

# **Your Life, Your Care:**

*a survey of the views of  
looked after children and  
young people aged 4-18yrs in  
Merton*

*April 2018  
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# About this research

## Bright Spots

This research is part of the Bright Spots programme: a partnership between the University of Bristol and Coram Voice.

The programme aims to:

- improve the care experience for all looked after children;
- give children a voice on their own well-being; and
- highlight the 'Bright Spots' of practice that contribute to children flourishing in care.

The project was funded by the Hadley Trust and the DfE Social Care Innovation Fund.


- Through the programme we developed the *Bright Spots Well-Being Indicators*, which put children's experience and voices at the heart of how we measure subjective well-being.
- The indicators are measured by the '*Your Life, Your Care*' survey – a tool grounded in research and comparable to national data sets.
- The survey was developed from literature reviews, roundtable discussions with professionals and from focus groups and individual interviews with 140 looked after children and young people living in nine different local authorities.
- The survey identifies the areas where children appear to be flourishing and where things could be improved, providing an evidence base of children's experience and well-being to inform service improvements.

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# **Section 1: Summary: Key Findings**

# Key findings

The overall response rate was 37%. Girls and children and young people living in foster care were over-represented. Merton is a small local authority. Although the response rate was good, remember that the responses came from 19 children (4-11yrs) and 33 young people (11-18yrs) when looking at the findings.



All young people (11-18yrs) had medium or high scores on whether they felt the things they did in life were worthwhile and only a small proportion of young people in Merton had low scores on life satisfaction, happiness yesterday and positivity about the future.

Compared to the general population and other looked-after young people a greater proportion of young people had very high scores (9 or 10) on all the well-being scales

Page 1  
Looked-after children and young people in Merton appear to be thriving. No children (4-11yrs) and only one young person (11-18yrs) has low well-being. There were numerous Bright Spots, where children and young people in Merton were doing as well as the general population or better compared to looked-after children in other local authorities (LAs).



31 (94%) young people and 7 (78%) children felt that their lives were improving.

# Key findings



All but one of the youngest children (4-7yrs) knew who their social worker was.



the majority of children (4-11yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) in Merton trusted their workers.



Over half (59%) of young people reported that they had only had one social worker in the last year, a higher proportion compared with young people (34%) in other LAs.



Almost all children and young people had a trusted adult in their lives, however 4 did not.



Around half of children (8-11yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) were happy with contact arrangements with their mothers and siblings.

7 young people had no face-to-face contact with either parent.



Children and young people in Merton reported positive relationships with their carers, the majority:

- trusted their carers;
- felt their carers showed an interest in their education; and
- thought their carers noticed how they were feeling.

# Key findings

The majority of children and young people were positive about their placements



They reported that they felt safe and settled in their homes.



However, around a quarter of the 8-11yrs and 11-18yrs age groups did not like their bedrooms. Some young people used the text boxes to write that they wanted a bigger room or that they did not want to share with siblings.



Others also wrote that they wanted to have a pet.

## **Section 2: Methodology**





# Methodology

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- Three online surveys were used to capture looked after children and young people's views on their own well-being. The three versions were for:
  - a) younger children aged 4-7yrs (16 questions);
  - b) children aged 8-11yrs in primary school (31 questions); and
  - c) young people of secondary school age 11-18yrs (46 questions).
- There was a common set of 16 core questions.
- Paper surveys were also available and used in cases where no Internet was available, or when the child preferred this method.
- In Merton at the time of the survey 142 children and young people aged 4-18yrs were looked after and able to complete the survey.
- Children and young people completed the survey anonymously: individual identifiers such as name, school etc. were not collected in order to allow responses without fear of consequences.
- If children recorded names or any identifying information on the survey these were removed by the researchers.

# Methodology

- The survey was distributed through the virtual school to head teachers and designated teachers in schools.
- Social care staff, including foster carers and social workers, were asked to encourage children and young people to complete the survey.
- Regular reminders were sent to head teachers and designated teachers and some schools were followed up directly.
- The survey was promoted at the Looked After Child and care leavers consultation which was attended by partnership agencies, designated teachers and social care staff.
- Most children and young people were asked to complete the online survey in school in February and March 2018, with a trusted adult present. The trusted adult was usually the designated teacher, learning mentor or SENCO.

# Methodology

## Subjective well-being:

### Are children flourishing?

- Subjective well-being in this survey refers to children's own evaluations of how they feel about their lives.
- There are questions in the surveys about affect (e.g. how happy a child feels now), cognitive judgements (e.g. evaluations of relationships) and the inner world (e.g. life having meaning).
- All these elements help us understand whether children are flourishing.

- Where possible, LA data are compared to data on children in the general population, and to the average responses from 13 local authorities.
- Data were weighted and tests run for significant difference between LAs.
- In addition to questions that measure overarching well-being indicators (happiness, life satisfaction etc.) the questions cover four domains that are important to children and young people: Relationships, Resilience, Rights and Recovery. The report covers each of these.

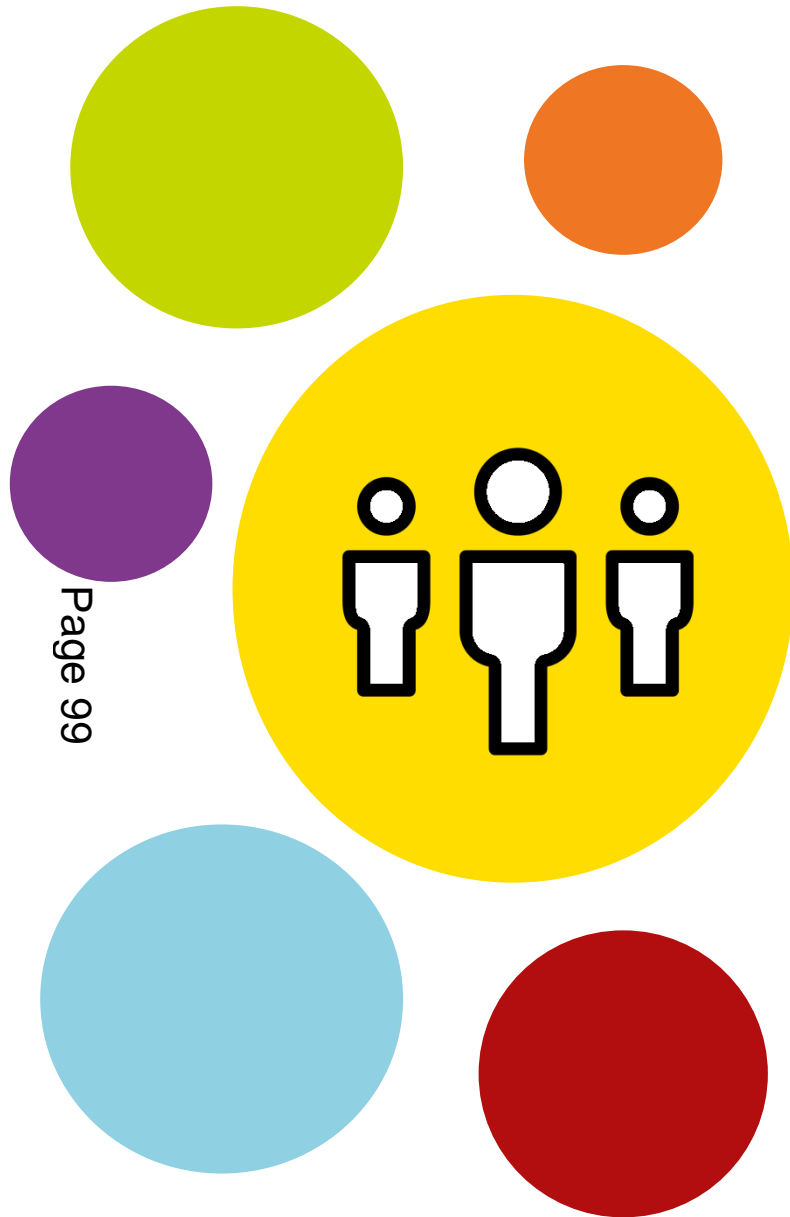


On some pages of this report you will see a '**Bright Spots**' icon (shown left). This indicates a 'good news' story – a positive aspect of practice in your local authority.

This is where children and young people are doing significantly better than children in care in other local authorities or report the same or higher well-being than their peers in the general population.



## **Section 3: Survey results**



# 1. Demographics

- Sample sizes
- Age and gender
- Ethnicity
- Placements
- Length of time in care

# Sample sizes

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Although the sample size must be borne in mind when considering the representativeness of the data, the response rate was significantly better than in some similar surveys. *The State of Nation: Children in Care 2015*, for example, had a response rate of 3%.

- 52 children and young people responded to the surveys from an eligible looked after population of 142.
- The overall response rate was 37%.
- There was a particularly good response from the youngest children (4-7yrs), where two-thirds (67%) of looked-after children completed the survey.

