

CARER EXIT SURVEY

Central Region

2016-2017



FOSTER CARE QUEENSLAND

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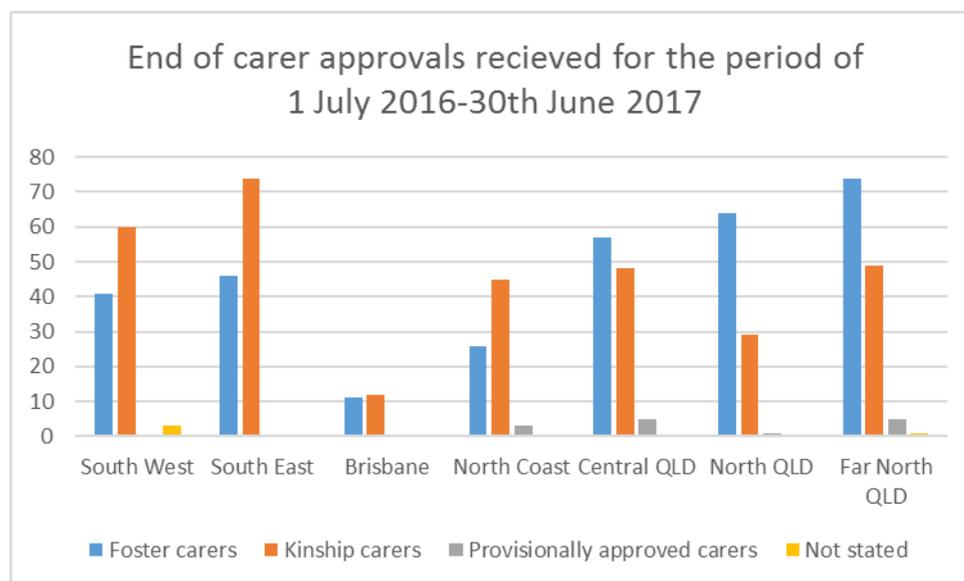
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Executive Summary

Information relating to End of Carer Approval Notices

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Foster Carers 575

- Kinship Carers 560
- Provisional Carers 332

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

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

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

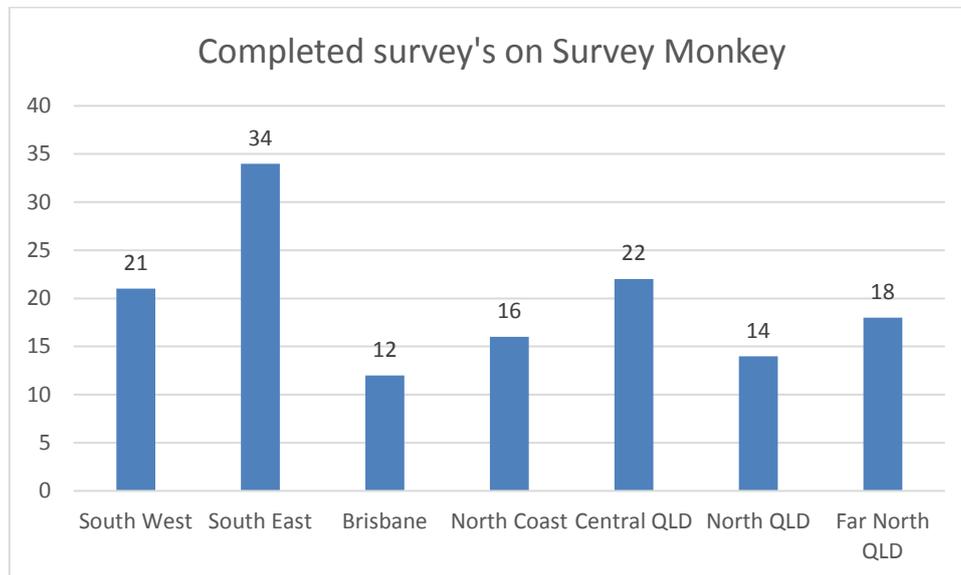
It has been noted this year that Brisbane Region provided 23 End of Carer Approval notices for this financial year, 12 Kinship carer and 11 Foster Carer, in relation to the amount of people that left their role as carers this financial year I would suggest that this is not a true reflection of the amount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

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

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

Overall Data and Findings

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



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

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

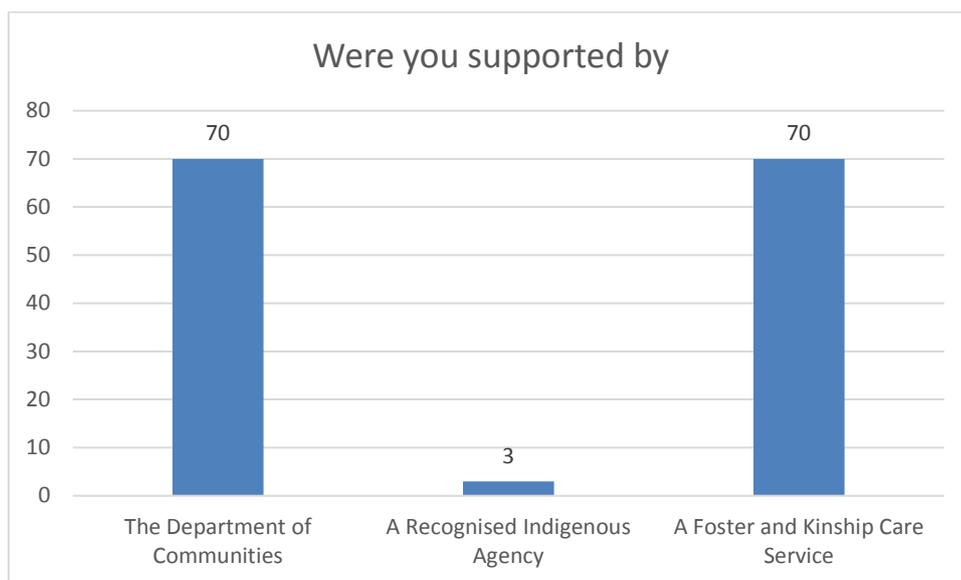
Overall it was also identified that the majority of people completing the survey were satisfied with training and development.

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

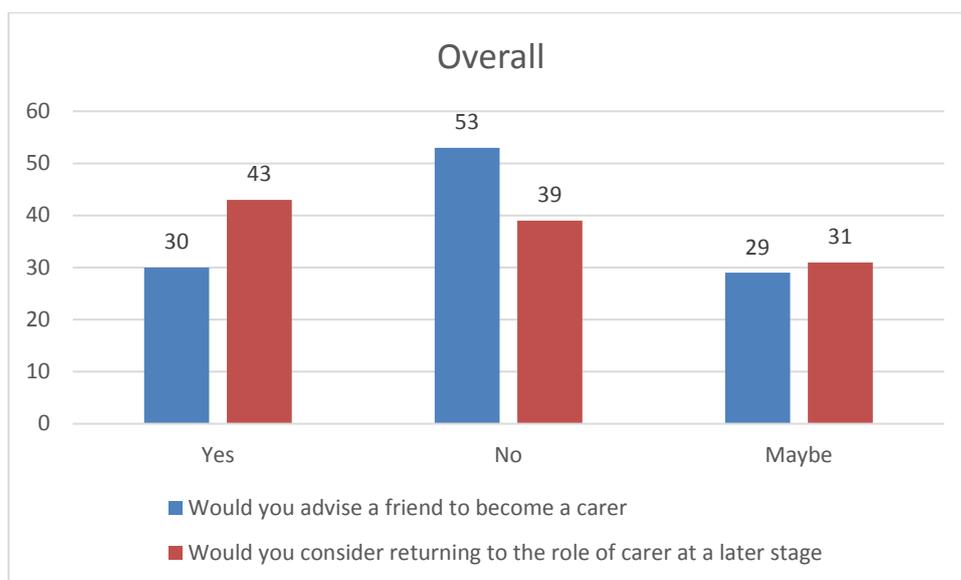
- Carers not feeling part of a care team
- Child Safety's policies and procedures for dealing with Harm Report/SOC process
- Child Safety's handling of a Harm Report/SOC process
- The carers ability to make a complaint about a service provided by Child Safety
- The carers ability to appeal a decision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

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

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



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



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

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

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

Completed by:
 Marijka Kelly
 Recruitment and Exit Co-ordinator

Presented by:
 Bryan Smith
 Executive Director

31 July 2017

Summary – Central Region

FCQ received a total of 654 End of carer approvals during the period of 1st July 2016-30th June 2017. 110 (16%) of the 654 approvals were received from the Central Region. All 110 end of carer approvals were sent an acknowledgement letter from FCQ and were contacted via telephone to discuss completing the Carer Exit Survey.

Information taken from the end of carer approvals

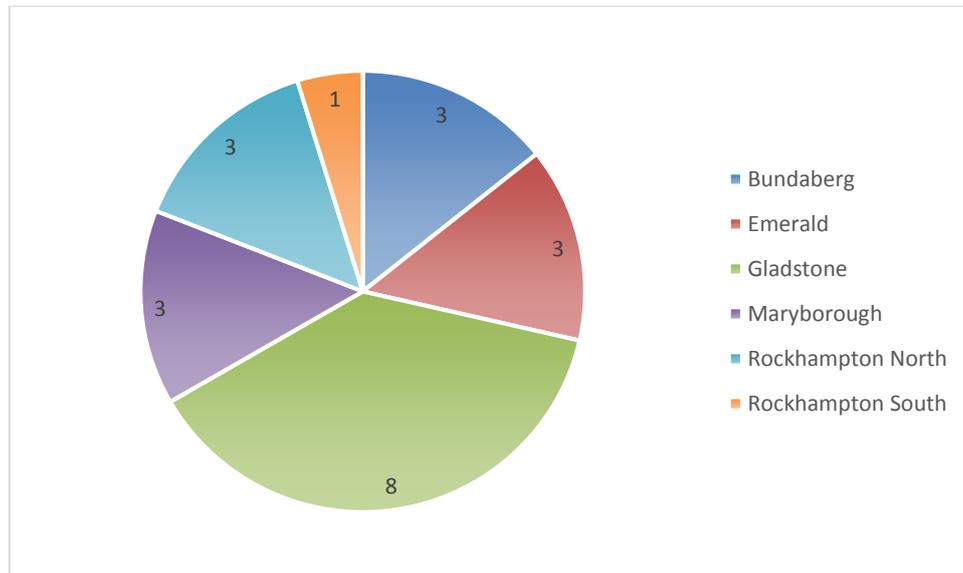
The 110 end of carer approvals consisted of;

- 4 identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- 18 identifying as aboriginal
- 84 identifying as neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander
- 4 end of carer approvals did not provide this information.
- The end of carer approvals also identified that from the 110;
 - 48 identified as Kinship Carers
 - 57 identified as Foster Carers
 - 5 identified as Provisional Carers

There were 22 people (20%) from the Central QLD area that completed a Carer Exit Survey. The following details relate to the responses that have been received from the surveys.

