

# CARER EXIT SURVEY

Brisbane Region

2017-2018



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## Executive Summary

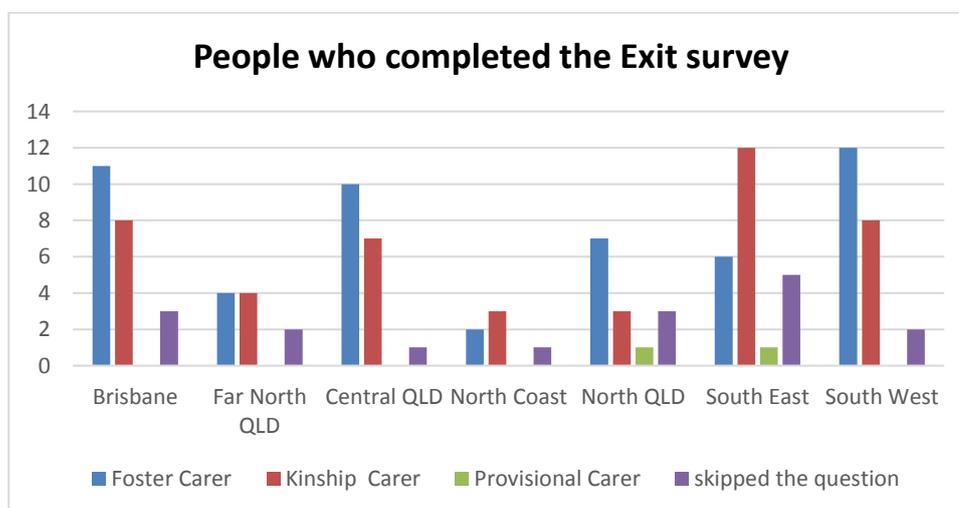
### Information relating to End of Carer Approval Notices

This report brings Foster Care Queensland (hereafter referred to as FCQ) to the end of our tenth year managing the Exit Interview Program. For this report, FCQ has maintained the breakdown of regions to previous seven regions prior to the change that occurred as the majority of the information related to the time that the regions were broken down to seven. Next financial years report will reflect the new changes to the regions.

FCQ received a total of 685 Exit interview referrals for the period **1<sup>st</sup> July 2017 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2018**. 315 of the total were Foster Carers, 356 of the total were Kinship Carers, 13 were Provisional Carers and 1 identified as the legal guardian.



116 Exit surveys were completed on Survey Monkey, either by Carers directly, FCQ inputting the data on the Carer's behalf from a paper based survey that the Carer was sent and returned to FCQ or the Carer requesting a telephone interview and FCQ inputting the data into Survey Monkey during the telephone interview. The return rate this year in relation to completed surveys, is 16.9%.



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

- FCQ sends a letter when they receive the End of Carer Approval Notice from the Department informing the person/persons that FCQ has received the End of Carer Approval notice and asking if they would like to provide information about their experiences as Carers. The letter also provides a number of ways they can complete the survey, for example: online, over the phone or a paper survey can be sent to them with a returned stamped addressed envelope, which would then be inputted into Survey Monkey by FCQ.
- After a two week period FCQ would follow up via phone calls where possible, with past Carers confirming receipt of the letter and discussing the opportunities to providing their experiences. Where no phone contact details have been provided, FCQ would email past Carers if this was an option, having been provided with the email addresses on the End of Carer Approval Notices.

During conversations with people in regards to the Exit Survey, they are either of the opinion that their feedback would not make any difference as “nothing changes” or they feel that talking about their experiences would be too distressing. This has impacted on the number of people who have taken the survey and FCQ has seen an increase in people stating that they would not like to undertake the survey.

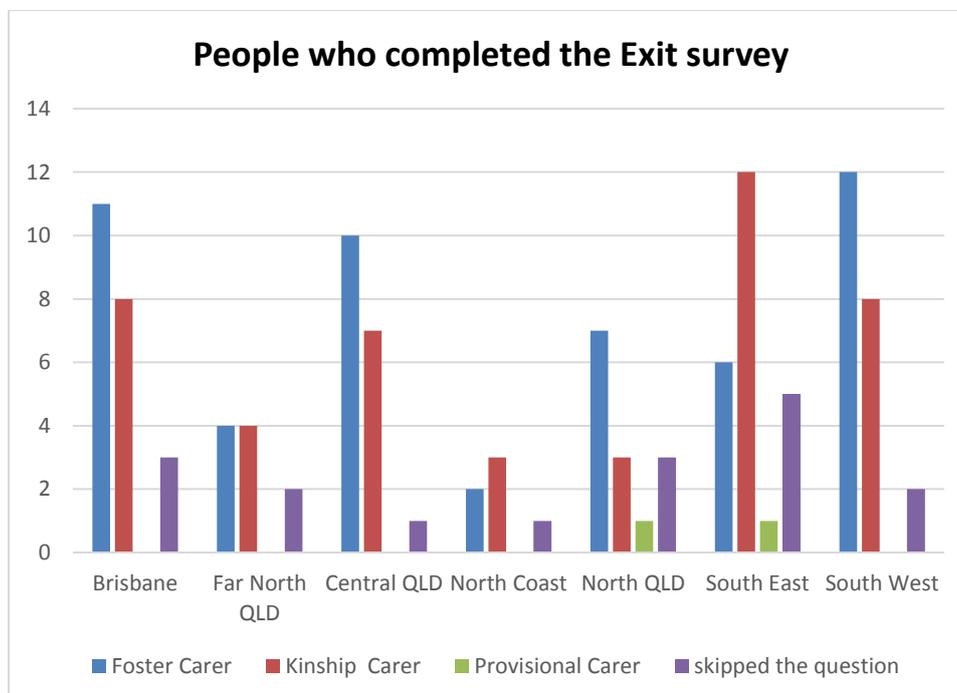
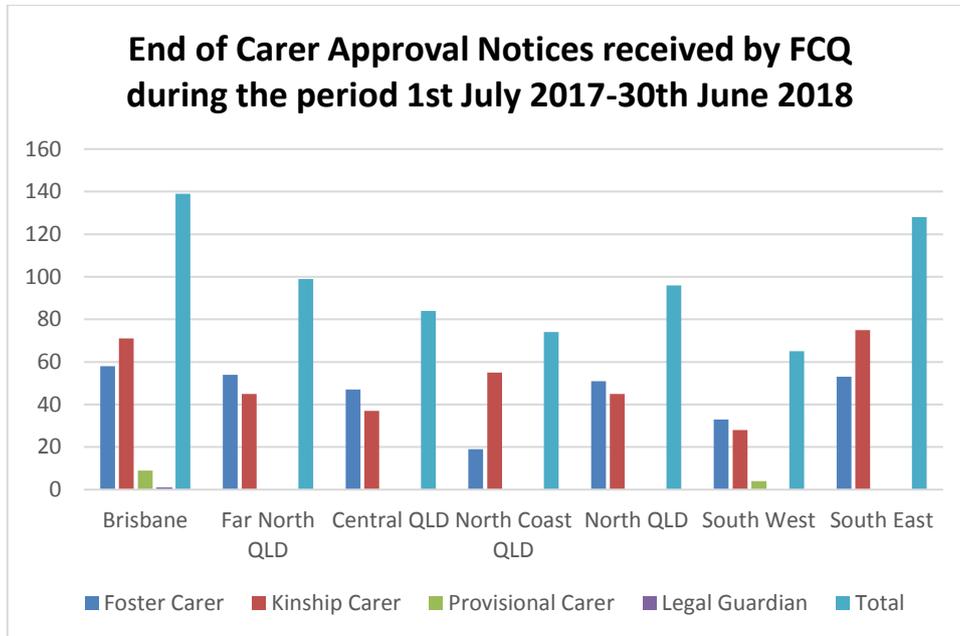
It was acknowledged by the Brisbane Region in March 2018 that they had reviewed their data and failed to provide FCQ with all the required End of Carer Approval Notices, approximately 118. It was agreed that they would provide all additional information to FCQ. As part of the notifications that FCQ receive contact is made via letter within a week. It was acknowledged that most of the notifications that were received from the Brisbane Region dated back some time since the person stopped being a Carer, but all past Carers were provided with a letter to ensure that they had to the opportunity to undertake an exit survey if they wanted too.

It has been noted over the years that FCQ don't receive all the End of Carer Notices that should be provided to FCQ to give the opportunity to people who would like to undertake a survey and this needs to improve to ensure equal opportunity for everybody to provide feedback.

As stated in previous reports FCQ continue to receive a number of End of Carer Approval Notices but based on the figures provided by the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women we continue to receive significantly less notifications than we should be receiving.

## Overall Data and Findings

The report outlines the feedback from all 116 Carers and is sectioned into Regions so that the information is specific to the feedback from each Region. The Regions will change in the next report for 2018-2019 to reflect the change in Regions.