Age	Care population <i>n</i>	Responses <i>n</i>	Response rate %
4-7yrs	15	10	67%
8-11yrs	28	9	32%
11-18yrs	99	33	33%

# Age and gender

- In Merton, 63% of the looked after population were boys.
- Girls were over-represented in the survey. A higher proportion of girls completed the survey compared with the proportion of girls (37%) in the looked-after population.

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Age group	Girls <i>n</i> (%)	Boys <i>n</i> (%)	Prefer not to say/no reply <i>n</i> (%)
4-7yrs	6 (60%)	4 (40%)	0 (0%)
8-11yrs	4 (44%)	5 (56%)	0 (0%)
11-18yrs	15 (45.5%)	18 (54.5%)	0 (0%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25 (48%)</b>	<b>27 (52%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>

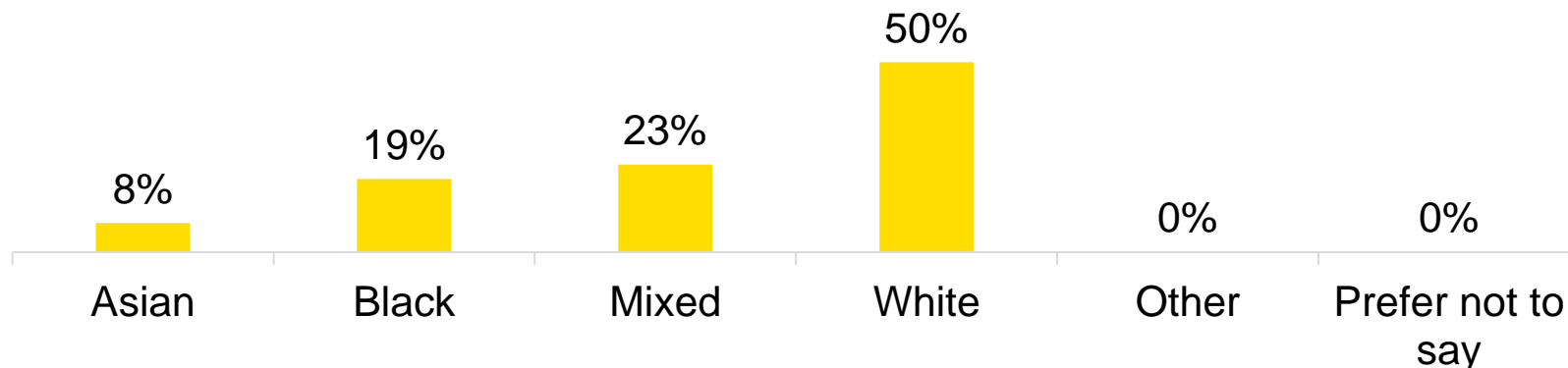
# Ethnicity

Children of Asian, black and mixed ethnicity appear proportionately represented in the survey, as they make up 49% of the care population in Merton's statistical return to the DfE (2017) – compared to 50% in our sample.

- Half (50%) of children and young people who completed the survey were white.
- A higher proportion of children and young people identified as being of mixed ethnicity (23%) compared to the 10% in the DfE published statistical return. (DfE, 2017)
- However, none of the children or young people identified as 'other' whereas the DfE (2017) statistics show 10% of Merton's care population as being of 'other' ethnicity.

Percentage of children

**The ethnicity of children who completed the survey  $n=52$**





# Placements

Children and young people in residential care were under-represented in survey responses: in Merton 66% are placed with foster carers and 26% live in residential care. (DfE, 2017)

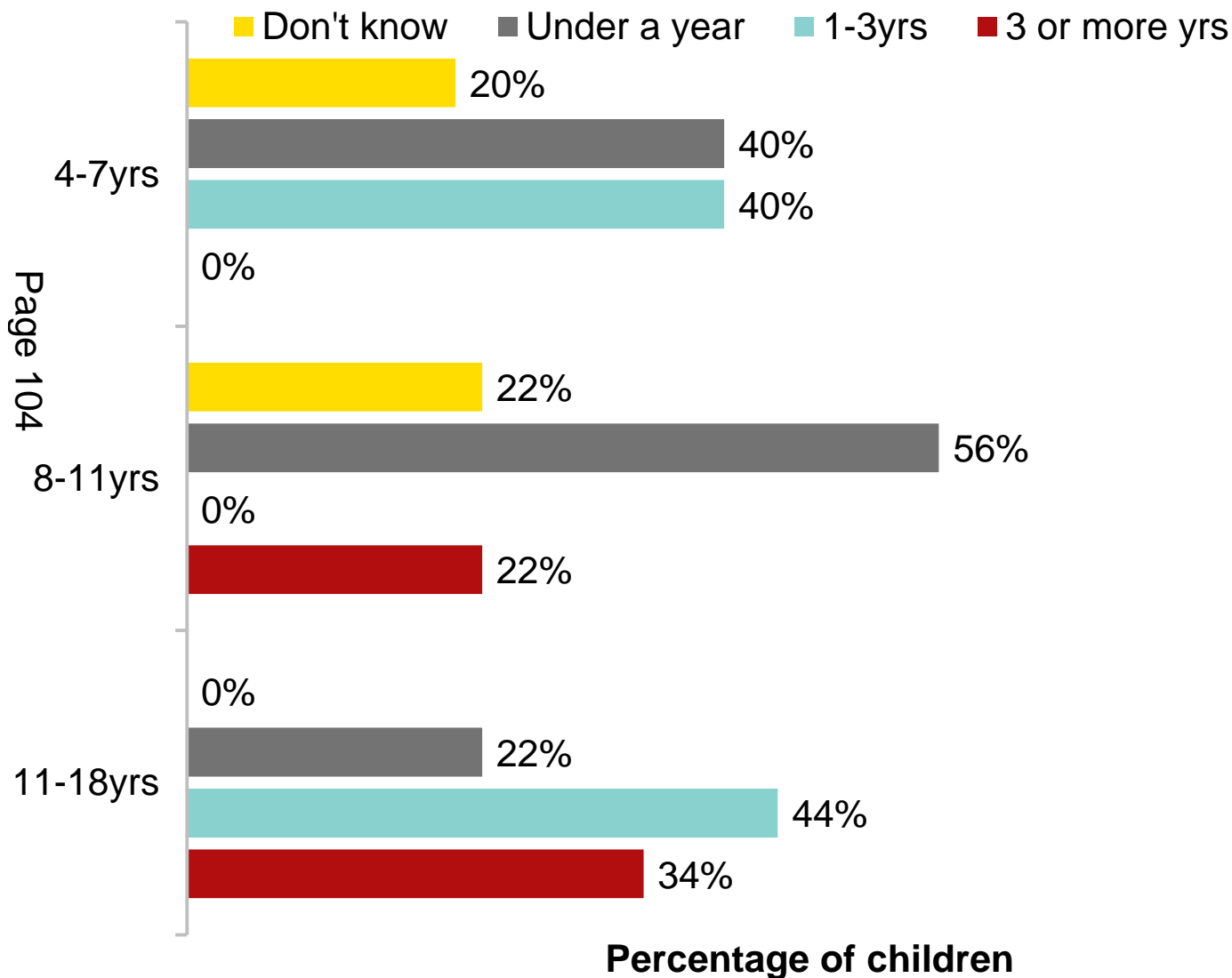
- The majority (71%) of children and young people were living in foster care.
- Children and young people living in foster care were over-represented: 73% of those who completed the survey were in foster care compared to 66% of looked after children in Merton.

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Age group	Foster care %	Family or friends care %	Residential care %	With parents %	Somewhere else %	Prefer not to say %
4-7yrs	50%	40%	0%	10%	0%	0%
8-11yrs	89%	11%	0%	0%	0%	0%
11-18yrs	73%	6%	18%	0%	0%	3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>2%</b>

# Length of time in care

How long have you been in care?





## 2. Relationships

- Family contact
- Good friends
- Pets
- Adults you live with:  
Continuity and trust
- Social worker:  
Continuity and trust

# Family contact

The youngest children (4-7yrs) were not asked questions about family contact, as it was thought that they might become distressed or anxious.






Children and young people (8-18yrs) were asked whether they were *content with the frequency of contact that was taking place with their mother, father, and siblings.*

- All of the children (8-11yrs) had contact with at least one parent. In the older age group (11-18yrs) seven young people had no contact with either parent.
  - Around half of children and young people saw their mothers and siblings 'just the right amount'.
  - 14 (47%) young people and 2 (22%) children felt that they saw their fathers 'just the right amount'.
  - No-one felt that they saw their family members 'too much'.
- A significantly greater proportion of young people in Merton were happy with contact arrangements with their fathers when compared with results from 13 other LAs. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

# Family contact

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Family member	Age group	Too much	Just right	Too little	I am unable to see them	Don't have any siblings
Mother 	8-11yrs n=9	0 (0%)	5 (56%)	4 (44%)	0 (0%)	-----
	11-18yrs n=31	0 (0%)	16 (52%)	7 (22%)	8 (26%)	-----
Father 	8-11yrs n=9	0 (0%)	2 (22%)	4 (44%)	3 (33%)	-----
	11-18yrs n=30	0 (0%)	14 (47%)	7 (23%)	9 (30%)	-----
Siblings 	8-11yrs n=9	0 (0%)	6 (67%)	1 (11%)	1 (11%)	1 (11%)
	11-18yrs n=32	0 (0%)	17 (53%)	7 (22%)	5 (16%)	3 (9%)

\*all rows may not add up to 100% because of rounding

# Family contact: 8-11yrs

Children were also given the option of providing *comments about contact*.

