



Looked After Children Report 2006

Introduction

This report is an analysis of the views of Looked After young people based on their contributions to their reviews. Viewpoint audio computer assisted self-interviewing (CASI) has now been used by local authorities for several years to help Looked After Children and Young People contribute their views to their reviews and several authorities have asked about the possibility of producing an overview report for comparisons with local data.

Following a consultation, 24 local authorities agreed to contribute anonymous data, and Professor Ian Butler, Professor of Social Work at Bath University agreed to look at the data and report.

There are obvious dangers in using data collected for one purpose for another. For example, different standards of reliability and validity apply to research instruments and to data gathering tools used to support practice. Additionally different forms of the Looked After Children questionnaires were used. Some questions were identical in each version while others varied across the versions. Data was also gathered under different circumstances.

As a result the focus of this report is only on those parts of the available data where there is confidence that the standards that might apply in a research context can safely be inferred.

Key Findings

- On the basis of the analysis reported here, the great majority of looked after children aged 10 -14 in 11 local authorities are generally positive about their experiences of being looked after.
- This finding should not mask the fact that **there is a significant minority of young people who do not feel both safe and settled and who report their experiences negatively.**
- These children are more angry or frustrated and, in general, report being less content with: how often they see their social workers; how easy it is to talk to carers/key-workers or social workers; being helped to understand their care plan and being helped to make decisions.
- It has not been possible to identify, at this point in the analysis, whether this group have recently become looked after or moved placements. Nonetheless, there would seem to be a *prima facie* case for focussed attention on this group.
- Viewpoint provides a valid and reliable means of making observations and judgements about the experiences of groups of looked after children.

Sample population

This report concentrates on a population of children (281) aged 10 – 14 drawn from the largest group of local authorities (11) using the same version of the 'questionnaire'.

The 281 children included slightly more boys (150; 53%) than girls (131; 47%). Ninety percent of the children were white British (254; 90%) while the other 10% comprised Asians (Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani) (6; 3%), mixed (White & Caribbean) (7; 3%) and others of mixed ethnicity (11; 4%).

Over half of the group (54%) were in foster placements within the geographical area of the local authority including the local authority's 'own' carers' (44%). 9% were placed with a relative/friend.

A further 25% were in foster placements 'out of area': 17% in local authority foster care, 7% in other agency placements and 1% placed with a relative/friend. Nearly a fifth (19%) of the children were in residential care, of whom 11% were in their local authority area, and 8% were in residential care out of area.

A few (3%) children were either at home with parents (4) or in other placements (5).

Themes and issues

In most areas, respondents expressed themselves broadly content with their circumstances. For example:

Table 1: *Enjoying food*

Q 61

Do you enjoy the food you're given where you are living?

Yes	70%
Often	14%
Sometimes	14%
Never	2%
n = 260	

Table 2: *Noticing doing well*

Q 33

Does (your foster care/key-worker) or someone else notice when you have done well at something?

Yes, definitely	72%
Sometimes	23%
Not really	3%
Not at all	2%
n = 269	

Table 3: *Staying overnight arrangements*

Q 20

Are you happy with the arrangements for staying overnight with friends or family?

Yes, completely	75%
Just about	16%
Not really	8%
Not at all	1%

n=144 (i.e. only those children who had overnight stays)

In a smaller number of areas, responses were more varied:

Table 4: *Keeping in touch with family*

Q 18

Are you able to keep in touch with your family as much as you want?

Yes, definitely	54%
Just about	23%
Not really	15%
Not at all	8%

n = 273

Table 5: *Visits from friends*

Q 16

Are your friends able to visit where you live now?

Yes, as much as I like	37%
Sometimes	43%
Not really	13%
No, they can't	7%
Do not have any to visit me	0%

n=273

Table 6: *Being listened to*

Q 57

Do you think your views and opinions are listened to?

Always	44%
Usually	43%
Not really	8%
Not at all	5%

n=263

Bullying is a concern for some children, although not for the majority.

Table 7: *Bullying in placement*

Q 11

Does anyone bully or pick on you, where you live now?

