

Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association Report

Foster Carers Supporting Foster Carers

Foster Carer Survey

June 2021



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on behalf of the CCC & PCC Foster Carer Associations
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About our Foster Carers Association

The main aim of our association is for Foster Carers to provide support for all our carers, to enable them to provide the best possible care and outcomes for the children and young people we look after. The main objectives are to:

- Raise the profile of Foster Carers and ensure that carers are viewed as professionals, working within Children's Services to improve our support, services, remuneration.
- Work in partnership with the Fostering Service to improve the participation of foster carers in service developments and initiatives

Fostering Network offer a Regional Foster Carer Association support group for foster carer committees and associations. The chair attends the support groups bi-monthly where experiences are shared between our peers in neighbouring counties. For example, the last support group we attended included representatives from Suffolk, Bedfordshire and Thurrock. This has proved very useful in gathering ideas from other carers and their experiences outside of our local authority.

Since our last report we have seen challenges for our carers following a period of change within the fostering service. Having now moved through this, we are looking forward to working with the service to support developments in progress and planning for those to come. We are particularly keen to work with the service on the drive to engage foster carers in all key activity, whether this is recruitment, peer support and mentorship or training. We know our foster carers have a wealth of experience and knowledge about the foster task and celebrate the fact that this is recognised.

Over the past few months, the committee in Peterborough and Association in Cambridgeshire have begun to work more closely together. Both Chairs have attended meetings with senior managers during which we have shared ideas that will assist with communication and ensuring that Foster Carers voices are heard. As an association and on behalf of all Foster Carers, we are thankful to the Corporate Parenting Sub Committee for allowing us a voice in this forum. We are very committed and will endeavour to assist this committee in all aspects of improving outcomes for our children and young people in care.

Purpose of this report

The Chairs of both Cambridgeshire's Foster Carer Association and Peterborough's Fostering Committee worked with the fostering service to develop a foster carer survey which was sent out to all foster carers in June (312 households). With the changes that have taken place over the past year or two, it was agreed that now was the perfect opportunity for the views of foster carers to be sought to help shape a fostering service that we are proud to be part of.

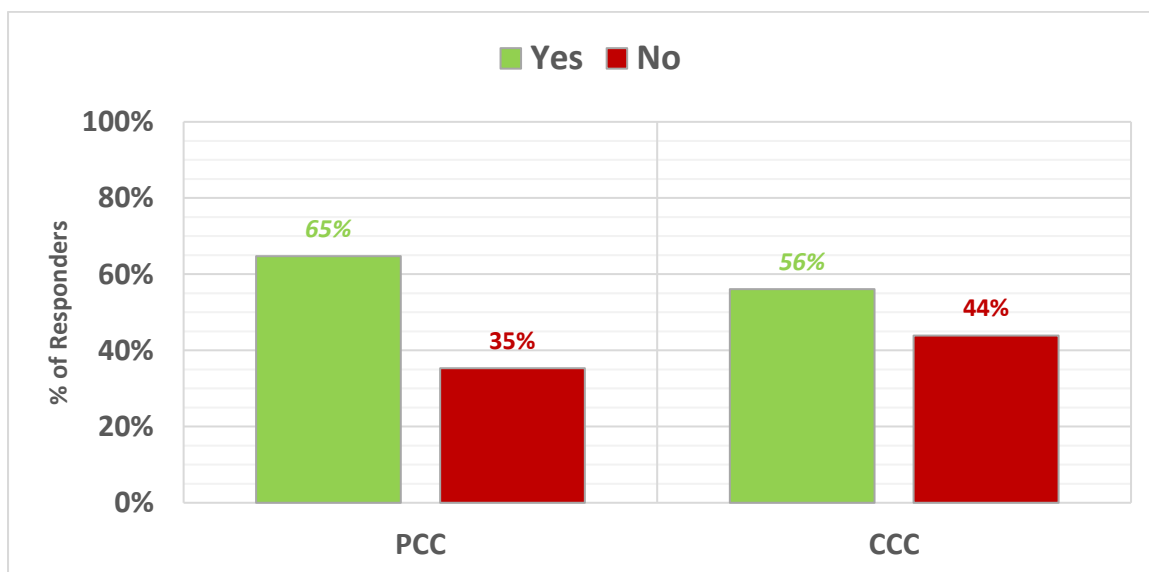
A total of 113 responses were received from individuals, capturing 36% of the cohort of registered Foster Carers, some of which could also be adoptive parents and including Connected Persons Carers from across both Local Authorities. Whilst less than half of our carers responded, this is an improvement of previous surveys and we would like to take the opportunity to thank foster carers for taking the time out of their busy schedules to provide feedback.