- 5 children took the opportunity to write their thoughts and feelings about contact. 3 children wanted more contact whilst 2 children were happy with their current contact arrangements. Quotes are shown below.

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*I'm ok with how it works.*

*No not really, but I would like to see my auntie, uncle and cousins.*

*I like it just the way it is.*

*I would like to have more contact with them.*

*I haven't had contact with my brother, my niece, or my older sister and I would love to have contact with them.*

# Family contact: 11-18yrs

- 12 (36%) young people took the opportunity to write their thoughts and feelings about contact. 5 young people wrote that they had limited or no contact with family members. 4 young people wrote that they liked contact and got to have fun with their family. 3 young people wanted more contact with their family members. Example quotes are shown below.

*My contact feels good.*

*I cannot contact them because they live in [country].*

*I would like to have more contact.*

*I see them quite a lot every holiday time and we have fun together and there is one [family member] I live with.*

*Don't want to see mam.  
Don't want to see dad.  
No other comments because I don't see them – apart from my nan and brothers.*

*Like seeing Dad – we go out to eat.*

# Good friends

bright spots



A lack of friendships is associated with loneliness and anxiety. All children and young people were asked whether they *had a really good friend*.

**General population:** *The Millennium*

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*Cohort Study (2015)* of young people aged 14yrs found that 3% of young people did not have a good friend.

- The majority of the children and young people stated that they had at least one good friend but 2 (4%) did not.
  - This was similar to their peers in the general population.
- All of the youngest children had a good friend. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

Age group	Yes I have a really good friend <i>n</i> (%)	No, I don't have a really good friend <i>n</i> (%)
4-7yrs	9 (100%)	0 (0%)
8-11yrs	7 (87.5%)	1 (12.5%)
11-18yrs	31 (97%)	1 (3%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>47 (96%)</b>	<b>2 (4%)</b>



# Pets



Children and young people aged between 8-18yrs were asked **if they had a pet in the home they lived in.**

## Focus group feedback

Pets were important to children in all the focus groups we ran.

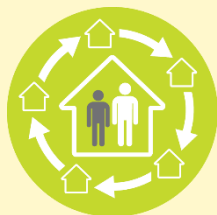
Children and young people said that pets are non-judgmental – they love you no matter what and are always pleased to see you. They can also give children an opportunity to take responsibility.

- 4 of the 8-11yrs children lived in a household with a pet.
- In the older (11-18yrs group), 11 young people had a pet where they lived.
- 5 children and 11 young people wanted to have a pet where they lived.

*I would like to be able to have a little pet where I live.*  
8-11yrs

# Adults you live with: Continuity & trust

## Placement moves



Young people (11-18yrs) were asked, *how many placements have you had since coming into care?*

Number of placements	Percentage
1 placement	44%
2-4 placements	41%
5-7 placements	9%
8-10 placements	3%
11+	0%
Don't know	3%

## Trust



Children and young people were asked whether they *trusted the adults they lived with (i.e. carers, parents).*

- 100% of children (4-7yrs) trusted their carers. This is a Bright Spot of practice.
- All but one (89%) of those aged 8-11yrs; and
- 97% of young people (11-18yrs) trusted their carers.

*My life in care feels very stable, better and calm in comparison to previously.*  
11-18yrs

# Social worker: Continuity & trust

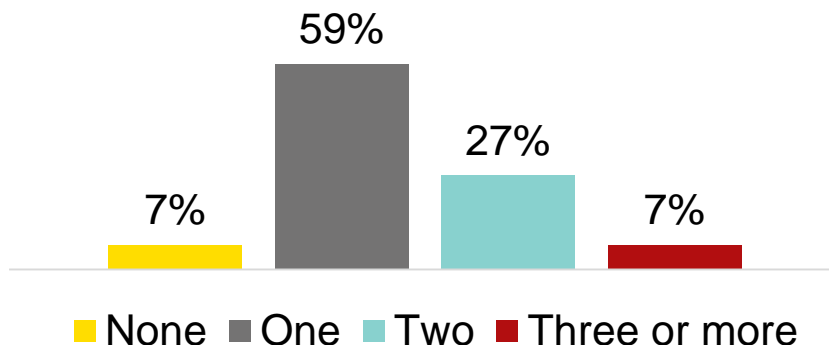
## Changes in social workers



11-18 year olds were asked,  
*how many social workers have  
you had in the past 12 months?*

59% had only one social worker in the previous year. This was a significantly greater proportion than in other LAs, where 34% of young people only had one social worker in the last year.

**How many social workers have  
you had in the last 12 months?**



## Trusting social worker



Children and young people ( $n=48$ ) who knew who their social worker was were asked if they *trusted their social worker*.

- The level of trust in social workers was high. One of the youngest children did not trust their social worker.
- 89% of children (4-7yrs);
- 100% 8-11yrs; and
- 97% of young people (11-18yrs) trusted their social worker.



### 3. Resilience

- Trusted adult
- Being trusted & helping out
- Liking school
- Adults you live with:  
Support for learning
- Having fun & hobbies
- Access to nature
- Second chances
- Life skills
- Access to Internet at home

# Trusted adult



Children and young people aged between 8-18yrs were asked, **do you have an adult who you trust, who helps you and sticks by you no matter what?**

- Most children and young people wrote that they had a trusted adult in their lives:
  - 89% of children (8-11yrs); and
  - 90% of the 11-18yrs young people.
- 4 looked after children and young people had no such adult in their lives.

## **A key turning point**

The availability of one key adult has been shown to be the turning point in many looked after young people's lives. (Gilligan, 2009)

Having a trusted adult has been shown to be the main factor in helping children recover from traumatic events.

# Being trusted & helping out

Younger children (8-11yrs) were asked if they *got the chance to help the teacher*.

## Focus group feedback

Children had said in the focus groups that they were never trusted to show visitors around school or deliver a message because they were looked after.

- 3 children (8-11yrs) responded that 'all or most of the time' they were asked to help and 4 answered 'sometimes'.
- 2 wrote 'hardly ever' or 'never'.

*It's a lovely experience and having love within the family your living with is great. I feel like foster carers need to trust their child a lot more but knowing their limits. Negotiating rules could help with this... It's lovely overall, sometimes it can be stressful.*  
11-18yrs



We asked young people, *how often do you get the chance to show you can be trusted?*

## Focus group feedback

Having trusting relationships and being trusted were key issues raised by the children in the focus groups that underpinned the development of this survey.

- 17 (57%) of young people (11-18yrs) thought they were given opportunities 'all or most of the time' to show they could be trusted and 11 (36%) given them 'sometimes'.
- 2 (7%) responded 'hardly ever'.

# Liking school



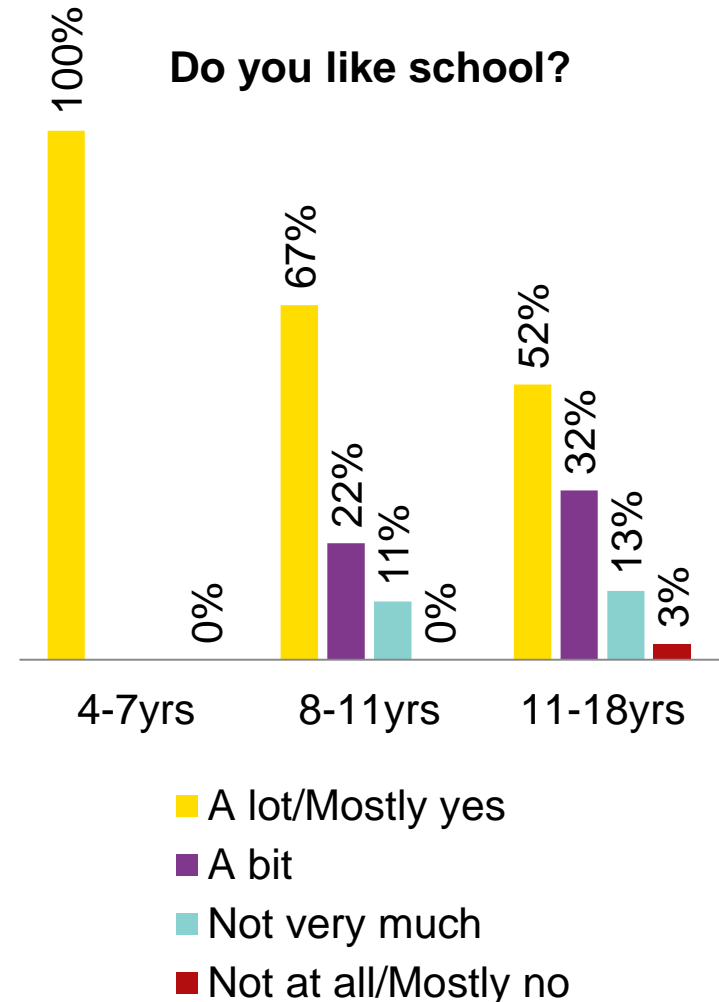
All the children and young people were asked how much they *liked school or college*.