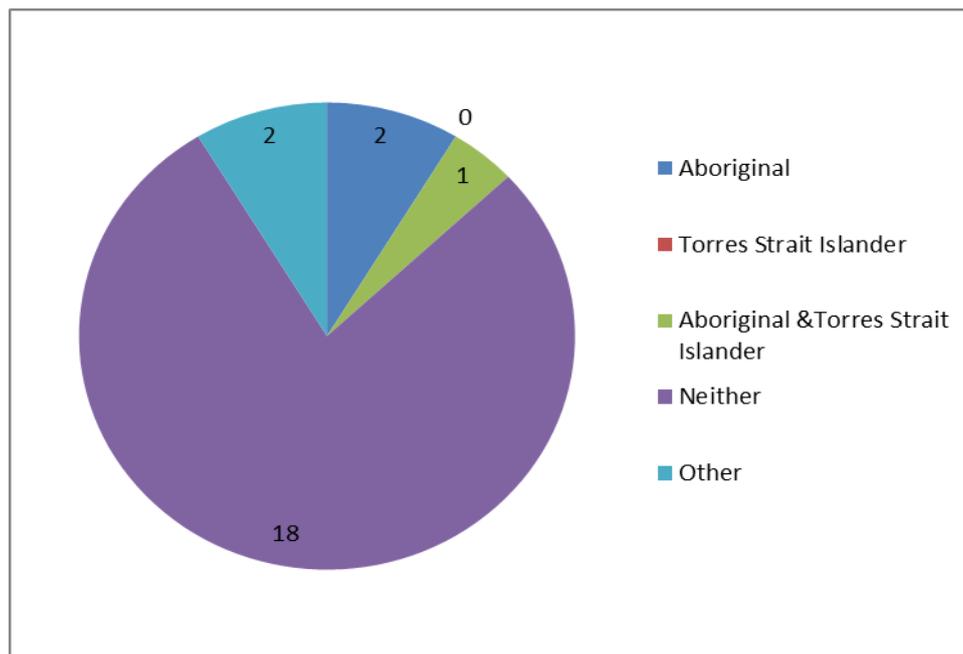
Questions: About You

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

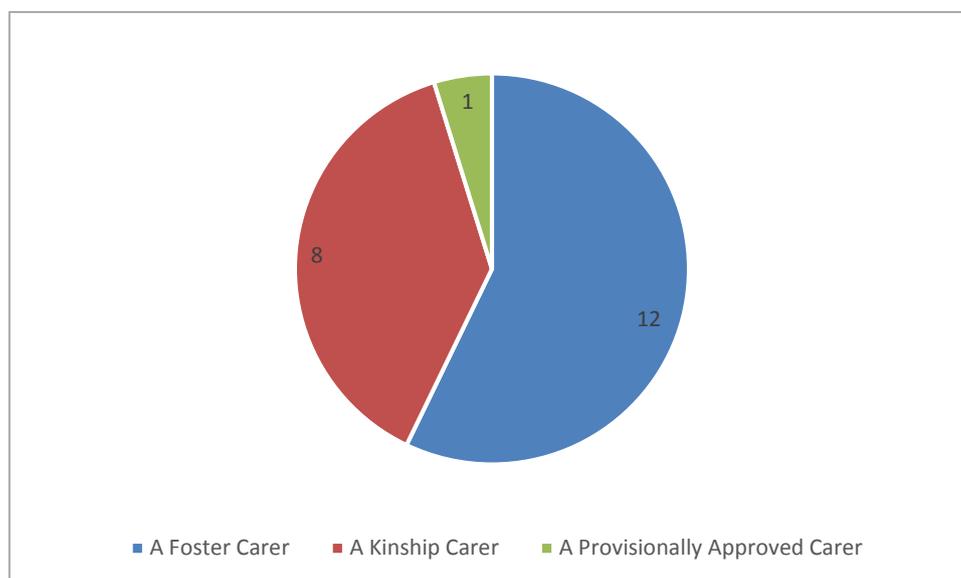


People completing the survey are asked to identify as:

- Aboriginal
- Torres Strait Islander
- Neither
- Other



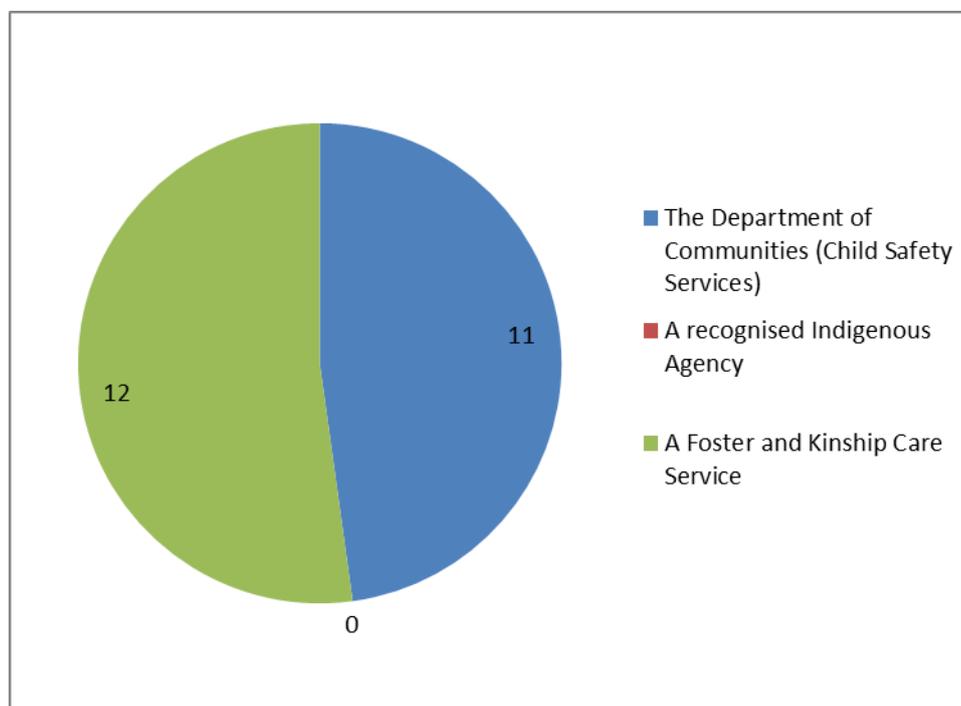
Listed below is information relating to the person’s foster carer status.



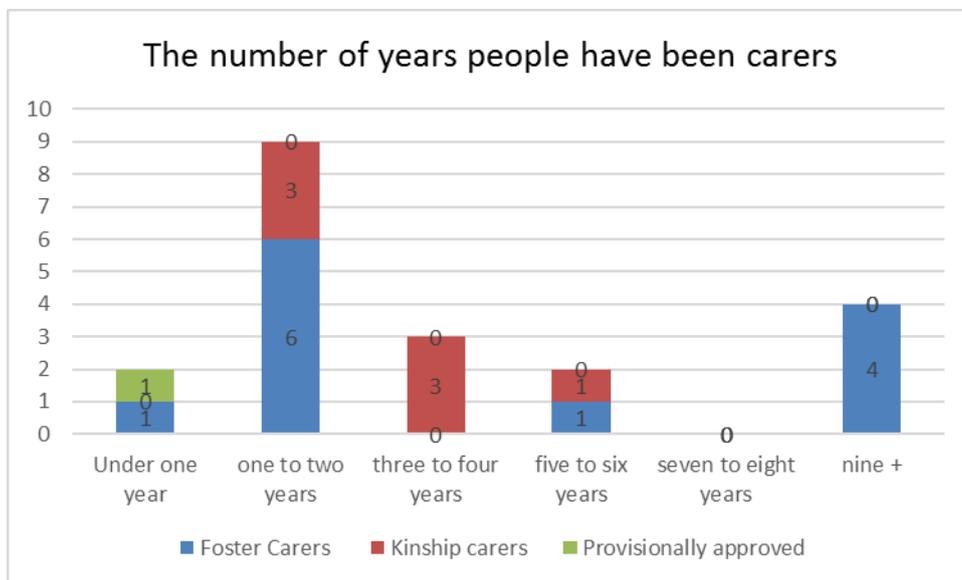
For the total of the 110 End of carer approvals received, only:

- 12 Foster carers completed the survey out of 57 (21%)
- 8 Kinship Carers completed the survey out of 48 (16%)
- 1 Provisional Carers completed the survey out of 5 (20%)
- 1 person did not provide their carer status

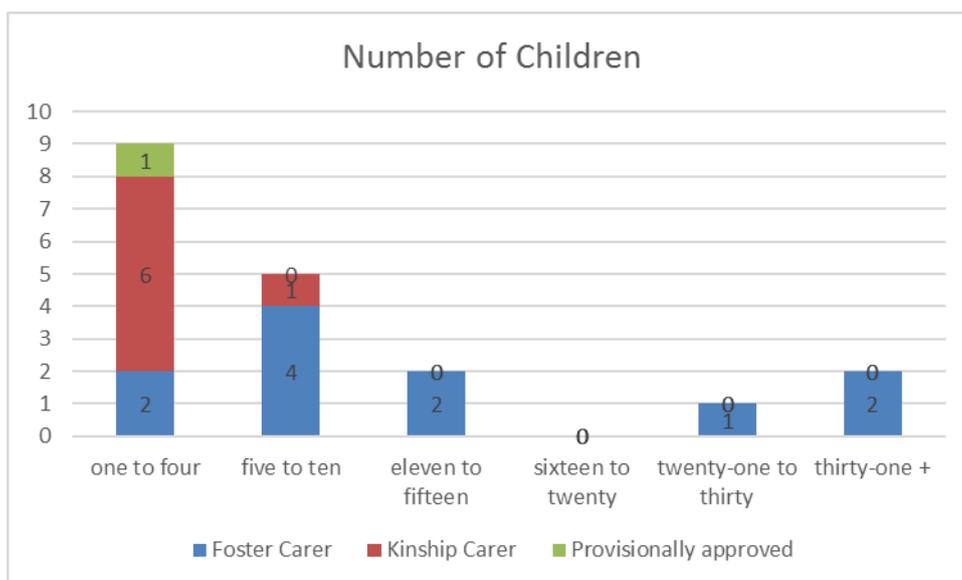
The table below identifies who the person was supported by.