Not at all	75%
A bit	19%
A lot	3%
All the time	3%

n=275

Bullying in school was an issue for more children.

Table 8: *Bullying at school*

Q 41

Does anyone bully, hurt or upset you at school?

Yes	9%
Sometimes	26%
No	65%

n = 269

A few questions requested factual information such as whether the child was currently regularly attending school (88% were), had a bank account (58% did) or knew if they had a care plan (82% did).

Table 9: *Going to school*

Q 36

Do you go to school every day?

Yes	88%
No	12%

n=269

In one or two areas, respondents were able to provide more open-ended responses and these provide a deeper insight into why respondents were less straightforwardly positive in their responses. One such area was life story work.

Respondents were asked if they had '*a life story book or information about people you know?*' Just over a third indicated that they had '*as much as I like*' (37%), a quarter indicated that they had '*some but would like more*' (26%) and a third indicated 'not at all'.

It is worth noting that the majority of the children did want life story work, though not necessarily now.

A subsidiary open question was used to find out from the two thirds who did not have 'as much as I like' what further information they would like. Those indicating that they wanted more information suggested a range of areas: birth and early life, information on siblings, nephews and grandparents, photographs and information on their early experiences of care.

Photographs and pictures were highly valued:

Pictures of my family, my brother, my dad. (*M, 10-14*)

Photos at a time when I was at home. (*M, 10-14*)

More photos and letters. (*M, 10-14*)

Just knowing names is not enough. A number of the children asked for telephone numbers. Others wanted broader knowledge:

Information about more of my family. Where they all live. What they do. (*F, 10-14*)

Family history, backgrounds, who is actually in my family, if anyone has passed away that I don't know about or if there are relatives I do not know. (*F, 10-14*)

Family can include not just parents, siblings and grandparents, but aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews and step families:

Where the rest of my family are like my dad, gran, aunties, them sort of people. (*F, 10-14*)

Photos and information about my cousins and sister. (*F, 10-14*)

What do my step sisters like doing? (*M, 10-14*)

Stuff about my dad and if he has kids or wife or whatever. (*M, 10-14*)

Wider networks are important too:

Everything. My life book has certificates in but none about my friends. (*F, 10-14*)

Assistance in filling in gaps in memory is important:

About when I was born. (*M, 10-14*)

To know about the places I have lived. (*F, 10-14*)

What cares (*placements*) I went into and what they were like when I first came into care and where I was living. (*F, 10-14*)

What I was like when I was small and why I came into care. (*F, 10-14*)

And understanding one's identity:

Where I was born. How much I weighed. Where my name came from. (*F, 10-14*)

Some children wanted to know more details about their parent's and their relationship:

A bit about my mother and father's relationship with each other and my real grandparents. (*F, 10-14*)

...what my mum and dad were like before they had me and how they first met. (*F, 10-14*)

More boys indicated a desire for factual information about the present:

I would like to know if my family are OK. (*M, 10-14*)

I want to know about my mum and dad's health and my grandmas. (*M, 10-14*)

Most girls were about to articulate the type of information they wanted, sometimes very succinctly:

'Bout my Dad. (*F, 10-14*)

It is interesting to note that the boys used the opportunity to ask questions about their current situation:

Have I got a foster family yet? (*M, 10-14*)

Well, it's more to do with where I am going to be staying until I am 16-18. (*M, 10-14*)

I would like to know what is going on. (*M, 10-14*)

Or wanted to know the answer to other unanswered questions:

No, but I want to know why I can't live with my Mum and Dad. (*M, 10-14*)

The question itself raised possibilities:

To see if I can see them (MY REAL DAD). (*respondents emphasis*). (*F, 10-14*)

There were a few more unusual requests:

I would like a book about my social worker please. *(M, 10-14)*

The final word has to go to this girl who asked for:

What I did, where I went and what I looked like when I was younger.
Happy moments not sad. *(F, 10-14,)*

Another set of questions concerning school also provided the opportunity to understand in more detail, the nature of children's particular concerns. It should be noted that the majority (females: 83%; males 77%) of children said that they had no worries about school. Of the others, a few familiar themes emerged: bullying, homework and exams:

Sometimes about my SATs and GCSEs. *(M, 10-14)*

Yes I worry about getting bullied. *(F, 10-14)*

Others had more individual worries:

I worry about some of the teachers as I feel sometimes they are too personal. *(F, 10-14)*

Sometimes people call me ugly. *(F, 10-14)*

My behaviour. *(F, 10-14)*

I am worried about when we move from (placement) next year, what will happen to my education. *(M, 10-14)*

Finally, by way of illustration of an area where children's responses were less straightforwardly positive was in relation to how much anger or frustration they felt. Sixty percent of the children indicated that they felt angry or frustrated 'not really' or 'not at all'. The 40% who indicated that they felt angry or frustrated 'all' or 'most of' the time were asked when this happens.

Some indicated that it was when they were at school:

When people at school annoy me.

In school in lessons I don't enjoy.

Others acknowledged that it was when they didn't get their own way:

When I don't get my own way. About anything!

When I am not allowed to do something.

When people bug me or get in the way . When I am told to do things that I don't want to do.

For many the cause was seen as other people:

When A annoys me!

When people wind me up.

When her grandchild proves superiority.

When the other brats get on my nerves.

When staff do not do what I want them to do.

If staff be's a pratt to me.

When I am stressed out at people because they annoy me.

When I come home from school. People shouting at me because I don't have my slippers on. Or something.

Others also it associated with getting into trouble:

When I am in trouble this is when it mostly happens.

When I get in a fight with mum and dad or when I have done something wrong, which is most of the time.

For some it was more complex than just getting angry:

When B and family get together I get jealous and a I go upstairs and I cry and hurt myself.

When I don't have my med and when people aren't with me.

Others linked getting angry with contact with their family:

Usually before I have contact.

When something goes wrong. When contact does not go right.

When I have a fight with my dad on the phone.

Some had understandable reasons for being angry:

When people are not very nice and they hit me in school.

When I have been thinking about things that have happened to me.
When people say things about my family.

When I think about my sister and with social services.

When I think about my mum and thinking about how I could have lived with my dad if he were alive.

The most telling question asked of this age group (who, by and large express satisfaction with their circumstances) was in relation to how settled and how safe they felt.

In line with previous comments, it should be noted that over two thirds of children (70%) answered that they felt 'completely' settled and nearly 80% that they felt 'definitely' safe. (See Tables 10 and 11).

Table 10: *Feel Settled?*

Q 3

<i>Do you feel settled where you live now?</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Yes, completely	72%	68%	70%
Just about	19%	21%	20%
Not really	5%	8%	6%
Not at all	3%	3%	3%

Male n = 149 ; female = 131 and total = 280.

Table 11: *Feel safe?*

Q10

<i>Do you feel safe where you live now?</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Yes definitely	81%	76%	79%
Just about	12%	22%	17%
Not really	3%	2%	2%
Not at all	3%	0%	2%

Male n = 145 ; female = 130 and total = 275.

Two thirds of all the children indicated that they felt completely settled *and* definitely safe. A further 20% of the children felt at least 'just about safe' *and* 'just about settled'. (See Table 12).

Of the minority who were not feeling 'settled' and 'safe', the girls were more likely to indicate problems with 'safety' and the boys with feeling 'settled'. It should be noted that data were not available on length of stay in current placement although this is unlikely to be gendered.

Table 12: *Feel Safe and Settled?*

	Percentage	
	Male	Female
<i>Q3 and Q10: Settled & safe?</i>		
Safe and settled	68%	65%
Safe & Just about settled	12%	7%
Just about safe & Just about settled	6%	14%
Rest	16%*	14%

Male n = 145; female = 130 and total = 275.

* Includes 2% males not at all safe and not at all settled. No females indicated this.

As would be expected, there was a high positive correlation between those that feel settled and those that feel safe. Nearly all (94%) of the settled group – those who answered 'Yes completely' to 'Do you feel settled?' – also indicated that they felt 'definitely safe' in their placement. Whereas under half (41%) of the rest - not settled - indicated that they felt 'definitely safe' and half (49%) indicating that they felt 'just about safe'. (See Table 13).