## General population: Liking school

The *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey* (2015) of 5,335 young people (11-15yrs) reported that 80% liked school 'a lot' or 'a bit' and 20% 'not very much' or 'not at all'. Liking school decreased with the child's age and girls were more likely to say they enjoyed school 'a lot' in comparison with boys.

- All of the youngest children (4-7yrs) and the majority of children (8-11yrs) and (11-18yrs) liked school.
- 84% of the 11-18yrs group liked school or college 'a lot' or 'a bit', which is a greater proportion compared to the general population.

## Do you like school?



# Adults you live with: Support for learning



Children in the 8-11yrs and 11-18yrs surveys were asked whether the adults they lived with (e.g. carers, parents)

*showed an interest in what they were doing in school or college.*

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## General population: Support with learning

In comparison the *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey* (11-15yrs) reported that 90% of children in England said their parents were interested in what happened at school.

- 8 (89%) of 8-11yrs and 29 (97%) of 11-18yrs recorded that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- A greater proportion of young people reported that their carers showed an interest in what happened at school compared to their peers in the general population, where 90% reported that their parents showed an interest in their education.



# Having fun & hobbies

Children aged 4-11yrs were asked if they had *fun at the weekend*.



The 11-18yrs survey asked young people if they were able to *spend time on their own hobbies or activities outside of school*.

- The majority of children and young people did have fun and were active.
- All of the youngest children felt that they had fun on the weekends. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

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Age group	Yes, I have fun/take part in activities <i>n (%)</i>	Sometimes I have fun/ take part in activities <i>n (%)</i>	No, I don't have fun or take part in activities <i>n (%)</i>
4-7yrs	9 (100%)	-	0 (0%)
8-11yrs	5 (56%)	2 (22%)	2 (22%)
11-18yrs	18 (60%)	9 (30%)	3 (10%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32 (67%)</b>	<b>11 (23%)</b>	<b>5 (10%)</b>

# Access to nature



Contact with nature can reduce stress and improve mental health. (Play England, 2012)

We asked whether children and young people had opportunities to *explore the outdoors*, such as visiting parks, beaches, fields and forests.

## Focus group feedback

Some of the children in our focus groups said safeguarding fears limited their opportunities.

## General population:

About 11% of children (6-15yrs) had not visited the natural environment in the last year. (Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey, 2016)

- 5 (56%) of children (8-11yrs) and 27 (90%) of young people (11-18yrs) answered that they did have access 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- It was surprising that only 56% of children felt they had opportunities to explore the outdoors, but 90% of young people did.
- It is more common that the youngest children are taken by their carers to play in parks, woods etc. So, whilst looked-after young people (11-18yrs) in Merton reported similar levels of access to their peers in the general population, there are concerns for the younger children.

## What would make care better?

*Maybe going out more often instead of staying in all the time.*

8-11yrs

# Second chances



Young people aged 11-18yrs were asked if they felt they *got a second chance if they did something wrong.*

## Focus group feedback

All children make mistakes and need a second or many more chances. It is part of learning and growing up.

Many children involved in the focus groups stated that looked after children were too readily refused a second chance.

- 57% responded 'all or most of the time';
- 40% answered 'sometimes'; and
- 3% thought they 'hardly ever' or 'never' got a second chance.

# Life skills



We asked the young people in the 11-18yrs group, *how often do you get to practice life skills like cooking healthy food, washing clothes or going to the bank?*

## Focus group feedback

This question was asked as many young people in the focus groups thought that they had been insufficiently prepared for independence.

### What would make care better?

*Stop having a go constantly and let me practice independent skills.*

11-18yrs

- 30 (97%) young people answered that they were taught independence skills 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' but one (3%) thought this was 'hardly ever' true.

### What would make care better?

*I would like to have my passport so that I can travel to different countries and do different things. I would also like to have a bank card so that I would be able to learn to save and do online shopping.*

11-18yrs

# Access to the Internet at home



Young people 11-18yrs were asked *if they could connect to the Internet from home.*

## General population: Access to the Internet

- In the UK, 98% of households with children have an Internet connection. (ONS 2017)
- The *Millennium Cohort Study* of children aged 11yrs old found that children who never used the Internet outside school had a high probability of low well-being. (The Children's Society, 2014)

- The *majority* (90%) of young people reported that they did have access to the Internet.
- 3 (10%) young people 'hardly ever' or 'never' had access.

**What would make care better?**

*Faster internet.*

11-18yrs



## 4. Rights

- Included in decision-making
- Stigma of being in care
- Feeling safe in placement
- Bullying
- Knowing and contact with social workers

# Included in decision-making



Children aged 8-18yrs were asked, *do you feel included in the decisions that social workers make about your life?*

- 8 (89%) of 8-11yrs 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' felt included.  
28 (90%) of 11-18yrs 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' felt included.

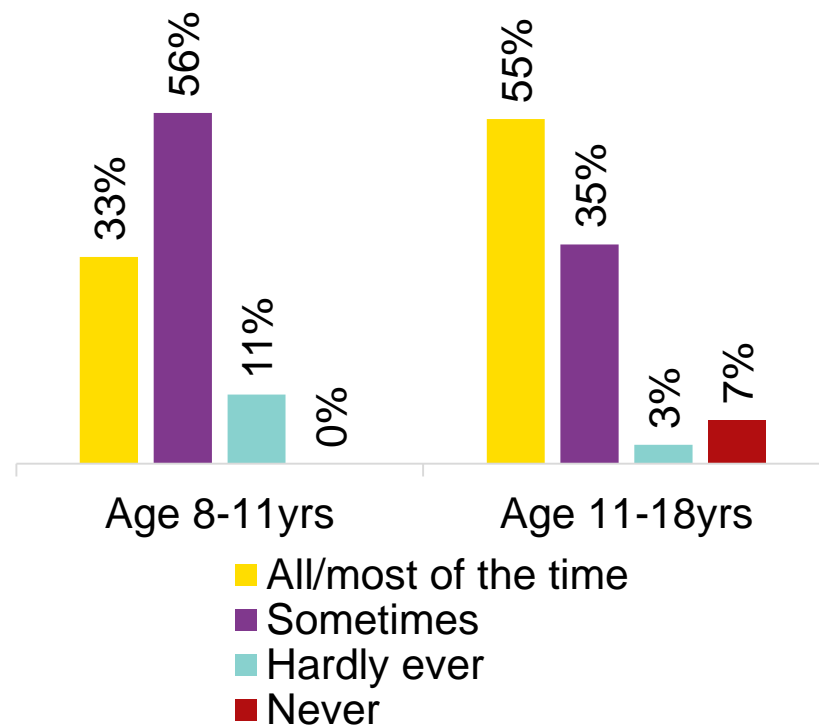
*I want to know what is happening with my mum and contact.*

11-18yrs

*I would like to know all options and services available to me.*

11-18yrs

**Do you feel included in the decisions that social workers make about your life?**



# Stigma of being in care



The 11-18yrs age group were asked a question in the survey about feeling different, *do adults do things that make you feel embarrassed about being in care?*

Younger children were not asked these questions, as the focus groups suggested that being made to feel different was of much greater concern in adolescence.

- 2 young people recorded that adults did things that made them feel embarrassed about being in care.
- They wrote:

*Well, they always talk to me as if I am 5 years old.*  
11-18yrs

*[They] talk about it to other people and in front of me.*  
11-18yrs



# Feeling safe in placement

bright spots

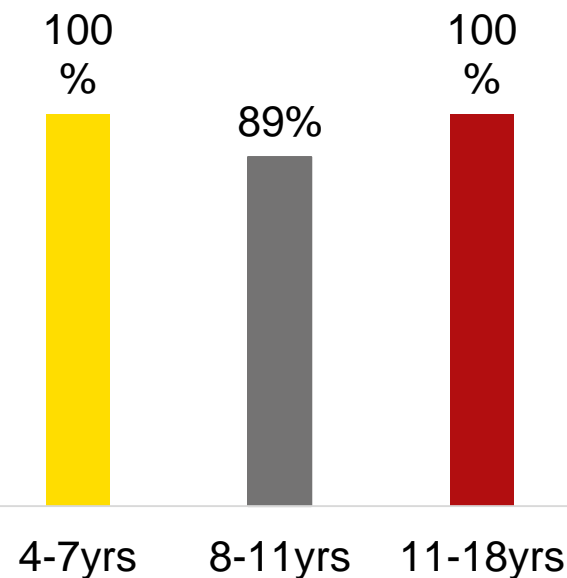


All children and young people were asked whether they *felt safe in the home they lived in now*. It is difficult to know what children were thinking about when answering, but feeling secure is about how the world *feels*, not necessarily how it is.