Overall, across the state people identified positives aspects of their time as Foster Carers and these related to:-

- The range of allowances provided by Child Safety to help meet the cost of caring for a child
- The allowance payment rates

- How quickly allowances were paid
- Opportunities carers were given to participate in training and professional development
- Pre-service training delivery
- Standard training modules 5,6 and 7
- Information provided about your role and responsibilities
- Information provided about Foster and Kinship Care Services role and responsibilities
- The manner in which the carer approval renewal process was undertaken

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

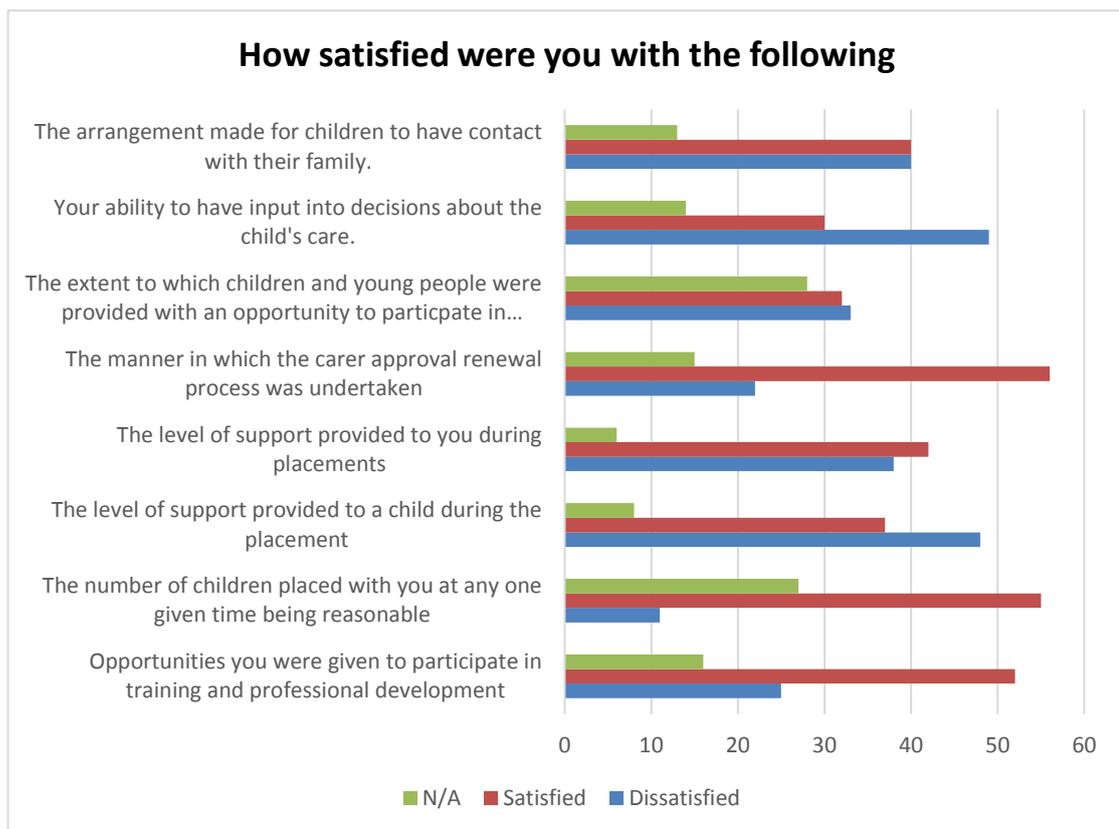
Overall across the state, there were similarities in terms of negative feedback provided. Listed below are common themes from information provided in the 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 reports;

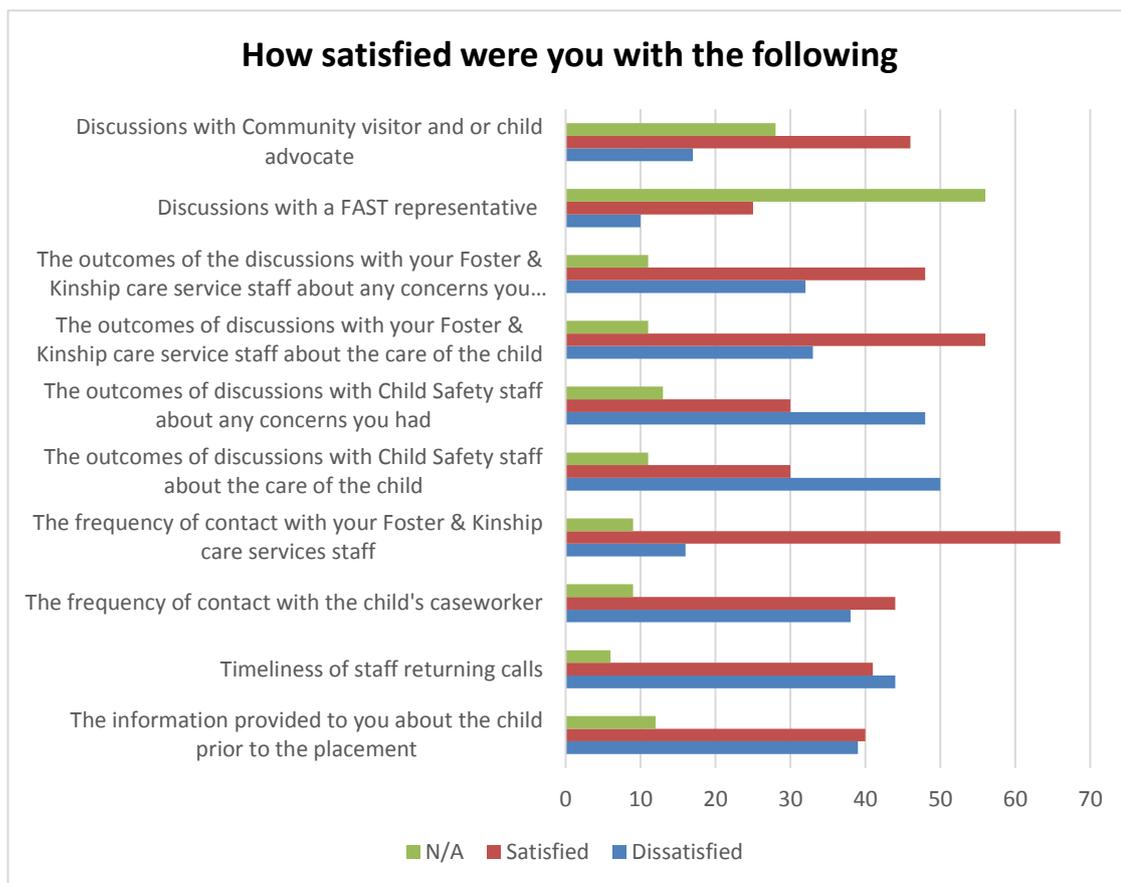
- Carers not feeling part of a care team
- Child Safety's policies and procedures, overall most people were dissatisfied where applicable.
- Child Safety's handling of a Harm Report/SOC process, overall dissatisfaction was significantly higher where applicable across the state.
- The carers ability to make a complaint about a service provided by Child Safety
- The carers ability to appeal a decision related to you that was made by Child Safety
- Carers not feeling listened too in relation to the needs of the child and concerns
- Lack of consultation prior to a child being placed with carers and at times no information provided about the child
- Telephone calls and emails not being responded to by the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women
- Lack of feeling valued as a volunteer
- The level of support provided to the child during placement.

The findings relating to what were the most challenging aspects of being a Carer have remained consistent over the years that FCQ has been undertaking the Exit Survey Report. The lack of communication and feeling part of a care team is dominated throughout the reports for each Region and this would be suggestive that this is a state-wide issue in regards to the feedback provided.

*People were asked to provide their experience of caring and how satisfied they were with:*

- The arrangement made for children to have contact with their family; the response overall was equal with 50% feeling satisfied and 50% feeling dissatisfied in relation to where this was applicable.
- Your ability to have input into decisions about the child's care, the response indicated for the Regions overall where applicable that most people were dissatisfied.
- The outcomes of discussions with Child Safety staff about any concerns you had, overall state-wide for the people who undertook the survey the response was a higher percentage of dissatisfied.
- Discussions with Community Visitor and or Child Advocate was significantly high in terms of people being satisfied with this area of their caring experiences.

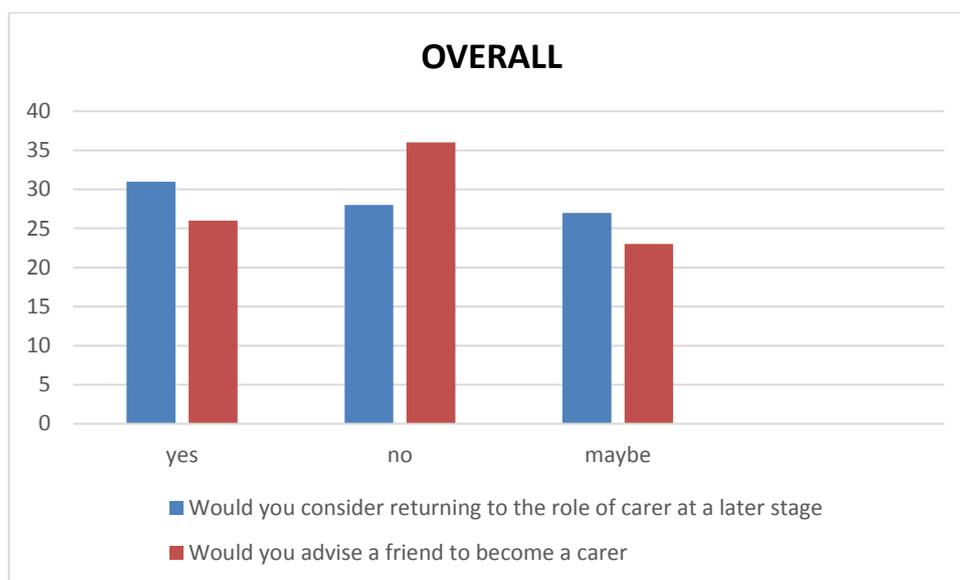




People were asked if they had attended training in the last 12 months, six out of the seven Regions signified a high percentage of 'no' in their responses.

People were also asked if they had a Foster Care Agreement in place and all seven Regions signified a high percentage of 'yes' in their responses.