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

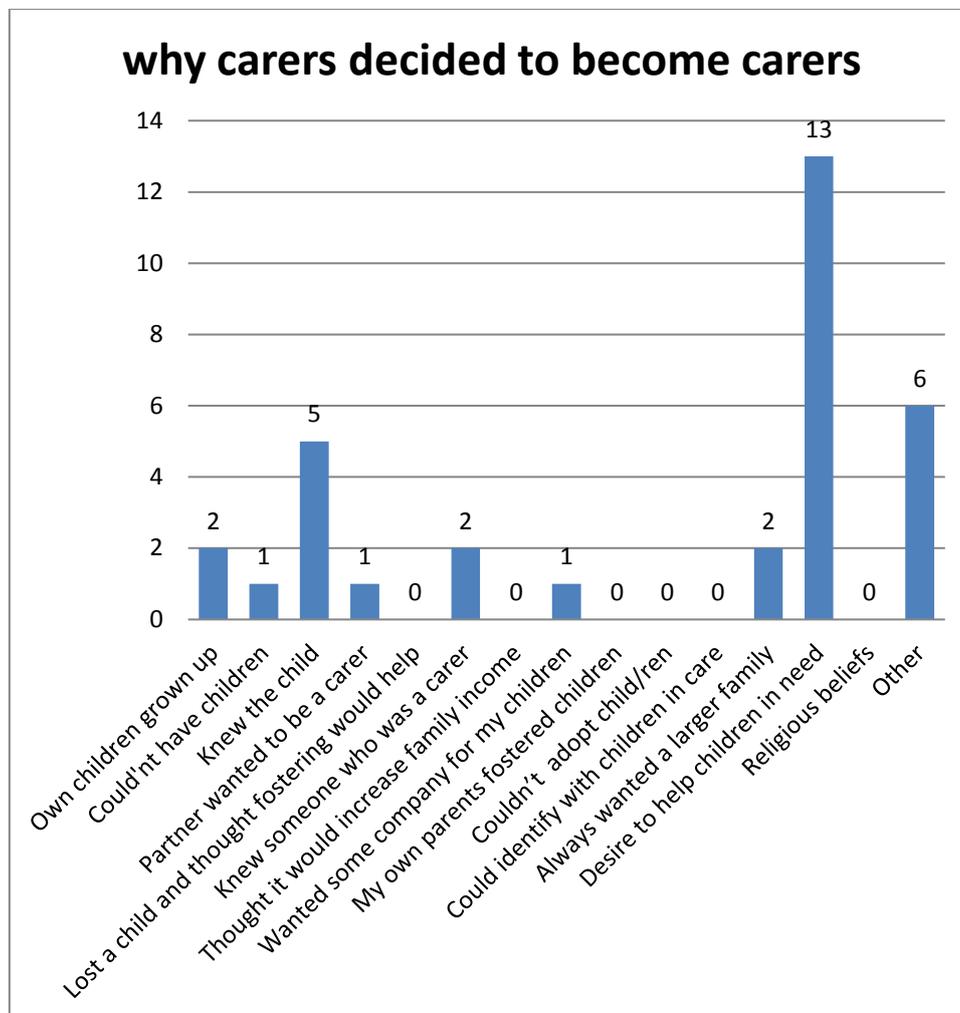


The information provided also evidences the amount of children the person/persons have provided care to.



Question: About Your Role As A Carer

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



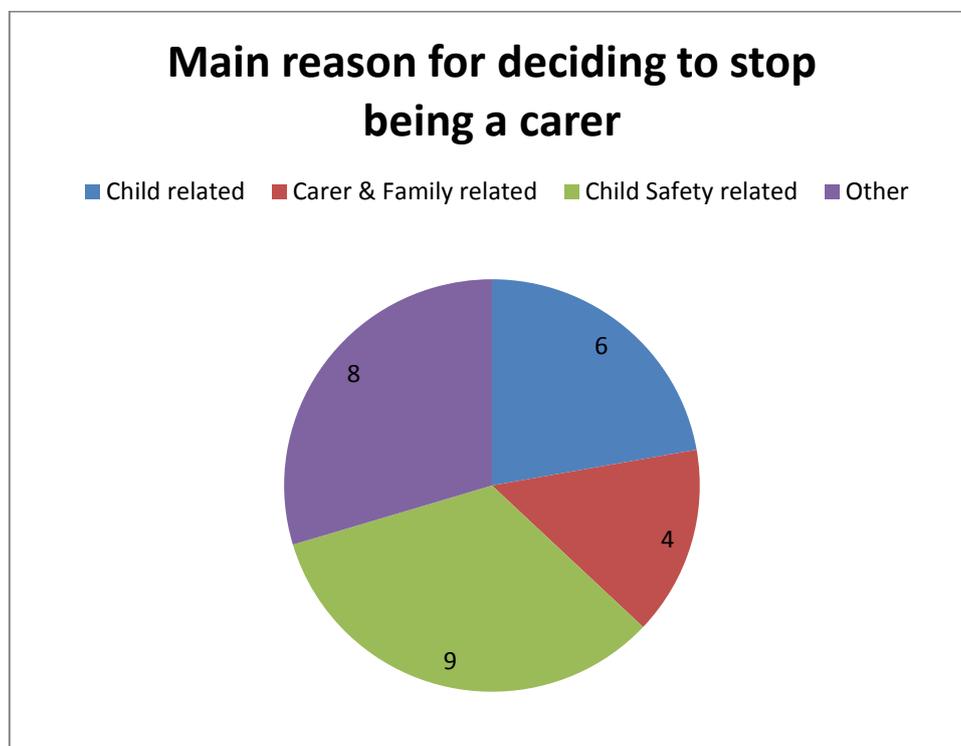
Below is a selection of some of the comments provided by the people undertaking the survey in relation to why they decided to become a carer. This information would be consistent with the section under *other* on the graph.

- My son passed away due to a drug overdose 3 weeks after his son was born. His partner also was on drugs through her pregnancy and also after which meant their son, my grandson was taken away from her. My husband and myself wanted to give the child a good home with lots of love so we took on the role as kinship.
- Mother trusted only me.
- They were our 3 grandsons.
- Was asked to care for him by his Mother after mother and father got in trouble with the law.
- They are my family.
- Grandson.

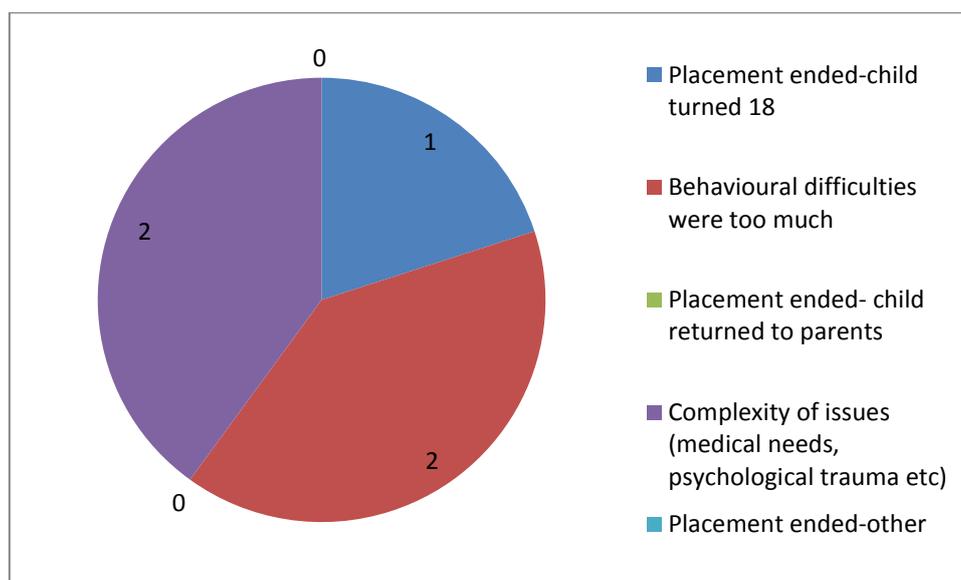
- Grandchildren.
- I made mistakes, owned up to them and began learning better strategies to help the children.
- I rescued my first foster child from carers nearby. They were nasty people.

Question: Reasons for Discontinuing as a Foster/Kinship Carer

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



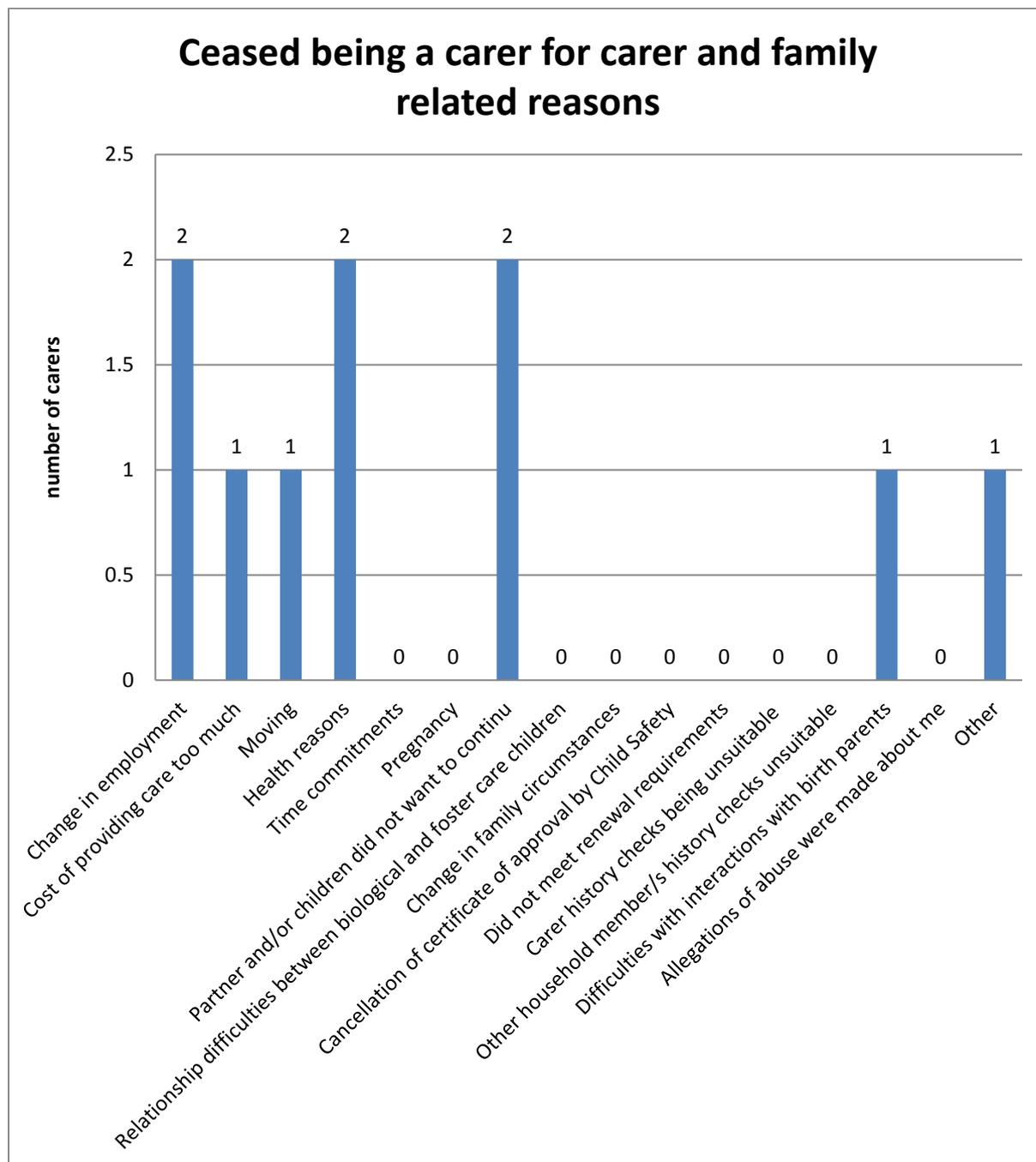
The following information will be specific to the reason that has been provided in this question. If the respondents answered that they ceased being carers due to child related reasons, they are asked to expand on the reasons, as follows:



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

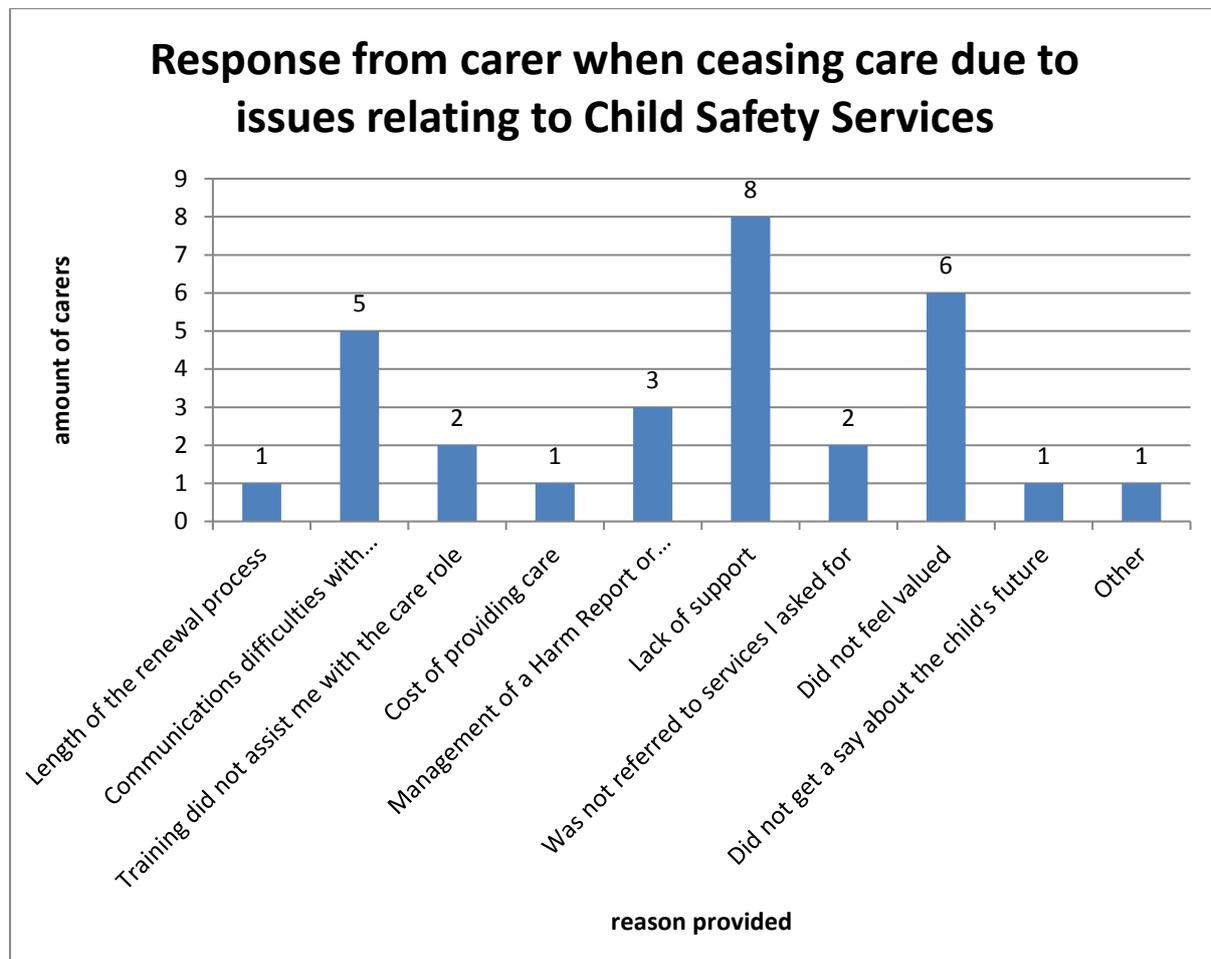
- Was in ICU 3 months and had problems coping mentally and physically.
- The grandparents our grandsons brainwashed them to not want to visit us because they were afraid of losing the money side of things. We did everything possible to get our grandsons but they were passed onto the other grandparents. Even though we could do better for the boys here. Plus they would have lived in a clean environment.
- Both children had been in foster care for 9 months already. I wasn't told the present carer wanted the children relocated for behaviour problems. I received two little kids (1 and 3) with extreme behaviour problems (I believe ADHD, Autism or brain trauma). Both kids were like babies (in nappies, bottle fed and unable to talk). My family were very stressed. We had no training at this stage. We cancelled our Foster Caring status straight away. Having the boys for a day I contacted the agency and expressed my concerns about the boys. I took them to the Doctors to get help in a diagnosis for them. Which Specialists appointments were made only though through the public system the waiting list could be a year.
- Details of child behaviour not shared with us prior to placement. Child was from a different area. CSO was supportive and helpful but local office did not provide support for this child as 'not theirs'.

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



Response comments:

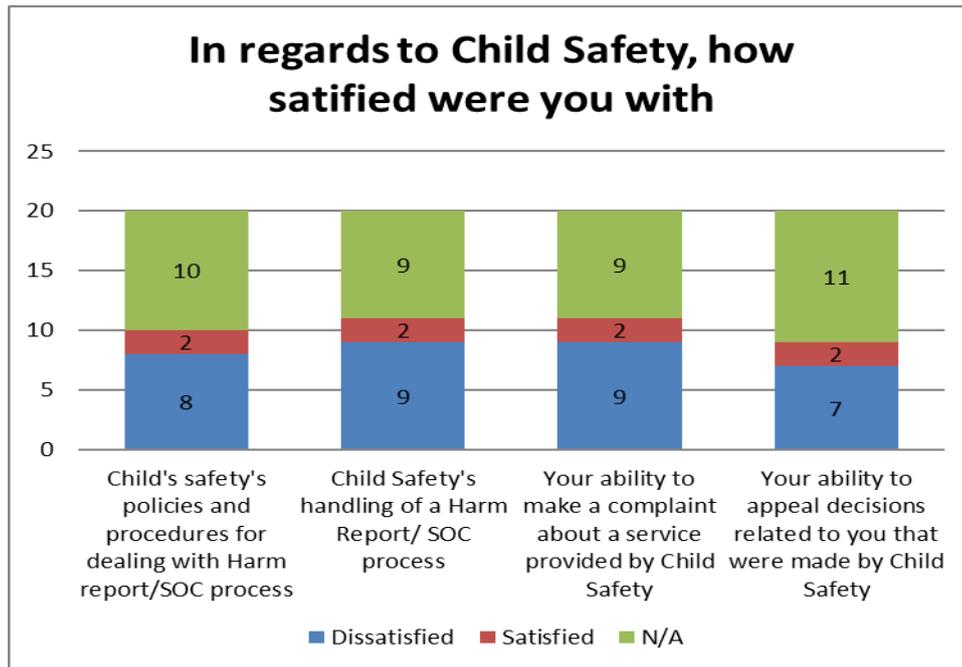
- My grandson was given back to his biological mother.
- The child was with my daughter so I knew she was ok.
- The grandsons kept telling us they couldn't leave the ones they live with. Even though they have come here every school holidays & 2 weeks for Christmas.



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.

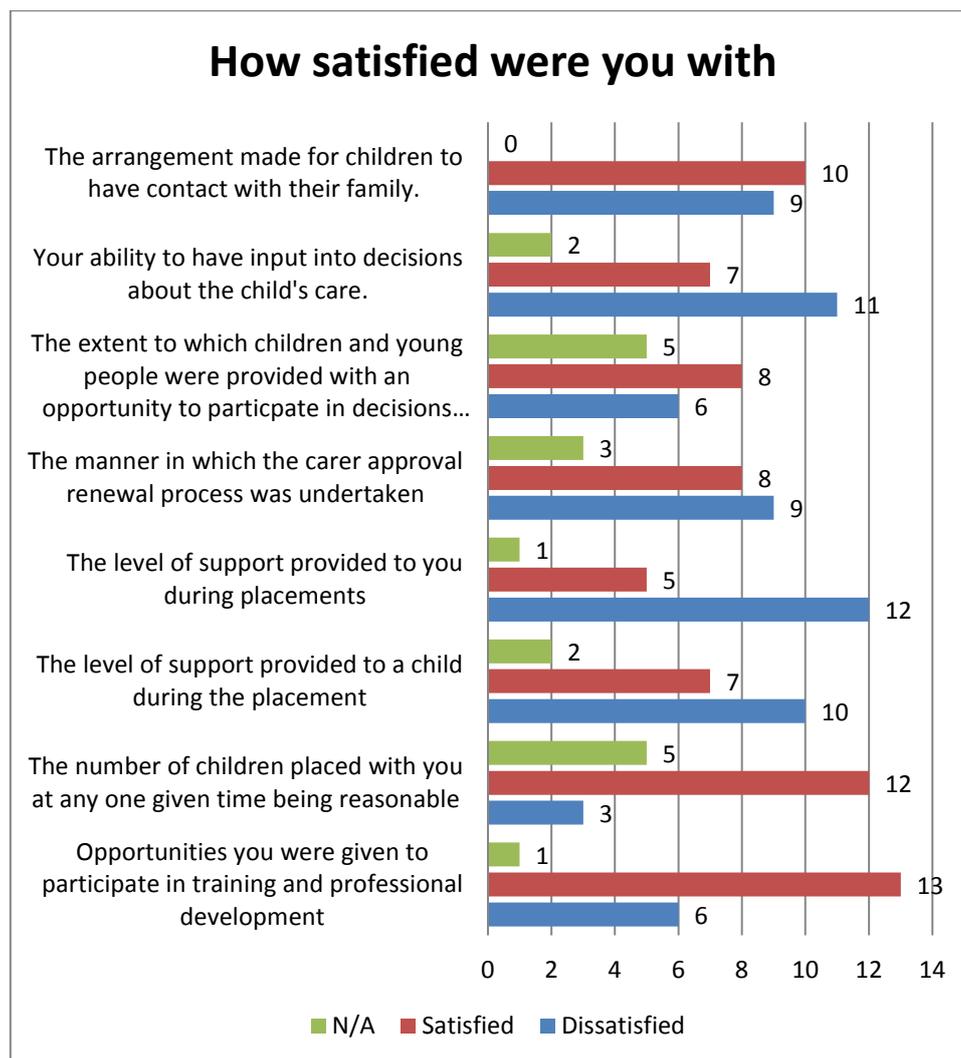
- We did not have a say in the fact that my grandson was given back to his mother. Child safety had told us she was off drugs and that she was taking all the courses that they told her to take.
- We had no say in the boy's upbringing. We don't like the fact our grandsons live in filth.
- I had NIL support I still have not heard from Child Safety.
- I feel like I didn't have a choice if I wanted regular contact with the boys. The Department told us in December that if we don't withdraw and continue with QCAT we would have limited supervised contact, resulting in not being able to see them over the Christmas break which would have been upsetting for all children involved. Since withdrawing we have been able to see them for whole days and even on a weekend. 2 boys were removed from our care from school leaving their younger brother in our care for another 4 months. No home visits were conducted during that time. Child was seen at visits with his mother. We applied to QCAT to get the decision changed. At the first compulsory conference we came to an agreement to work towards the children returning to our home. Their placements had broken down.
- Because my CSO thought she was GOD. The CSSC office does not have the children's needs paramount.