- Overall, 94% of children and young people reported that they 'all or most of the time' felt safe in their placements.  
All 4-7yrs group and those aged 11-18yrs reported that they felt safe.  
One child in the 8-11yrs group reported that they 'sometimes' felt safe in their home.

- A higher proportion of children and young people in Merton felt safe at home compared with their peers in the general population, where 75% reported that they felt 'totally safe' at home.

**I feel safe in the home I live in all or most of the time**



## General population:

*The Children's Worlds* survey found that 75% of children (8-13yrs) in the general population felt 'Totally safe' at home. (Rees *et al.*, 2014) Not feeling safe is associated with raised cortisol levels and difficulty in learning and concentration. (Harvard University, 2012)

# Bullying

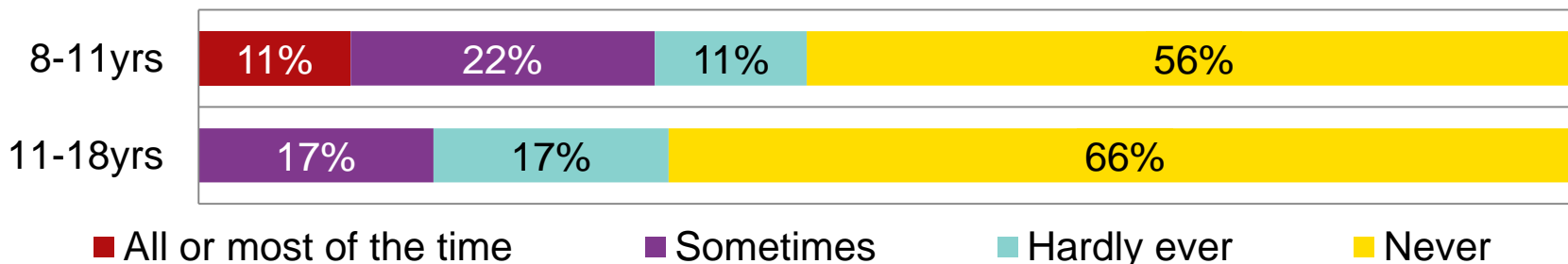
Our question asked whether *children felt afraid of going to school because of bullying* and if they were bullied were they *getting support from an adult*.

## General population: Bullying

- The analysis of the *Children's Worlds surveys* in 22 countries has shown that being free from bullying is one of the most important factors in children's well-being. (Rees *et al.*, 2010)
- About 12% of children in England say they are regularly bullied at school. (ONS, 2016b)

- One child (8-11yrs) was afraid to go to school because of bullying 'all or most of the time' and 2 children were afraid 'sometimes'.
- Only one child (8-11yrs) reported they were getting support from an adult to cope with bullying.
- 5 young people (11-18yrs) reported that they were 'sometimes' afraid to go to school because of bullying. 4 of these young people felt they were getting help.

## Do you ever feel afraid of going to school or college because of bullying?



# Knowing identity of social workers



All the children and young people were asked if they *knew their current social worker*.

- Overall 98% knew who their social worker was.
- All but one of the youngest children (4-7yrs) knew who their social worker was.
- All children and young people aged 8-18yrs knew who their social worker was. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

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Age group	Know social worker <i>n (%)</i>	Don't know social worker <i>n (%)</i>
4-7yrs	8 (89%)	1 (11%)
8-11yrs	9 (100%)	0 (0%)
11-18yrs	31 (100%)	0 (0%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>48 (98%)</b>	<b>1 (2%)</b>

# Contact with social workers

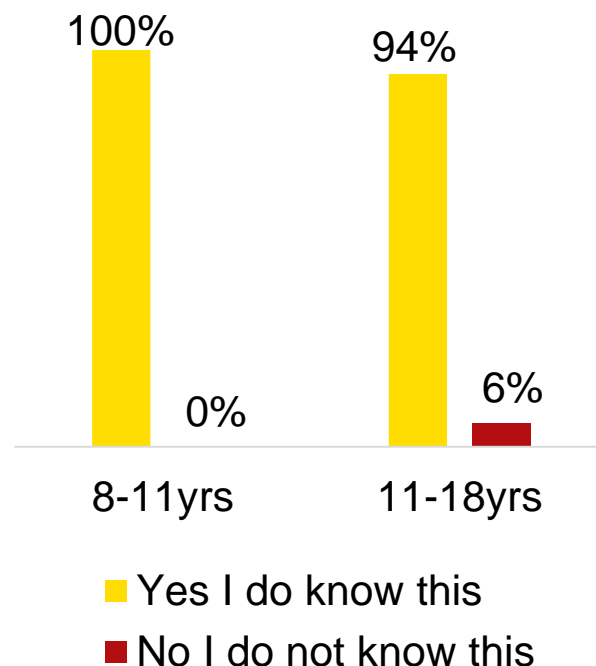


Children and young people (n=48) who knew their social worker were asked *how easy it was to contact them*.



Children (8-11yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) were also asked whether *they knew they could speak to their social worker on their own*.

**Do you know you have the right to speak to a social worker on your own?**



- A high proportion (89%) of young people (11-18yrs) reported that they could get easily get in touch with their social worker 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'. However, 3 (11%) young people could 'hardly ever' or 'never' get in touch with their social worker.

- All children (8-11yrs) knew that they could ask to speak to their social worker on their own. This is a Bright Spot of practice.



## 5. Recovery

- Knowing reason for being in care
- Feeling settled in placement
- Liking bedrooms
- Adults you live with:  
Sensitive parenting
- Adults you live with:  
Sharing confidences
- Support with worries
- Parity with peers
- Happiness with appearance

# Knowing reason for being in care



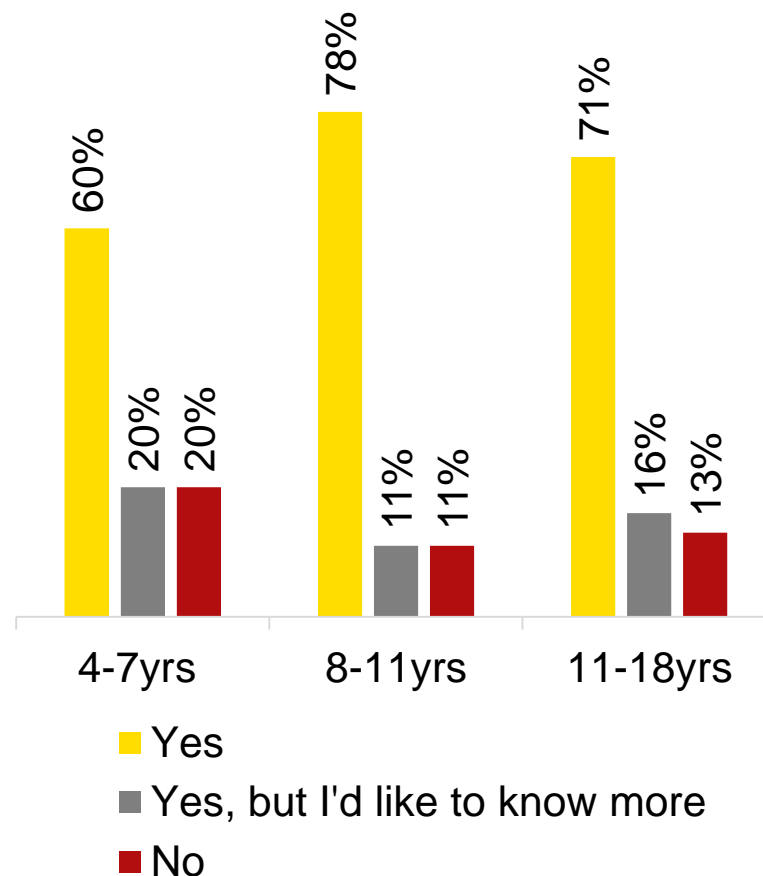
All the children and young people were asked if *someone had explained why they were in care.*

## Important for recovery

Having a coherent account of one's history and understanding the reasons that led to becoming looked after are important in the development of an integrated identity and in recovery from abuse and neglect. (Adshead, 2012; Adler, 2012)

- The majority of children and young people knew why they were in care.
- 15 (28%) children and young people did not know why they were in care or wanted to know more about their life story.