Table 13: *Do you feel safe?*

Q10 <i>Do you feel safe where you live now?</i>	Settled group	Not yet settled group	All
Yes definitely	94%	41%	79%
Just about	4%	49%	17%
Not really	1%	5%	2%
Not at all	1%	5%	2%
	n = 197	n = 83	n = 280

Similar results were found when looking at the 'safe group', where 85% felt completely settled compared to only 19% of those who did not yet feel settled. (See Table 14).

Table 14: Do you feel settled

Q 3 Do you feel settled where you live now?	'Safe group'	Not 'feel safe' group	All
Yes, completely	85%	19%	70%
Just about	12%	48%	20%
Not really	1%	22%	6%
Not at all	1%	10%	3%
	n = 217	n = 58	n = 280

These two global questions were asked independently, but it is inferred that the two variables are not independent. This seems to be borne out by subsequent analysis of what, in effect, amount to two distinct groupings; those who feel settled and safe and those who feel less so.

Settled and Safe

As indicated, nearly two thirds of the looked after children (185 children; 64%) indicated that they were completely settled and definitely safe. Most of the others (62; 21%) children *either* indicated that they felt 'completely settled' or 'just about settled' *and* that they felt 'completely safe' or 'just about safe'. The other 15% responded to one or both questions that they were 'not really' or 'not at all' safe and/or settled. (See Table 15).

For the rest of this report the two thirds who indicated they felt completely settled and definitely safe are referred to as the 'safe and settled' group, and all the rest, those who expressed some dissatisfaction on one or both of these two measures as the 'less safe or settled' group.

The information on legal status was largely incomplete in relation to both broad groupings and so no definite inferences can be drawn on this basis. However, the available data did indicate that the less safe or settled group may have included more children who had recently become looked after as there were more on interim care orders (10% :33%) and fewer on full care orders (63% : 33%) in the less safe or settled grouping than in the safe and settled grouping. A similar percentage of each group were being looked after under Sec 20 (27% : 23%).

There were differences in the placements of the children in the two subgroups. More of the safe and settled group were living in local authority foster care both in area (48% :34%) and in agency foster care (20% : 9%). There were *many fewer* of the safe and settled group in foster care with relatives/friends in the local authority area (4% : 17%¹)

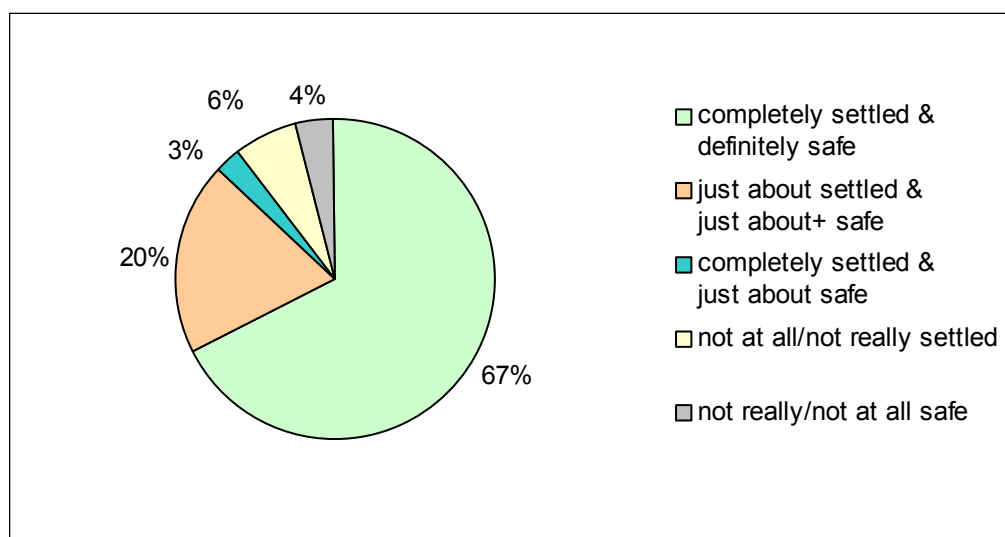
The remaining children were predominantly living in residential homes (14% in the safe and settled group, 31% in the less safe or settled group). One should note that nearly a third of the children who felt less safe or settled were living in residential homes in the area (26%) or in residential homes out of area (5%).

