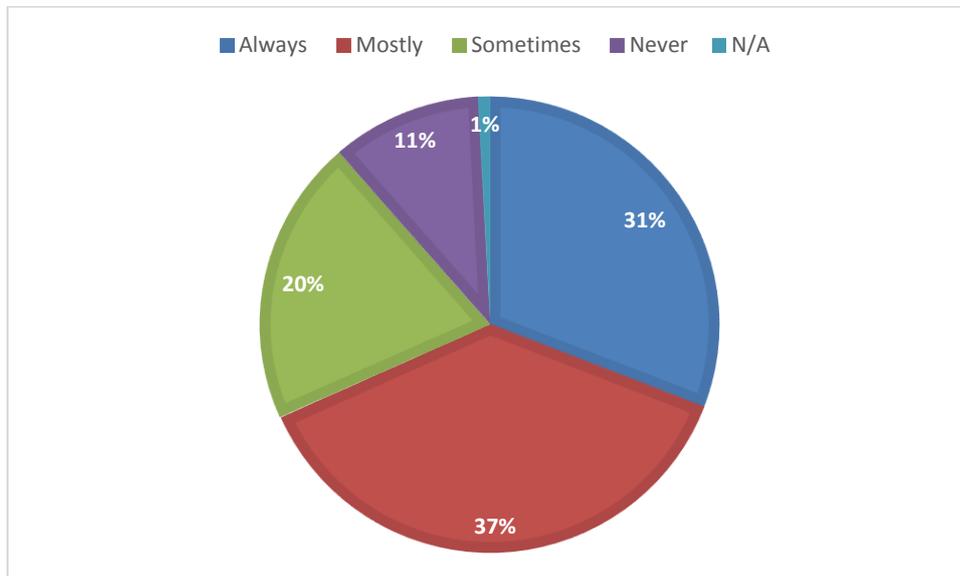
CALD Community

This is the second survey FCQ has sought to gather information from our carer community regarding the CALD community, specifically how many of our carers identify as being from a CALD community and whether carers have provided care for children and young people from a CALD community.

Just 5% (6) of carers who completed the survey in the South East Region identified from a CALD community and 8% of carers in South East who completed the survey reported they either were or had provided care to children who were from the CALD community. Carers who had provided care to children from a CALD community were asked whether they were provided with appropriate training to assist them to provide culturally appropriate care. Unfortunately only 21% advised that they had been provided with training.

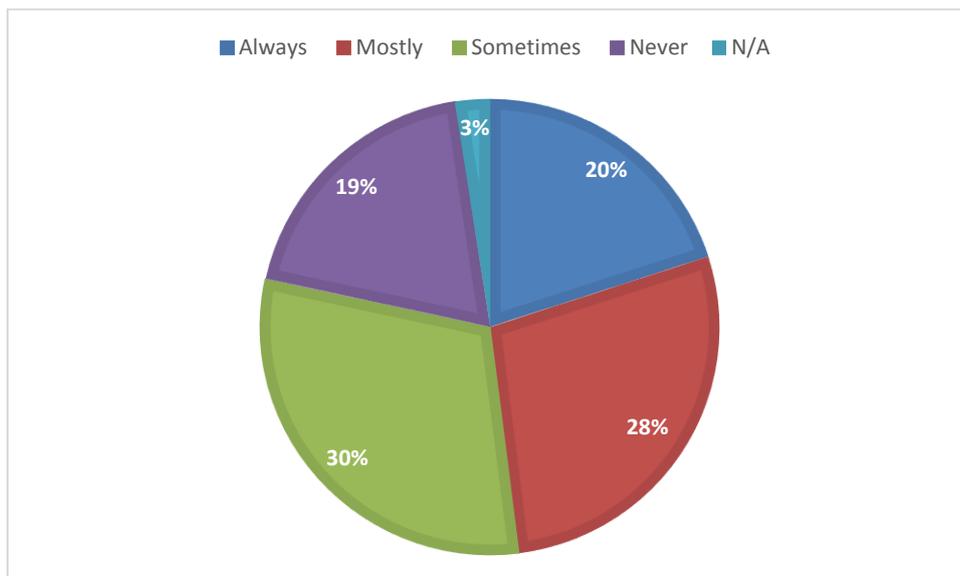
How satisfied are you with Relationships with Staff at Child Safety Services

Carers were asked whether they felt respected by their CSSC.



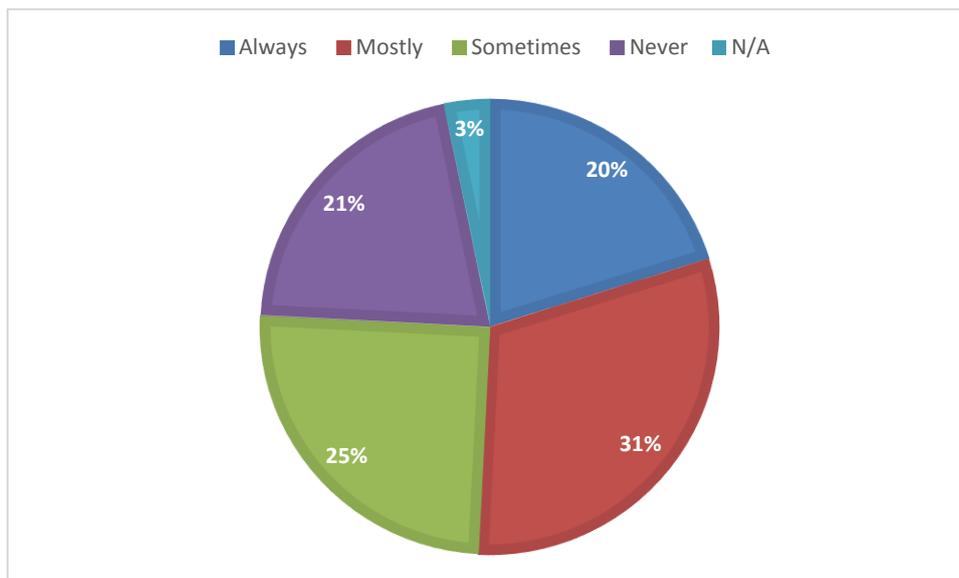
A total of 68% of carers reported feeling respected either always or mostly which is positive; that does leave 31% of carers however who reported only feeling respected sometimes or never (1% reported this as being N/A).

Carers were asked whether they felt part of a team.



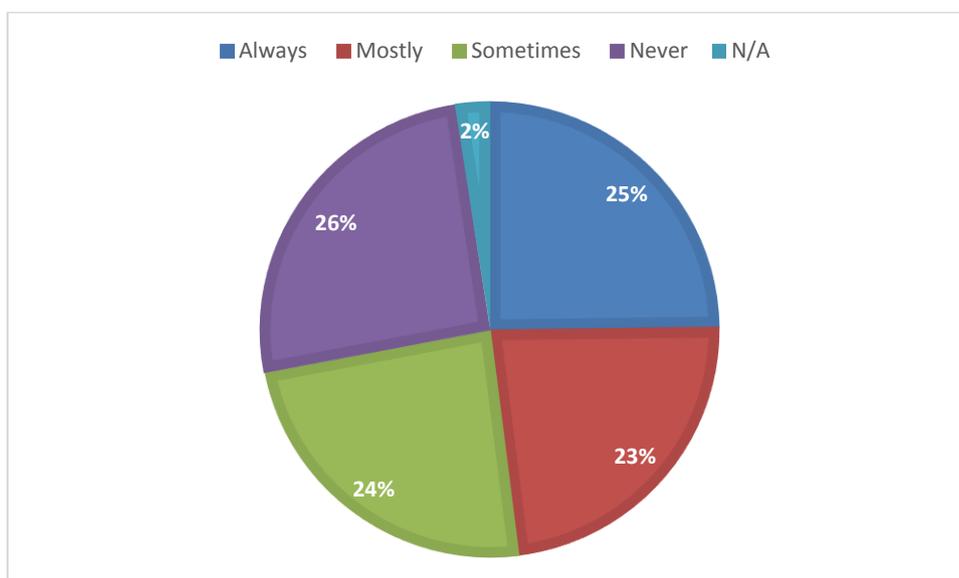
49% of carers reported feeling like part of the team only sometimes or never, with 48% of carers feeling like they were either always or mostly treated as part of the team (3% reported this as being N/A).

Carers were asked whether they feel as though their views are heard.



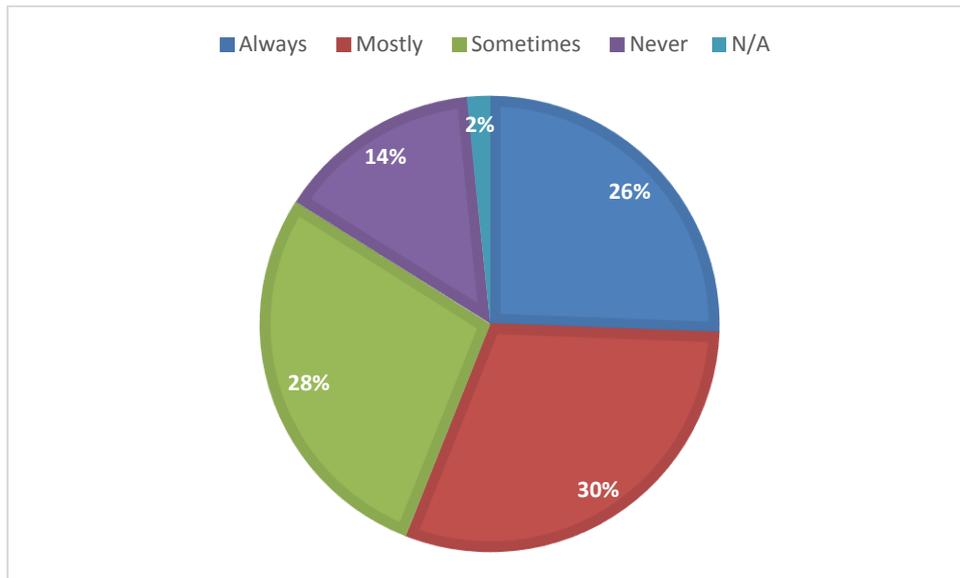
51% of carers reported feeling that they feel their views are either always or mostly considered. This still leaves 46% of carers who were surveyed in South East stating that they feel that their views are only heard sometimes or never.

Carers were asked whether they feel as though there is consideration given to their whole foster or kinship family.



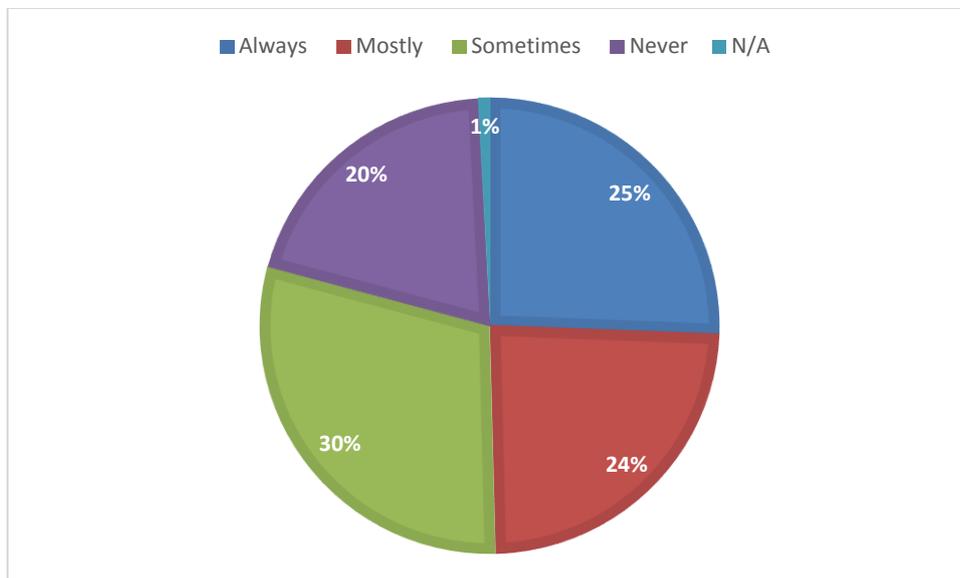
It is concerning that 26% of carers reported that they felt as though there is never any consideration given to the whole of family with another 24% stating that they feel as though consideration for the whole of family is only provided sometimes. Having 50% of carers with a view that their family is never or only sometimes considered is concerning. Families are more likely to leave the fostering system when they see their whole of family being effected negatively and given little consideration.

Carers were asked whether Child Safety is responsive to calls and emails.

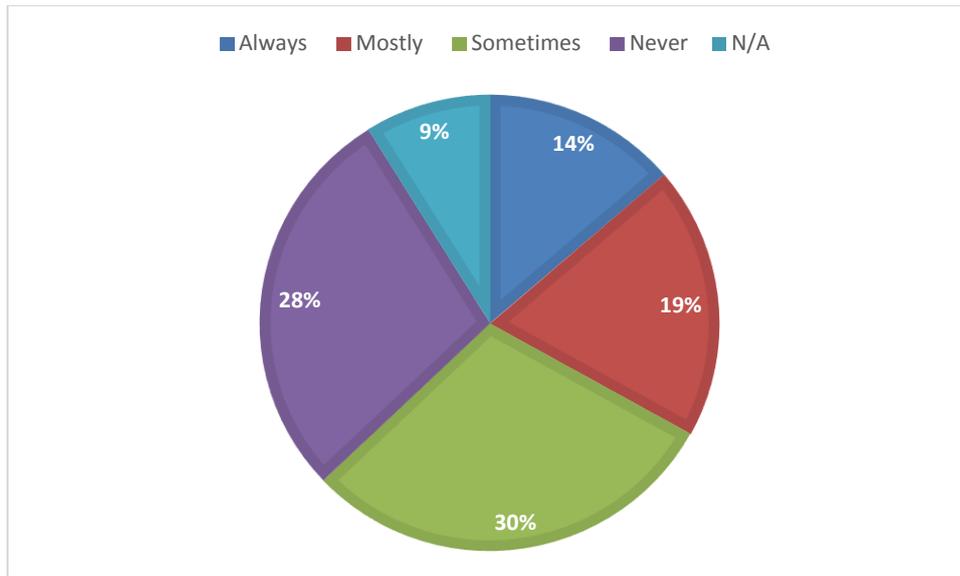


56% of carers reported that their CSSC was responsive to emails and phone calls, 42% reported only sometimes or never and 2% marked N/A.

Carers were asked if the CSSC creates a supportive environment.

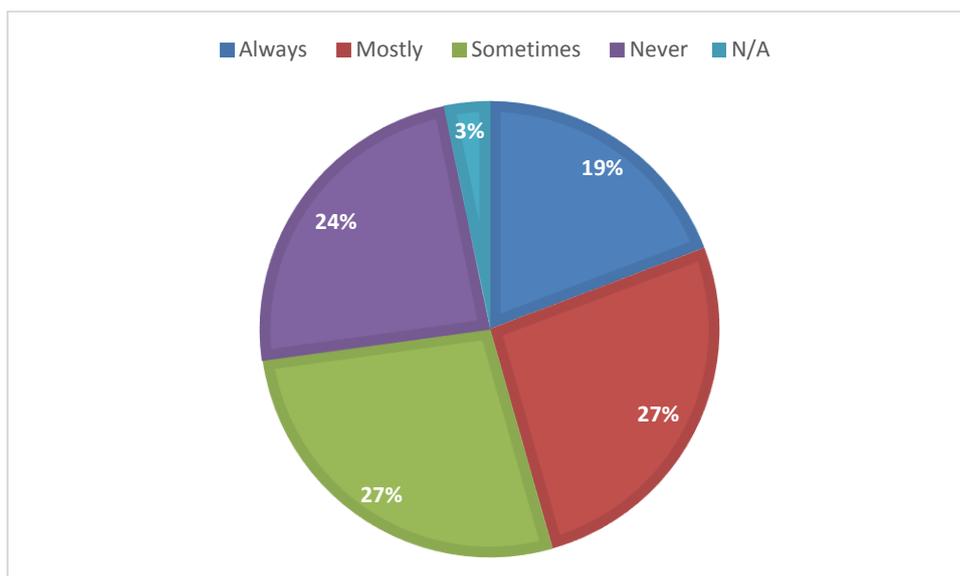


Carers were asked if they are assisted in completing applications for reimbursements/claims in a timely manner.