## Has someone explained why you are in care?



# Feeling settled in placement



The surveys aimed to capture whether children felt a sense of belonging and felt at ease in their placements. Based on the advice from our focus groups, children and young people were asked,

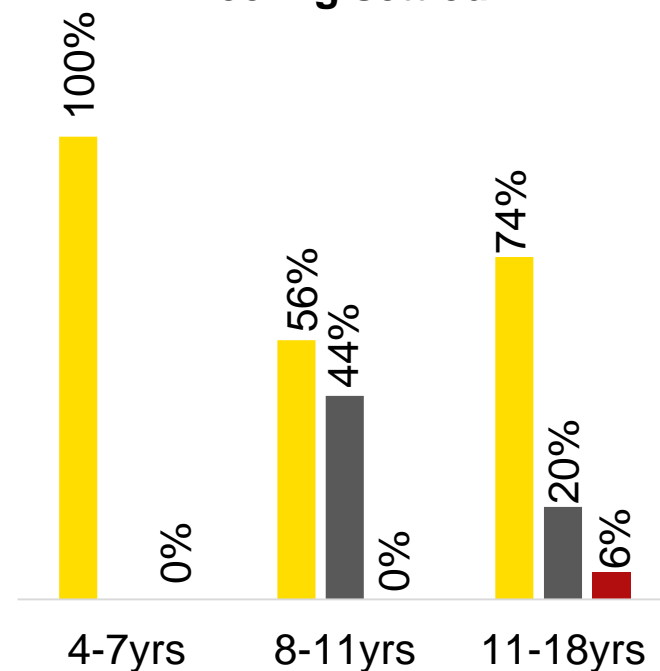
*do you feel settled in the home you live in now?  
(Do you feel comfortable, accepted and at ease?)*

## Answer options

Younger children (4-7yrs) could answer 'mostly yes' or 'mostly no'. Children (8-11yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) could answer: 'all or most of the time', 'sometimes', 'hardly ever', or 'never'.

- All of the youngest children (4-7yrs) felt settled in their homes.
- 5 of the 8-11yrs group felt settled 'all or most of the time' and 4 felt settled 'sometimes'.
- 23 of the 11-18yrs group felt settled 'all or most of the time' and 6 felt settled 'sometimes'.

## Feeling settled



- All or most of the time/Mostly yes
- Sometimes
- Hardly ever/Never/Mostly no

# Liking bedrooms



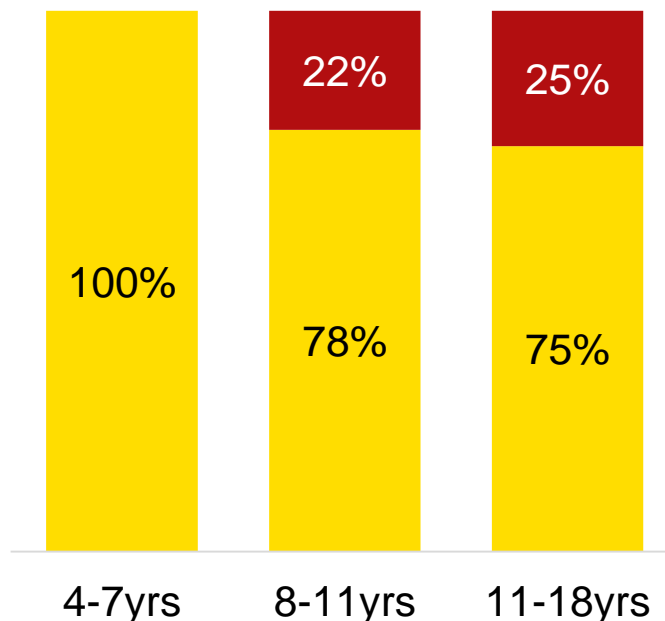
Liking your bedroom was an important feature for the focus groups we ran.

## Focus group feedback

Young people reflected that their bedrooms were a place for being on your own in busy homes. It is linked to safety, sense of identity and feeling a sense of belonging.

- The majority of children and young people liked their bedrooms.
- However, compared to looked after young people in 13 other LAs, a significantly larger proportion of young people in Merton did not like their bedrooms: 25% in Merton disliked their rooms compared to 6% elsewhere.

Do you like your bedroom?



■ Like

■ Dislike

**What would make care better?**  
Have my own bedroom  
(not with my brother)  
11-18yrs

**What would make care better?**  
A bigger room  
11-18yrs



# Adults you live with: Sensitive parenting



All children and young people (4-19yrs) were asked whether the adults they lived with *noticed how they were feeling*.

- All of the youngest children (4-7yrs) felt that their carers noticed how they were feeling 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.
- 8 (89%) children, aged 8-11yrs, and 28 (97%) young people, aged 11-18yrs, thought their carers noticed how they were feeling 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes'.

# Adults you live with: Sharing confidences



Young people (11-18yrs) were asked how frequently they *talked to the adults that they lived with about the things that mattered to them.*

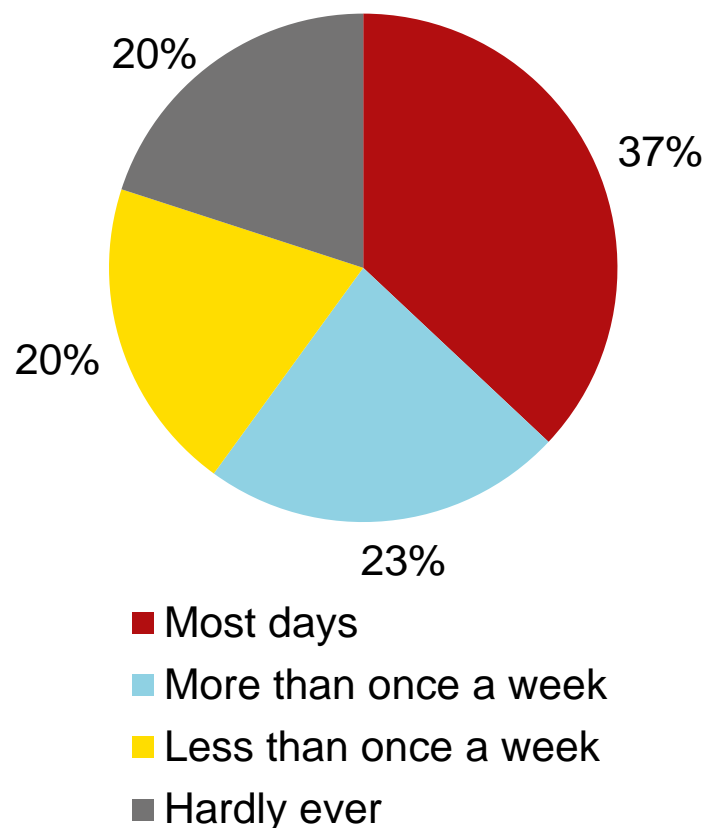
## General population

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The *Understanding Society* survey (2017) found that 66% of children (10-15yrs) talked regularly to a parent.

- 60% of young people talked regularly with their carers/parents about things that mattered to them.
- This is a slightly smaller proportion compared to their peers in the general population.

## Speaking to adults about things that matter



# Support with worries



Children and young people (8-11yrs and 11-18yrs) were asked if they *worried about their own feelings or behaviour* and, if they *did have concerns, were they receiving support*.

- 5 children (8-11yrs) worried 'sometimes' about their feelings or behaviour.
- 3 of the 5 children who reported worrying thought they were getting help.
- 4 young people (11-18yrs) worried 'all or most of the time' and 18 'sometimes'.
- 17 of the 22 young people who reported worrying thought they were getting help.

## General population & other comparative data: Mental health

- In Merton, about 42% of looked after children have concerning SDQ scores. (DfE, 2017)
- Studies of looked after populations show that children's level of difficulties are much higher, ranging from about 45% of children in foster care to 75% of those in residential. (Ford *et al.*, 2007)
- In the general population, 13.5% of children have SDQ scores that suggest they have a clinical level of mental health difficulties. (ONS, 2016b)

# Parity with peers



Young people (11-18yrs) were asked if they *got the chance to do similar things to their friends.*

- 93% of young people reported that 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes' they did do similar things to their friends.
- 2 (7%) young people reported that they could 'hardly ever' or 'never' do similar things to their friends.