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



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

In summary, people identified that they would consider returning to Foster Care at a later stage but the margin between whether they would and would not is only slight. A higher number of people identified that they would not advise a friend to become a Carer.

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 Executive Director

23 July 2018

## Summary – Brisbane Region

FCQ received a total of 685 End of Carer Approvals during the period of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2017 - 30<sup>th</sup> June 2018. A total of 139 (20.2%) of the 685 approvals were received from the Brisbane region. All 139 End of Carer Approvals were sent an acknowledgement letter from FCQ and were contacted via telephone to discuss completing the Carer Exit Survey.

### Information taken from the end of carer approvals

The 139 End of Carer approvals consisted of:

- 4 identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- 9 identifying as Aboriginal not Torres Strait Islander
- 1 identifying as Torres Strait Islander not Aboriginal
- 111 identifying as neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander
- 14 end of carer approvals did not provide this information
- The end of carer approvals also identified that from the 139;
  - 71 identified as Kinship Carers
  - 59 identified as Foster Carers
  - 9 identified as Provisional carers

### **Out of the 139 End of Carer approvals that were received, only:**

- 11 Foster Carers completed the survey out of 59 (18.6%)
- 8 Kinship Carers completed the survey out of 71 (11.2%)
- 0 provisional carers completed the survey out of 9 (0%)

There were 22 people (15.8%) from the Brisbane area that completed a Carer Exit Survey. The following information details the responses that have been received from the surveys.

The 22 people who completed the survey provided the following information;

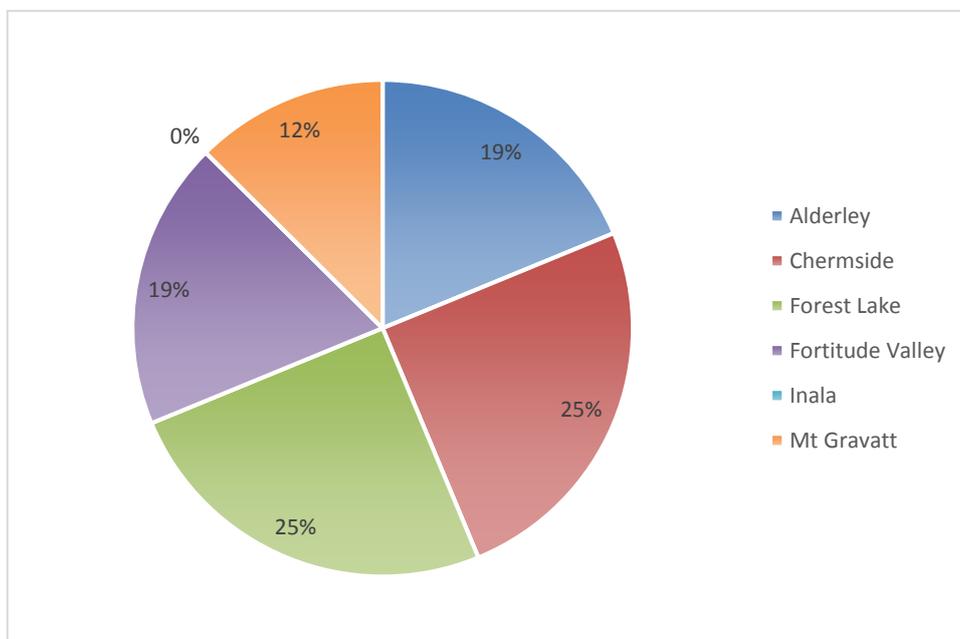
- 11 identified as Foster Carers
- 8 identified as Kinship Carers
- 3 people skipped this question

19 identified as neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander

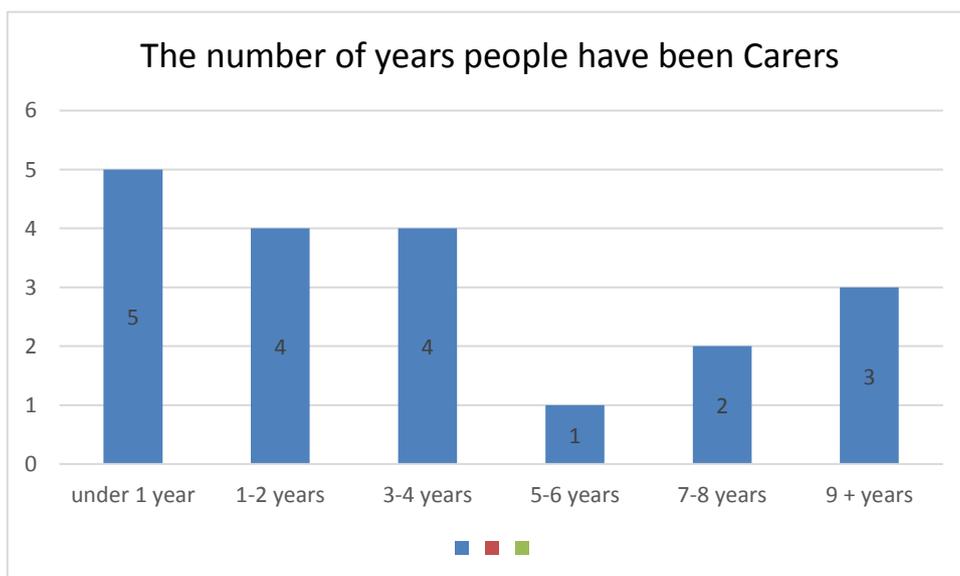
3 identified as other (white Australian, Caucasian and Australian)

### Question: About You

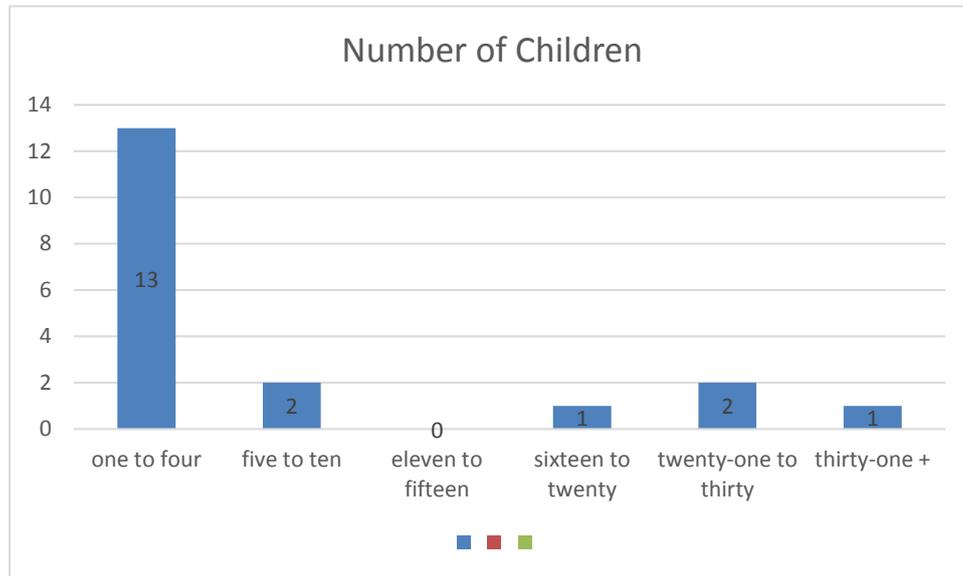
Information identifies which child safety office the person was attached to while they were Foster Carers.



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

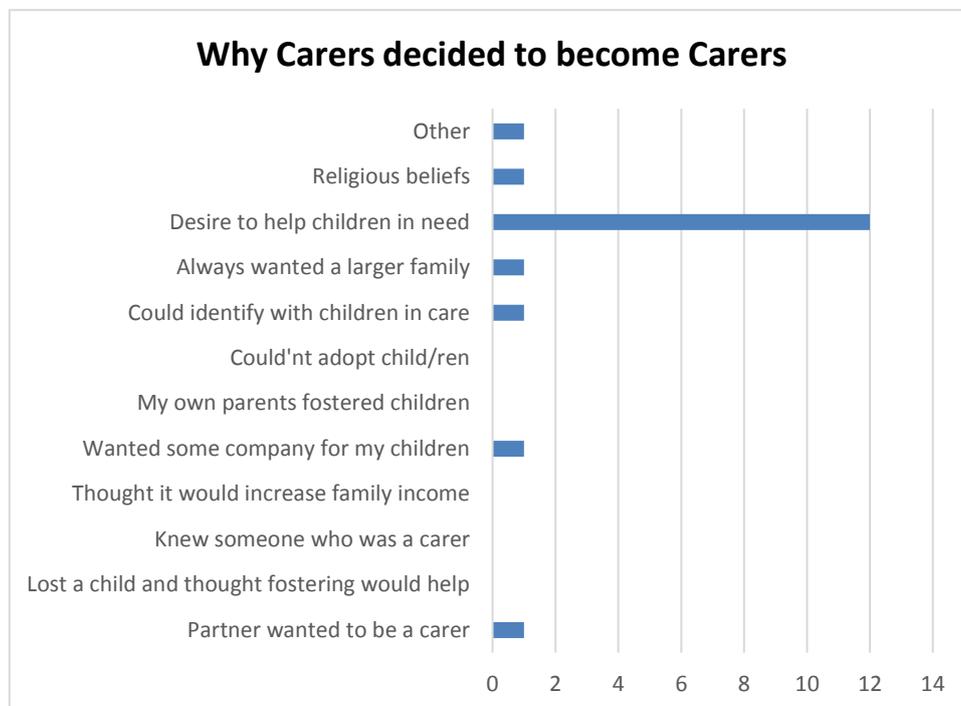


The information provided also evidences the amount of children the person/persons have provided care to.