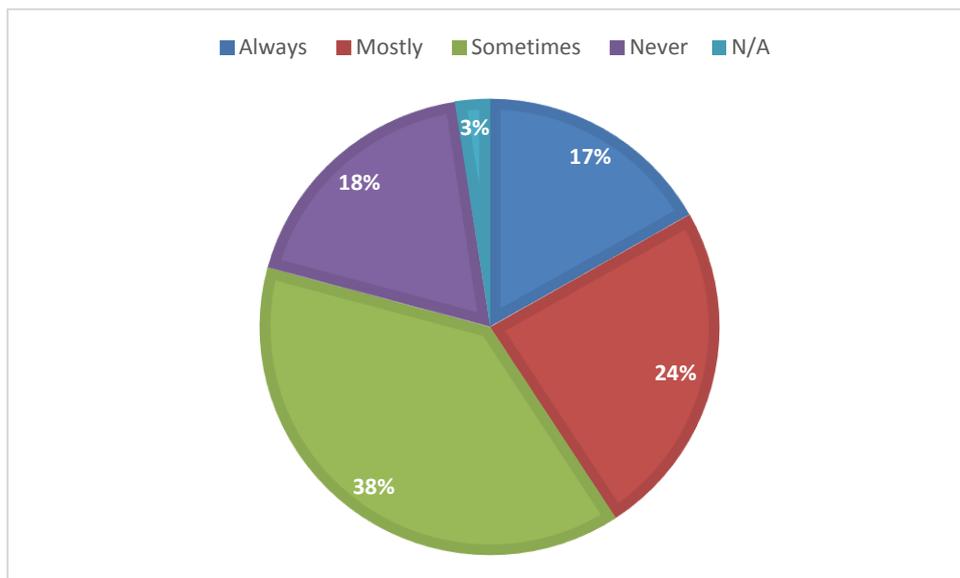
58% of carers reported that they feel that the CSSC only sometimes or never assists in this area. As stated in 2016 Carer Survey, financial stress can very much impact on placement stability and is often overlooked as a stress factor in foster and kinship families despite financial stress being one of the most recognised sources of stress in normal everyday families.

Carers were asked whether their CSO's let them know when they are going on leave or are going to be unavailable.



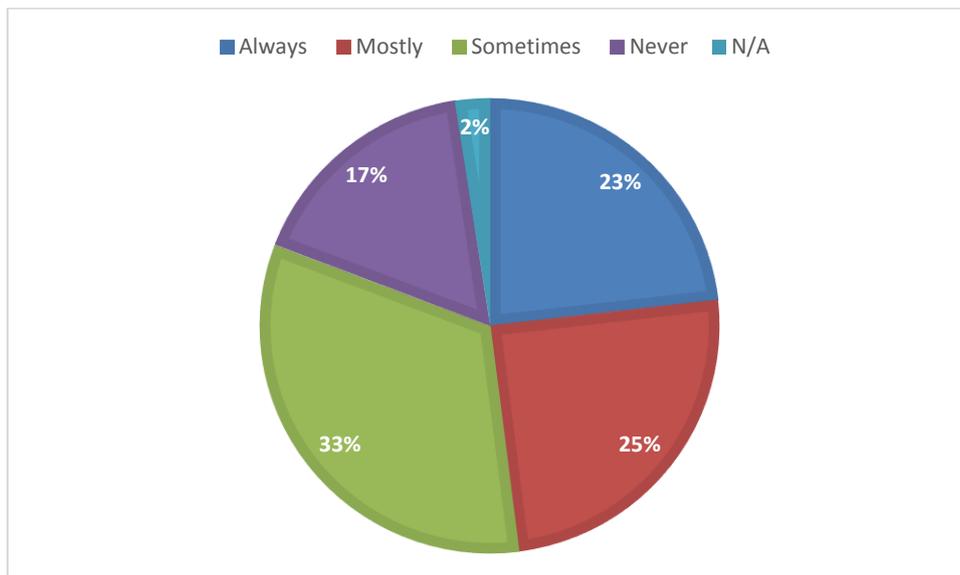
Advising the care team when planned leave or unavailability is occurring is a basic communication requirement in order to build a respectful and supportive care team. Carers are expected to let the care team know when they are going away or are going to be unavailable, therefore it would be an expectation that this same courtesy was provided to carers, however only 46% (44% 2016 – South East) of carers reported that they are either always told or mostly told when this occurs leaving a large proportion of carers in the dark during these times.

Carers were asked whether they are given ongoing information about the child in their care.



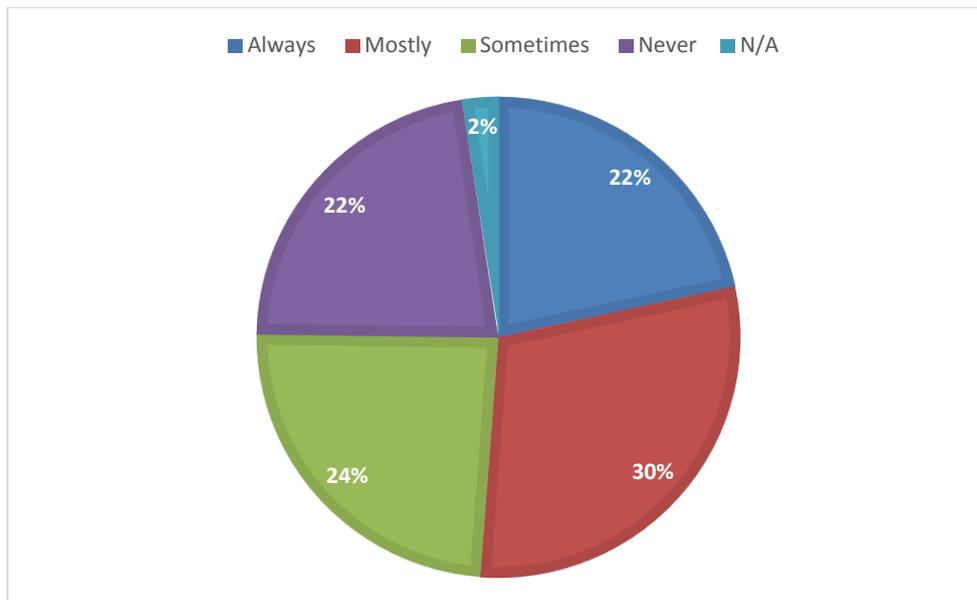
56% (55% 2016 South East Data) of carers reported that they only sometimes or never get updated information about children in their care. This percentage is still high given the legislative requirements of the Child Protection Act 1999 that require carers to be provided with information that allows them to provide safe and appropriate care to the child and other children in their care.

Carers were asked whether support and assistance was provided to them by CSSC for the children in their care.



Unfortunately half of the carers who responded felt that support and assistance for children in their care was only provided sometimes or never.

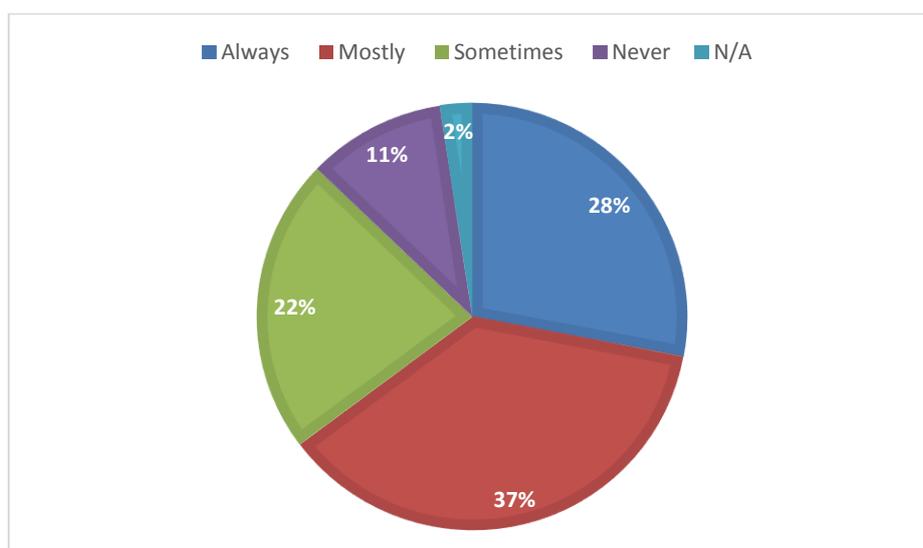
Carers were asked whether they were respected to advocate on behalf of the children in their care for resources, goods and services.



46% of carers reported that they sometimes or never feel that they are respected to advocate on behalf of children in their care. Carers are assessed against their ability to be considered a suitable person to provide care through many criteria, one of these being their ability to appropriately advocate on behalf of children. Stakeholders can hold different views, however it is important that all members of a child's safety and support network feel empowered to advocate on behalf of a child. This leads to accountability, transparency and best practice overall.

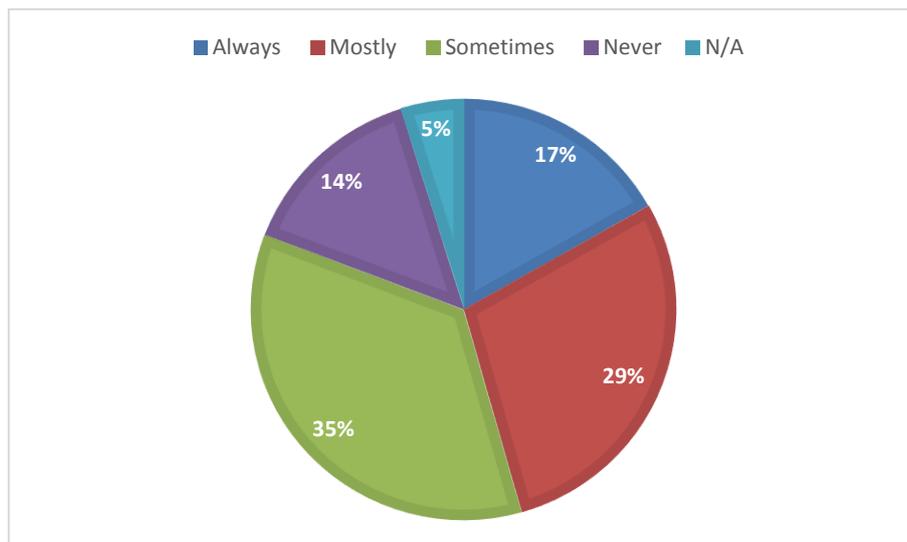
Child Safety Processes

Carers were asked whether they were satisfied with the approval and reapproval processes as carers.



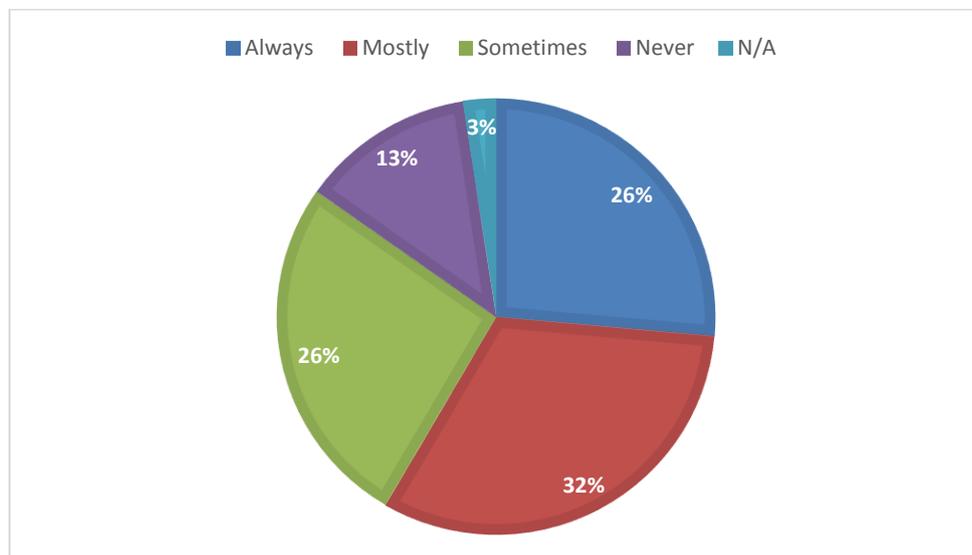
It is positive to see that 65% of carers reported feeling either always or mostly satisfied and that overall only 11% of carers reported never feeling satisfied in this area.

Carers were asked if they were satisfied with the completion of Placement Agreements.



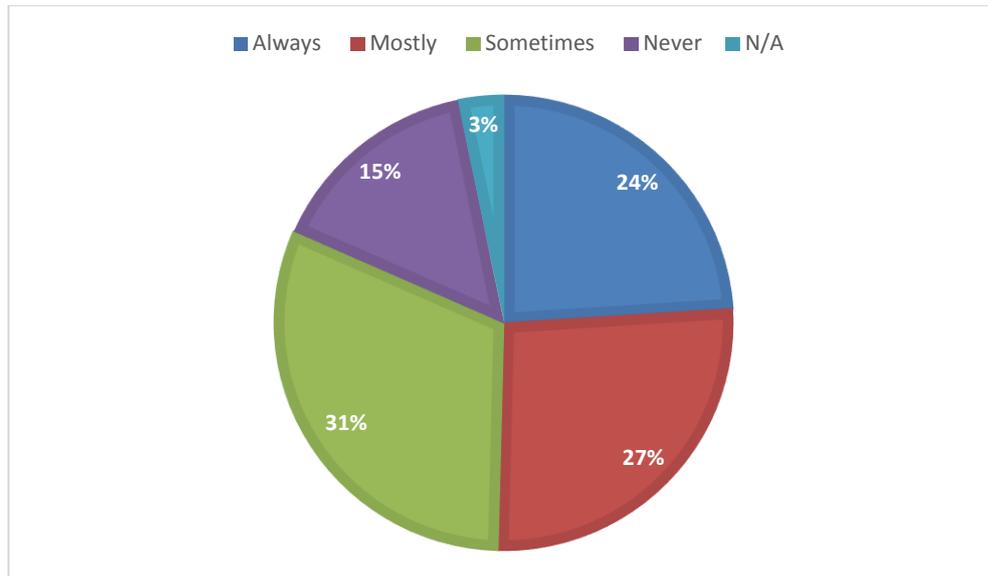
This area is explored in more detail further into this report. It is concerning however that given Placement Agreements are a legislative requirement it is concerning that 49% (44% 2016 Carer Survey) surveyed reported only feeling satisfied sometimes or never in relation to the completion of Placement Agreements.

Carers were asked if they were satisfied with home visits being completed by Child Safety.



58% (55% 2016 South East Survey) of carers reported feeling sometimes or never satisfied in relation to home visits being completed. It is acknowledged this question would need to be more detailed to examine whether the answer to these is based on frequency or quality of visit and this will be noted for the 2020 survey.

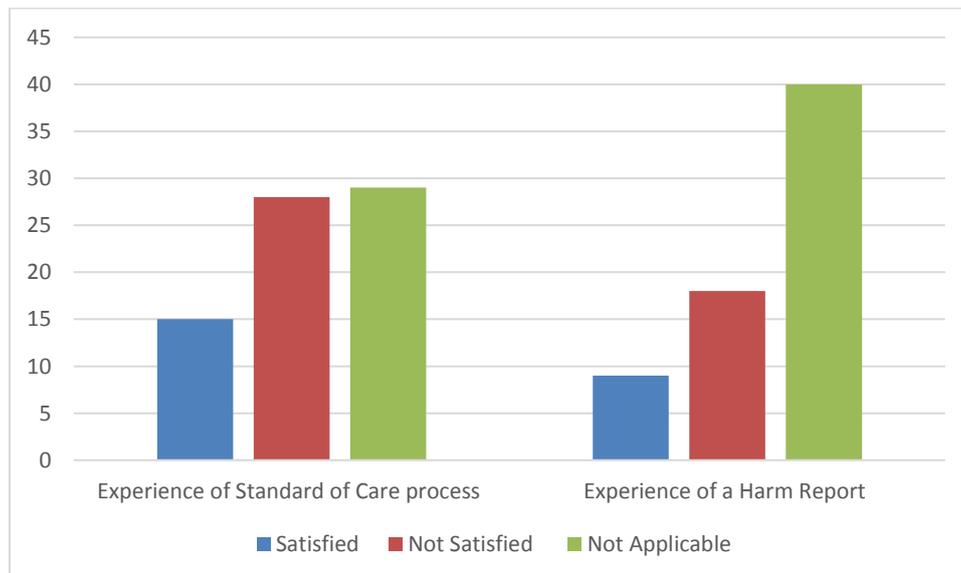
Carers were asked if they feel satisfied with their ability to engage in Case Plan meetings for children in their care.