- Our last CSO did not communicate with us on a regular basis and did not take note of our concerns. Did not support our decisions or contradicted us to the child - undermining our authority to care for the child effectively.
- We stopped being a carer due to the fact that child turned 18 years of age. She continues to live with us as part of our family.
- Other reasons for discontinuing: Behavioural difficulties were too much did not meet renewal requirements Cancellation of certificate of approval by Child Safety Our case is going to QCAT Tribunal.
- Took over 5 years for renewal process after MOC, Addendums kept getting added. Dept. and agency did not want us as carers.
- Training did not prepare me for child behaviour.
- It doesn't matter what we say. The department isn't about keeping families together.
- Only what I have previously stated. I believe all children that go into Foster Care should be assessed both physically and mentally straight away. Not just babysat. And not on the public health system waiting lists. I believe both my husband and I may have been better equipped with training. We both still want to be Foster Carers as we really want to help kids. But we feel more assistance should be available to the Carers. Also we feel we cannot handle special needs children.
- My first child to foster was a very difficult child with court appearances, break and enters, went missing for 2 days had a curfew from court. I had NIL support from child safety. I rang to get assistance to see what I needed to do for the court appearance and no one rang back. No one has rung back ever! Even when I said I can't have her in my home as she was damaging property and tried to burn the bedroom furniture and threatened my dogs....no one rang from child safety.
- Child was returned to the care of his mother with our blessing.
- The cost of providing child care was too expensive as we were not entitled to any rebates as we earned too much. I was using all the payment I received on child care and did not get any help in finding day-care or in costs occurred.
- The Department also decided that contact needed to be monitored for 1 out of 3 hours. Once again the reports weren't true but we couldn't prove it. We had 2 unsupervised contacts in August and there were no reports or concerns. The CSO only attended one contact to do the monitoring. When our Kinship assessment was sent back for an addendum only department workers and agency workers were re-interviewed. Early last year (February) we had contact cut with no formal explanation.
- As the children were based in Gladstone, when we relocated back home they were not permitted to go with us. We wanted to continue as Foster carers, but financially could not afford to do so, on one income.
- Previous CSO's were helpful and supportive and communicated with us. Difficulties were discussed face to face and a resolution agreed upon.
- Relocation.



Question: The Experience of Caring

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



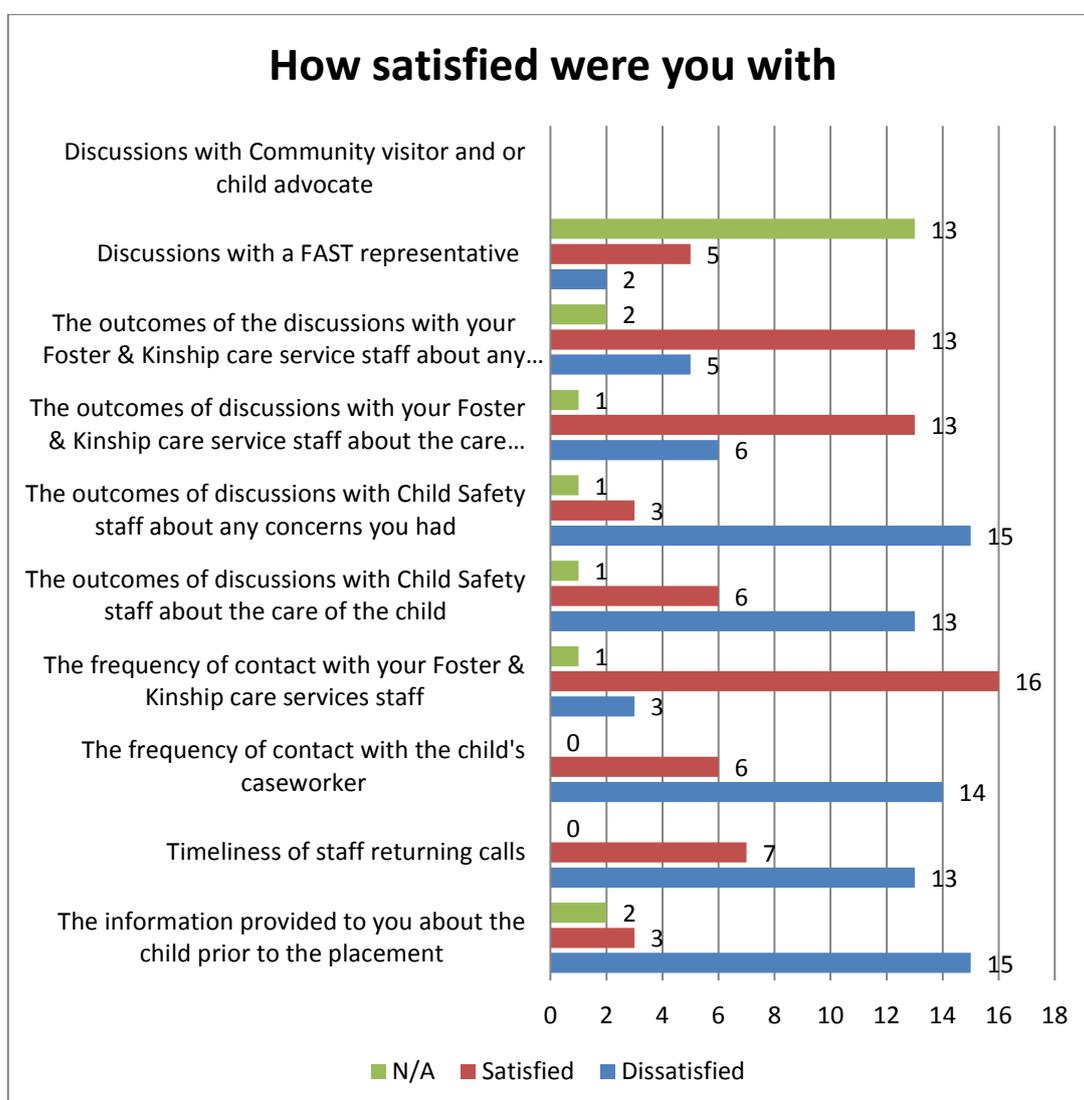
Below are extracts from comments made in reference to this question by the people undertaking the surveys.

- We instigated any sibling contact, apart from on one occasion where a group home held a BBQ at the beach.
- I believe both my husband and I needed training beforehand. Therefore more regular training opportunities needs to be done for new Foster Carers.
- Agency did a wonderful job but dealing with DOCs was not a pleasant experience. Had no voice. Re: Q above: The arrangement made for children to have contact with their family depended on rules being followed.
- We felt like we didn't have a choice if we wanted to continue to see the children. Unfortunately their mother will play mind games when something happens that she doesn't like and it confuses the children as they want to please everyone, while trying to please everyone they try to tell others what they want to hear. I am very unhappy with the treatment from the CSSC office. I learnt better strategies as was implementing however it seemed to me like The Department didn't want to see the change, The Department hardly spent any time with us while the children were in our care. The boy's mental health worker could see the change.

- Decisions with child undermined by caseworker - no boundaries - mixed messages - false promises - no follow through with decisions.
- Dept. knew parent was on drugs.

Questions: 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.



Comments taken from the responses to the question.

- I am disgusted with the whole system of child safety. We were made to feel like we were the ones that had done something wrong and never were we made to feel like we were the child's

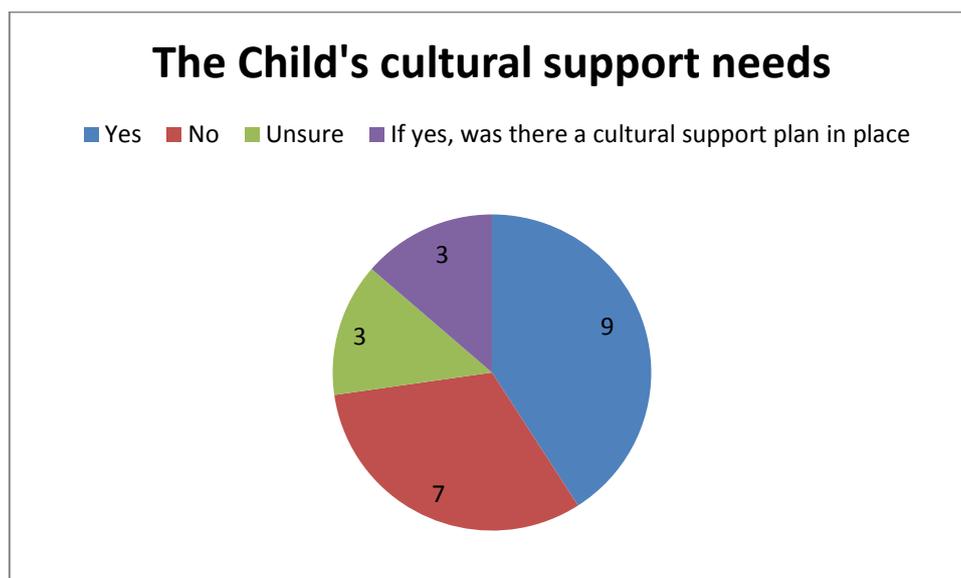
grandparents. We had a child in our care for 13 months in which time for the first 4 months his mother was only allowed to see him if she was supervised. Then she was allowed to take him to her and her new partners home. She was then able to have him one night a week, within 3 weeks after a meeting child safety then decided 2 nights and 3 days. We knew that this was eventually going to be a permanent thing, so because we had concerns and not knowing her new partner (who she moved in with 3 weeks after our son passed away) we asked if we could meet him knowing that he would be the one that our grandson would eventually be living with. We were told by child safety that we didn't have to meet him, which they were the ones that would decide if he was suitable.

- The constant turnover of CSO's was extremely disappointing as there was a distinct lack of continuity. Visitation from the Department was primarily to attend to any paperwork needed. The lag time when a new CSO took over was almost unworkable. Thankfully, we did not have a child that outwardly exhibited extensive needs. We were fortunate to be experienced enough to handle most situations.
- Our relationship with the Department has been somewhat strained which stemmed from negativity from Management.
- Very limited information was available about the boys in which they had already been in Foster care for 9 months already. Especially about their behaviour issues, speech issues and mental issues. Nothing in fact about that.
- Communication with DOCS was difficult. Felt like I was just a part-time baby sitter with no rights or voice.
- Sometimes it would take days to get a reply email and sometimes no reply at all.
- Timeliness of Staff Returning Calls - dissatisfied and satisfied but can only tick one.
- Not enough information provided prior to placement - put child at risk. Some caseworkers did not listen to concerns caseworker would often visit the child at school without notifying us so we did not have regular communication.
- More information about the child would enable the carer to understand the child better I think.
- Case worker seemed disinterested in the child, frequently lost information and didn't attend meetings as she 'felt she had nothing to offer'.
- 1st case worker never returned calls. 2nd no phone calls to enquire about child 3rd when problem with child's mother, took hours later to reply back
- When attempting to advocate for a child placed in my care and express concerns about their best interests I felt ignored, disregarded and shut out of any discussions or decisions making process.
- We bought up our concerns, one of them being how is he able to afford to pay for his house payments when he is on the dole, this fell on deaf ears.
- Child had experienced eleven previous placements before coming to us.
- Child's Educational Needs: constant fights with Dept/Manager to get the needs for children in our care. Child's Health Needs: Reimbursements for travel & accommodation were never paid for medical treatments in Brisbane.
- These two little boys needed Speciality help long before they came into my care. We were simply unable to cope with their needs.