## Question: About You as a Carer

People were asked to identify what made them decide to become a Foster Carer.

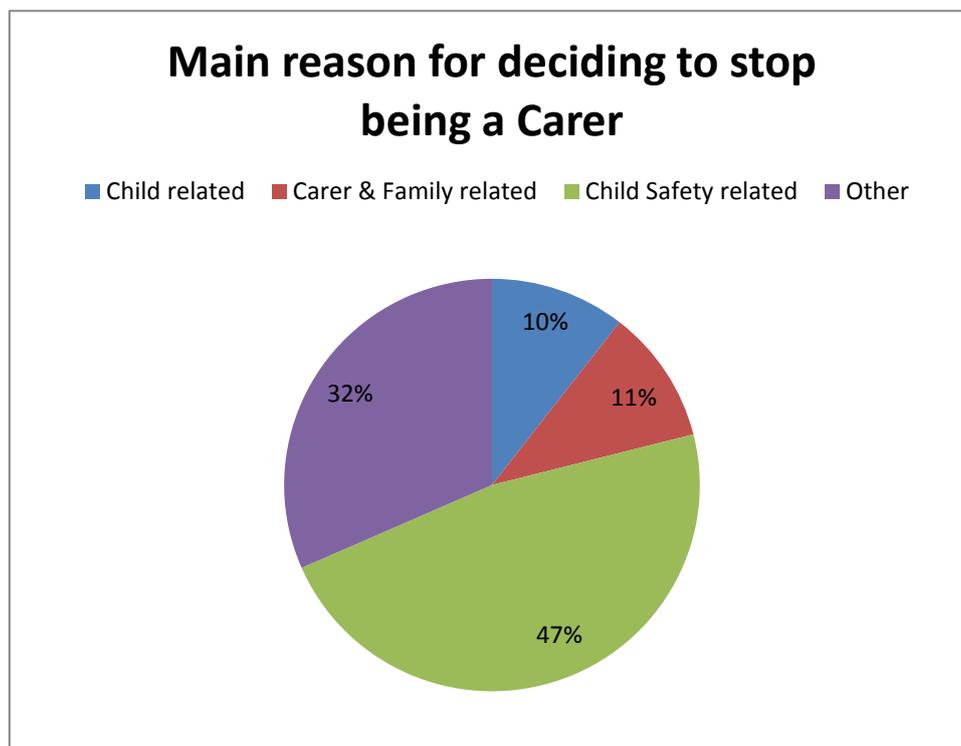


Below is a selection of some of the comments provided by the people undertaking the survey in relation to why they decided to become a carer. This information would be consistent with the section under *other* on the graph.

- Wanted our own children to be involved in providing direct care to children who were in need
- We were looking after a family's children intermittently on a voluntary basis from 1998 until children were taken into care in 2004. Applied to become their foster carers.
- My friend who was a long term foster carer who I knew for about 8 years committed suicide. Her foster daughter who was with her from a 3-month old baby was who I was reading to regularly and so I knew her quite well. Instead of this child having to go into 'the system' I took her in straight away. I also lived nearby, she was familiar with me and she could continue at the same school etc.
- No
- My Grandmother was a long term foster carer and I always thought I might do some fostering to help a child when my own children came of age.
- Extended family member lost her children due to poor choices, we were the only option apart from foster care.
- My son and his partner were on drugs and we wanted the best for our grandson, so took on the role to care for him.
- Single with no children. Had the capacity to help during school holidays as I'm a teacher.
- To help the Family

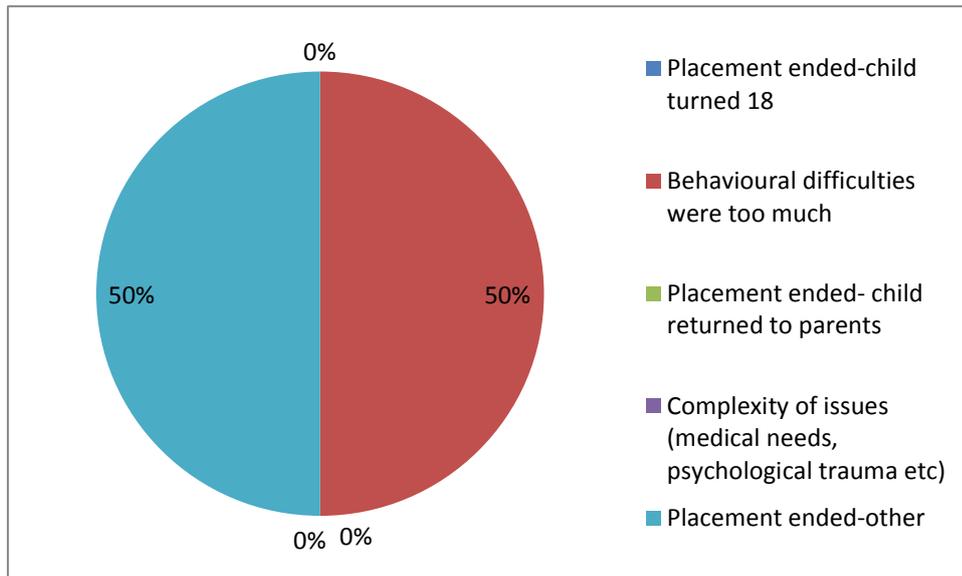
## Question: Reason for Discontinuing as a Foster/Kinship Carer

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

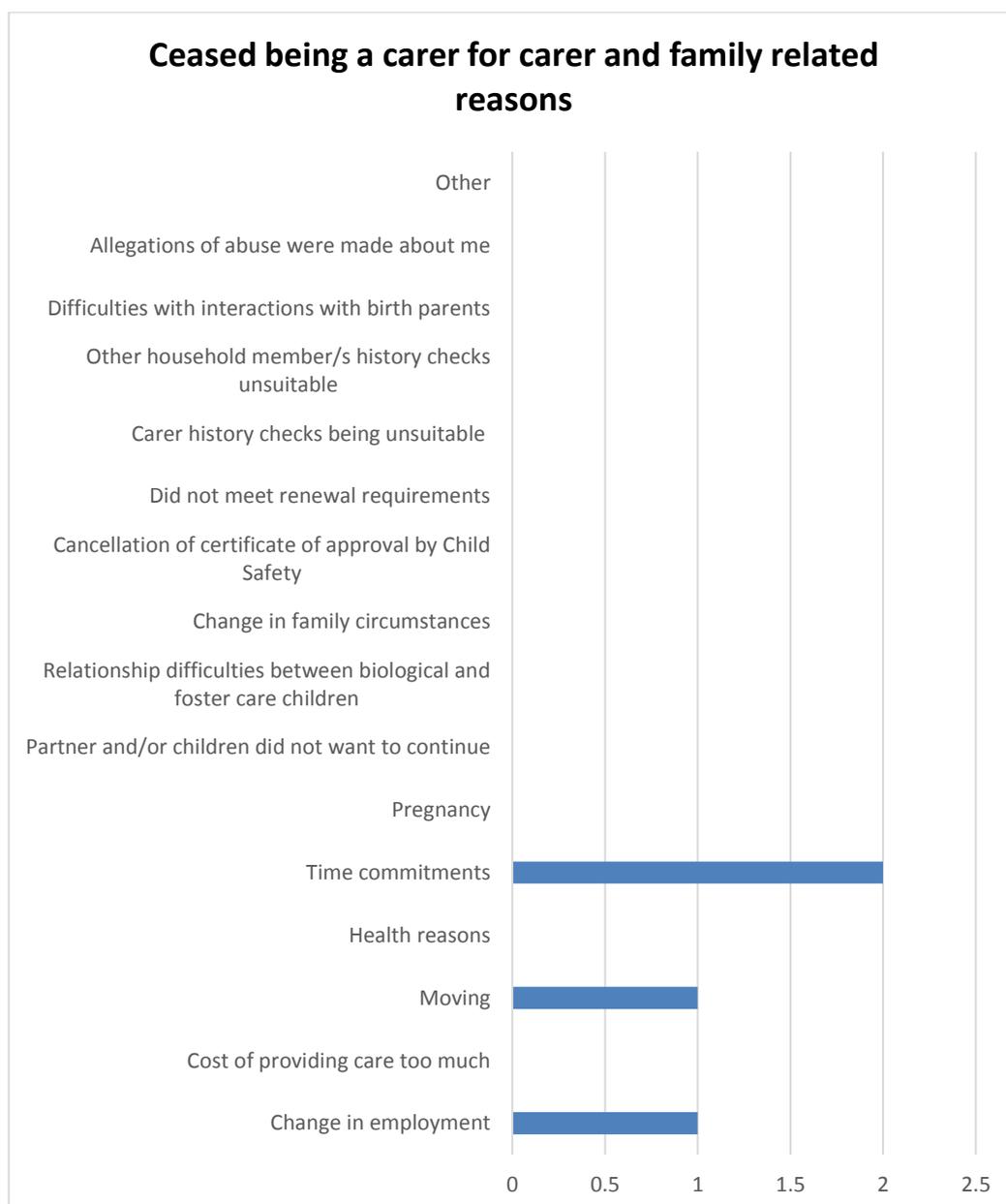


The following information will be specific to the reason that has been provided in this question. If the respondents answered that they ceased being carers due to child related reasons, they are asked to expand on the reasons, as follows.