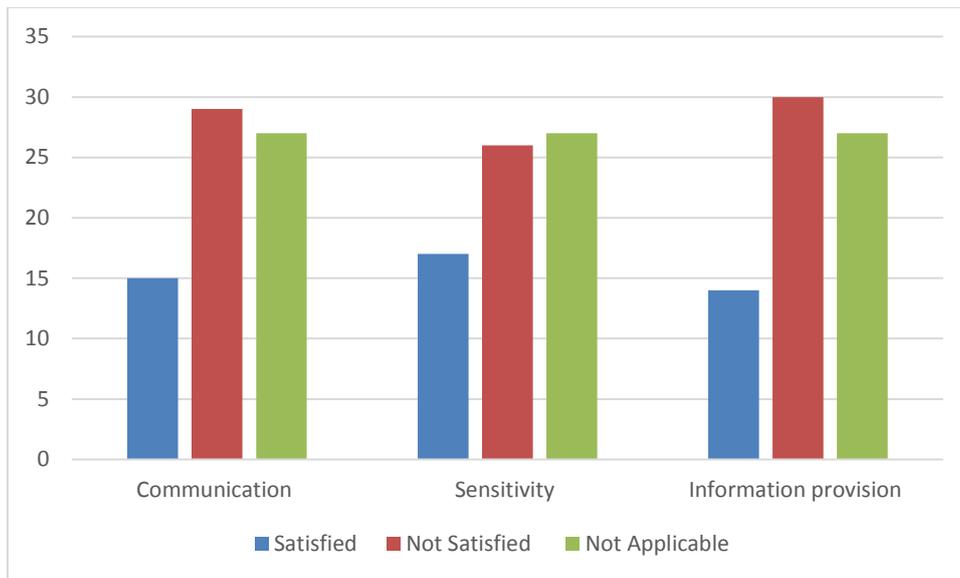
46% of carers report feeling satisfied only sometimes or never. Given statements within the Statement of Commitment that recognise a critical role in participating in decisions effecting children in their care, these figures should reflect a much higher percentage.

Standard of Care/Harm Processes

Carers were asked whether they were satisfied in respect to Standard of Care and Harm processes they had been through.



Carers were asked a range of questions around the process relating to the quality of communication, sensitivity and information provision.

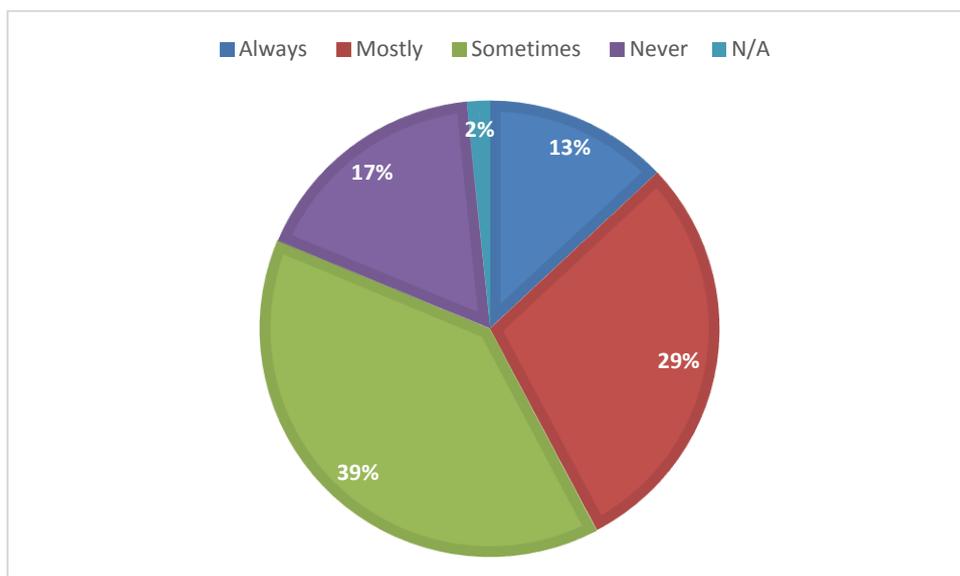


Carers were then asked if they were satisfied with the timeliness of the outcomes 41% reported feeling unsatisfied with the timeliness of the process and 21% reported feeling satisfied with the remaining percentage stating it was not applicable.

Carers were then asked if they were satisfied with the review process that took place if they were not happy with the outcome of the Standard of Care and/or Harm Report, of those who thought this question was applicable to them 70 % reported not feeling satisfied with the review process (a total of 33 carers answered this question).

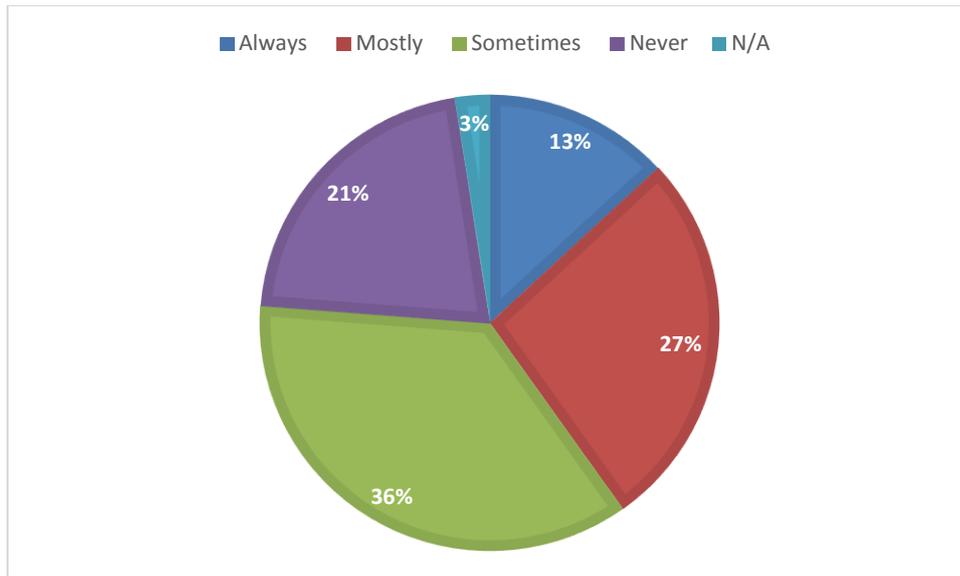
Confidentiality

Carers were asked if they were satisfied with information provision provided to them about the children in their care.



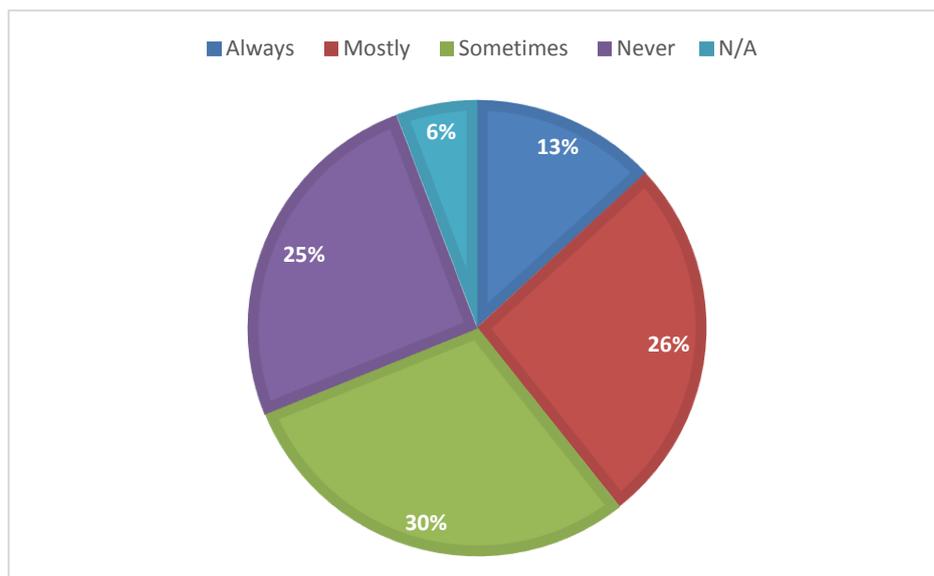
56% of carers reported they are only satisfied sometimes or never.

Carers were then asked if they were satisfied that information was provided to them about the child as it became available to Child Safety.



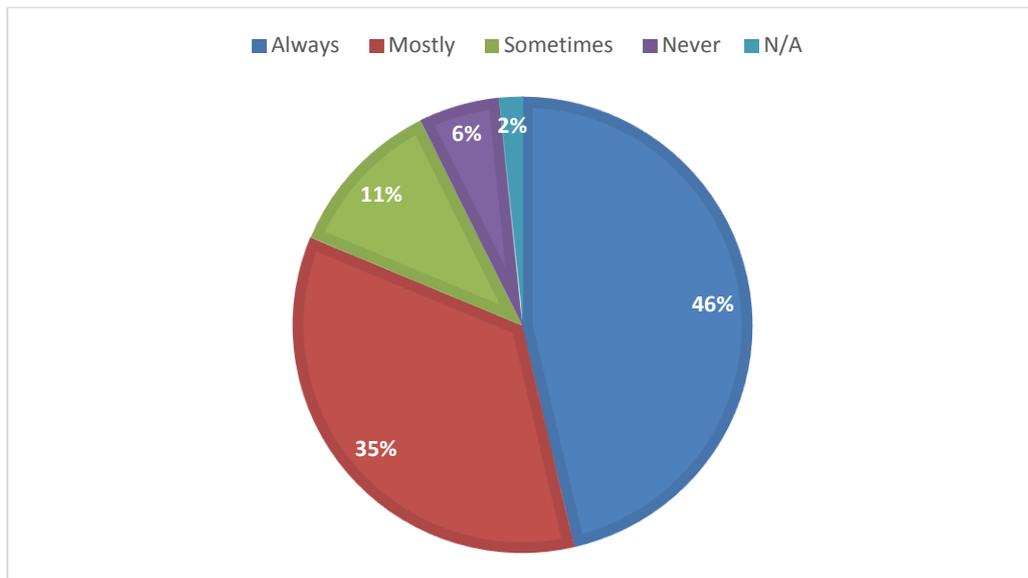
Whilst it is recognised Child Safety very rarely have all the information at time of placement, over time Child Safety gathers information which is vital to pass on to carers as this allows the carers to understand a child’s trauma better and provide care in accordance with this. Unfortunately, 57% (53% 2016 South East Survey) of carers reported that they feel ongoing information about a child is only shared with them sometimes or never.

Carers were asked whether they were satisfied with the information provided to them in respect to the safety checks being completed prior to identifying information being given out.



55% of carers surveyed reported only feeling satisfied sometimes or never regarding communication in this area. Only 39% felt satisfied always or mostly in this area with 6% advising the question was not applicable (likely to be kinship families).

Carers were asked whether they were satisfied with their understanding of confidentiality provisions and how this relates to them as carers.



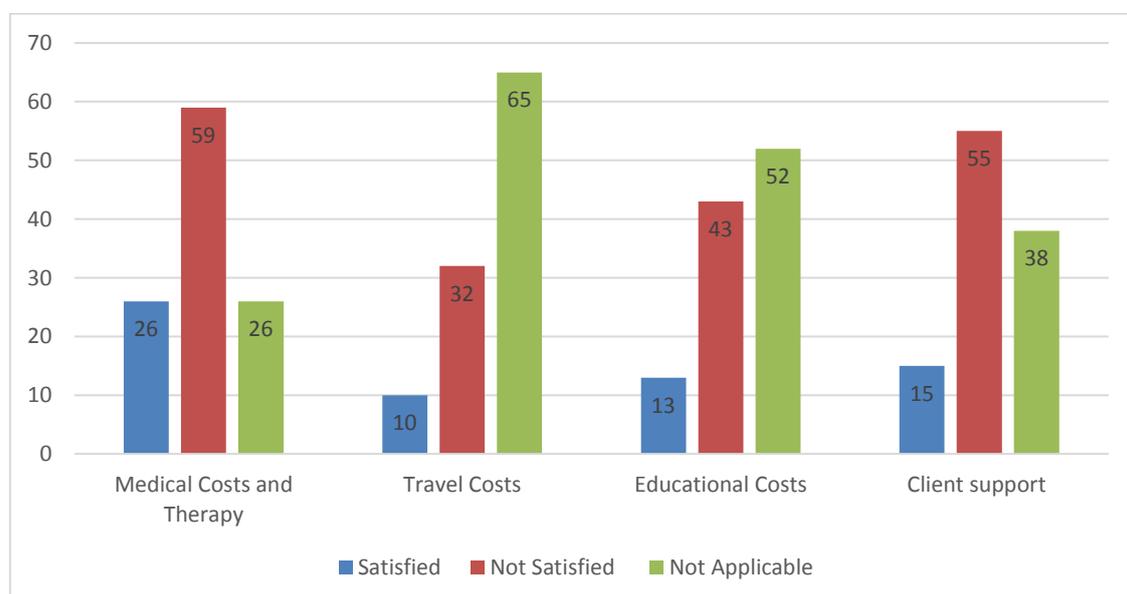
81% of carers reported a good understanding of confidentiality provisions.

Financial

This is an area where typically Child Safety have had high rates of satisfaction. This was observed to have decreased in the 2016 survey reporting only a 65% satisfaction with the amount of which the fortnightly fostering allowance is paid at (down from around 80%). In 2018 this figure has gone down even further with only 61% of carers reporting satisfaction and 38% reporting not being satisfied (1% ticked not applicable).

Of those carers who felt that the question relating to requests for HSNA and CSNA was applicable, 46% (49 carers in total) reported not feeling satisfied with their requests being met in this area.

Carers were asked about a number of Child Related Costs that sit outside of the fostering allowance and whether they felt satisfied in relation to the payment of them.



Carers highlighted a majority of dissatisfaction in all four identified areas of Child Related Costs.

On 2nd July 2018, children in care across Australia became eligible for the Australian Child Care Subsidy at Risk through the Department of Education and Training. This was a significant accomplishment for Child Protection systems right across Australia. In order to access, carers must be informed and have access to the appropriate documentation through Child Safety. FCQ asked carers in the survey whether they were satisfied with their provision of required documents to access the free child care through the Australian Child Care Subsidy for children in care. Only 110 carers answered this question (this may be an indication of lack of understanding) of those who answered 35% reported feeling not satisfied and 34% stated it was not applicable. This is an area that requires a lot of education through the sector to help not only carers understand the changes, but also Department staff and Fostering and Kinship Care staff.

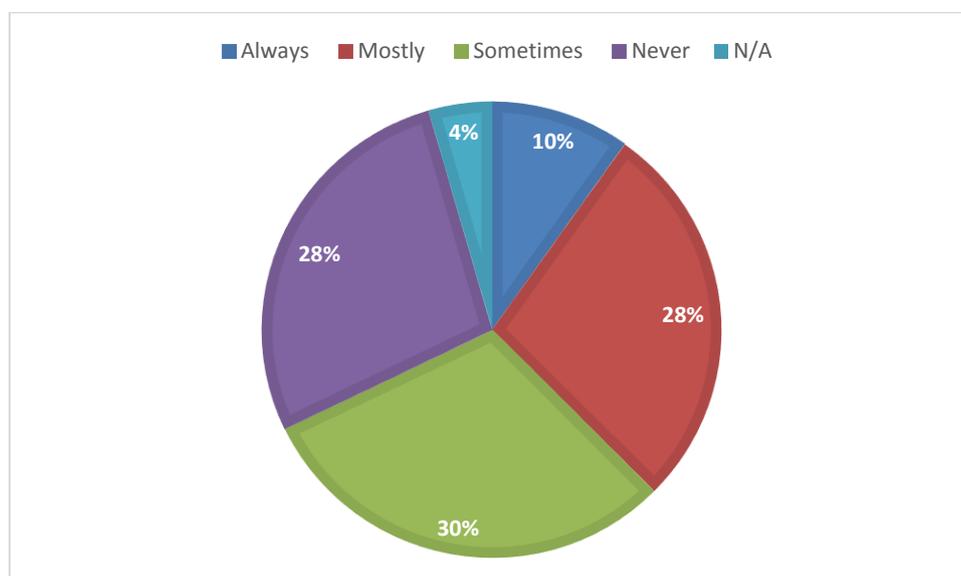
Carers were asked about their knowledge to apply for ex-gratia (special payments) and whether they were encouraged to apply for these when applicable. Only 3% of carers reported having knowledge and being encouraged to apply for special payments. 70% reported not feeling satisfied in this area with the remaining feeling the question was not applicable to them.