# Happiness with appearance

bright spots



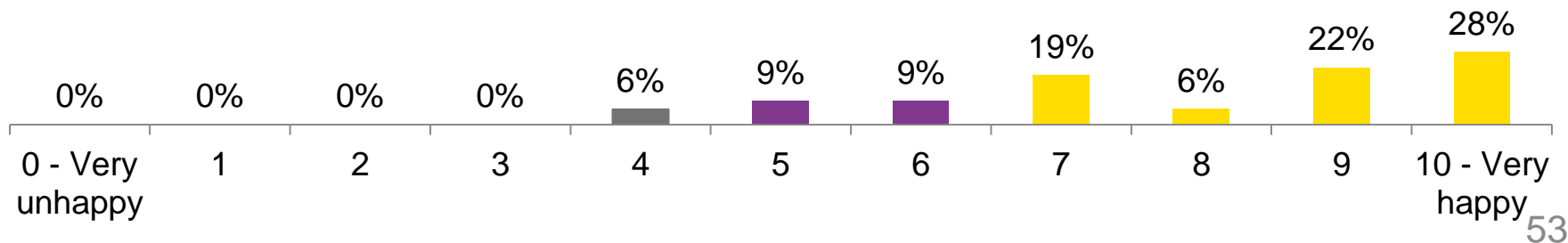
Studies have shown that poor body image is associated with low self-esteem, depression and self-harm. (Cash and Smolek, 2011)

## General population: Happiness with appearance

- 10% of 10-17 year olds in the general population are unhappy with their appearance. Girls are more likely to have a lower opinion of their appearance than boys. (The Children's Society, 2017)

- The majority of young people were happy with their appearance.
- In the general population 10% of young people dislike their appearance. Merton's young people were more positive and only 6% were unhappy with their appearance. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

## How happy are you with the way you look?





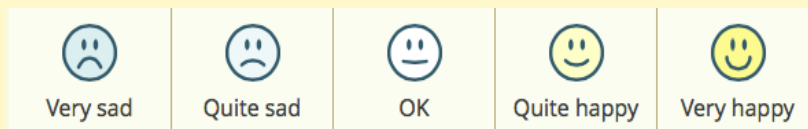
## 6. Well-being

- Happiness yesterday – affect
- Life satisfaction – overall evaluation
- Life is worthwhile – psychological/eudemonic well-being
- Life is improving
- Positivity about the future

# Happiness

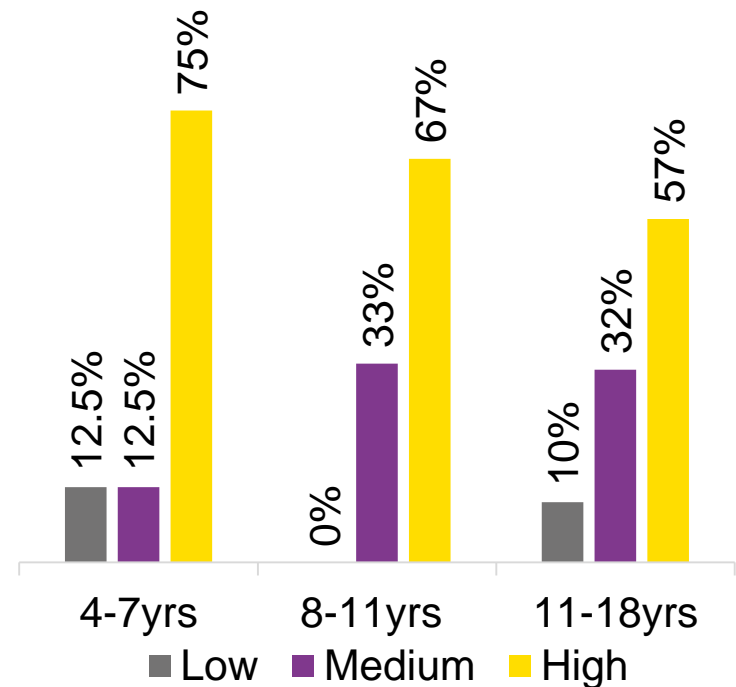
The decrease in happiness with age occurs in all surveys. Well-being decreases from school year 5 onwards with age 14-15yrs being the lowest point. It then starts to rise again. (Rees *et al.*, 2010)

- Children (4-7yrs & 8-11yrs) were asked to rate *how happy they were yesterday* on a five-point scale, from 'very sad' to 'very happy'.



- Young people (11-18yrs) selected a point on a 0-10 scale with 0 being 'very sad'.
- The majority of children and young people had been happy the previous day.
- One child (4-7yrs) and 3 young people (11-18yrs) reported that yesterday they had been 'quite sad' or 'very sad'.

## Happiness yesterday



*I am happy  
now.  
4-7yrs*

# Life satisfaction

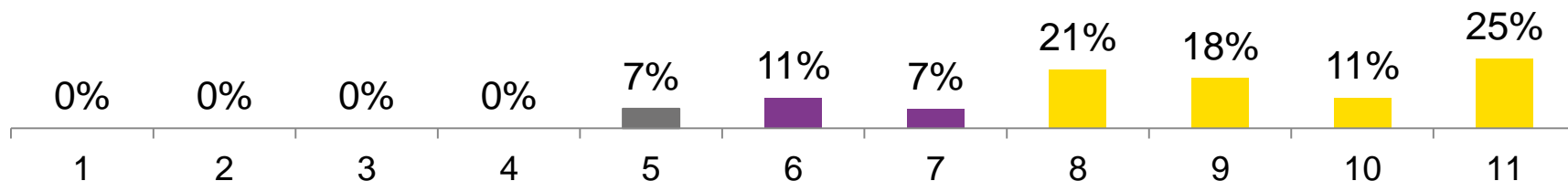


Young people (11-18yrs) were asked *how satisfied they were with their life* on a 0-10 scale.

This question exactly replicates The Children's Society survey question. A score of 7 or more is considered to be high life satisfaction. (The Cabinet Office, 2012)

- The majority (75%) felt positive about their future.
- Like the general child population in England there was a positive correlation between high life satisfaction scores and being happy at school.

How satisfied are you with your life?





# Are the things you do worthwhile?

bright spots

Young people (11-18yrs) were asked *if the things they do in life are worthwhile*.

## Importance of purpose

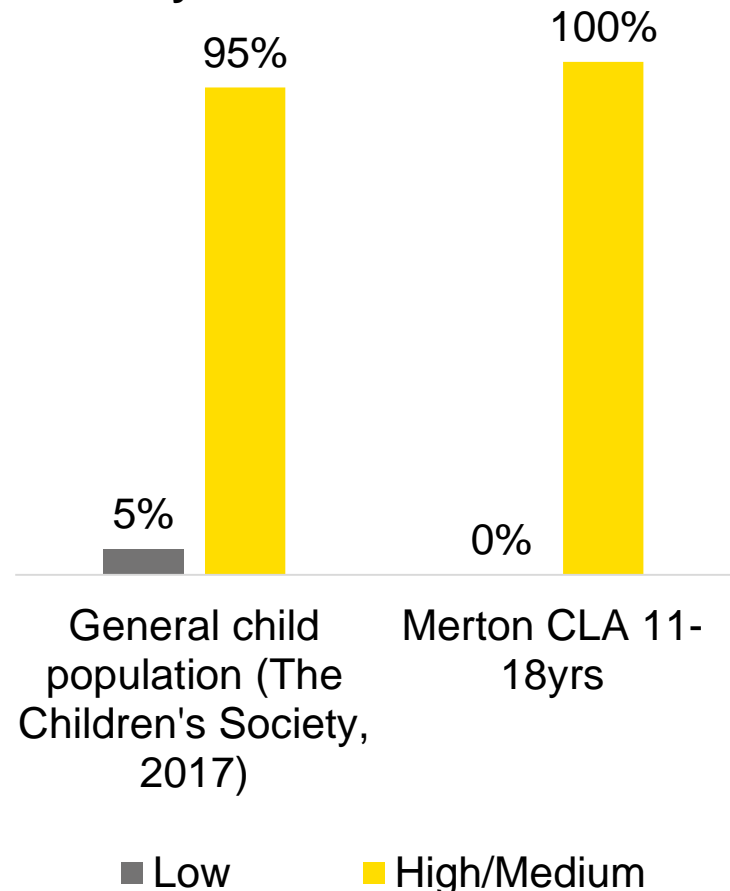
Having a meaning or a purpose to life is strongly associated with well-being.

(ONS, 2014)

Young people (11-18yrs) completed the same 0-10 scale as used by The Children's Society (2017) in their household survey with 3,000 young people aged 10-17yrs.

- 70% of young people scored high or very high, and 30% medium.
- No young people had low scores.
- All the young people (100%) in Merton had high or medium scores; a greater proportion than children (95%) in the general population. This is a Bright Spot of practice.

Overall, to what extent do you think the things you do in your life are worthwhile?



# Positivity about the future

bright spots



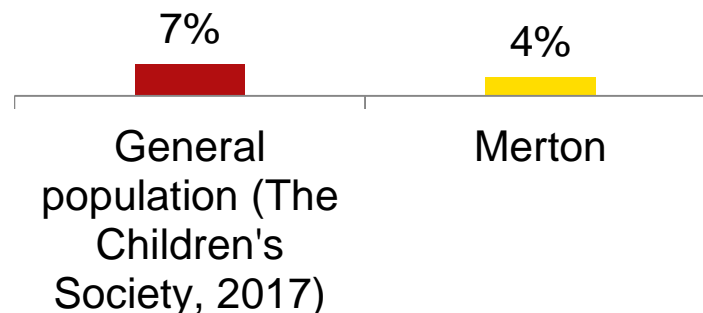
Young people were asked on a scale of 0-10 *how positive they were about the future.*

## Links to happiness

Optimism about the future is linked with happiness and resilience. (Conversano et al., 2010)

- 20 (74%) were very positive about their future.
- One young person had a low score suggesting they felt pessimistic about their future.
- A smaller portion of young people in Merton had low scores compared with their peers in the general population.