- The Department allowed the 6 yr old to travel in the car because he had out grown the booster seat the current carers had even after I provided names of seats that are available on the market that he still fits in.
- The child's cultural support needs: After the child was in care with us for more than 12 months. Others not at all Question 5: The child's health needs: Not all children had one and especially the last one even after we requested it.
- I personally felt the child had been lost in the system and forgotten about.

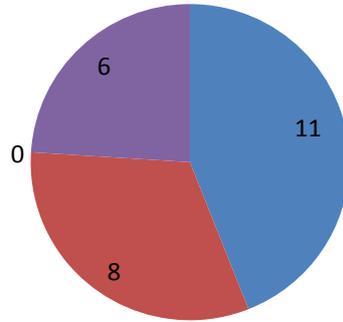
The carers were asked to identify whether Child Safety discussed the following matters with them.

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



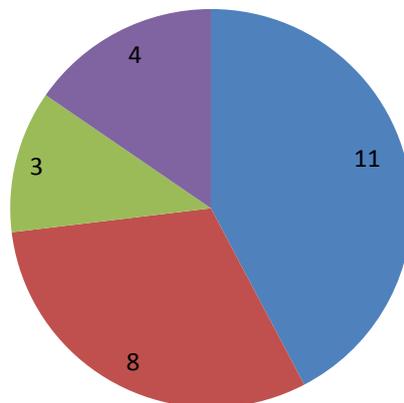
The child's educational needs

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

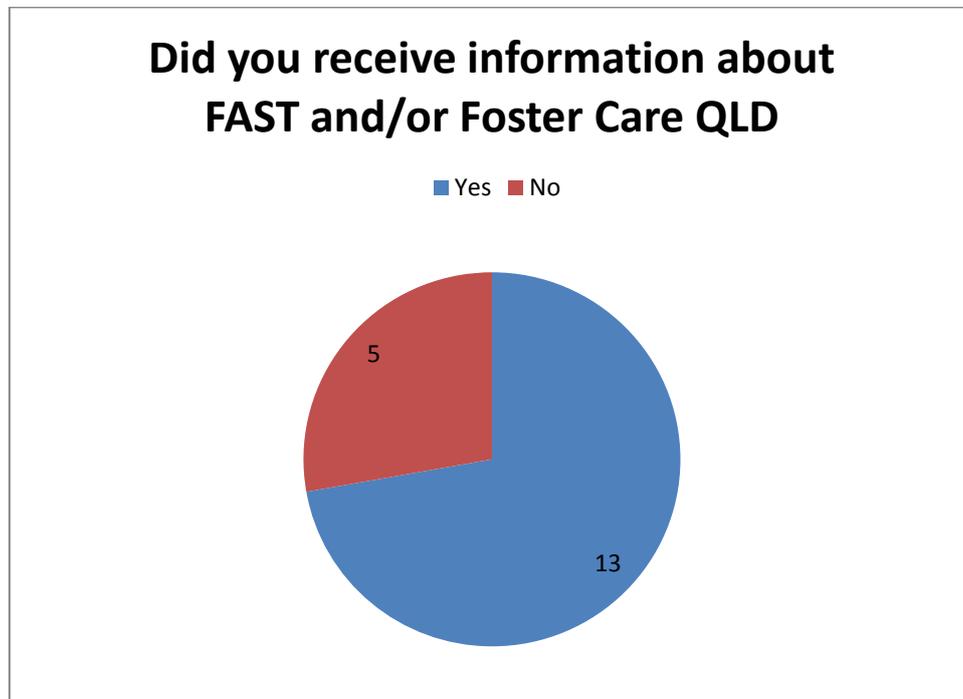


The child's health needs

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



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



Response comments:

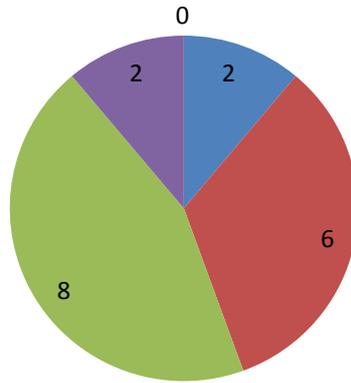
- Cultural support plan was n/a re: #3 Child's cultural support needs question.
- Very limited information.
- Can't remember.
- Yes, but received info from FCQ not child safety.
- I don't recall hearing about them at all?

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



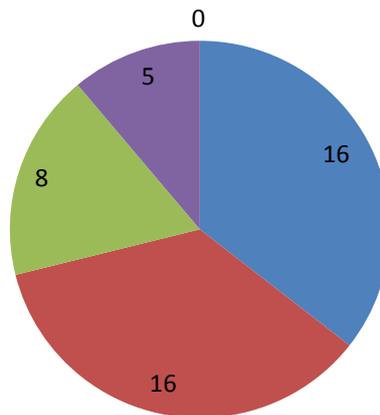
How often did you have contact with your Foster and Kinship Care Service?

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



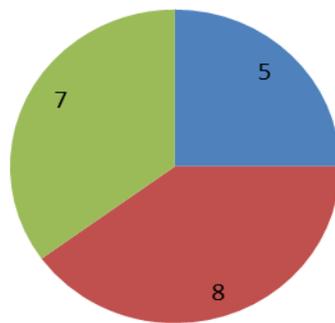
How did this contact occur?

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



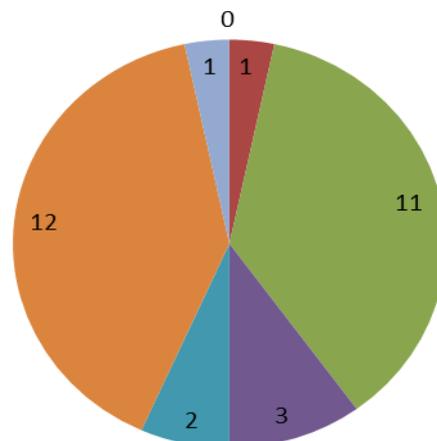
What was your preference regarding contact?

■ E-mail ■ Phone ■ Face to face



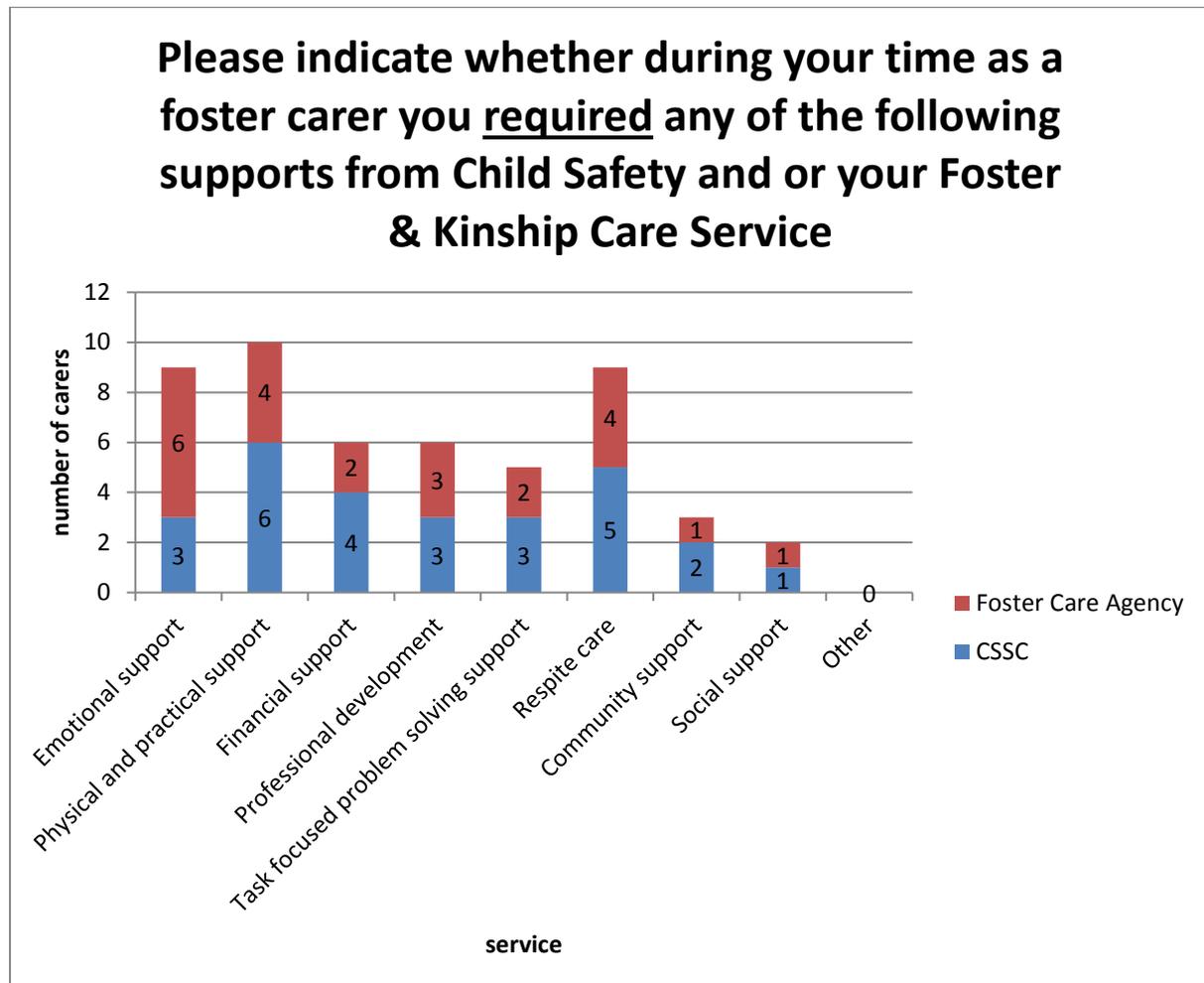
Which of the following persons did you usually have contact with?