- We decided that I would just become more of a casual friend to the child and continue being in her life - we didn't need to go through the system (as recommended by the agency and Child Services)
- Ongoing complexity of idealised transition was never ending and we lost motivation to continue
- Would not do it now. We are too old plus have commitments to our ex foster children. One still lives with us; the other requires being driven to get groceries, job interviews, and social activities, mental and financial support.
- Obviously my husband's surgery made it difficult to continue but despite our offers to resume the care of the child we were not utilised. We became very disillusioned by the whole system and the fact that the children were not made the priority in the system.

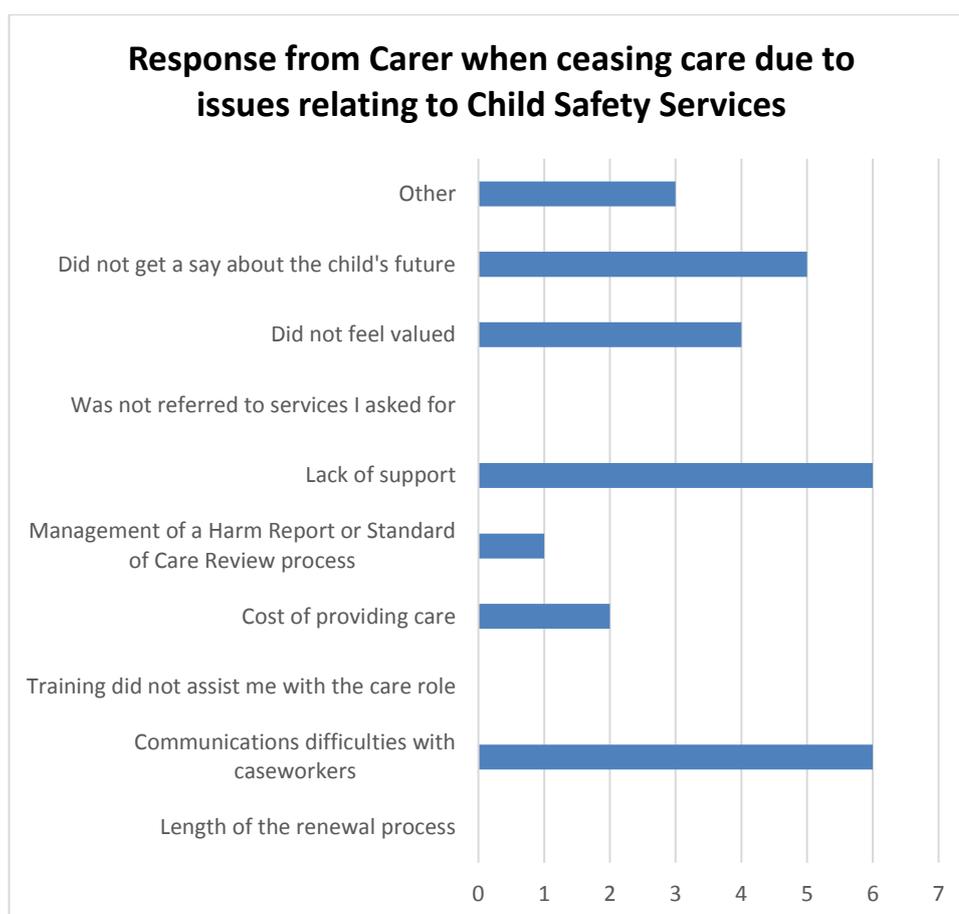


**For people who stated that they ceased caring due to carer and family reasons, they were asked to expand on their response.**



#### Comments made

- I did not continue due to lack of support from child safety and foster agency.
- Interstate move with work. I hope to continue in the ACT.
- We had children for respite care for more than 2 years, and they changed primary placement and no longer required respite care. We thought it would take a very long time to develop a relationship with new children. We are thinking of relocating in the next 18 months and this is not fair for children.

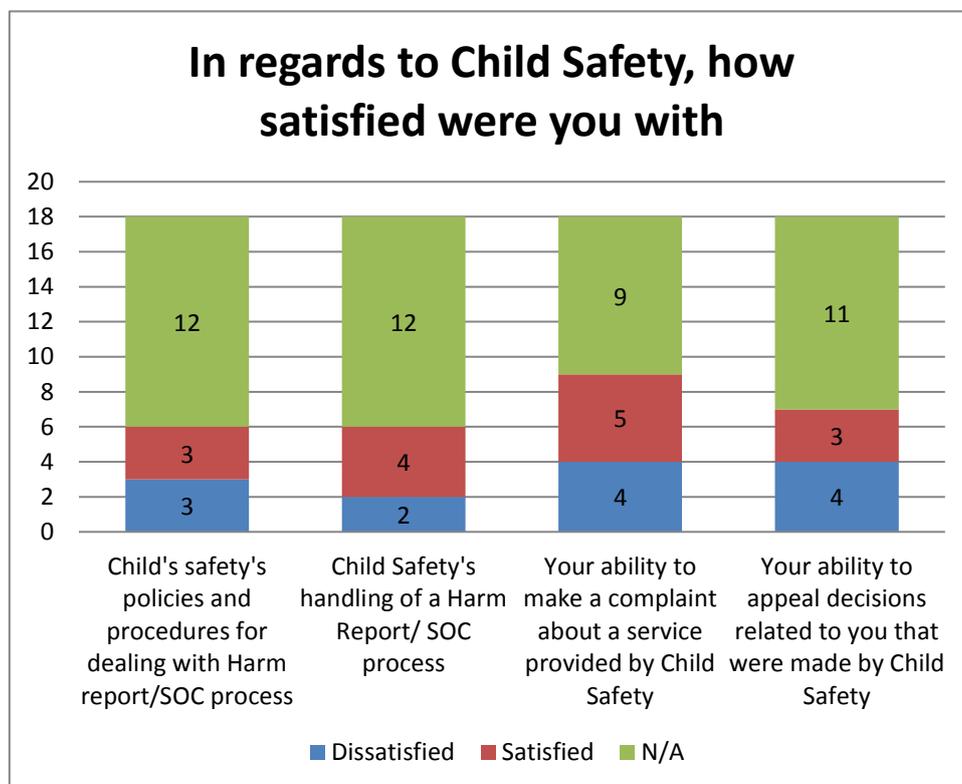


**Below are extracts of comments made by carers in relation to the questions referring to why they ceased as Carers if this was related to Child Safety Services.**

- I had no say. The child was allowed to dictate her care.
- The parents needs were the focus not the children's
- Notified child safety and the child's advocate officer of medical concerns about the child having "absence spells" and there was nothing done. Now nine months later after leaving our care and despite notifying the new carer to my knowledge nothing has been followed up about these concerns.
- Did not get a clear picture about the overall plan for the children which made it difficult to make plans in our own life
- I found the caseworker assigned to me had no psychological understanding of reading / understanding human behaviour, which a concern was given she was working with some very challenging kids / cases. My feedback is that the caseworker was not able to identify and therefore not able to provide the support needed to a traumatised child who had just lost the only mother she had ever known. The communication with me about feedback from the child was not interpreted, it was simply just regurgitated verbatim from what the child said. In this instance the child had shut down emotionally and physically as a way to cope. She had not shown any emotion after her mother's death and was not provided with any counselling in the time she was with me despite my requests. Then when she was starting to get comfortable living with me, she started to feel the impact of what had happened to her, she was coming

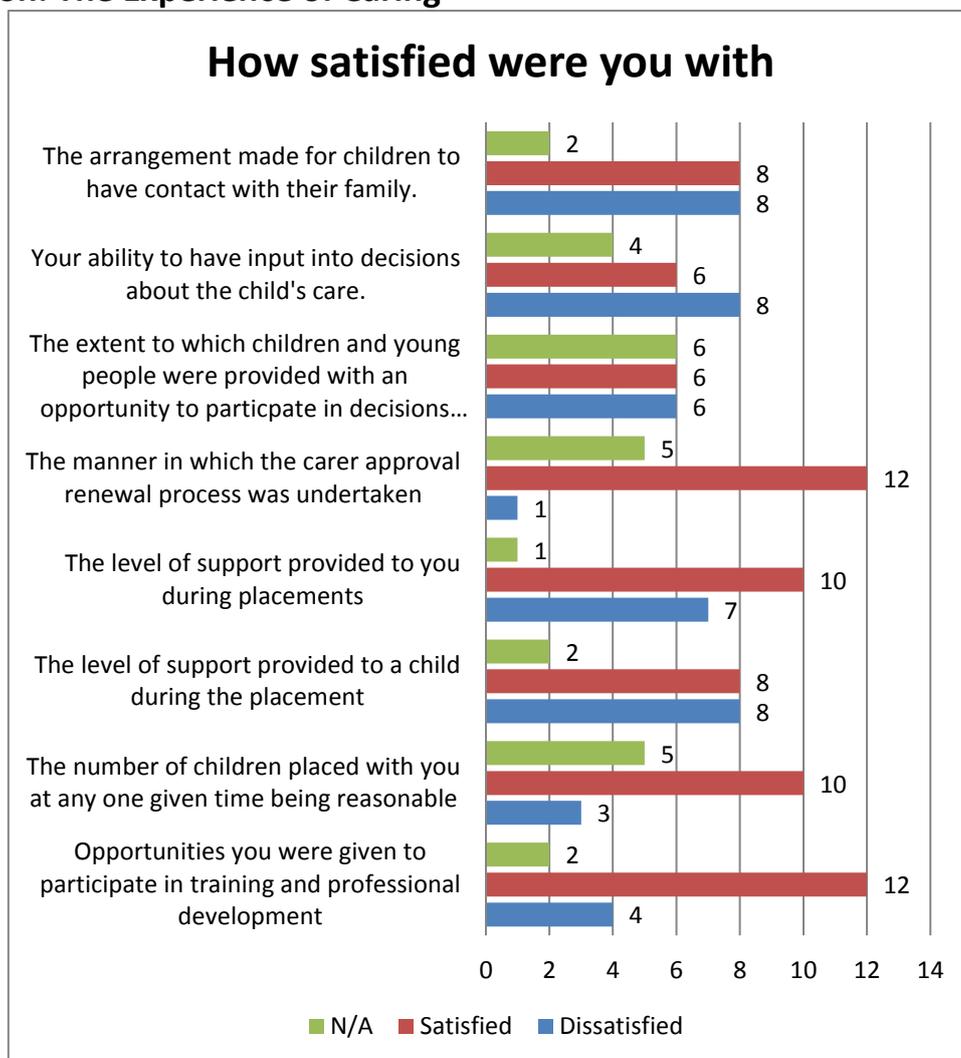
out of survival mode. But instead of helping me help her through what she was feeling, the child's request to be moved and shut out anyone who knew her mother and go back into survival mode was supported. I got a feeling I did not fit the mould for what a foster carer should be. It was easier to move the child to someone who was.