Carers were asked about their satisfaction in respect to the provision of Dual Respite – 108 carers felt this question was relevant to them and of these carers, 28% (30) reported not feeling satisfied in this area. The area of Dual Respite is one that FCQ is constantly receiving calls about – there appears to be a lot of inconsistency across the State in respect to application of Dual Respite and for this reason, FCQ continues to advocate for policy and procedure that reflects clear guidelines for Managers in respect to the approval of Dual Respite.

Finally carers were asked if they were satisfied about overall information provision relating to Child Related Costs - 67% of carers reported feeling dissatisfied in this area.

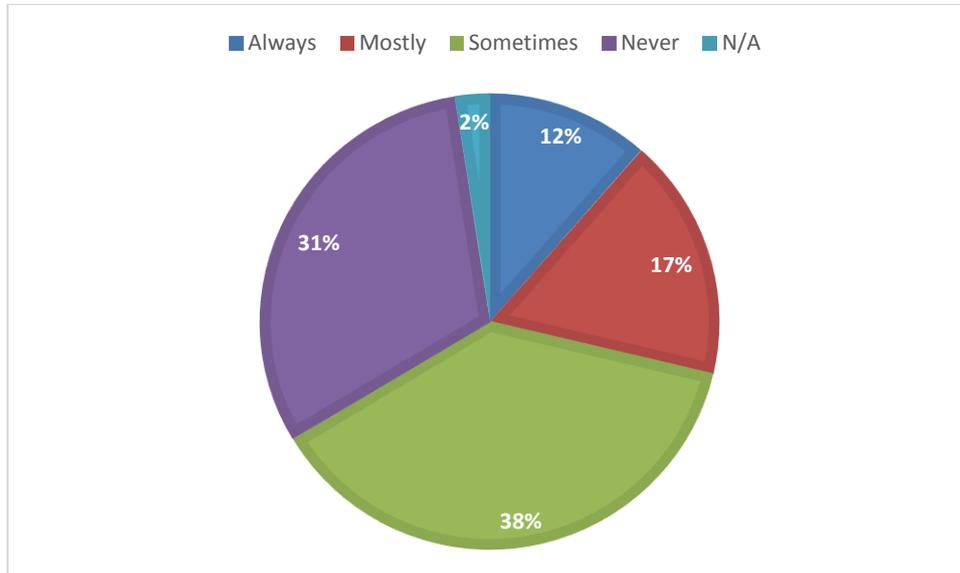
How satisfied are you with local practices of CSSC

Carers were asked how satisfied they were regarding information in relation to changeover of CSO.



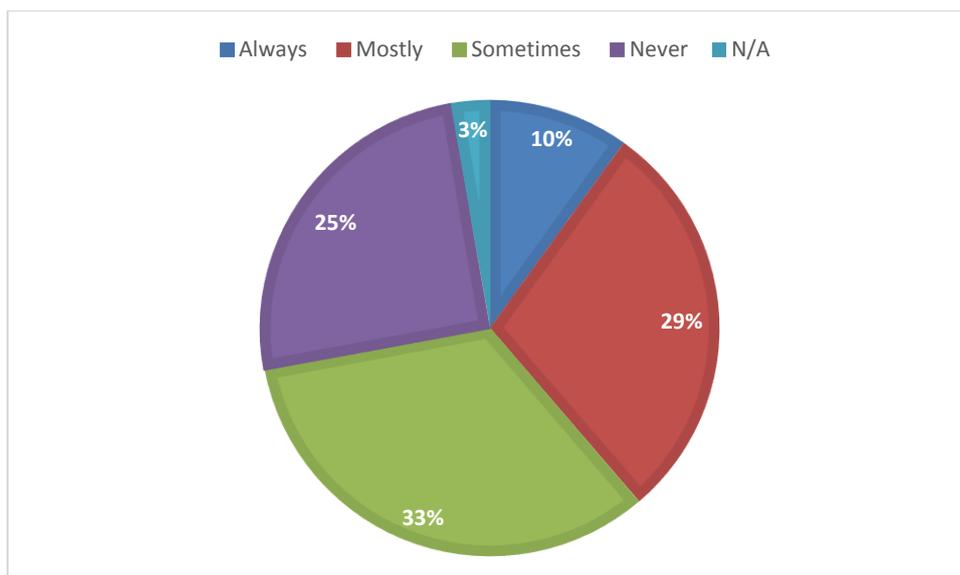
58% of carers reported feeling either sometimes or never satisfied regarding information relating to CSO hand over.

Carers were asked whether they were satisfied with the knowledge of the history regarding the child/ren in their care.



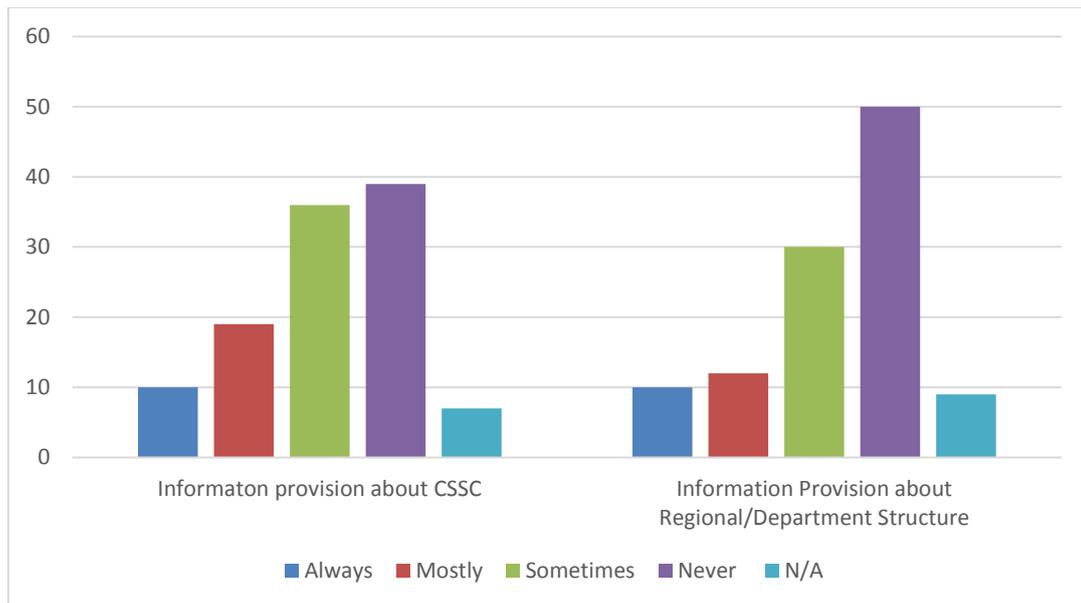
69% of carers reported feeling only sometimes or never satisfied at the level of knowledge CSO's have in relation to the children placed in their care.

Carers were asked if they were satisfied with the timeliness and provision of Case Plans.



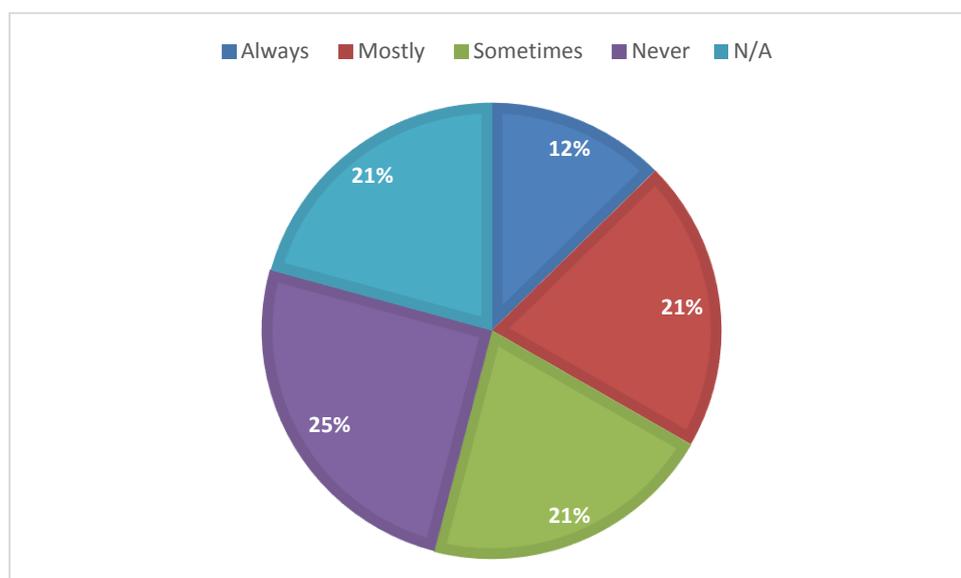
Only 39% of carers reported that they were always satisfied or mostly satisfied in this area, leaving 58% of carers in South East feeling that Case Plans were only done in a timely manner and/or provided to carers some of the time or never (3% N/A).

Carers were asked if they were satisfied about provision of information provided by the CSSC and Region.



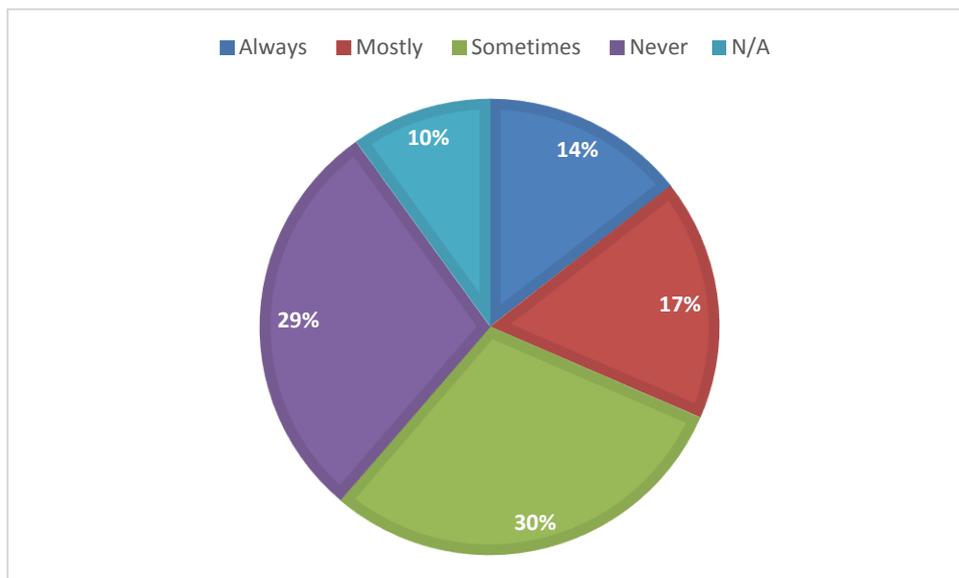
As demonstrated in above graph, carers expressed that they are not kept up to date about changes in either their CSSC or Region/Departmental structure. Whilst the Sector may think that through the use of email, all carers will be kept updated, it must be acknowledged that all carers are individuals and should be communicated with in a way that meets their needs. For some this will be via email, for some this will be via phone or sometimes face to face. It is hoped that in two years' time, this area will be vastly improved with the introduction of the new Carer Connect App and through carers becoming more familiar with the newly introduced carer website. FCQ acknowledges Child Safety's efforts to improve this area from the previous survey through Partners in Care and subsequent recommendations.

Carers were asked if they were satisfied with their ability to access respite.



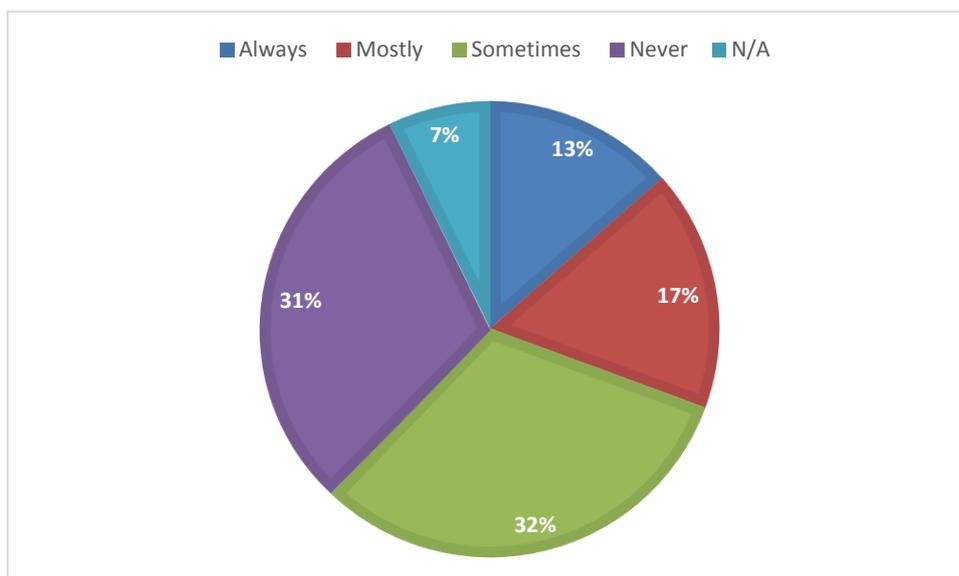
46% of carers reported feeling that they were either only sometimes supported to access respite or never. Respite can be an essential element of placement support, when used appropriately, it can create an extended network for children in care and provide self-care opportunities for carers.

Carers were asked whether they were satisfied in respect to being consulted regarding Family Contact.



59% of carers reported feeling only sometimes or never satisfied in this area. Once again this does not appear to align with the Statement of Commitment where carers should be consulted in respect to decisions affecting children in their care. Carers often have critical observations and information to input into decision making. Consultation does not mean that carers make the decision, it means that Child Safety spend time accessing critical information the carer holds in experience of providing 24/7 care to the child.

Carers were asked whether they felt they were supported to meet their own family commitments.

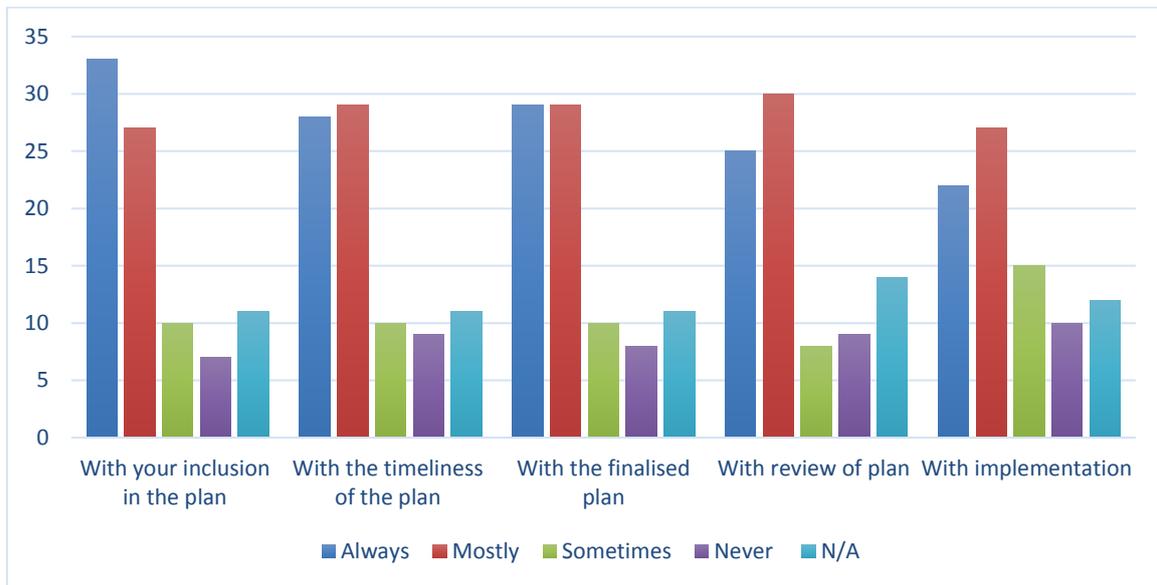


63% of carers felt that their family needs were sometimes or never taken into consideration, with only 30% of carers reporting that they felt their family's commitments were always or mostly taken into consideration.