**Young people who were pessimistic about their future: comparison of Merton's (11-18yrs) looked after children with the general child population**



*[Being in care] has given me a chance to do things.*  
11-18yrs

# Comparisons

Levels of well-being – Merton's looked after young people (11-18yrs) compared to peers (10-17yrs) in the general population (The Children's Society, 2017) and to the average scores of looked after young people in 13 other LAs.

Well-being measure	Score	Merton	2018 average in 13 LAs	Peers in general population (10-17yrs)
Life satisfaction	High scores	36%	34%	27%
	Low scores	7%	15%	5%
Happiness yesterday	High scores	39%	39%	26%
	Low scores	11%	19%	8%
Things done are worthwhile	High scores	52%	36%	29%
	Low scores	0%	12%	6%
Positive about future	High scores	44%	35%	19%
	Low scores	4%	11%	7%

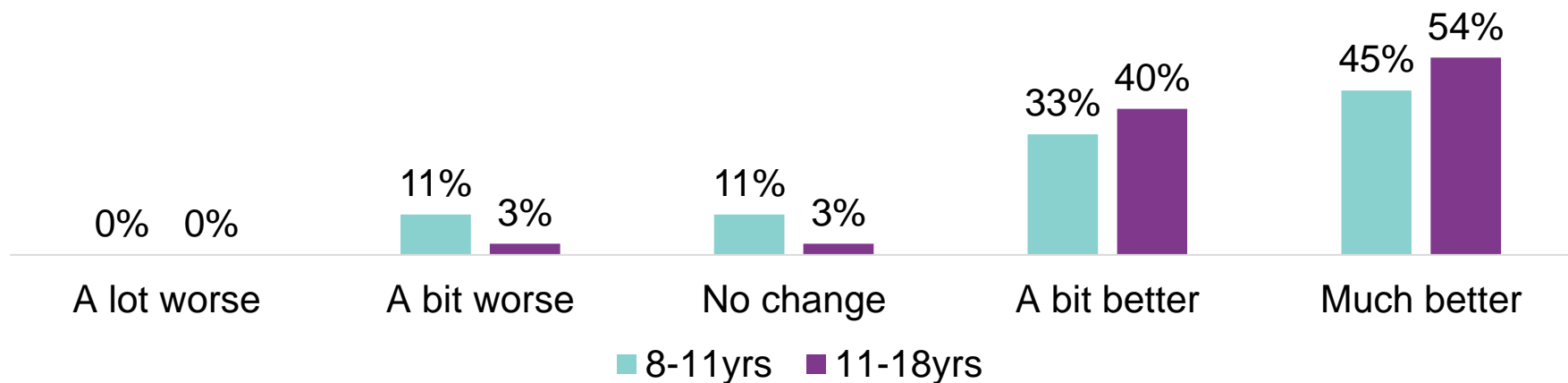
# Life is improving

Children aged 8-18yrs were asked whether they thought their *life was getting better*, and could choose from a five point scale ranging from 'A lot worse' to 'Much better'.

- The majority (83%) of children in Merton felt that their lives were improving.
- 2 children and young people felt that their lives were getting a bit worse, and 2 felt there had been no change in their lives.

## Is your life improving?

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# Low well-being



4-7yrs

- One child in the 4-7yrs group described themselves as having been 'very sad' the day before the survey.
- However, the child responded positively to all other questions in the survey and did not appear to have low well-being.
- When asked what would make care better the child wrote:

*Hugs and  
tickles.  
Playing.  
4-7yrs*



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8-11yrs

- None of the children in the 8-11yrs group described themselves as 'quite sad' or 'very sad' yesterday.

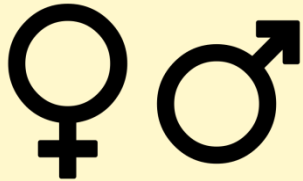
bright spots



11-18yrs

- One young person had low well-being (i.e. scored 4 or less on two or more of the 0-10 well-being scales).
- This young person reported that they:
  - Did not have a trusted adult in their life.
  - 'Sometimes' worried about their feelings or behaviour.
  - 'Never' had opportunities to explore the outdoors.
  - This young person also did not like school and was 'sometimes' afraid of going to school because of bullying.

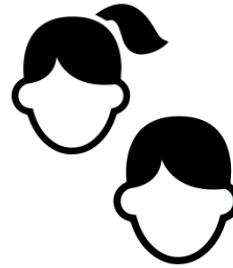
# Gender differences 11-18yrs




The Children's Society (2017) reported that in the general

population one in seven (14%) girls (10-15yrs) were unhappy with their lives as a whole as were one in ten boys.

Examining gender differences in our surveys in 2017, we found no gender difference in the surveys for 4-7yrs and 8-11yrs but girls aged 11-18yrs were more likely to report low well-being. Girls were four times more likely to be unhappy with their appearance and this contributed to gender differences in well-being.



- We could not explore gender differences in the Merton 11-18yrs survey as the numbers were too small for statistical analysis.



## **Section 4: Children and young people's comments**

*Is there anything else you  
would like to tell us? What  
would make being in care  
better for you?*

# Comments: 4-7yrs

- 5 children (age 4-7yrs) gave text responses on: *What would make care better/ anything else you want to say?*
- 2 children wrote about playing.
- 3 children wrote about their homes and families.

*If my big sister  
was there and  
my toy monkey  
was alive.*

*I have a real cat at  
home and she is a bit  
naughty but she does  
like me.*

*It's good living  
with Nan.*



# What would make care better and other comments: 8-11yrs

- 7 children gave text responses on: *What would make care better/ anything else you want to say?*
- 3 children wrote about their hobbies and wanting to have more fun.
- 2 children wrote that they wanted a pet.

*I want to go when I am sixteen – maybe get a house. I want some more pocket money because I have 45 pounds and I spend my money on games.*

*Would like to see dad more and try living with him again.*

*I would like to be able to have a little pet where I live, have more time outdoors (not just in a garden), not be pulled out of class by MRS [name] ALL THE TIME!*

*I am happy now.*

*Maybe going out more often instead of staying in all the time.*

*I would like a pet to keep me comforting – hamster.*

# What would make care better and other comments: 11-18yrs

- 15 (45%) young people gave text responses on: *What would make care better/ anything else you want to say?*
- 4 young people wanted more contact with family members.
- 3 young people wanted to be trusted more or have more independence.
- 2 young people wrote that they did not want to be in care.
- Several other young people wrote about their placements, including wanting a bigger bedroom, more food or a different house.
- One young person wanted more time with their key worker.
- One young person was angry with Merton for not helping their mum.
  - *YOU GUYS FROM MERTON DID NOT HELP MY MUM WHEN SHE NEEDED YOU MOST.*
- Other young people wrote:


*Staying with my Mum for short periods of time.*

*I would not like to be in care so they can't make anything better.*

*Negotiate rules within the house would be better. To be trusted more.*

*Probably more time with my keyworkers.*

*Faster internet. A bigger room. More food and bigger fridge.*



## **Section 5: Positive aspects of practice and areas for improvement**

# What's working well

In Merton, several areas stood out as Bright Spots of practice:

- The majority (94%) of children and young people felt safe in their homes 'all or most of the time', in comparison 75% of children in the general population felt 'totally safe' at home.
- The majority (96%) of children and young people had a really good friend. This was similar to their peers (97%) in the general population.
- All of the youngest children trusted their carers 'all or most of the time' or 'sometimes', felt that their carers noticed how they were feeling, liked school, and got to have fun at the weekends.
- All of the 8-11yrs trusted their social worker and knew that they could ask to speak to their social worker on their own.
- A significantly higher proportion of young people (11-18yrs) were happy with contact arrangements with their fathers compared with their peers across 13 other LAs.
- A higher proportion of young people in Merton liked school (84%) and felt that their carers showed an interest in their education (97%) compared to their peers in the general population.
- Compared to the general population, a higher proportion of young people in Merton were happy with their appearance, felt that the things they did in their lives were worthwhile and felt positive about their future.

# What could be improved

- **Ask children and young people what they want to do on the weekends and in their spare time.** 15 children and young people felt that they only sometimes got to have fun and 5 felt that this 'hardly ever' happened. 4 children (8-11yrs) also felt that they 'hardly ever' got the opportunity to explore the outdoors.
  - **Help children understand why they are in care.** 15 (28%) children and young people wanted to know more about why they were in care.
  - **Continue to ask about worries children have about their feelings and behaviour.** 5 children (8-11yrs) and 22 young people were 'sometimes' or 'all or most of the time' worried about their feelings or behaviour.
- Work with carers to ensure children and young people are happy with their bedrooms, and that young people's feelings are taken into account.** Compared to other LAs, a higher proportion of young people in Merton did not like their bedroom (linked to safety, sense of identity and feeling a sense of belonging).
- **Continue to work with schools to identify and help children who feel bullied at school, and support children and young people to make and keep friendships.** 5 young people and 3 children reported that they were afraid to go to school because of bullying.



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Understanding Society <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/>

**For enquiries about the Bright Spots project see:**  
<http://www.coramvoice.org.uk/professional-zone/bright-spots>

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