Table 15: Do you feel settled? & Do you feel safe?: number and percentage

	Definitely safe	Just about	Not really	Not at all	All	All (%)
Yes, completely settled	185	8	2	1	196	79
Just about settled	27	27	0	1	55	17
Not really settled	3	9	2	2	16	2
Not at all settled	2	3	2	1	8	2
All	217	47	6	5	275	100
<i>All (%)</i>	70	20	6	3	100	

n=275 (Note the shading is consistent with Chart 1).

Chart 1: Safe and settled subgroups



Source: adapted from Table 6 data.
(Note the shading is consistent with Table 16).

¹ Skewed by one authority's sample.

Analysis of the responses of the children in the 'safe and settled group' found that they were generally very positive about their care experience as would be expected from our previous comments. For example, these children and young people felt able to make choices, had good support and were satisfied about much of their contact arrangements with family and friends as we have indicated (see Tables 16– 23). Indeed, there were 21 questions where the 'safe and settled group' gave significantly more positive responses than the undifferentiated sample might suggest. These included issue around friends, doing hobbies, communication with social workers and foster carers, access to support around schoolwork and information needs.

Nearly 80% of the safe and settled group indicated that their foster carer/key worker encouraged their hobbies compared to 43% of the rest.

Table 16: *Encouragement with hobbies and sports*

Q 14

Does your foster carer/keyworker or someone else encourage you to do hobbies or sports?

	Safe/Settled	Less settled safe
Yes. completely	79%	43%
Just about	12%	33%
Not really	5%	15%
Not at all	4%	9%

Three quarters indicated that they were 'completely' able to talk to their foster carer/key worker compared to a third of the rest.

Table 17: *Talk to foster carer/keyworker*

Q 32

Is your foster carer/keyworker someone you can talk to?

	Safe/Settled	Less settled or safe
Yes, completely	75%	34%
Yes, sometimes, it depends	21%	39%
Not really	2%	15%
Not at all	2%	12%

Most of the safe and settled group (85%) indicated that their foster carer/key worker noticed when they did some thing well compared to less than half (44%) of the rest.

Table 18: Notice doing well

Q 33

Does your foster carer/keyworker or someone else notice when you have done well at something?

	Safe/Settled	Less settled or safe
Yes, definitely	85%	44%
Sometimes	14%	45%
Not really	1%	6%
Not at all	1%	6%

The former group was also more positive about being able to see their social worker, with over half indicating they saw their social worker 'as often as they liked' compared to less than a quarter (23%) of the rest.

Table 19: Seeing social worker

Q 27

Do you see your social worker as often as you like?

	Safe/Settled	Less settled or safe
Yes definitely	55%	23%
Just about	21%	38%
Not really	13%	28%
Not at all	11%	11%

Over 70% of the safe and settled group indicate they are able to 'make and keep friends' all the time, compared to under a third of the rest.

Table 20: Make and keeping friends

Q 15

Are you able to make and keep friends of your own age?

	Safe/Settled	Less settled or safe
All the time	71%	32%
Most of the time	23%	45%
Not really	4%	14%
Not at all	2%	9%

Over 70% of the safe and settled group felt they had sufficient information to make decisions about their future, compared to only 40% of the rest.

Table 21: Information to make decisions

Q 56

Do you receive enough information to enable you to make decisions about your future?

	Safe/Settled	Less settled or safe
Yes, as much as I need	71%	40%
Some but I'd like more	13%	35%
Not really	12%	15%
Not at all	4%	10%

Just over half of each group (53%: 51%) had overnight stays away from their placement but there was a significant difference in how happy each group was with the arrangements: 83% of the safe and settled group indicating they were completely happy with arrangements, compared to less than two thirds of the less settled or safe group (58%).