Education Support Plans

Carers were asked if they had a current ESP plan in place for the child/ren in their care, 67% reported having an ESP plan.

Carers were then asked a range of questions relating to the ESP process and their satisfaction with this as follows.

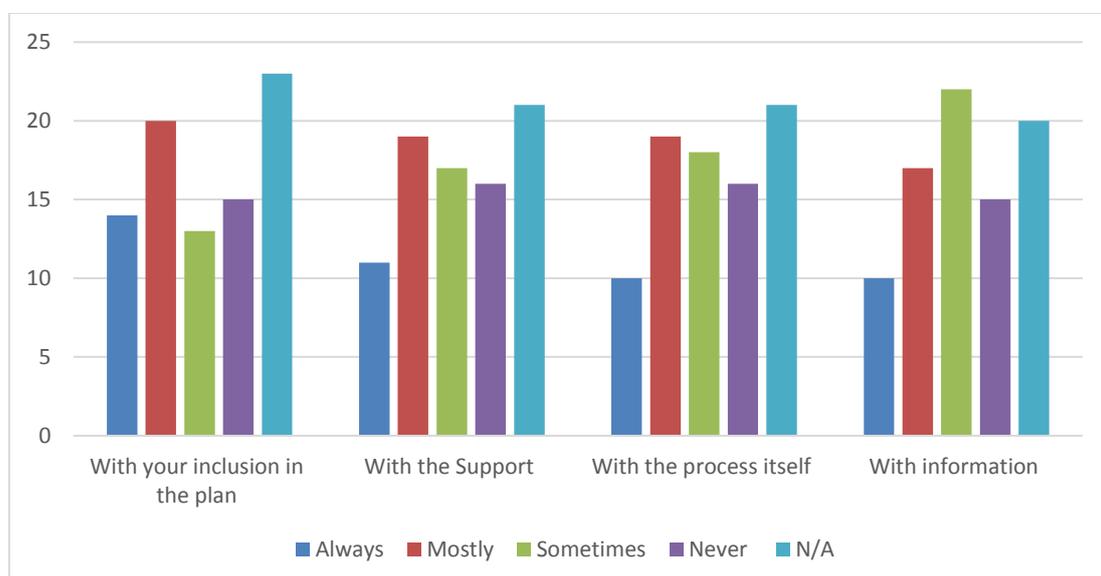


It would seem from the data above that in the most part carers are reporting that they are either always or mostly satisfied with the processes surrounding ESP plans. Satisfaction rates did seem to go down a bit in respect to the actual review and implementation of plans.

Child Health Passports

Carers were asked if the child/ren in their care had a current Child Health Passport, 59% of carers reported having a Child Health Passport.

Carers were then asked a range of questions relating to the processes of Child Health Passports and how satisfied they were, carers reported as follows:

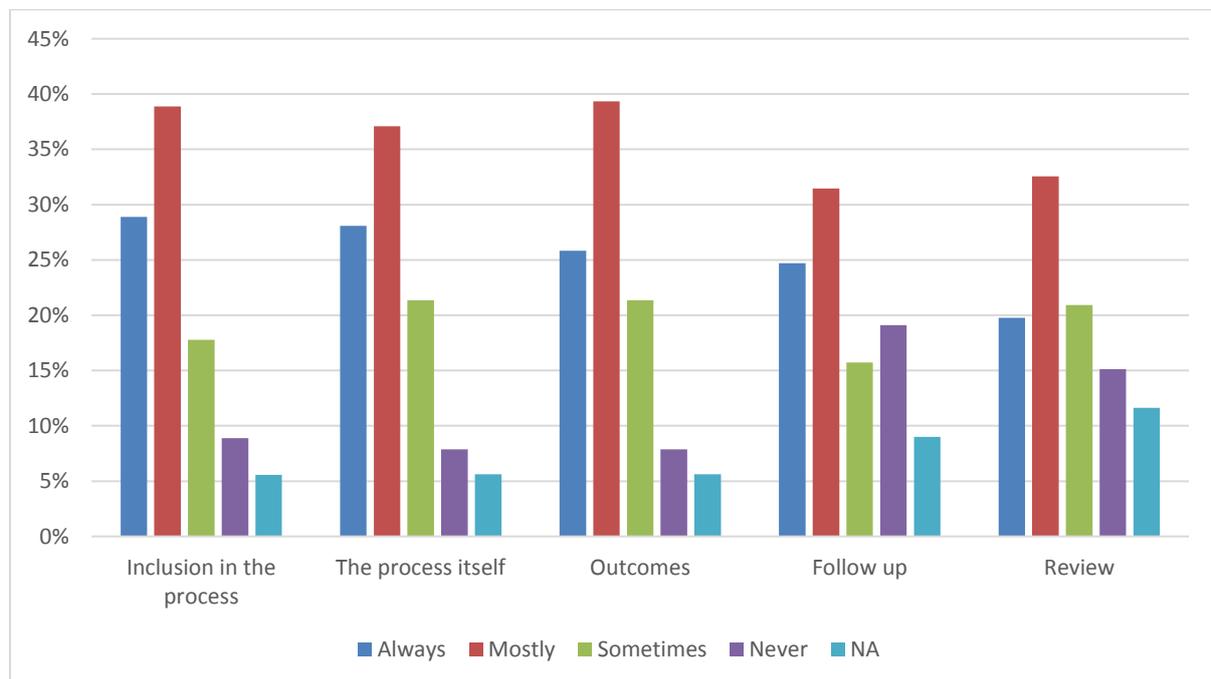


Carers reported high levels of dissatisfaction in respect to a number of processes relating to Child Health Passports, but most notably with support and the process itself. It is hoped that the Strengthening Health Framework will provide a much higher degree of service delivery to children in care that is meaningful.

Placement Agreements

Carers were asked if they had a current placement agreement generated from a placement meeting, 72% of carers reported they do (75% said they did in 2016 South East Survey)

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to their satisfaction around the processes of Placement Agreements with the following responses.

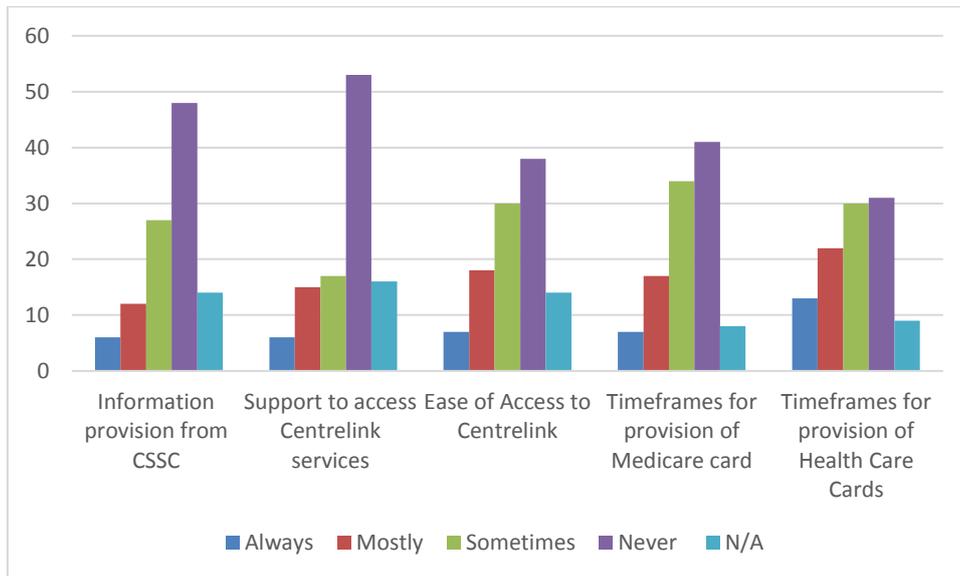


It is positive to see that across the areas of inclusion, process and outcomes, that carers are reporting a high level of satisfaction. The follow up and review process appears to be the areas identified by carers in South East that require attention. Carers seem mostly satisfied with Placement Agreement processes and their inclusion in this process which is great to see.

Carers were then asked whether they received a copy of the placement meeting minutes, unfortunately only 33% reported they did – this is an increase from 2016 where only 27% reported they received placement meeting minutes.

Centrelink

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to Centrelink and how they were supported to access services through Centrelink from the CSSC, responses were as follows.

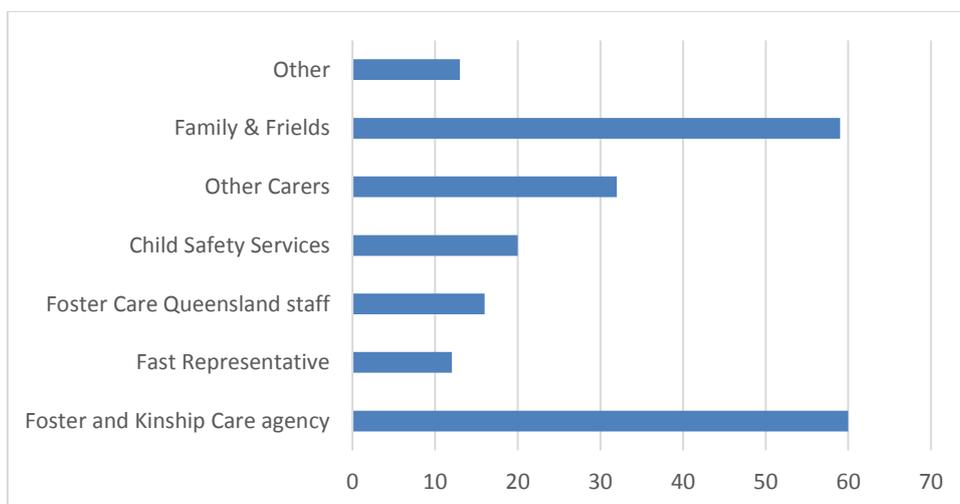


It is evident through this data that carers are feeling a high level of dissatisfaction in this area with the majority of carers feeling that they never receive information or support from their CSSC in relation to how and what they can access from Centrelink.

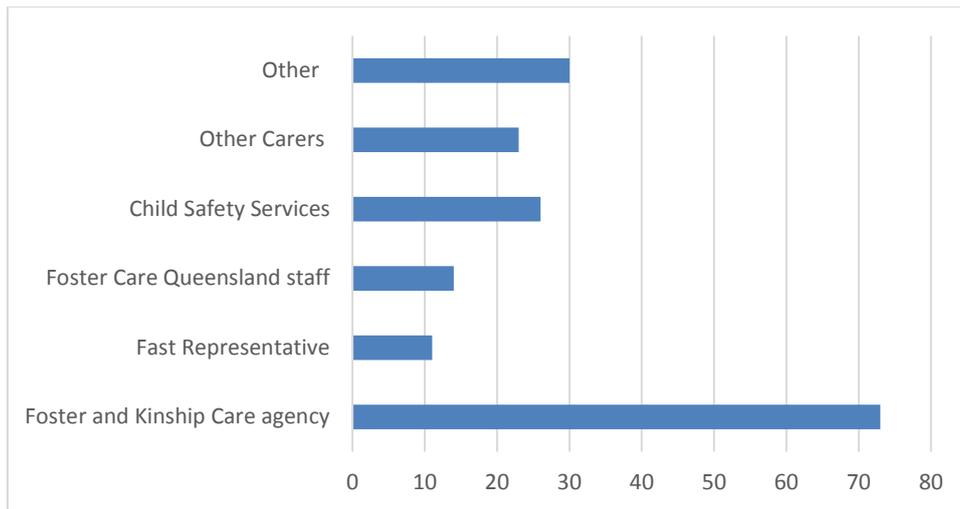
Carers were then asked question relating to ease of access to Medicare Cards for the children in their care and Health Care Cards. 70% of carers reported only sometimes or never feeling satisfied with the timeframes associated with accessing Medicare Cards. 61% of carers reported feeling only sometimes or never satisfied with time frames associated with accessing Health Care Cards.

Support

Carers were asked where they accessed the majority of their support from.



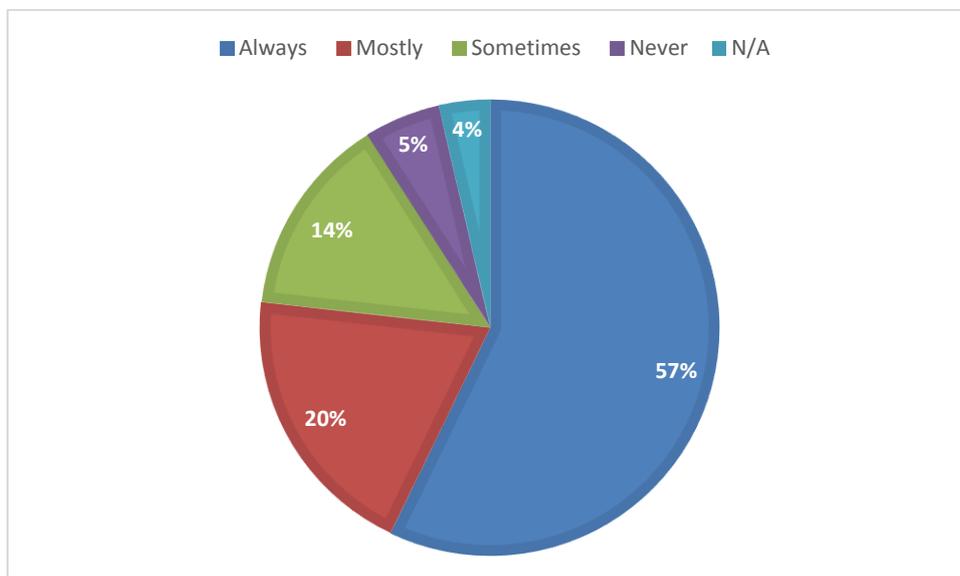
Carers were asked where they access the majority of their information from as carers.



Foster and Kinship Care Services

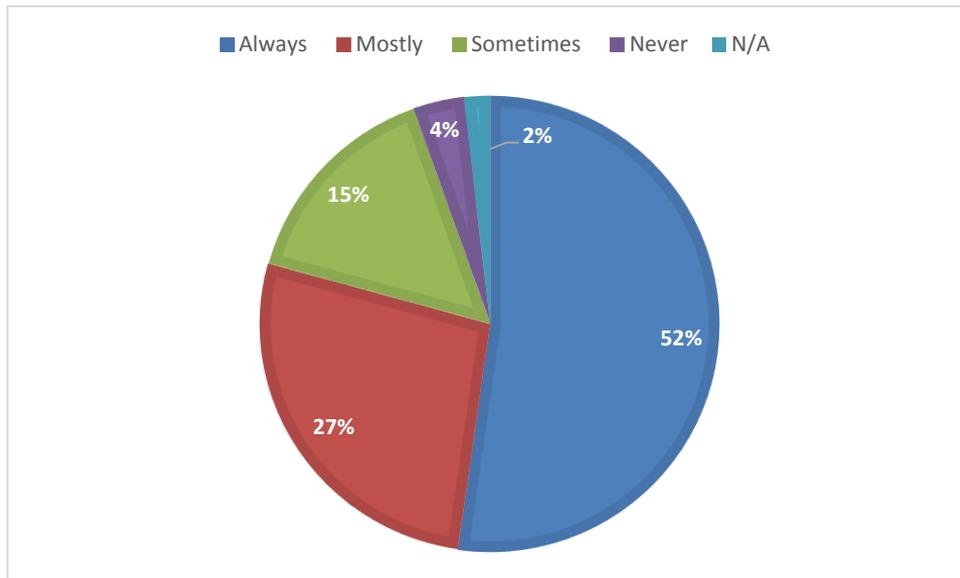
Carers were asked a range of questions relating to the support provided by Fostering and Kinship Care Agencies. Firstly carers were asked if they were attached to a Fostering and Kinship Care Agency, only 3 carers in South East who completed the survey identified they were not attached to an agency.

Carers were asked if they were satisfied in respect to regular support visits occurring (at least monthly).