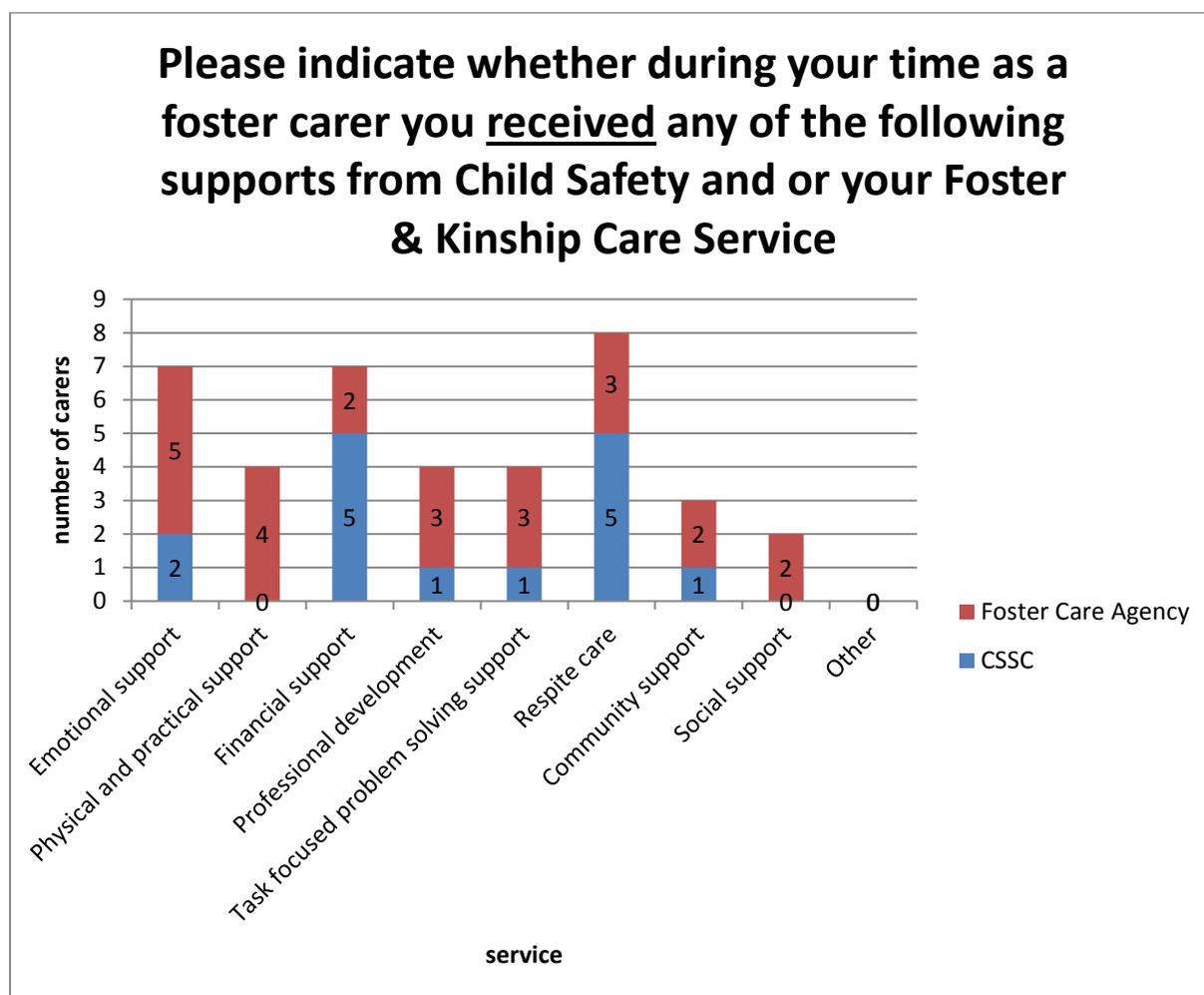
■ Child Safety Service Centre Managers
 ■ Child Safety Team Leaders
 ■ Child Safety officers
 ■ Child Safety Support Officers (family support worker)
 ■ Child Safety Youth Worker
 ■ Foster and Kinship Care Service Workers
 ■ None of the above



Question: The Experience of Caring – Support

This section addresses the experience of caring and support received.





Carers were asked to provide responses to two questions:

- Did you 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:

- Agency
- I wasn't aware of support. I liked the worker from the agency. She at least tried to help me with my Health concerns about the boys.
- Network with other carers for emotional and social supports psychologist.
- Received tremendous support from friends and neighbours.
- Mildura Child Protection.

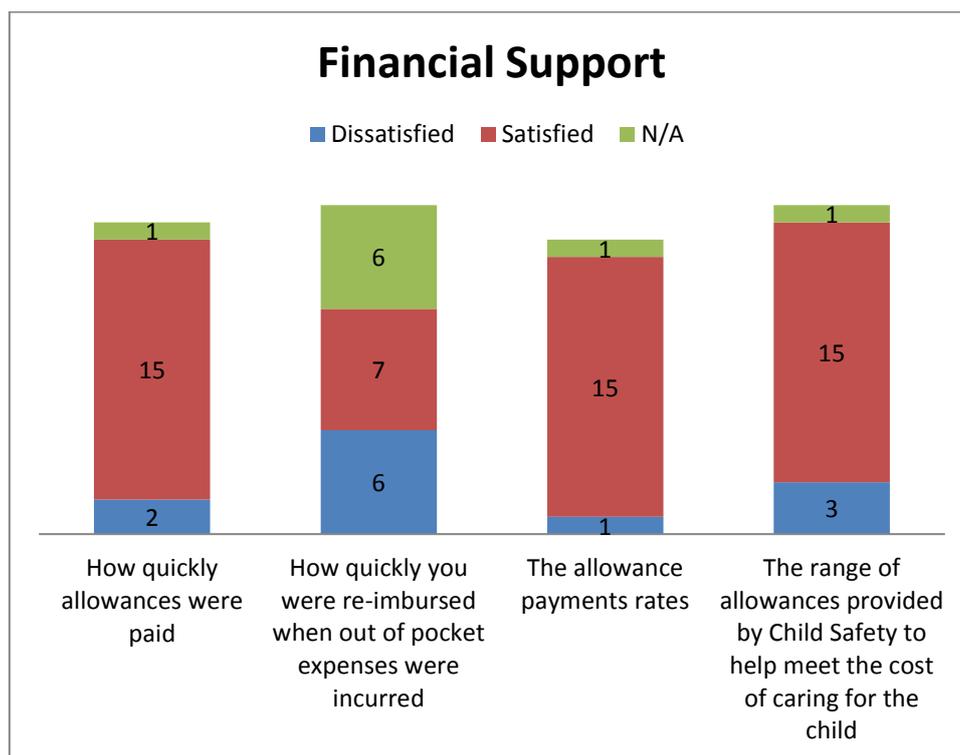
Responses to, were there other supports you would have like to access:

- We would have liked to have seen the child and her siblings receive appropriate cultural identity connections.
- I wasn't aware of any supports.

- You don't receive support from the CSSC at all so there is no point in asking for any.
- Youth workers Psychologists.
- Evolve program.

Question: The Experience of Caring – Financial Support

Experience of caring in relation to financial support.

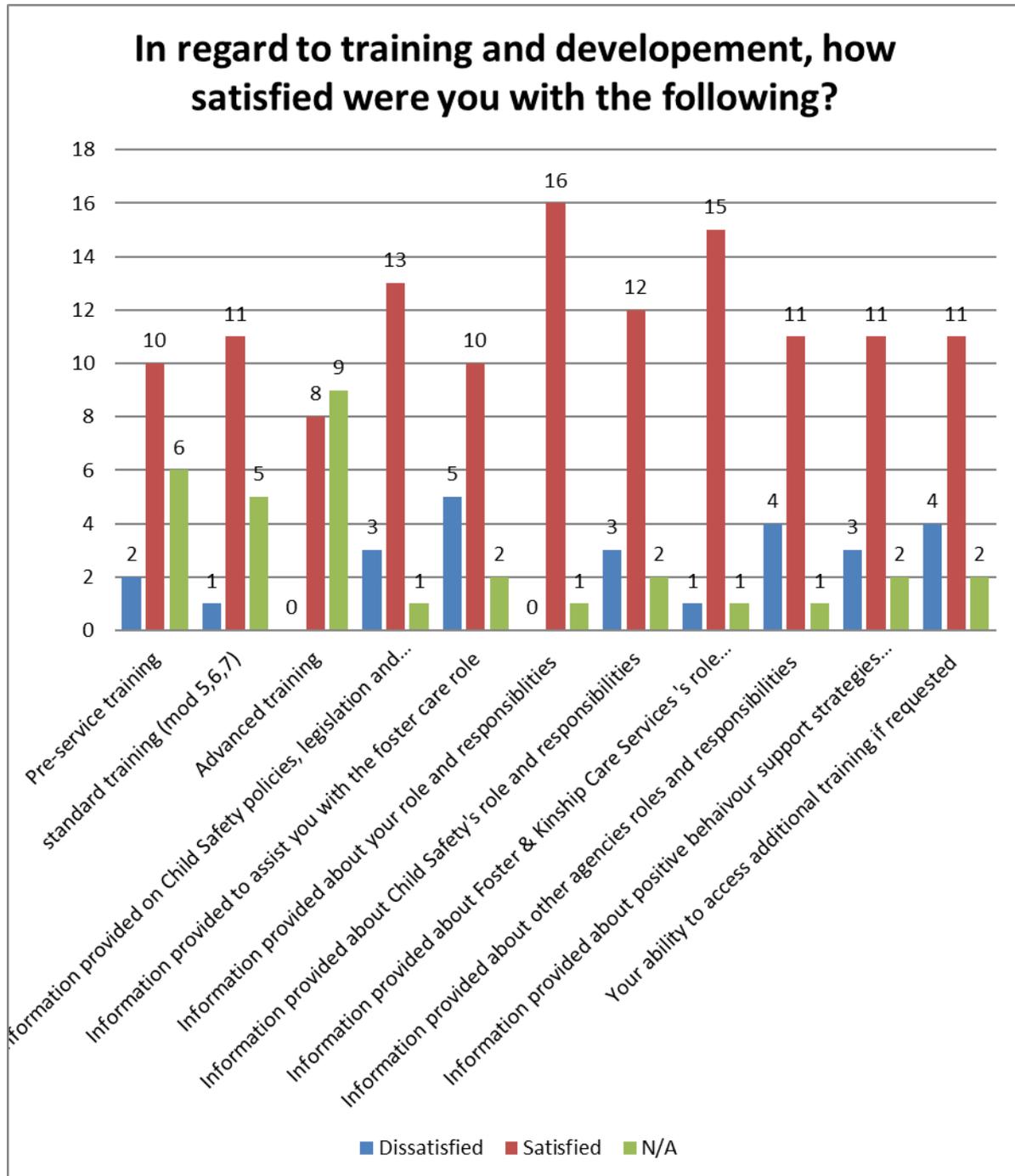


Responses from carers in relation to financial support:

- It was a constant fight to have reimbursements approved and paid. No support offered ever.
- Also dissatisfied with allowance payment rates.
- Extra financial support difficult to process especially when property damaged. Incorrect information provided by CSO re. Financial reimbursement meant we were out of pocket for several months until we appealed the decisions.
- Child Safety promised reimbursement for vacation care - still waiting
- I feel the financial allowances and benefits are fair and adequate to care for a child and I was in a very low income bracket. This was not an issue at all.