This report provides an overview of the responses received. The full detailed responses have been shared with managers in the service and over the coming months we will work with the service to collate and address themes as well as keeping foster carers informed of the impact their views have had.

Overview of responses

Question 1:

Do you feel fully supported by the Fostering Service/Local Authority?



In both authorities more carers felt fully supported than those who did not. Those who felt supported said that their supervising social workers supported them well and commented on the quality of training offered. Foster carers were most dissatisfied with changes in their fostering social worker or the child's social worker which impacted on the relationships and communication they have with services. Other comments included carers asking for more support in challenging or crisis situations, an improvement in the information they receive when children come to live with them and for the fostering service to support them to be more prepared for the task ahead when first approved.

In response, the service has told us that an improved support offer is in development which includes the out of hours support line for foster carers. A review of the training offer for carers in assessment

is underway to compliment the skills to foster training and an improved peer support/mentorship framework is also being developed.

Question 2:

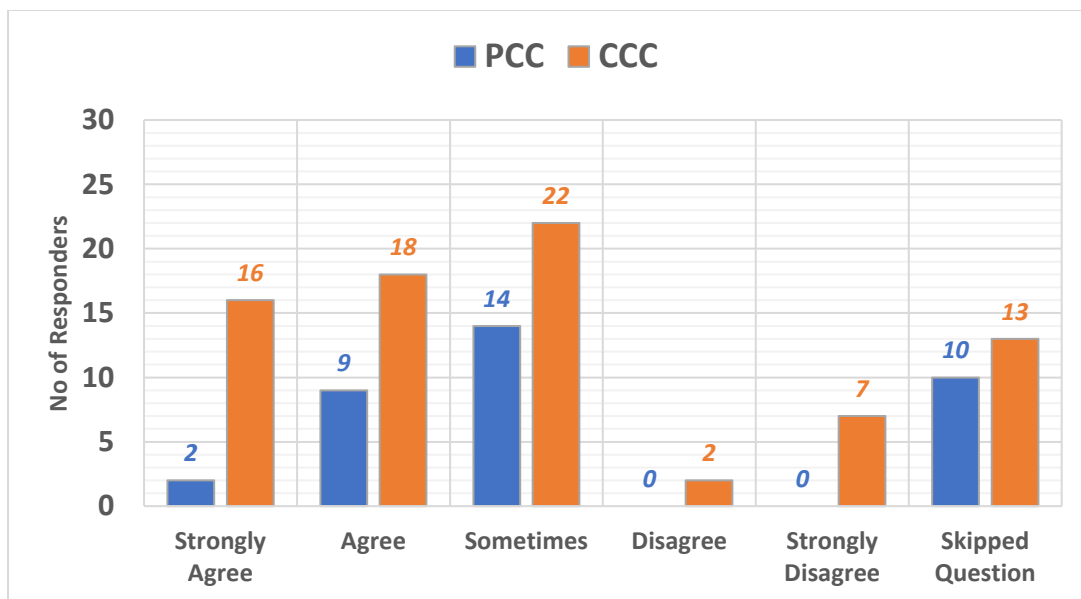
What improvements or changes within the Fostering Service Department would assist you to reach your full potential in your role as a carer?