- I realised the child safety system is more geared to accommodating the parents and the reunification process. The child's welfare came a poor second to this. How many chances are the parents given? Some children get returned despite thriving in foster care because of a policy of reunification at all costs. How much damage does a child have to suffer before the parents are deemed incapable? In our case two children were removed from the household and two more were left with the parents including a baby for a further nine months without any monitoring or visits from the child safety department. Needless to say the two remaining children suffered unnecessary abuse and neglect for a further nine months despite the Child Safety being contacted by a concerned relative several times.
- Last child in our care was re-unified too soon. We were taken advantage of by dept and left significantly out of pocket for day-care fees despite an arrangement in place for dept to pay these costs.
- Very poor support
- Generally poor communication. Not knowing what was going on
- Did not get all payments I was entitled to until after placement ended. Didn't get any payments for first 6-7 weeks. I and my advocate had to keep chasing up payments. Also found psychologist did not provide any support for me in handling behavioural difficulties of child.
- We were left in the dark about the kids, our concerns were not taken into account. It took a long time to receive financial support.



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

### Question: The Experience of Caring



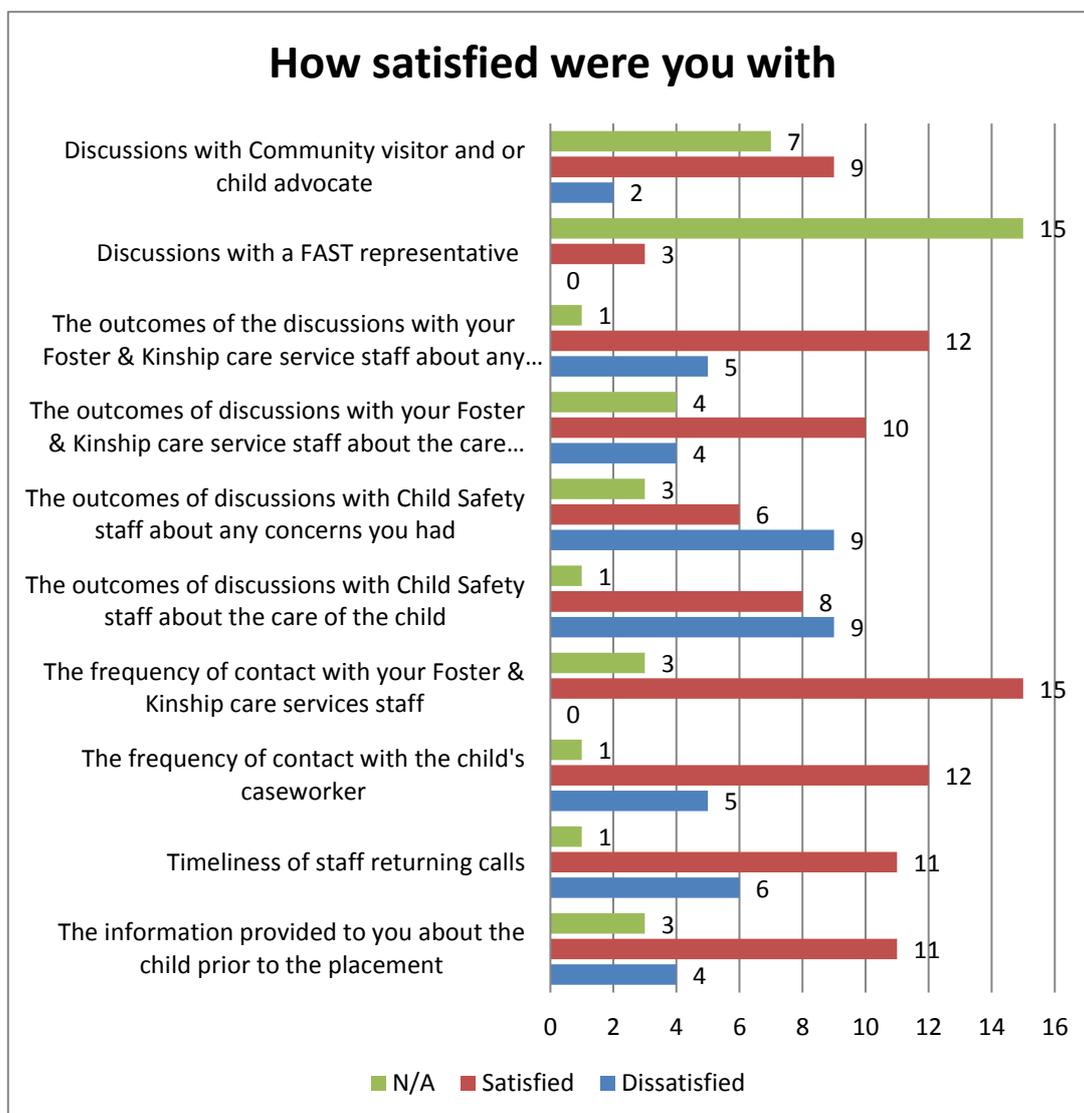
Below are extracts from comments made in reference to this question by the people undertaking the surveys.

- Children reached 18, still part of family. Partially supporting them emotionally, family and financially.
- The child was given back to his parents through Child Safety
- Time
- Re-unification with Mother
- He turned 18
- I moved out of Brisbane and taken up full time work. I didn't think that my working life would continue to suit fostering

- I am starting a business which operates on weekends so am no longer able to provide respite care.
- Very determined biological father who was in and out of their life which unsettled the children.
- Placement ended - child turned 18. Still caring for them as young adults.
- I was initially interested in being a kinship carer as I knew the child and could be a positive influence on her. After dealing with Child safety and seeing how the system works I do not want any further involvement.
- My husband fell ill and had to have a quadruple heart bypass surgery and lots of rehab appointments afterwards which was very difficult while trying to care for a lively under 2 year old toddler. We were not offered any help or respite care from child safety. Even though we loved the child very much and he had thrived in our care we reluctantly had to give up caring for him. When my husband recovered we offered to care for the child again but our offer was declined. Child safety also had a poor record for returning our phone calls and emails. We were also not provided with any form of support or visits from any agency and basically left to our own devices which in our case it was lucky that we were mature experienced loving foster parents to the child.
- The child's parents undertook a drug program and have managed to change their life around.
- Time for the training and the regular interviews with support worker was a bit much when I only provided respite to one young person, 1 weekend per month.
- It became very tiring after working all week and providing respite care on the weekends.

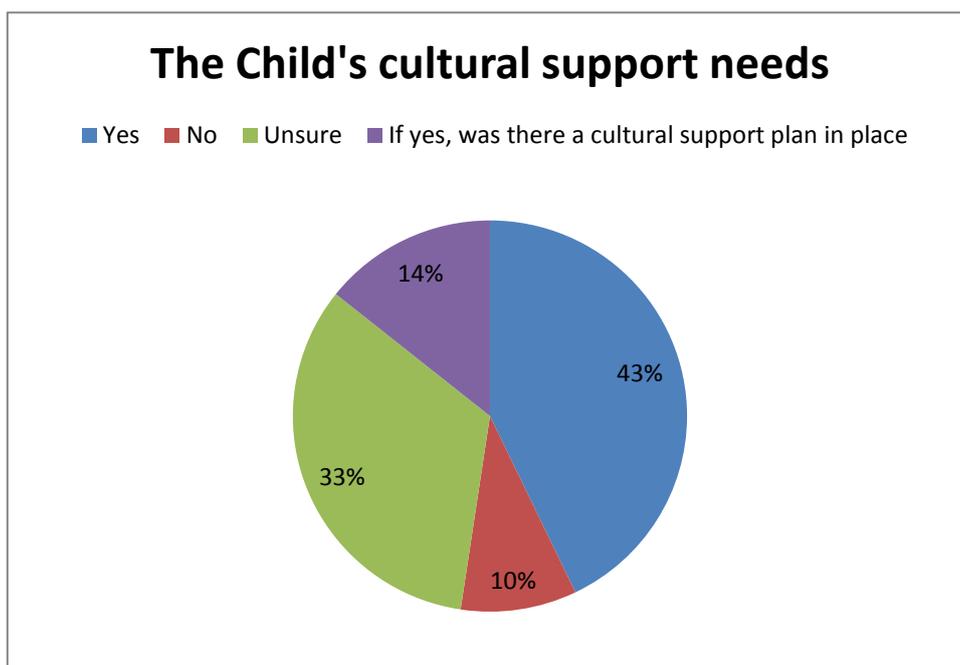
### Question: The Experience of Caring Communication

Carers were asked how satisfied they were with their experiences of communication with relevant stakeholders. Below is a table that outlines the responses and extracts of further comments that they wanted to make in relation to the question.