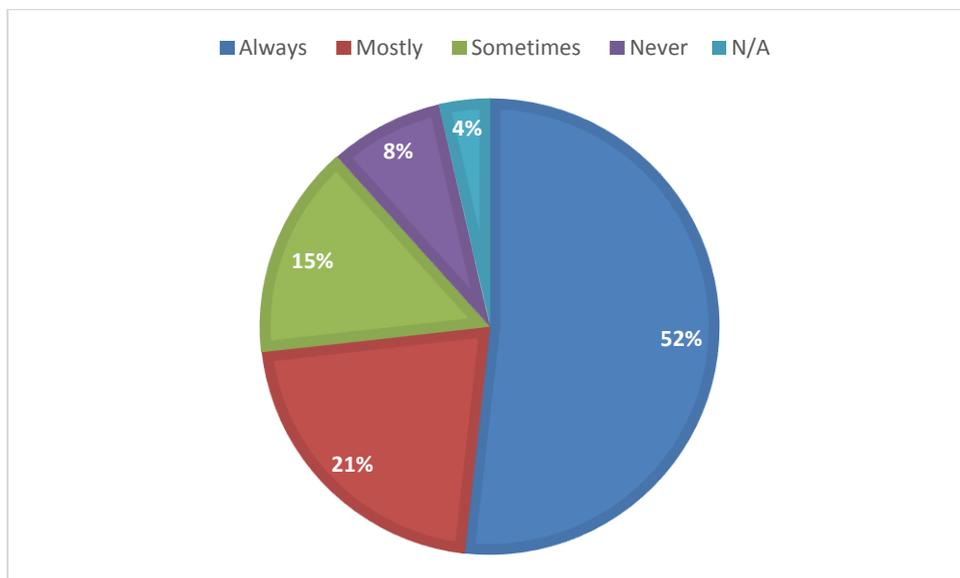
It is very positive to see that 77% of carers reported always or mostly always feeling satisfied with the regular support visits occurring – however it must be noted that there is a decline in satisfaction in this area since the 2016 survey of 13%.

Carers were asked whether they were satisfied with response to contact with their agency.

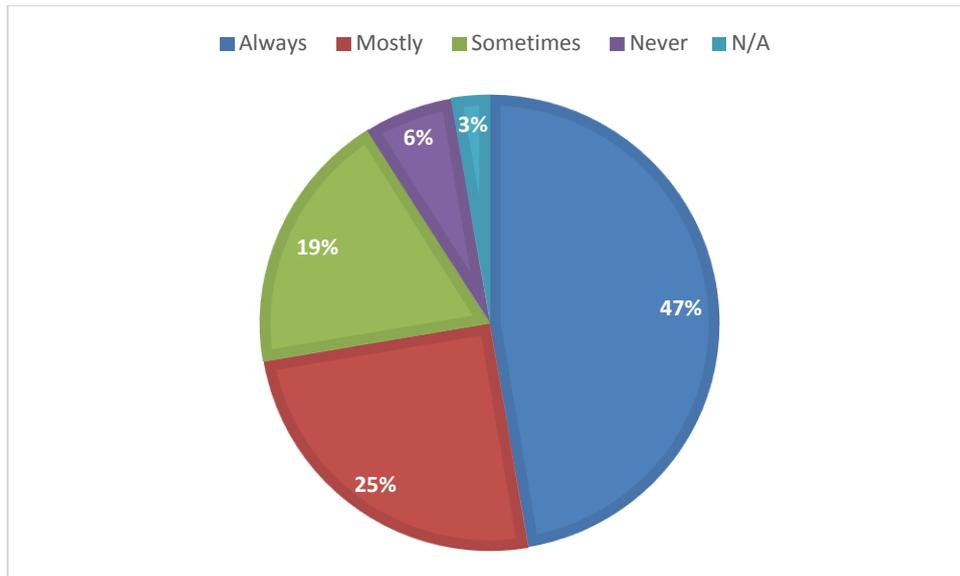


79% of Carers reported feeling always or mostly satisfied with responses relating to contact with their Fostering and Kinship Care Agency.

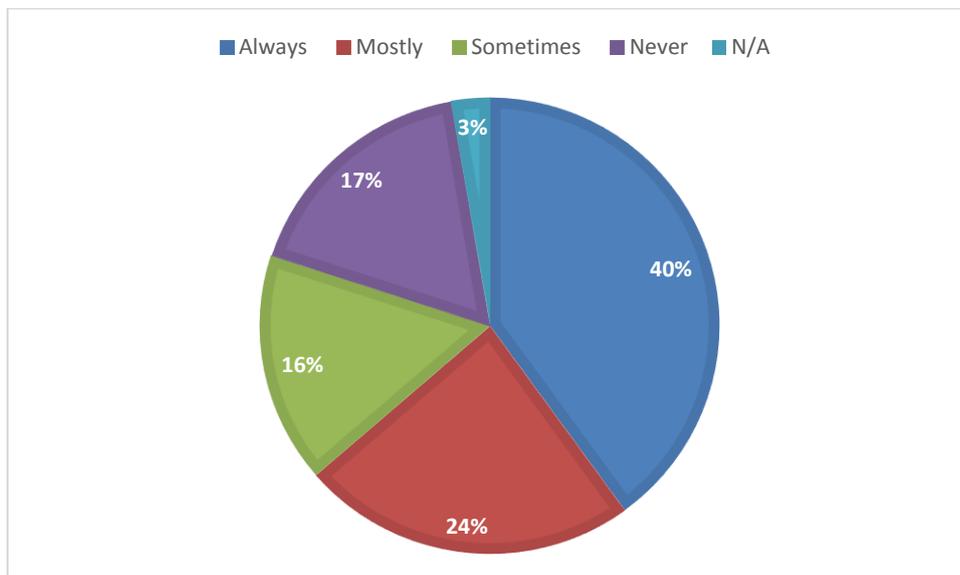
Carers were asked whether they were satisfied with assistance provided by their agency to complete paperwork.



Carers were asked whether they were satisfied with their workers knowledge of current policy and procedure.

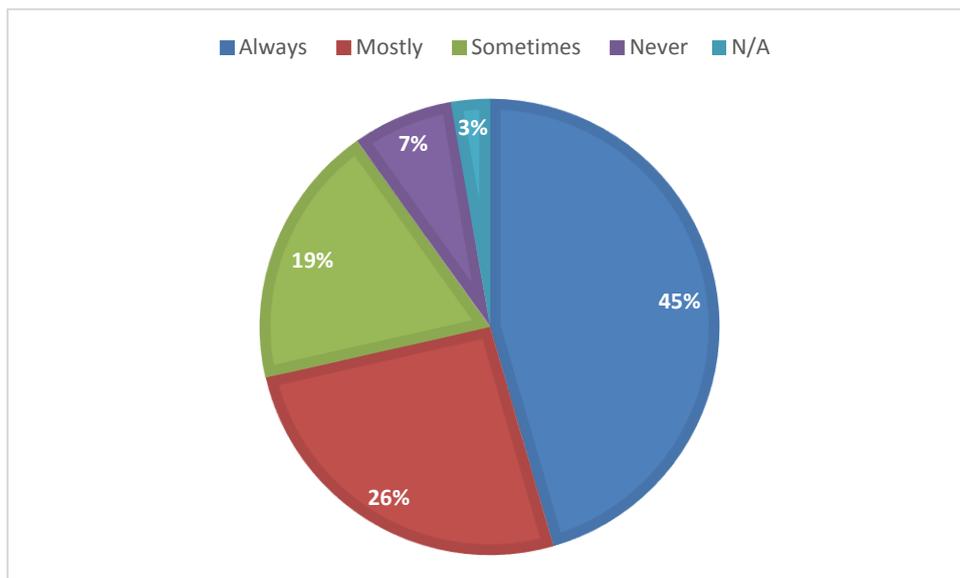


Carers were asked whether they were satisfied with their access to support networks through their agency.



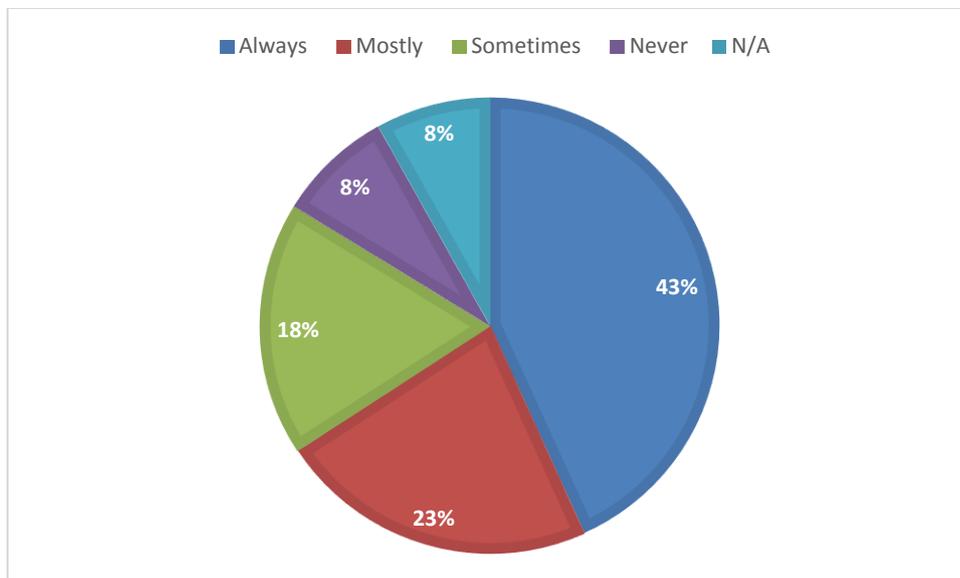
Whilst the majority of carers have reported either always or mostly feeling satisfied in this area, 33% of carers have identified they are only sometimes or never satisfied with their access to support networks through their agencies. This is an area worth exploring further between agencies and carers they are supporting in the South East Region.

Carers were asked if they were satisfied with their access to training.



71% of carers identified they are mostly or always satisfied with access to training, this represents a decline of 8% in satisfaction since the 2016 report.

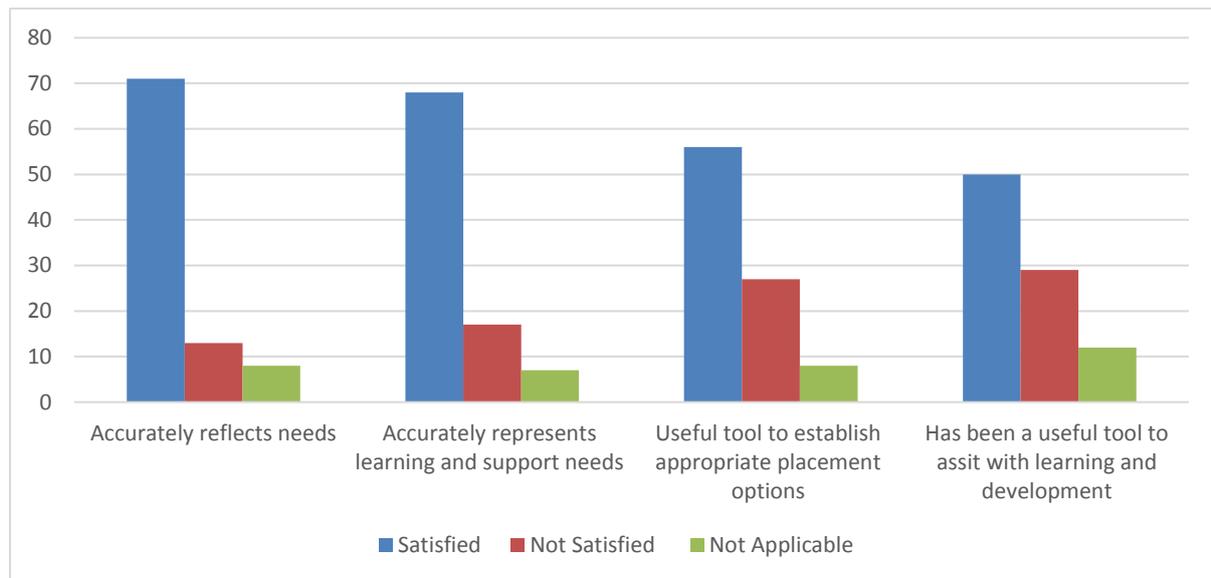
Carers were asked if they were satisfied with the on call service provided by their agency.



Foster Care Agreements

Carers were asked if they had a current Foster Care Agreement, 83% reported they have one, 13% reported they did not and 4% reported they did not know what one was. It is likely that most of those carers who reported they don't have one are in fact Kinship Carers who don't require one. Kinship Carers could also account for some of those who did not know what one was.

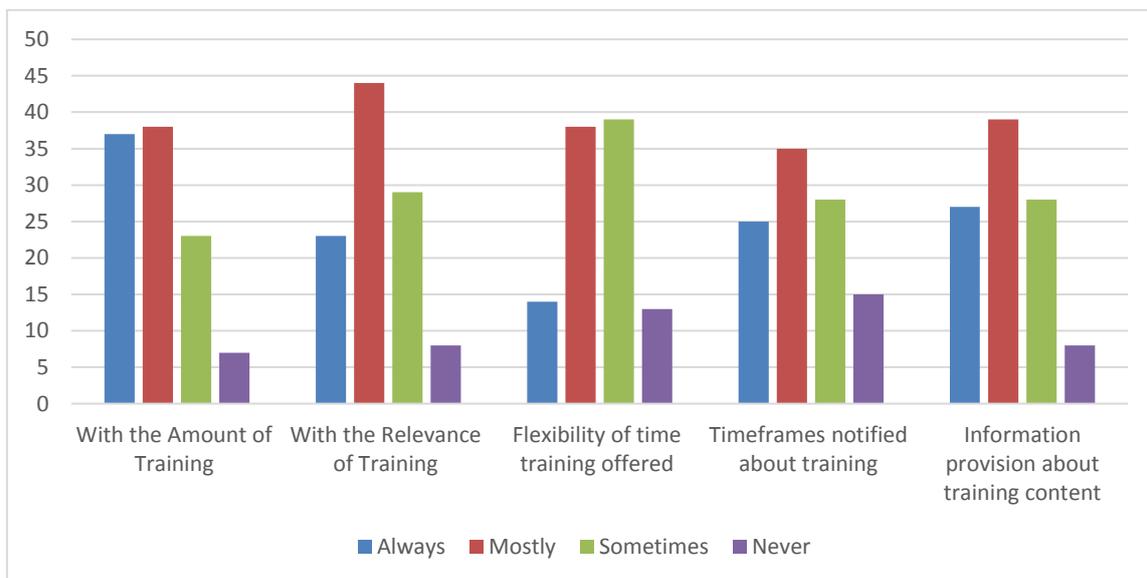
Carers were then asked a range of questions relating to the usefulness of the Foster Care Agreement as follows.



Carers have reported high levels of satisfaction across the board in relation to the Foster Care Agreement.

Training

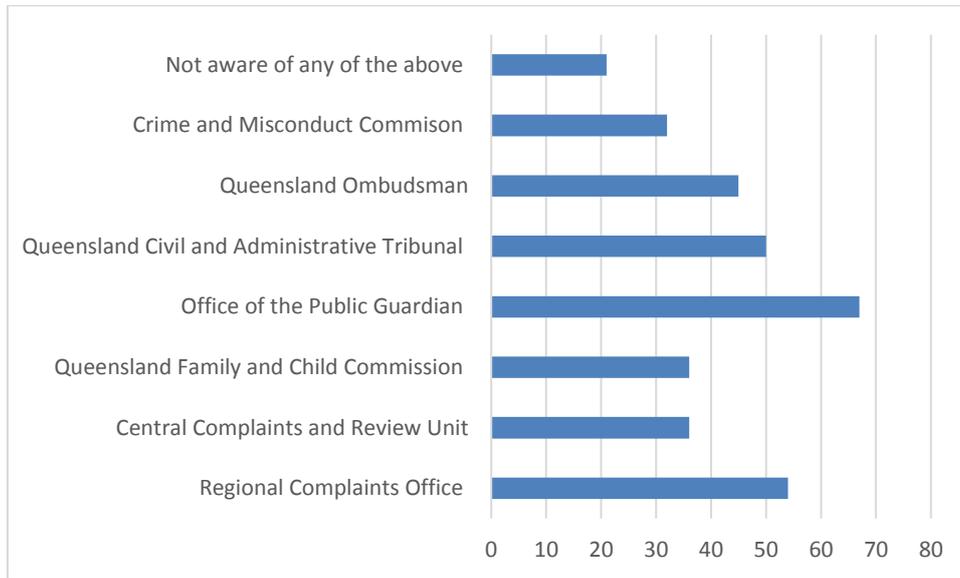
Carers were asked a range of questions relating to their training experiences as follows.