Table 22: Staying overnight

Q 20

Are you happy with the arrangements for staying overnight with friends or family?

	Safe/Settled	Less settled or safe
Yes, completely	83%	58%
Just about	9%	31%
Not really	6%	11%
Not at all	2%	0%

It was found that there was a significant subgroup of the less safe or settled group (61%) who indicated that they felt angry or frustrated 'all' or 'most of the time' compared to less than a third (29%) the safe and settled group.

Table 23: Getting angry or frustrated

Q 22

Are there ever times when you get angry or frustrated?

	Safe/Settled	Less settled or safe
All of the time	4%	20%
Most of the time	25%	41%
Not really	63%	34%
Not at all	8%	5%

These children, who felt angry or frustrated 'most' or 'all of the time' gave similar answers to the rest of the 'not settled and safe' group to many of the questions. But there were two questions where they were significantly different.

In each group around three quarters indicated that they 'knew they had a care plan' (79%: 74%). But a much lower percentage of those who felt angry or frustrated indicated that they were helped to understand it (41%:70%).

Table 24: Understanding care plan

Less settled or safe subgroup ONLY

Q 64

Are you helped to understand your care plan?	angry mostly	rest	Less settled or safe (all)
Yes	41%	70%	52%
Just about	49%	17%	37%
No	11%	13%	12%

Angry mostly n =47; rest n= 31; Less settled or safe (all) n= 78 (p < 0.05)

The other area of particular dissatisfaction was that those who indicated that they became angry or frustrated were not able to see their friends as much as they wanted. Less than 10% (9%) were completely happy with the arrangements compared to over three quarters (76%) of the rest of the less settled or safe group. Nearly half indicated they could not or 'not really see their friends as much as they wanted (45%) compared to a fifth (21%) of the remainder.

Table 25: Seeing friends

Less settled or safe subgroup ONLY

Q 17

Do you see your friends as much as you want?	angry mostly	rest	Less settled or safe (all)
Yes, completely	9%	76%	35%
Just about	46%	3%	30%
Not really	28%	15%	23%
Not at all	17%	6%	13%

Angry mostly n =54; don't usually n= 33; less settled or safe n= 87 (p < 0.002)

In addition there was an indication that they were more negative in their responses to a number of questions related to communication with and support from their foster carer/key worker, but the differences were not statistically significant. (i.e. not at 5% level $p < 0.05$. This may be due to the small numbers involved.)

Table 26: Talking to foster carer/key-worker

Q 32

Is (your foster carer/key-worker) someone you can talk to?

	angry mostly	rest	less settled or safe (all)
Yes, completely	25%	50%	34%
Yes, sometimes, it depends	45%	28%	39%
Not really	19%	9%	15%
Not at all	11%	13%	12%
Angry mostly n=53; rest n= 32; less settled (all) n= 85. (p = 0.08)			

Table 27: Noticing doing well

Q 33

Does (your foster carer/key worker) or someone else notice when you have done well at something?

	angry mostly	rest	less settled or safe (all)
Yes, definitely	42%	47%	44%
Sometimes	51%	34%	45%
Not really	6%	6%	6%
Not at all	2%	13%	6%
Angry mostly n=53; rest n= 32; less settled (all) n= 85. (p = 0.16)			

Table 28: Help from social worker

Q 30

Does (your social worker) help you when you have problems?

	angry mostly	rest	less settled or safe (all)
Yes, definitely	38%	55%	44%
Yes, but I'd like more help	30%	36%	33%
Not really	25%	6%	17%
Not at all	8%	3%	6%
Angry mostly n=53; rest n= 33; less settled (all) n= 86. (p = 0.10)			

The group who indicated that they mostly felt angry or frustrated also were more likely *not* to be in school (28%) than the rest (13%). Although there is a correlation between these two factors, whether 'not being in school' was caused by 'feeling angry' or the 'feeling angry', was a consequence of not being in school or if both had a similar cause cannot be determined by analysis of the data.

In addition, how much these differences are linked with being in residential placements, as opposed to foster placements, and/or not being regularly in school, warrants further analysis.