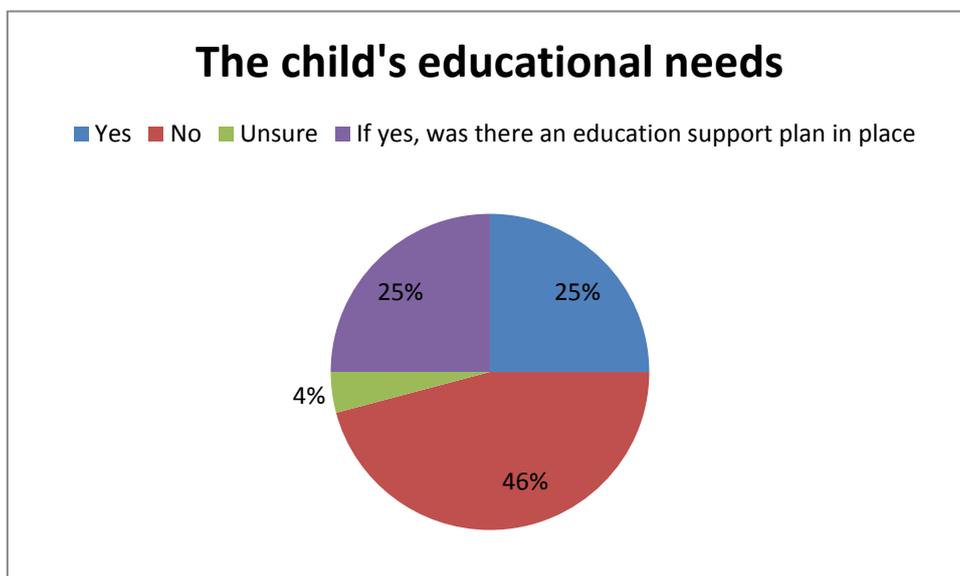


The carers were asked to identify whether Child Safety discussed the following matters with them:

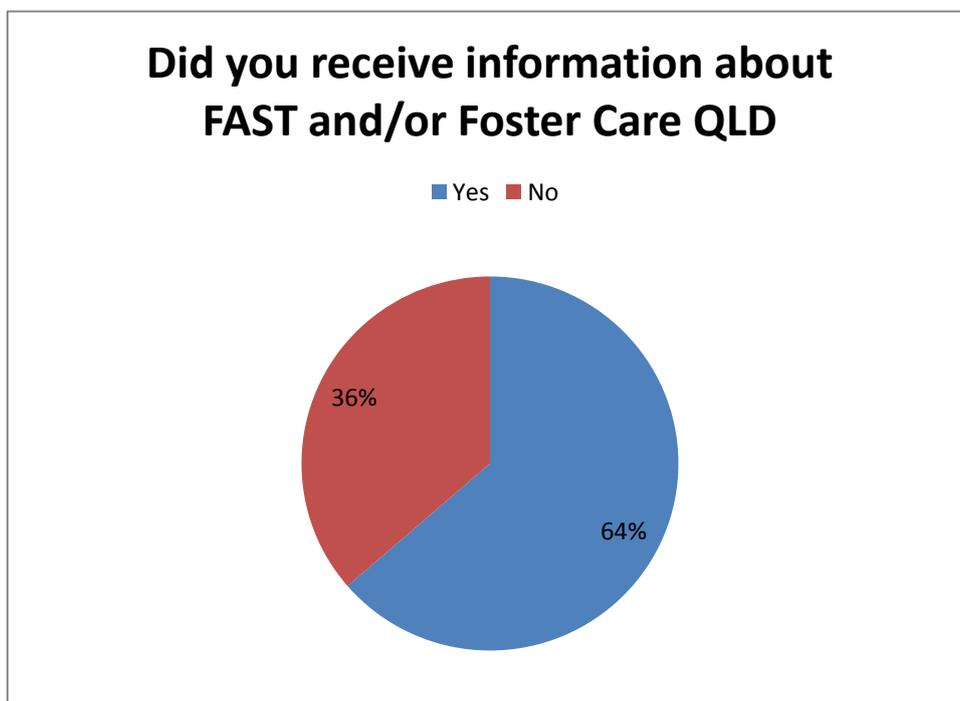
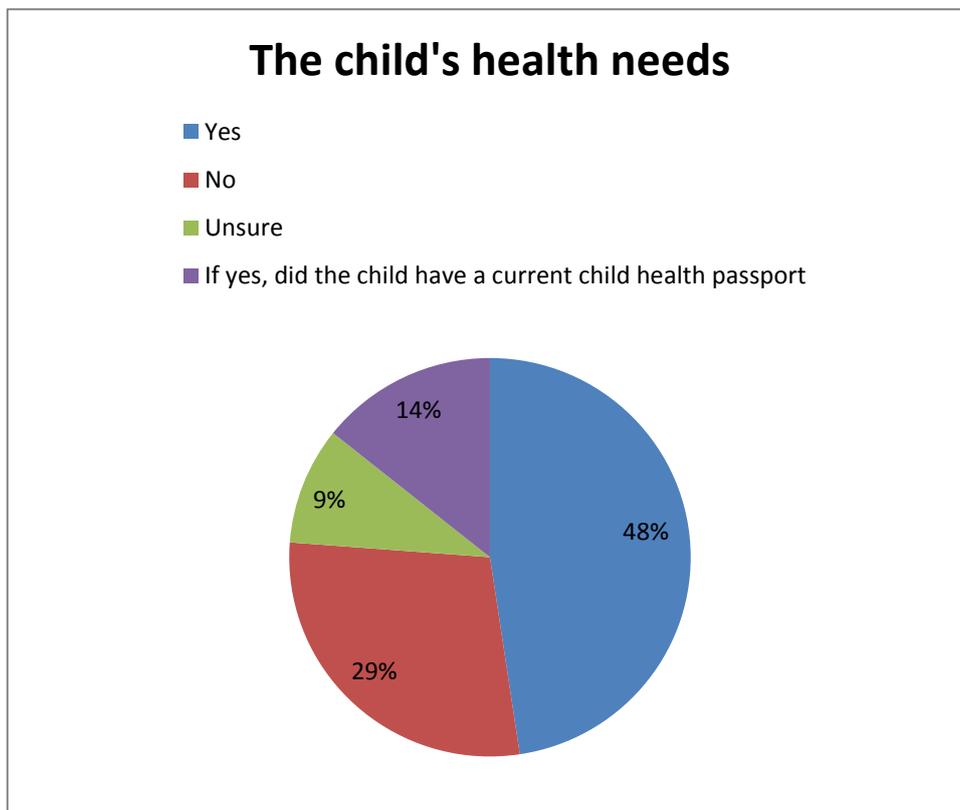
- The child’s cultural support needs.
- The child’s educational needs.
- The child’s health needs.
- None of the above.



**43% of Carers identified that Child Safety discussed the child's cultural support needs, but only 14% identifying that a Cultural Support plan was in place.**

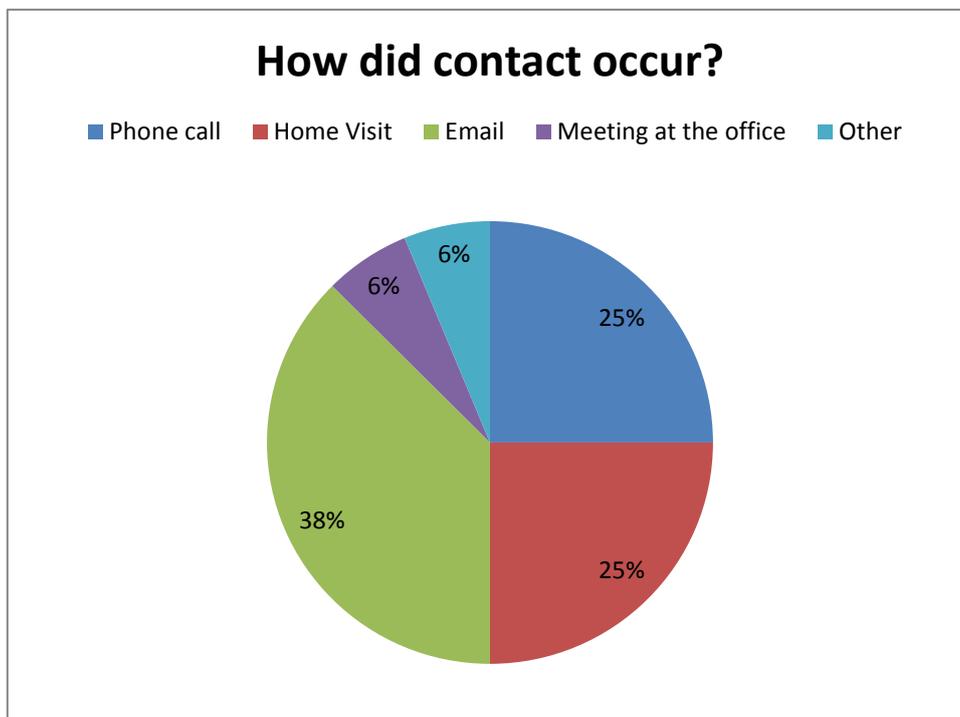


**25% of Carers identified that Child Safety discussed the child's educational needs, and all 25% had an educational support plan in place.**



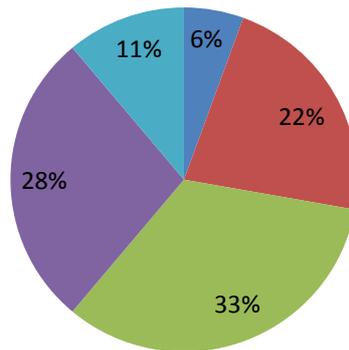
Carers were asked if they had received information regarding FAST Representatives and Foster Care QLD, the table below identifies their responses.