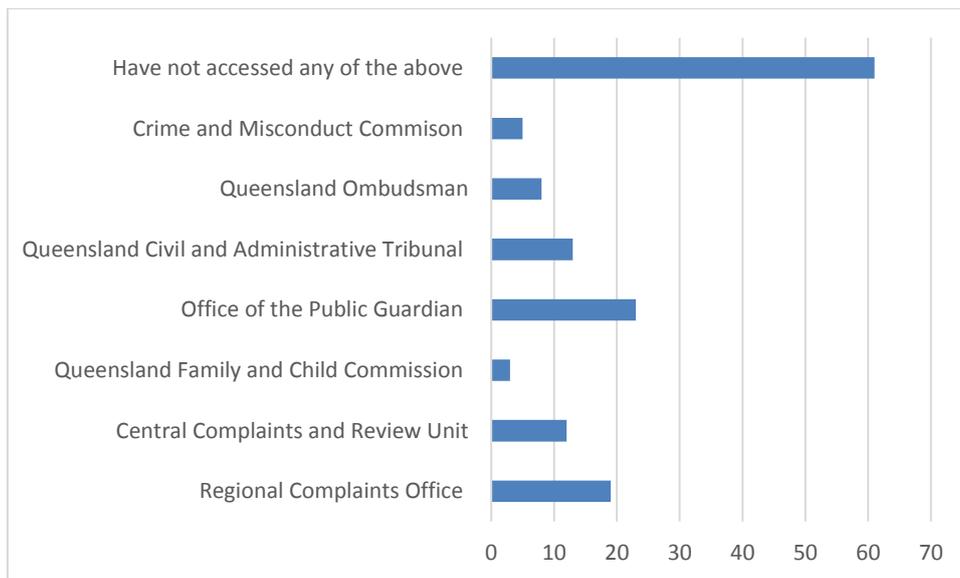
Carers were also asked whether they were satisfied with provisions of or support to access child care during training. Only 33% of carers reported feeling always or mostly satisfied in this area.

Complaint/Concerns Processes

Carers were asked to identify which complaint/appeal processes they were aware of.



Carers were then asked if they had accessed any of the above processes.

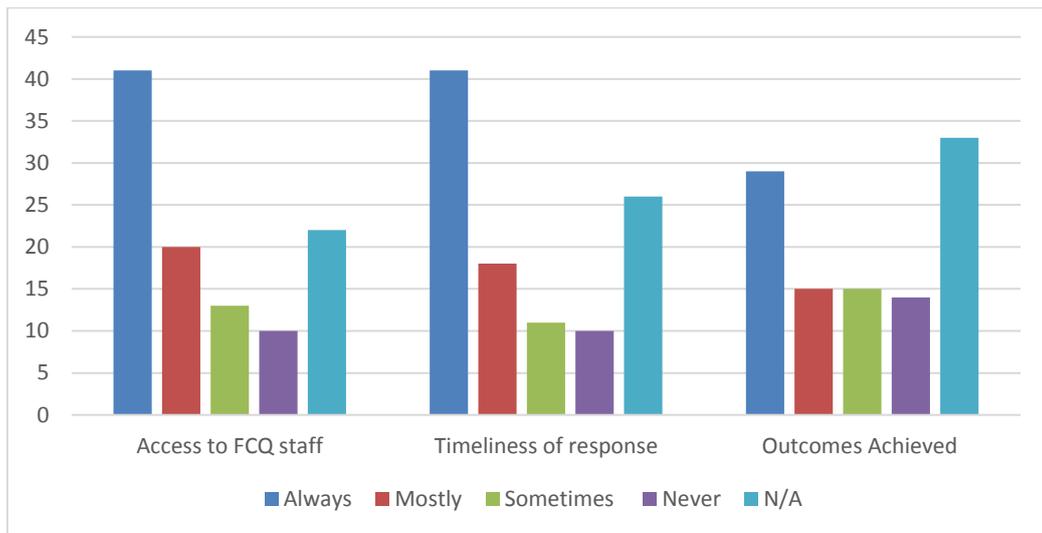


Carers were asked if they felt heard and were satisfied with the outcome regarding their contact with the above services. 55% of carers reported they felt heard, however only 36% of carers felt satisfied with the outcome achieved.

Foster Care Queensland

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to Foster Care Queensland (FCQ). Firstly carers were asked if they were satisfied in respect to information provision regarding FCQ, 68% of carers reported satisfaction. In respect to knowledge and understanding of services provided only 65% of carers reported feeling satisfied. With approximately 20% of carers feeling neither of these questions were applicable.

Carers were then asked a range of questions relating to their experiences if they had contact with FCQ, please note that carers who have put not applicable, have not been included in this data as it is not relevant.

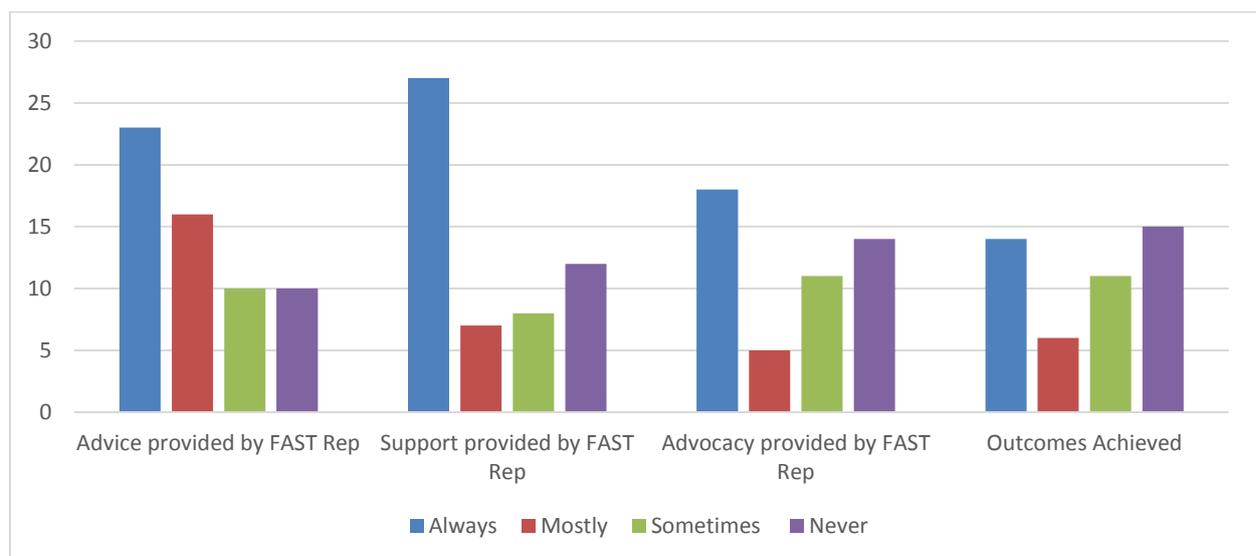


FAST Program

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to the FAST program attached to FCQ.

Carers were asked if they were satisfied with provision of information about FAST, of those carers who felt the question was applicable to them 70% reported feeling satisfied.

Carers were asked a range of questions relating to their experiences of accessing a FAST Representative, please note only responses from those carers who felt these questions were applicable have been included.



Of those who accessed their FAST Rep, 41% did by social media, 20% by email and 39% via phone.

Partners in Care

FCQ included a section in this year's survey on Partners in Care, the following results were received:

- 21 carers who completed this survey from South East have attended a Partners in Care Workshop
- 35 carers identified they have received information about the Partners in Care initiative since 2017
- 13 carers reported seeing a positive difference since Partners in Care was established
- 80% of carers identified they would like to attend future forums similar to Partners in Care Workshops in the future.

Looking Forward

During this section of the report, carers were asked a range of questions relating to their future as carers and what they would like to see change.

Firstly carers were asked how long they intended on continuing to provide care for. 89% of carers reported they intended on caring for more than 3 years. 8% stated they only intended on caring for another year and the remaining 3% stated they intend on caring for another two years.

Carers were then asked if there was support that would influence that decision – 53% of carers stated that the support they received would influence this decision. The following comments were provided:

1. *The Department don't care and laugh at FCQ.*
2. *If staff in {location de-identified} don't stop making false allegations about carers then I will stop immediately. Carers are treated so poorly. Completely different to how the centre used to operate when {name withheld} was a manager. Staff have too much power with no one checking anything. I have had staff tell me policies have changed when they have not. {Names withheld} highly inappropriate in the way they speak to carers.*
3. *Money and mental care.*
4. *Need a CSO that will do their job properly! Question 54 I answered the least amount of time as I'm about ready to quit. I'm not respected or valued. I am a very good carer and once felt valued and a well-respected part of the team. Not anymore. I gave my all and would have continued for many years. Not now.*
5. *I have told my Department and my Agency that I'm unable to continue for financial reasons; I need to build a life for myself and my family and the kids already have. I have told them and feel terrible but I can't help myself to look after children in need and stop contacting me but I still continuously get requests as I try and sell off children like used car salesmen.*
6. *It's yes with biological grandparents.*
7. *We need staff in the {location de-identified} office who are professional and show integrity in their work. We have evidence of altered documents, Case Plans that were not given to us, lies told to us and about us, no respect for us as people, no consideration for us as individuals, no concern with our welfare or the welfare of the children in our care. Decisions are made by {names withheld} on their personal feelings. The principles of natural justice is a foreign concept to them and information is withheld, procedures and policies are ignored and consistency in their decisions are non-existent. We are not given the opportunity to discuss our concerns and decisions are made without any opportunity given to us to even know what we are accused of let alone comment on the accusations.*
8. *Whether Dept. shows respect, listens to carers, and includes carers as part of a team. Some Dept. Managers are on a power trip.*
9. *Recognition. Periods of extended respite. Wage.*
10. *Respite and youth work and Evolve.*
11. *Finance. I don't foster for the money but lack of money could stop me.*
12. *Lack of support from Child Safety or agency. Placements failing due to lack of information of child before accepting placement.*
13. *Teen pregnancy or having a sexual relationship with a family member.*
14. *To have carers properly supported by agencies. Child Safety to listen to carers.*
15. *No support.*
16. *Remain as respite carer {identifying information removed}.*

17. *Personal circumstances.*
18. *Being treated with respect by Child Safety staff.*
19. *Guardianship.*
20. *Assistance with child in care. Contact. A lot more information about the people in the young person's family group.*
21. *If I have to constantly deal with CSOs who knowingly shut their eyes to situations that could put a child in danger I could not continue to be a carer. It is a CSOs job when doing a reunification to ensure the home the child is going to is safe. Not tick the boxes and pretend they don't know.*
22. *Need honest CSOs who don't lie to the children and then stab them in the back; who don't make mistakes and blame the carers when the carer has nothing to do with the decisions in the first place.*
23. *No support given when grieving the loss of a placement. Often feel like I am left out of the process and treated like just a glorified babysitter when I have invested heavily in the life of the children I have cared for and loved. Very, very hard to access respite for the one single occasion I have asked for it in the last 12 months and then only given it when I was told by my support worker to leave the child at a Child Safety Office, despite more than a week's notice and calls to check each day if respite had been organised. I still missed the first three hours of my event as I had to wait for him to be picked up. Gave me no confidence that respite would be provided when I needed it. {identifying information removed}.*
24. *We are in our 70's and enjoy being "useful" and help these kids. While we have been doing this for 12 years, we are still enjoying thinking we are able to contribute to these kids. While there are some trying times, we usually can work through them and help the kids to understand why they are in this position. As we tell them, it is NOT their fault, but together we can work through their problems.*
25. *If reunification takes place we will take a break as carers, if reunification does not happen we have volunteered to care for our placement on a long term agreement.*
26. *Child Safety staff should be trained to deal with each family (carers and young people) as unique and respect their views more.*
27. *It is getting financially harder to provide care on just 1 income. It is difficult to get a family holiday that is affordable and achievable around contact visits. The long term effect on bio children.*
28. *The {location de-identified} office staff being made to act professionally, competently and truthfully. At the moment they are a law unto themselves. This is not only detrimental to carers it is damaging children.*
29. *More honesty from agency about behaviours of child when requesting longer respite for a child or sibling group.*
30. *Kinship carer payments and monthly respite care, which are in place.*
31. *It is the luck of the draw with CSOs. Some are fantastic to work with but others are not.*
32. *I would actually need full support from the agency whom is meant to be providing support. Also Child Safety need to understand that when they make a statement "be a team play" that it also refers to them not just the carers.*
33. *Respite and the meeting of a child's medical needs.*
34. *Being able to support myself financially while caring full time for children and the experiences I have with other stakeholders while caring for children- especially Child Safety and my support agency.*
35. *Financially the basic foster carers allowance is not realistic and sustainable to cover children's basic needs. It is unrealistic and out of date with modern day. There needs to be an allowance or waiver to cover or supplement the costs for a child's schooling. It is unfair and not financially viable for*

foster carers to pay for school fees and school uniforms for the children out of the basic foster carers allowance when these are so costly.

- 36. The review of suitability based on hearsay, no evidence and a mountain of lies.*
- 37. We have not been satisfied with the information given, we have wanted to change foster care agencies and despite contacting other foster care agencies and the Department of Child Safety no-one has returned my calls for this to be able to happen.*
- 38. If {location de-identified} staff don't improve I cannot cope with the constant abuse and nastiness from CSSC staff.*
- 39. Outcome of Harm Report, which was brought about by someone making false accusations about us.*
- 40. Carers are often left out of the loop - we are not trusted with information which is important to care for these children.*
- 41. Another fortnightly session with a youth worker for fun activities. I do think there should be an increase in the reimbursement allowance that reflects current economic growth in Australia.*
- 42. If I was supported by the Department, by my agency in times of crisis it would definitely alter my decision.*
- 43. If my CSO changed to someone like the CSO, TL and CSSC Manager I had at {location de-identified} who were utter lying manipulative people.*
- 44. Staff in the {location de-identified} office particularly the ones mentioned are actively pushing us out as carers through lies and intimidation.*
- 45. That children were the priority instead of just collateral damage with the Depts. interventions. That as the carers of these children every day for years and years we were listened to and our advice and opinions were taken into account instead of just being dismissed.*
- 46. The system needs to take the focus off the biological parents and back onto the children in its care. As a carer it is frustrating to constantly have to fight for the children's rights and needs.*
- 47. If I get support I can see our family keep being a foster family but more needs to be done to support the whole family! Our bio children often suffer trauma for having kids in care with us but there is basically no support for our bio children which is wrong!!!!*
- 48. Once I sort my SoCR out and receive my outstanding CRC I am resigning as a carer. The treatment from this CSSC and the CSO/TL is deplorable and I will NEVER allow anyone to treat me like they have ever again.*
- 49. If {location de-identified} CSSC does not improve its staff, I will leave caring. The staff and Team Leader are vindictive and nasty.*

Carers were asked if they had any suggestions to improve services for Foster and Kinship Carers. The following comments were provided:

1. *The entire system needs and overhaul.*
2. *Centrelink- have a streamlined process for foster carers. Make the application process less drawn out, and find ways to encourage more carers. We have high needs / complex boys and getting access to regular respite is so limited. Without respite carers, primary placements break down - costing the Department more!*
3. *Fire some staff who have been around for so long that think they are invincible.*
4. *Support support support! Hire Quality staff that engage with the kids!*
5. *Start to look after and respect carers.*
6. *Often feel we have all of the responsibility for the child but none of the 'say' in decision making. Never know what the future holds.*
7. *Yes, remove the abovementioned staff from the {location de-identified} office. Many carers are expressing the same concerns we are. Make the Department accountable and transparent in their decisions. Not allow them to use confidentiality provisions that are there to protect the children to hide their incompetence and inability to follow procedure. Give permanency to placements of children in long term care so that children's lives are no longer used as ransom to bully carers.*
8. *Listen to us, don't always believe everything a child says at face value even when all know child is lying. Let carers have dual respite without needing to argue with managers. We all need a break occasionally and bills don't go away just because we have a week off to rest.*
9. *CSOs to be more responsive.*
10. *More mandatory training. Recognition that care is a full time occupation.*
11. *I have found FB group Foster & Kinship Carers Qld extremely helpful. Lots of questions asked that have either helped in the short term or will perhaps benefit in future. Lots of sharing from FAST Reps about what's happening, new policies etc. It was by chance I found out about this.*
12. *Can't seem to get procedures on what happens after events - so if the child has an incident what is the standard procedures for the care or the child and foster parents. I.e. follow up calls etc. duty of care for the child.*
13. *Is mileage allowance prorated for respite? I can't see that it is and that would make things better. In fact, a general review of allowances, and reimbursement for damage.*
14. *More information about and access to free or low cost resources/activities/services for children in care.*
15. *More information about the child and reasons why past placements have broken down.*
16. *Let carers who want to care love & parent do just that.*
17. *Listen more to carer so they don't feel they are alone.*
18. *Staff, CSO, need training in understanding the vital role carers play. It's hard to work with people who continually see carers as 'just a carer'.*
19. *Yes for carers to stop being treated like they are imbeciles and doormats.*
20. *Provide more assistance for childcare around training opportunities. Dual respite still requires careful consideration. Carers costs are higher at times and self-care/taking a break/utilising respite is now being carefully considered by some due to losing allowances but still having the same/similar costs. Results in carer fatigue/burnout and is counterproductive.*
21. *Allow carers to have more of a say in how a child's week should look. Doing multiple contacts with normal Evolve appointments and schooling it leaves not much room for the child to do what they want e.g. soccer and swimming.*

22. *Yes have them all treated as part of the care team not a piece of {profanity used} sitting in the corner.*
23. *More intensive training about trauma and trauma recovery.*
24. *Provide respite care when needed. Help navigate financial/Centrelink requirements.*
25. *Stability is what is vital for these young people to heal. If they can't find it with their biological parents let them find it with Foster or Kinship Carers. Actually listen to the Foster and Kinship Carers, they are not advocating to make life difficult for the Department or for the parents, nor are we "making up" the feedback. We are fighting so hard because we live their hurt every single day and we are desperately trying to help.*
26. *Our biggest problem is the amount we are paid. \$2 pay rise every year does not really cover what we have to pay out over the amount we are given. The extra expenses make it very hard when we have to dig into our pensions or savings.*
27. *When {organisation de- identified} attends our house they should listen to what the young children are saying and advocate for them.*
28. *Allow carers better access to Centrelink benefits.*
29. *Provision of practical supports, i.e. when children sick in hospital that a meal be provided where the hospital doesn't cater for adults. Relevant discounts to family venues.*
30. *Consistency in CSO and Agency support workers.*
31. *Yes, change the structure so that we work with our agency and the agency manages cases. This way we will not be subject to the personal views of Departmental staff. Our agency knew all of our kids far better than any CSO. And their decisions are always in the best interest of the child. You can talk openly to the agency without fear of what you have said being twisted and taken out of context and used to crucify you. There needs to be a Royal Commission but there also needs to be real change. As a senior staff member of Child Safety said to me - children in care will not notice if there is no Department but they will notice when there are no carers. Too many children are being removed from good foster families and placed in residential accommodation. Why? No review, no independent assessment.*
32. *Sometimes it is necessary for Dept. staff to step into a situation where a birth family is verbally abusive to a carer either in or around the Dept. building. Over the 15 years I have had instances where the Dept. staff have not been supportive.*
33. *More openness and more say about how the child's contact is set up.*
34. *Would be great to have access to babysitting service. We don't have respite but it would be great to have a couple of hours a month to be able to go out for dinner etc.*
35. *Yes Child Safety personally need to stop thinking they are god and treat carers with the same respect that is required from carers to them.*
36. *Start listening to them and supporting them rather than supressing them.*
37. *I think for me the biggest thing is being treated with respect in all aspects of caring and being treated as an important member of a team. All stakeholders need to be transparent and honest with each other - not just the carer. I often feel that carers have so much responsibility and expectations put on them but none of the rights and then if anything goes wrong the carer is put under the spotlight- not the whole team!!!! Carers are also scared to speak out because they don't want to lose the children they care for... services need to be more accountable to carers.*
38. *Treated with more basic respect and courtesy by Child Safety. COMMUNICATION is number 1 on my list. We are always left in the dark about even basic things. RETURNED phone calls from CSOs!!!! Government or Child Safety to pay for annual school fees and an annual school uniform allowance and stationary/school resource fees to be paid for. Babysitting allowance implemented as the respite system is not working efficiently at all.*

39. *That we are included in reviews of case workers and CSO. Who else but carers know if they are doing home visits and other things that they should but don't.*
40. *More communication. Everything seems to go through so many people before you can get an answer. So inefficient.*
41. *We have great support now but in the past we were not told things and it was very frustrating.*
42. *Clean out {location de-identified}.*
43. *It is mostly all around the Department and their services and procedures. The system is broken and needs an overhaul!*
44. *NDIS has been difficult to get a face to face interview.*
45. *Regions being on the same page re decisions.*
46. *Financial support for 18-21 year olds is a MUST!! Taking 18 years old into adulthood should see carers with financial support {identifying information removed}. But we average \$70 a week we give to her for fuel to get to TAFE 3 days a week - 45-55min drive each way.*
47. *More support. Listen to carers. Let carers have a voice for the children that are in care. Look after the carers and their families both with support and with financial support.*
48. *From the top down: recent Partners in Care workshop top leader/s sat on mobile phones and not participating. I feel they were too busy to talk to us, we are not worth their time. This sets a tone for all workers. From the bottom up: training for reception staff. When I am told the worker is too busy to come to the phone, I feel that I am not worthy of their time. Or the scrutiny from reception when calling when they do not/have not passed information gathered on. Or the other end where they don't ask who I am and tell me to ring back tomorrow. Please note I am not a frequent caller, this year I have called the Department three times only.*
49. *Yes multiple suggestions which you are more than welcome to contact me about and have a conversation with me.*
50. *Yes. Take Child Safety out of their management role. Move to a system similar to NSW where the agencies manage the cases.*
51. *The process for Centrelink payments was made easier.*
52. *Start listening to them. Utilize their skills and knowledge and stop assuming the never ending stream of CSOs know what's best for the child.*
53. *Hire CSO that are not straight out of Uni with no life experience.*
54. *Independent agency perform all SoCR etc.*
55. *Listen to agencies as they know the carers better than the Department.*
56. *Relationships with CSO's and office are generally poor. It's more about them telling you what they are doing, not asking. That's not partnership.*

Carers were then asked if they could change two things about the Child Protection System tomorrow, what would they be. Carers left the following comments:

1. *Replace {organisation de-identified} with a legal support service for carers.*
2. *Find a model that improves foster carer numbers. It's a really tough gig - it needs to be more collaborative; and the allowance isn't really adequate. Change the current ACCS determination process - it's too onerous on providers to have to reapply every 13 weeks, and while in approval carers have to pay fees.*
3. *Get Centrelink to acknowledge foster carers separate from single parents. Get CSO to register new born babies with Medicare & Centrelink within the first week.*
4. *{location de-identified} CSSC staff. Length of time it takes {position de-identified}.*

5. *Streamlining the approval and payment process. It took 8 months to officially approve me to care for my 2 foster grandchildren who I had been caring for as respite for 2 years. It then took 3 months for payments to start.*
6. *Less PARENT focused more CHILD focused! And have respect for the people who give up their lives to do this 24/7! You lot get to go home and check out each day! We do not! We have lives too, and are not EMPLOYEES. My home is just that, a home! And not yours! It's not an extension of the Child Safety office.*
7. *Paid professional carers.*
8. *More knowledge of future intentions of the Dept.*
9. *Children in long term care given permanency. Staff accountable for their decisions and expected to tell the truth.*
10. *More allowance it just does not cover costs, high supports for extreme behaviours not just for extra costs.*
11. *If reimbursements are approved on Placement and Case Plans then pay within 14 days not 78 weeks.*
12. *Increase payments.*
13. *Listen more to the children and what they really want.*
14. *On the job training and development.*
15. *Simply, simplify. It seems a lot of effort by carer is put into advocating for the child and convincing Child Safety of this need.*
16. *1st improve the payment or offer of child support for after school for working family. 2nd Online courses for the foster parents.*
17. *A uniform standard of care offered by all CSOs and their offices. More detailed information on allowances available and how to apply.*
18. *More early intervention support to keep children safely at home. Less of a siloed approach to keeping kids safe. Multi-disciplinary care teams should be established to provide consistent support to families. The high number of CSO's, agency, health workers and foster carers in children's lives is unnecessary, we should change our systems to better meet the needs of vulnerable children.*
19. *More information on referrals for foster carers to make an informed decision as to whether the placement will suit their family. Financial support around beginning school.*
20. *More carers getting together for group chats.*
21. *Child Safety to listen to carers.*
22. *Go guardianship as soon as possible so I can parent my daughter.*
23. *Greater stability/certainty for children in long term orders. Greater focus on outcomes for the children rather than the parent - in particular those with a long term history.*
24. *Have people stop passing the butt and tell me the truth.*
25. *Don't just follow the rules, be able to protest or challenge decisions made by head office who have little or no contact with the children without reprisal.*
26. *That the "culture trumps anything" mentality changes. That complaints processes are transparent.*
27. *More thoughts about the child's wishes instead of the biological parent. Implementing LTGO.*
28. *More permanent long term allocation of support staff especially CSO who supports the carers attempts to manage child and less input from parents when the child's welfare is not being kept at the centre of decisions.*
29. *More CSO's & support staff - so that there was smaller caseloads, less staff turnover, staff felt engaged & were encouraged to form bonds with the children & families within their caseload. Ongoing & evolving training & support for the above to ensure CSOs were able to build & contribute to a better child safety system for all, especially the children in care & the carers.*

30. *Child Safety staff to put child's need first instead of trying to please biological families all the time. That children were given a fair chance at a decent life instead of bouncing around in the system since before they were born til they were nearly 6 without any solution in sight.*
31. *For CS to admit they have a major crisis in their system.*
32. *More support for the carer family as a whole. A better understanding of the family dynamic as an entirety and not just the individual child within the carer family.*
33. *Carers get included or consulted about the child's needs. The financial assistance given.*
34. *Better communication where it's not a case of CSO telling you what is happening, you work it out together. Stop pushing for faster reunifications. Better training of CSOs or have them when they are new mandatory that they have a mentor to help them learn how to deal with children with complex needs.*
35. *Sack {location de-identified} staff all of them and replace with real child focused staff.*
36. *That it be more child focused on what is best for the child rather than parents' rights. Also it should be mandatory that carers support sibling contact.*
37. *Foster families should be given the first chance to adopt the children in their care. Children should be Child Safety's first concern and not subjected to emotional mistreatment in order to continue to give multiple second and third and hundredth chances to the biological parents.*
38. *Parents who show no improvement or attempt to successfully reunify should be put on strict timeframes and made to adhere to their Case Plan goals, if not contact should be cut. All the money that is going into Agency's, third party assessors etc., should be filtered directly to the kids that need it and then their world would be vastly improved. The question below does not have a feedback box, but I want to comment further. Being a carer can be very rewarding, but I think through advertising and promotion carers begin the journey with blinders on. Caring for children from these difficult places is very very hard, its commitment, its life changing, its confronting and I think that the motivation for why you want to care should be thoroughly examined before you even begin the enquiry process. Then more carers would go in eyes wide open, rather than with rose coloured glasses.*
39. *Respite: Never enough respite carers to get a break for a weekend or whatever. Higher pay: It is nowhere enough to cover the expenses we are confronted with. Damage to property by an upset child: We put in a claim to fix a hole in the wall a child did last December. Still waiting.*
40. *If the children are not reunited within 2 years allow the children to be adopted. Hopefully have a judge with a warm heart for the child's wellbeing. Not one that says I have flicked through this large file and then make a decision to send children home under a high alert safety order. There has been one too many deaths.*
41. *More training for CSOs and for carers and young people to be respected and listened to when voicing their views around visitation etc.*
42. *That the system actually be child focused not parental right focused. That carers get treated as professionals that actually carry all the knowledge about the child.*
43. *Carers and children are the most important when it comes to decision making. Parent's decisions and requests are often seen as the priority over anyone else's.*
44. *Consistency.*
45. *Make the system more child focused and not be the system for endless second chances for parents that just don't make the effort. Everyone on the same page and less politics.*
46. *Child Safety would be removed from direct case management of all children. Managers would be held accountable for their decisions and need to justify them to an independent body.*

47. Carers need to be listened to about the needs of the child. The bio families appear to have a lot more consideration shown to them than the best interest of the children. E.g. contact that some parents continually avoid at an emotional cost to the disappointed child.
48. Stop enabling young people to move out of home, do drugs and have babies.
49. More respectful interaction with Child Safety and being kept informed about what is happening and planning for children in my care.
50. The court system for orders and having a say in contact and being able to tell the cap that the child cannot emotionally cope with contact or is too sick to attend.
51. To be provided with all the info about a child before taking a placement and more consultation about reunification plan.
52. Sack all staff at {location de-identified}. Return the focus to the child/children and their needs and wants; not have the focus on the officers' clean-up rate. Provide a service that does support the carers.
53. More support for carers and more trust in carers.
54. Ensuring FCQ advocate for foster children. Changing the structure of the Department of Child Safety.
55. A union for carers to make sure our rights are looked after.
56. SCHOOL related expenses to be paid for by government or Child Safety e.g.: school fees, school uniforms, school resource fees for stationery COMMUNICATION: Compulsory for CSOs or Child Safety to return your phone calls and within a reasonable time limit, not never or 2 weeks after your call. Please note all my answers are also related to several offices in the South East Qld region not the 1 I tagged.
57. That carers are believed with what they report and valued as volunteers and included in decision making.
58. Giving all relevant information at the beginning - I always feel as if they are not being totally truthful, my gut feeling every time has been correct. I have just waited 3 weeks to get medical info on child I am looking after!
59. To put the child/children first (not always the parents). Children need a Forever Home to feel secure and happy.
60. That foster carers have more rights and that if something arises that has not been proven, carers seem to be thought guilty until proven innocent!
61. Medicare for the kidlets for refunds.
62. I feel I do not need a foster care agency except for the provision of respite. Even then I had to find my last three lots of respite carers as they did not have anybody suitable on their books.
63. Carers need to have some sort of monetary compensation - albeit a small amount per day. We live in a society where rewards are no longer a pat on the back or a certificate. Rather money to go out and buy a coffee/have a massage/lunch/perfume.
64. More money to do more things with children. Set up bank accounts to assist. Better transitions from care support. Other stakeholders' trust and value carers' ideas as a team.
65. To keep the staff consistent.
66. Foster caring should be paid employment as in the UK. Treat the carers and children in care with respect instead of disdain.
67. Put the children above the parents' wants/ego. Provide more access to extracurricular activities through financial aid.
68. Reimbursements: Service Level agreement for Reimbursements. Must respond to Carer within 14 days if reimbursement approved, If approved paid within 14 days. If not approved, fine – just tell

us so we don't keep chasing, waiting, worrying. I have approved reimbursements waiting to be paid from 18 months, and 'yes put in for reimbursement and we will see' for over 12 months.

69. *Sack {organisations de-identified}. Make the new NGOs appointed more accountable for every dollar they spend. The money shouldn't be going outside the state to support National CEO or such.*
70. *New staff at the {location de-identified} office and a culture that puts the best interest of the child at the forefront of their decisions. And permanency of care for long term children.*
71. *That children were given permanency in a timely manner i.e. 1/2 years instead of bouncing back and forth from biological family and multiple carers. That carers could submit information directly to DCPL regarding the children for upcoming court processes.*
72. *Focus on the child, not the parents. Listen to the carers. They are the ones who live with these children and really know them.*
73. *For carers to be treated with the respect they deserve by Dept. staff. That when carers are accused of harming a child that they are not guilty before proven innocent which is what happens now. All investigations to be completely done by external assessor not the vindictive power hungry unqualified staff at DOCS.*
74. *More support for the whole foster family. Free services for bio kids when they have been exposed to trauma for having FC in our care.*
75. *Actual accountability of Dept. staff.*
76. *Communications and trust, both are lacking.*

Comments with any identifying or sensitive information about a child or young person in care, names of workers and/or locations have been removed from the public copy of this report to ensure confidentiality of children, young people and their carers are maintained. However comments have been included in a version submitted to the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women to ensure that carers' voices are heard.

Finally – carers were asked if they would recommend fostering to a friend.