Comments included: Foster Carers want to feel respected as professionals, more involved in decision making and feel part of a team. Foster carers would like more opportunities to meet other foster carers and training was identified as a key area. Foster carers would like to understand what support can be offered when it is needed.

In response, the service has told us that the new training programme has been launched and based on the positive feedback from foster carers, Foundations for Attachment training will also be available this year. The service will also be piloting membership to the National Association of Therapeutic Parenting for a cohort of foster carers, as recommended by foster carers. The fostering service will share views received via the survey with other areas within children’s services and we will work on advocating and improving the inclusion of foster carers, this being a key priority for us.

Question 3:

As a Foster Carer do you feel your thoughts, opinions and experiences are valued and taken into consideration when decisions/plans are being made for the child/young person in your care?



As the graph above shows, more foster carers told us that they strongly agreed, agreed, or sometimes agreed than carers who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Positive comments included some activity to support carers as being “excellent” and feeling valued when they are included in providing information about a child and invited to key meetings. Foster carers also told us that they would like to receive feedback from meetings about the child they are looking after, to feel listened to and their opinions and views taken more on board when decisions are made. Some foster carers also asked the service to improve the way children are matched to foster carers.

In response the service told us that they are keen to work with us on ideas to raise the profile of foster carers within the professional networks, this could for example be recorded question and answer sessions or foster carer involvement in induction programmes for new social workers joining

the Local Authorities or as part of the training programme for newly trained social workers. We were also told that the service will be working with colleagues in the operational teams and commissioning services to improve the information provided about a child.

Question 4:

What changes/strategies do you think would improve the lives of the young people in your care?

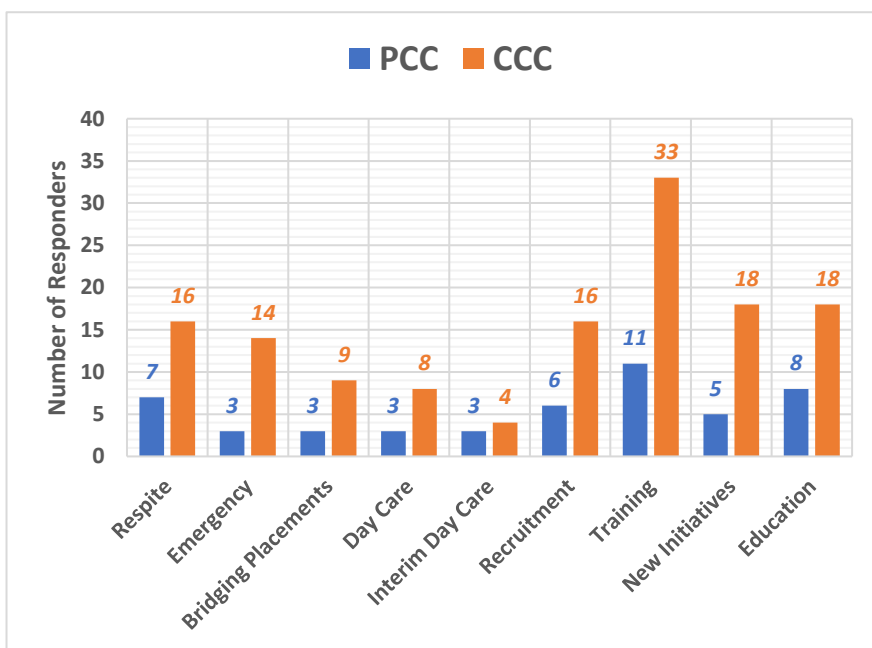
Most responses received were about the importance of having a consistent social worker and requests that visits to children are planned around both foster carer commitments and the child’s commitments. Foster carers asked for more training on disability and support for those who provide care for that cohort of children. We are welcoming the opportunity to work with the fostering service to ensure foster carers are aware of how and when to escalate any concerns they may have.