Question: The Experience of Caring – Training and Professional Development

Experience to training and development



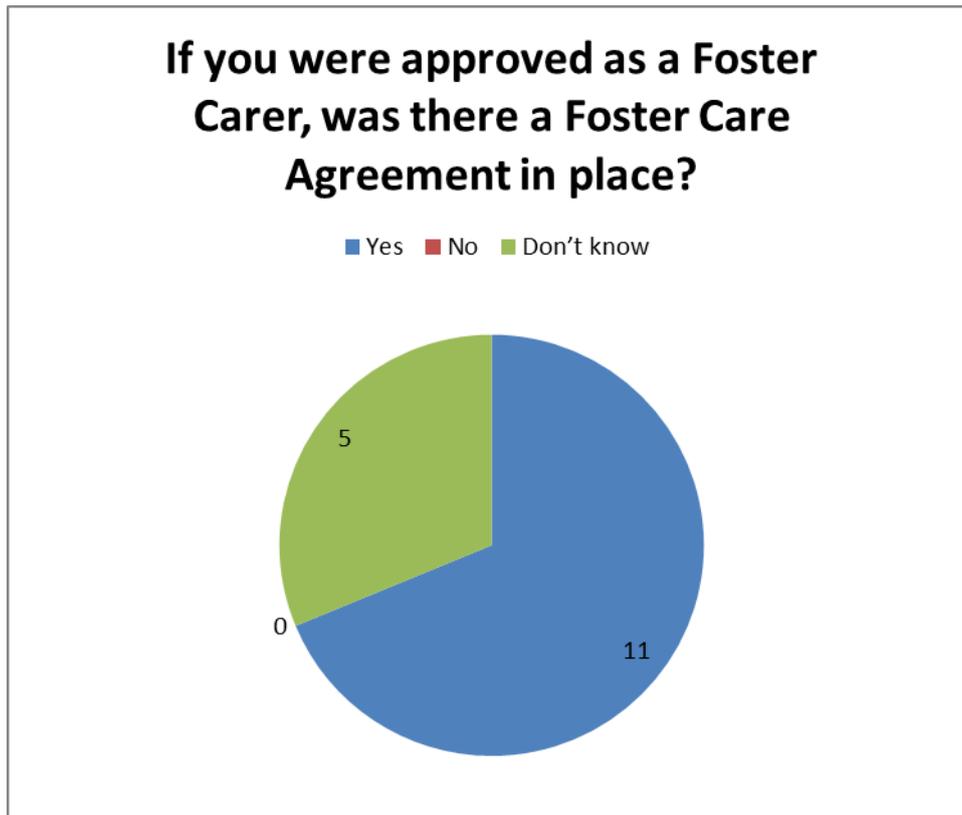
Responses to the question:

- There was no training in the last year.
- Needed more about child's typical behaviour e.g. verbal, physical and mental abuse, need to not take it personally. More understanding of their anger.
- Had no training.
- Until we were connected with the mental health worker the training that was offered didn't work with children that had been through trauma. The mental health worker was the one that said we needed trauma based learning and that made a very big difference and I learnt a lot from it.



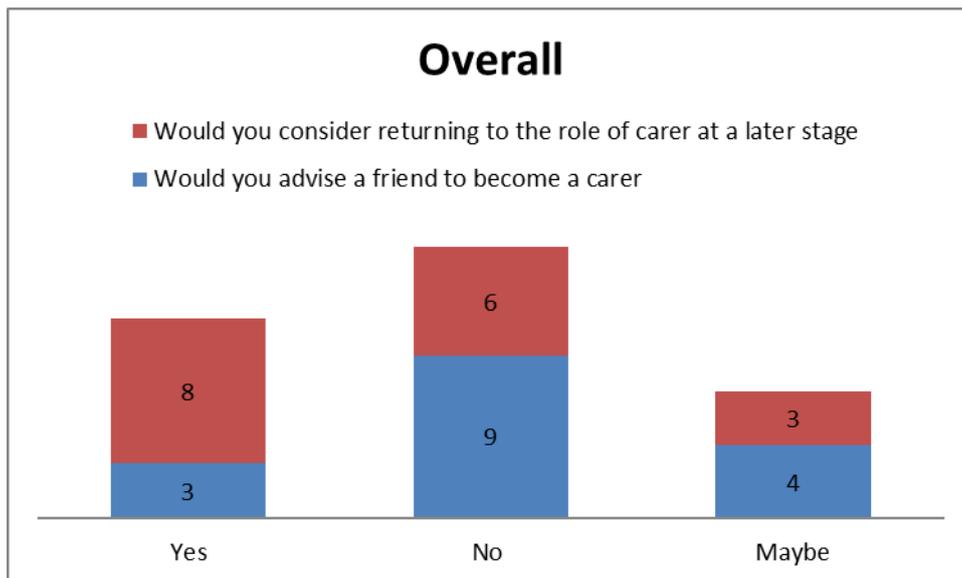
Response comments:

- To place the children back with their parents.
- Circle of Security with the mental health worker. Started pre service but wasn't completed before withdrawing.



Questions: Overall Experience

Overall experiences.



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

- Fostering for us was a one off as we personally knew the child involved. We answered "maybe" to Q1 Overall as we believe that foster carers need new skills other than general parenting as these children come with complex needs.
- Definitely will not be with DOCS or agency.
- We still wish to be Carers only with more knowledge and training.
- If I only dealt with agency it would be great. Dealing with DOCS was a negative experience.
- There are too many carers in it for the money. Too many carers don't treat the children right. Too much sharing information. In-house abuse. Some children better off with own parents.
- Definitely would not refer a friend. I would return at a later stage ONLY because I have been a carer for 20+ years. I have wanted to be a carer since I was 10 years old.

Q2. Did your experiences of providing care meet the expectation you had?

- Yes.
- No.
- Yes - more positive experience at DOCS.
- No.
- No.
- No.
- Was hard work. We didn't choose to be a carer, it chose us. Glad we helped him.
- Unfortunately no.
- Yes.
- Yes. I loved the children. I could provide most/all with love, routine, care, respect and happiness.
- We loved being carers. We just felt there was a lack of communication between departments.
- Concerning the children - yes CSSC - absolutely not.
- Yes - except for the treatment by a couple of the caseworkers. Other earlier caseworkers were more supportive.
- Yes.
- No.
- Yes he is my grandson.
- Yes and No. I had hoped to have a better relationship with my support workers and feel this would have made a huge difference to my overall experience.

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

- Dealing with issues that were foreign to our skill set and that we were not informed of.
- Carer for children who had problems. There was not enough professional help.
- Trying to access supports including financial from DOCS. MOC procedure.
- Having children with disabilities.
- Dealing with DOCS and not being heard.
- The behaviour problems of the child which were not addressed. I believe a lot of information was kept from me before I decided to accept this child.
- The behaviour before learning about the effects of trauma. Being between 2 houses (here and their mother).
- Not knowing what was happening next.
- Dealing with the CSSC. They have no respect for us as carers.

- Child Safety - Lack of response and support. Lack of child information prior to placement.
- Discipline.
- The expectations and limitations put on us by C.S combined to make the process very difficult.
- Not having support when needed.
- Returning the child to a situation not knowing if they would be ok and not having any rights to know how they were doing. Also my own daughter's difficulty in saying goodbye!

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

- To have the opportunity to give a child positive choices in their life rather than following the status quo of their family.
- To see the children reunited with their parents.
- Relationships with children, which some are still ongoing.
- Learning about myself through the child.
- We could have time with our grandsons & stay in each other's lives.
- Caring for children. Being a positive role model for them. Knowing they are in a safe kind and happy environment.
- Watching him grow and learn.
- The love you have for a child that is biologically not mine.
- Seeing them happy and being able to tuck them in every night.
- Knowing the children were safe! Seeing the children smile, laugh, sleep soundly, stop wetting the bed, do well at school, behavioural changes.
- Being able to provide an alternative lifestyle for the children.
- Seeing the children grow/learn, working with the biological families.
- Meeting some lovely children and seeing them grow and develop.
- Being able to provide safe care for the kids.
- The response of our friends and neighbours who never stopped caring.
- Giving the child the love and life he deserves.
- Feeling the love and trust that a child places in you in such a short time and watching the bonds my daughter formed with all the children we cared for - one in particular.

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

- We both drew upon our skills as parents but also from our experiences of being school chaplains for many years.
- Fellow carers were the best support.
- Being able to phone up the Department and agency, rant and rave without feeling like an idiot.
- Not supported at all. We feel disappointed with the "system".
- By being able to contact the Support Agency whenever we needed to.
- There was one lady who was very helpful. I found that the child services worker made the child's behaviour change for the worse after he had left.
- I had fabulous case workers as well as support service staff.
- Having support from the children's biological family
- Our foster and kinship support team were excellent. Other carers were very supportive
- A wonderful understanding Foster Care support person and the child's therapist.
- We didn't feel supported

- One particular Social Worker whom I was dealing with during one placement (from CSSC) was fantastic. I also liked the case worker I was eventually re-assigned to however this was at the end of my time as a carer.

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

- Practical training and workshops with people who have succeeded at fostering.
- Partnership Communication Treat Carers as equals.
- Departments need to follow through with what they say e.g. caught with drugs no apartment.
- Knowledge. Knowledge of training. Knowledge in that the children have been assessed both physically and mentally straight away. So then carers know how to care for them in a way that to assist in the children's growth.
- More rights as a Carer in the eyes of the Department.
- Providing care for a child to help the career still be able to work. A more open conversation and information that is updated about the child
- More information about trauma based training
- More staff! These case workers do a wonderful job. Unfortunately they are well understaffed and way over-worked. Child Safety needs much, much more than the shake-up so recently implemented.
- More information needs to be provided if a child requires special needs. I understand that if the child is new to the system this may not be apparent, but the beautiful young girl we had was in care for over 2years. Had we of known her history we would have been able to appreciate and accommodate accordingly to ensure a smooth transition from her previous carer to us.
- Not to be treated with no respect from CSSC. Actually being part of a care team.
- Caseworkers should listen to the carers more as they live with the child/ren.
- Better communication
- More communication between team leaders and care management
- I had reservations about whether certain case workers were well suited to their role especially for a "new" carer.

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

- One size does NOT fit all and each child must be seen and treated as an individual. They are all extremely precious, but most of them don't know it. They would all benefit greatly from early intervention regarding their self-worth and identity. Thanks for the opportunity!!
- I have many concerns in relation to fostering which I believe starts from management issues within DOCS.
- We are more than baby sitters and deserve to be treated the way a parent is treated.
- Training for Foster Carers available more regularly. More information on the children from Specialists. Knowing the Children have been assessed both physically and mentally beforehand and then knowledge on how to care for their needs. More needs to be done for children straight away in an assessment for the health both physically and mentally.
- There are too many people constantly coming and going from your home. One person should be enough to be in charge of a child
- How on earth are some Carers passed? Young lives on the line - yet Child Safety cannot possibly give 100% when their workload far exceeds what is humanly impossible. Don't blame only Child Safety - it's the fat cats at the top.

- The DOC'S office needs to be investigated particularly with decisions made by the senior practitioner. Her very poor practice has damaged many lives, biological family, foster carers and most importantly the children. Her sever lack of judgement and blatant lies is very damaging and needs to be looked at ASAP before more lives are destroyed. She even has destroyed the lives of her own staff.
- Complaints process is a waste of time with Child Safety. Facts not taken into account, or addressed. We were made to feel we were in the wrong, when we asked for support or assistance. Our concerns when we made a complaint about a particular CSO were not taken seriously and the complaint closed after just one phone call from the local manager who just defended her staff with no regard to the child matter.
- No.