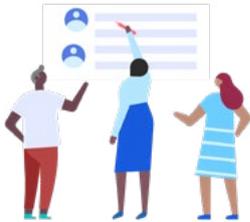


NATIONAL SURVEYS



National Surveys, 2020

The Alliance surveys gather views, information and evidence from foster Carers throughout the UK. Foster carers from all fostering providers, both local authority and agency take part.



Three quarters of looked after children are with fostering families and foster carers are the backbone of fostering services, no one is better positioned to feedback factual evidence of how fostering is working or not working for our children and young people and the families that look after them 24/7.

Foster carers have a unique perspective of being able to see the outcomes in real time, watch how services perform, and feedback on how they are treated.

Our surveys are trusted by foster carers as the Alliance team are foster carers themselves and know how nervous carers can be about filling out forms for their fostering providers and the fostering organisations that work for them.

Research and data is key to us to evidence what works well and what doesn't. Providing this evidence means that we can start to improve the outcomes for children in care as this starts with improving the respect, security, practical and financial support for the people who play the key role in transforming lives and deliver foster care on a daily basis...the foster carers.

This Survey: Support during the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic The summary report



Key findings

In discussion with the Children's Minister, Vicky Ford in May 2020 we were asked to feedback our foster carers views to the Minister and her team on the support carers received during lockdown. Already our conversation with the Minister enabled us to access support, funding, laptops and PPE.

Foster Carer Profile

A total of 616 foster carers took part across England, Scotland and Wales. Respondents were equally from local authorities and independent fostering agencies and was representative of mainstream fostering households around the UK.

Funding

- » 80.2% reported that they had received no extra funding
- » 19.8% reported that they had received some extra funding, although this was variable
- » For the 19.8% that reported extra funding they have been between a one off £20 payment, between £10/£25 per week per child during lockdown, one report of a one off payment of £200. The average was a one off payment of £25.
- » One local authority paid day care rate for children out of school, another local authority paid £400 for a 3 month period. Fostering providers gave out stationary vouchers via the Virtual School. Some gave funding and said it was just for utility bills, some to cover meals.
- » Some reported “practically begging” for financial support and assistance, not all were successful.
- » “We were promised £100 but have never received it”
- » “We received a one off educational allowance for children over 5yrs”
- » “We were given £50 to spend on a specified website but never received it”
- » “We were not awarded that extra funding was available, it was never mentioned to us”
- » “I received a small one off payment as my child has complex needs”
- » “We felt we had to practically beg for funding, even then we were ‘invited to compose and sign a letter’ to our council and justify our request”
- » “We received a weeks groceries!”



Our response:

The Children's Minister clearly stated that she had provided several million pounds to support looked after children during Covid19. It was made clear that foster carers were to be given additional funding from this amount. The evidence shows that only 19% of carers received any funding at all and 81% of foster carers were denied any funding despite requests. Of the 19% that financial support was offered, all was Children's allowances and the foster carers got nothing, or very little.



Support

- » 75% of carers reported good to outstanding support from their social work team
- » 25% reported low levels of support

Our response:

Three quarters of foster carers were satisfied with the support from their social work team, the feedback we were getting was that the support from the teams and social workers around the foster carers was good. This is very positive, but we are still concerned that a quarter of the carers found the support very poor. foster carers got nothing, or very little.

Education provision and demands

- » 89% of carers reported that they had not felt pressured into sending their children to school against their wishes and in line with government Covid19 safeguarding guidelines.
- » Only 7% of foster carers reported that they had been refused a school place where it had been requested for their child.



Our response:

The Alliance worked hard to ensure that the difference between 'vulnerable children with a social worker' and looked after children in foster care was established. The initial government legislation did not make this clear. In our discussion with the Minister and her team it was confirmed that children in a secure fostering family setting were not classed as vulnerable at that time and therefore were not required to attend school. School provision was however to be provided to looked after children if it ensured placement stability and where appropriate in individual situations on a case by case basis. The legislation was then changed to reflect this.

Contact with birth families

13% of carers were asked to undertake face to face contact sessions. 87% were not, and personally facilitated contact from their homes via platforms such as Zoom or FaceTime.



Adoption introductions

We asked 'Have you been asked to undertake adoption introductions?' Although only 42 of our participants replied yes it is important to remember that the percentage is probably proportional to the number of carers who work in foster onto adoption.

Our response:

This was one of our most recurrent issues in carers reaching out for support. Adoption introductions seemed to be going ahead even in the height of lockdown.

Many carers were expected to put themselves into situations that their own fostering provider key worker did not deem safe or within government guidelines/legislation, during adoption introductions. Social distancing was not possible, and babies and children handed back and forward amongst carers and adoptees in confined spaces with no PPE.

In some instances fostering providers in adoptions were demanding foster carers sign waivers saying that if they contracted Covid19 whilst carrying out adoption introductions that their fostering provider was not held responsible.

The Alliance felt strongly that for the sake of a few weeks that peoples lives were being put at risk, the waivers were inappropriate and showed a distinct lack of any form of duty of care towards foster carers.

Laptops

- » Out of 616 responses, 503 foster carers stated that they had not been provided with a laptop for their child. 81% did not receive them.
- » 35% of those foster carers stated that they had requested laptops.



Our response:

The Children's Minister clearly instructed fostering providers to ensure all looked after children had extra laptops during this period, it clearly did not happen. The Alliance worked with many to help carers get access to laptops for their children. We found that there was a lot of 'blame' and passing the issue around, some providers said it was the responsibility of school, some passed it to their virtual school, some said it had to come out of the child's food, clothing and accommodation allowance, some said it was covered by PIPs.

Access to free school meals and vouchers

194 carers out of 616 said their children were eligible for free school meals. Of those eligible approx 30% said they were unable to get access to vouchers.

PPE

92% of carers were not provided with PPE

Our response:

Much of our work was around safeguarding carers during lockdown. As the evidence confirmed over 90% of carers were not provided with PPE. Many carers were expected to put themselves into situations that their own fostering provider key worker did not deem safe or within government guidelines/legislation.

In some instances fostering providers were demanding foster carers sign waivers saying that if they contracted Covid19 whilst carrying out contact or adoption introductions their fostering provider was not responsible.

The Minister confirmed that foster carers were key workers, some fostering providers were quick to respond and send carers appropriate information and proof of being a key worker but many did not.

As with everything else the inconsistency of fostering providers is evident.

In summary

As you can see from this data 80% of foster carers received no extra funding during lockdown. Our carers have gone above and beyond to care for traumatised vulnerable children during Covid19 and despite the Children's Minister, Vicky Ford, providing considerable extra funding for the support of foster care this largely went ignored.

We were however delighted to see that 75% of foster carers reported good or outstanding support from their immediate fostering teams, including their own supervising social workers.

The overall summary is one we find pervades fostering throughout the UK, one of inconsistency. We also find that fostering providers find different ways of 'interpreting' policy, legislation, guidance, standards and instructions from Minister and DfE.

This leaves the fostering community, and by nature the children and young people exposed to varying degrees of all forms of support across the UK. The quality of care we provide should not be a postcode lottery, and down to councils and agencies to interpret ministers instructions, National Minimum standards, Allegations policies and legislation as they feel fit. We really appreciate the challenging times all local authorities find themselves under but feeling they have no accountability to these important standards and instructions is not beneficial to our children and young people.