The fostering service told us that they will ensure foster carers views are shared with the relevant services and will continue to advocate on their behalf. The service will review the training and support for carers who look after children with disabilities.

Question 5:

Would you be willing/available to share your experiences/commitment to the YP in your care to others?

As shown in the graph below, a high number of carers confirmed their interest in working with the fostering service in a variety of ways. Where possible, the details of individual foster carers interested in specific areas will be shared with the fostering service. We believe this demonstrates the commitment of foster carers to children in care by offering their skills and experience.



Question 6:

There is a high percentage of children and YP; teenagers and those exhibiting challenging behaviour who are being placed with IFA's. In your opinion, what does the service need to do to encourage and empower in-house Foster Carers to be more confident and step out of their comfort zone to care for these YP?

Foster carers reiterated their comments that a 'buddy system', more targeted support and having the right information about children would support more children in care to live locally. Working as a team and more timely mental health support for young people was also felt important.

The fostering service has told us of their plans to clarify the peer support and mentorship programme, the review of the support offer and how they intend to work towards improving the information about a child with the relevant areas of the wider service. The service will also ensure that foster carers views regarding timely mental health services is shared with colleagues in health and the clinician services offered by the Local Authority.

Question 7:

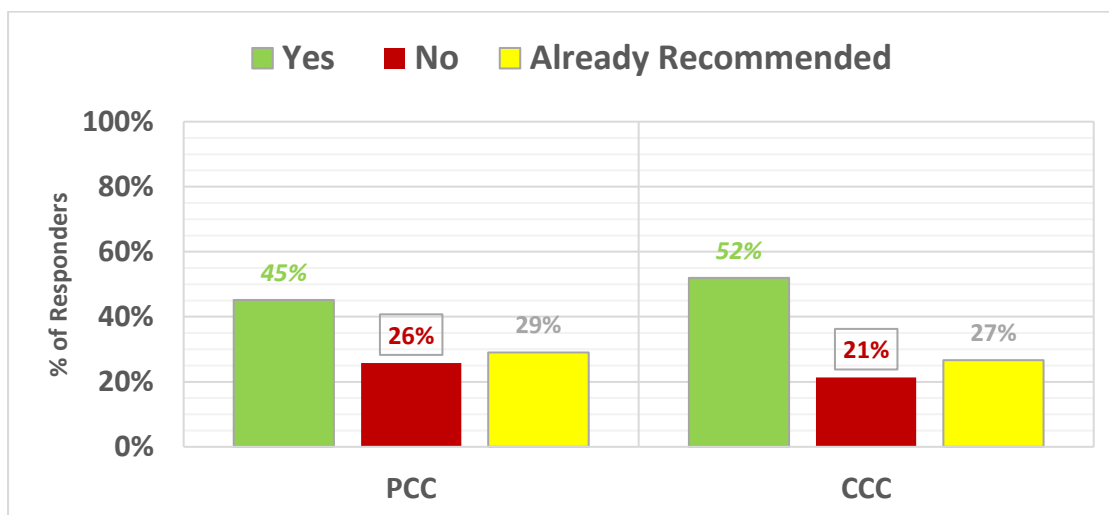
As a Foster Carer, if you had a magic wand what would your three wishes be that you would like to see the Fostering Service implement?

Several comments reiterated foster carer views already detailed within this report. In addition, foster carers asked that the service ensures that their supervising social worker has the time they need to spend with them. Communication and working in an open and transparent way with foster carers were also themes. In addition, foster carers would like to see the service develop a network of foster carer support that could also include respite arrangements for carers when they need it.

The fostering service told us that they appreciate the informal networks of peer support that fosters have built up between themselves and of the importance of these networks. The service is keen to work with us to explore how what some foster carers have built up over time can be replicated for others who may not have the same opportunities and specifically for those who care for older children with more complex needs. There are social worker vacancies within the service and recruitment campaigns are underway as well as activity to ensure we have the right capacity as the number of new carers increases.

Question 8:

Would you recommend other potential carers to join the LA in their fostering journey? Whether this be new carers or others transferring from an IFA



As highlighted in the graph above more carers would recommend the service than carers who would not:

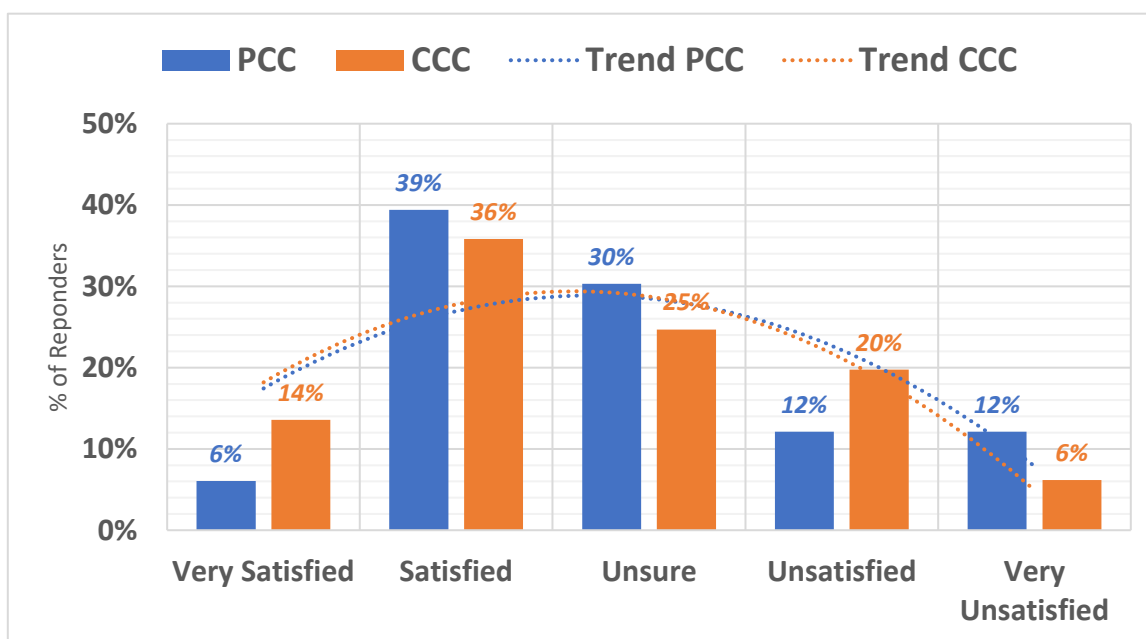
- 52% of CCC and 45% of PCC Carers who responded to the survey would recommend working for the Local Authority to others
- 29% of CCC and 27% of PCC Carers who responded to the survey have already recommended working for the Local Authority to others

The fostering service acknowledged this is positive but is also committed to improving the number of carers who would recommend the Local Authority to others.

Question 9:

Do you feel satisfied with the way that your Fostering service works to retain and support its existing carers?

Overall responses from foster carers are shown in the graph below. Comments included a number that have already been detailed in this report, specifically around consistency of social workers, support to foster carers and the continuing need to improve communication. Foster carers felt that decisions about children could be made more quickly and suggested meetings are held when unplanned endings happen. Foster carers also commented on the difference between the amount external foster carers receive for looking after children and what their Local Authority pays them.



The fostering service told us that it acknowledges carers working for external agencies receive a higher payment than those providing foster homes for both Local Authorities. Payment fees were reviewed last year and benchmarked against the payments made by other Local Authorities. The service also told us that they are developing a process for reviewing unplanned endings that will involve foster carers so that lessons can be learned and shared with the fostering community as well as the workforce.

Question 10:

Please select ALL relevant criteria from the list below. You may fall into two categories e.g. Foster & Adoptive Parent