### Information relating to contact taking place.



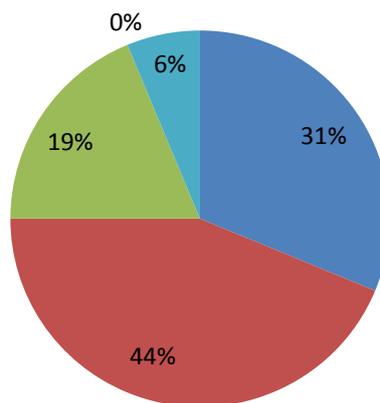
### How often did you have contact with your Foster and Kinship Care Service?

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



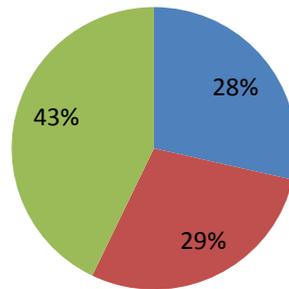
### How did this contact occur?

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



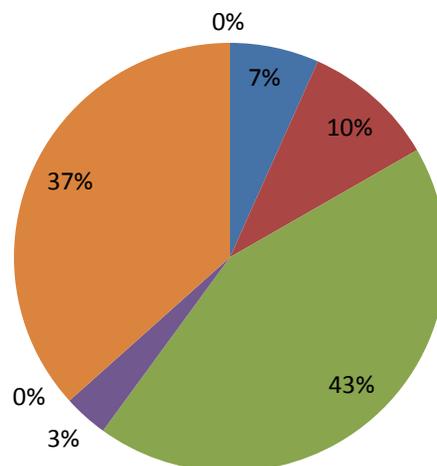
### What was your preference regarding contact?

■ E-mail ■ Phone ■ Face to face



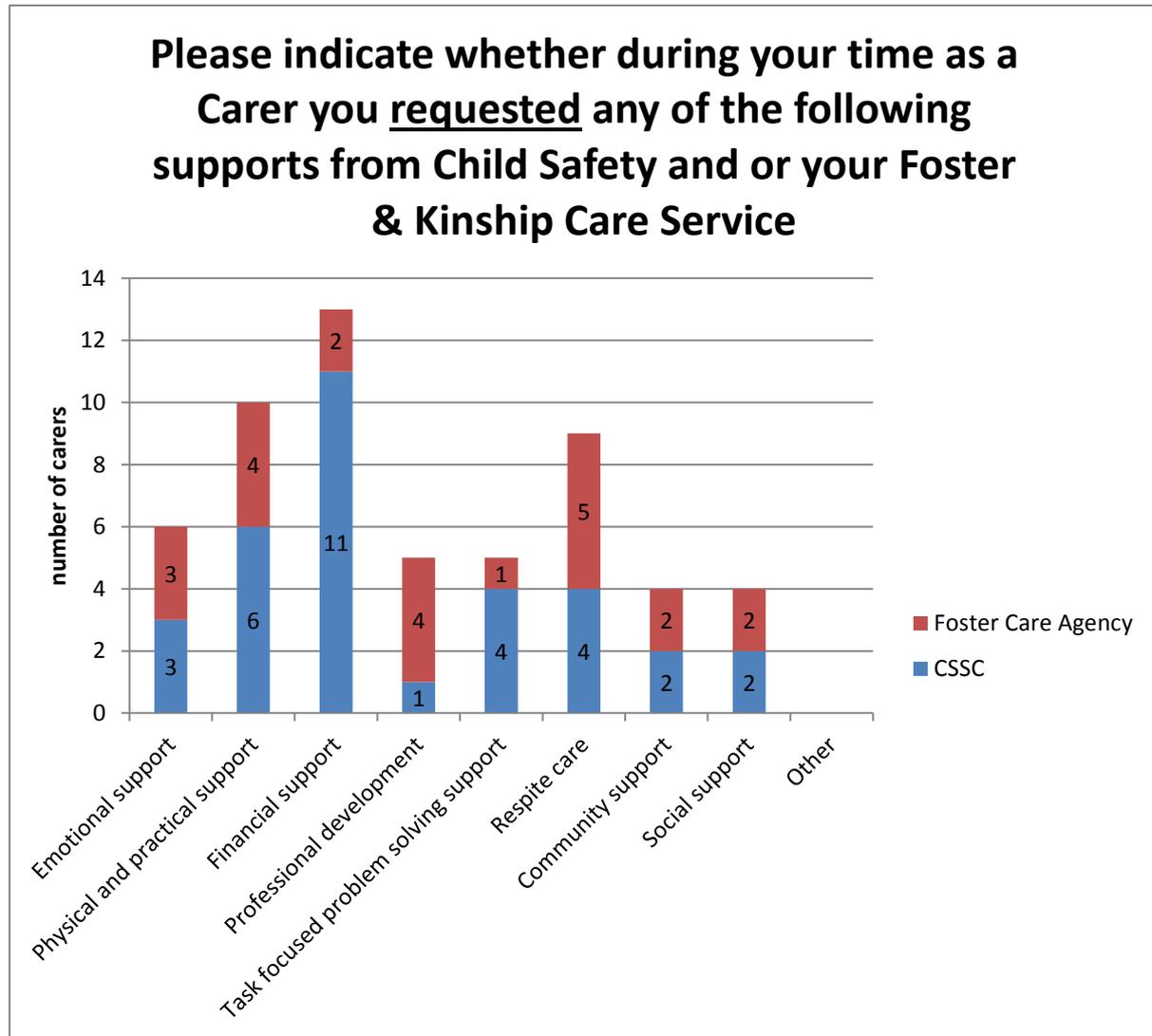
### Which of the following persons did you usually have contact with?

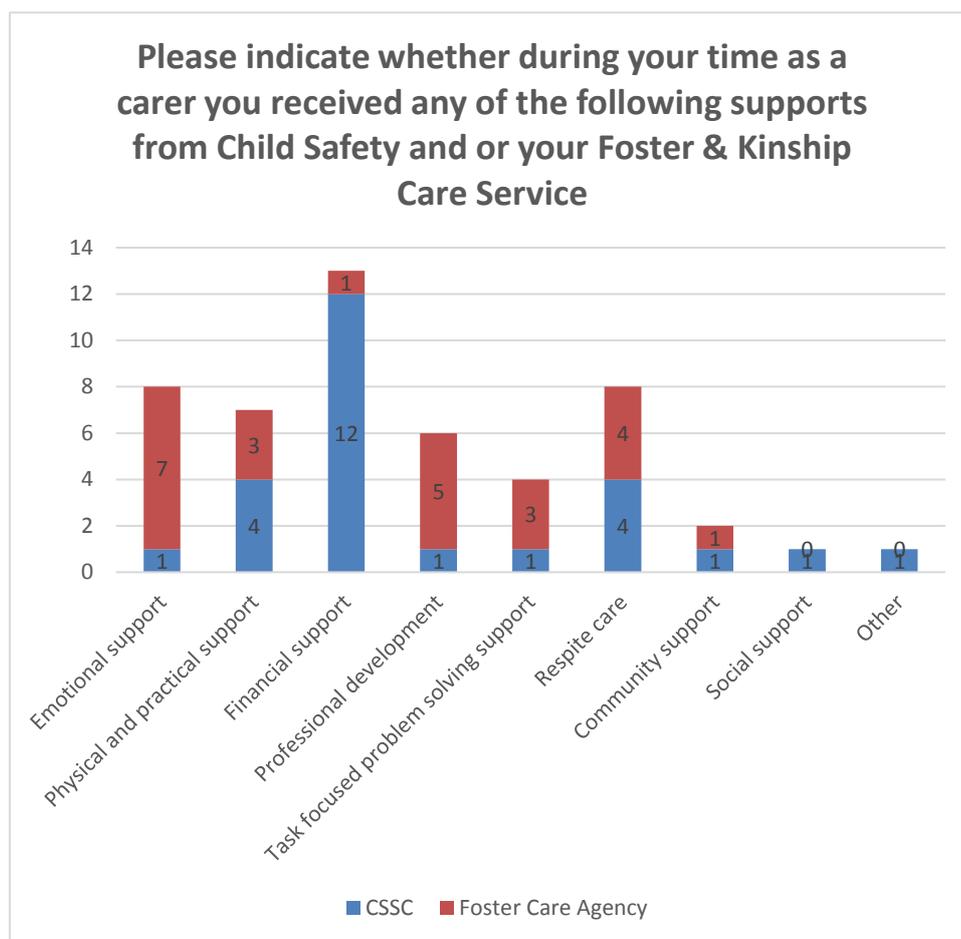
■ Child Safety Service Centre Managers  
 ■ Child Safety Team Leaders  
 ■ Child Safety Officers  
 ■ Child Safety Support Officers (family support worker)  
 ■ Child Safety Youth Worker  
 ■ Foster and Kinship Care Service Workers  
 ■ None of the above



### Question: The Experience of Caring - Support

This section addresses the experience of caring and support received.





**Carers were asked to provide responses to two questions:**

- Did they seek or receive any other form of support, and where was this from?
- Were there other supports you would have liked access to?

**Below are the responses supplied:**

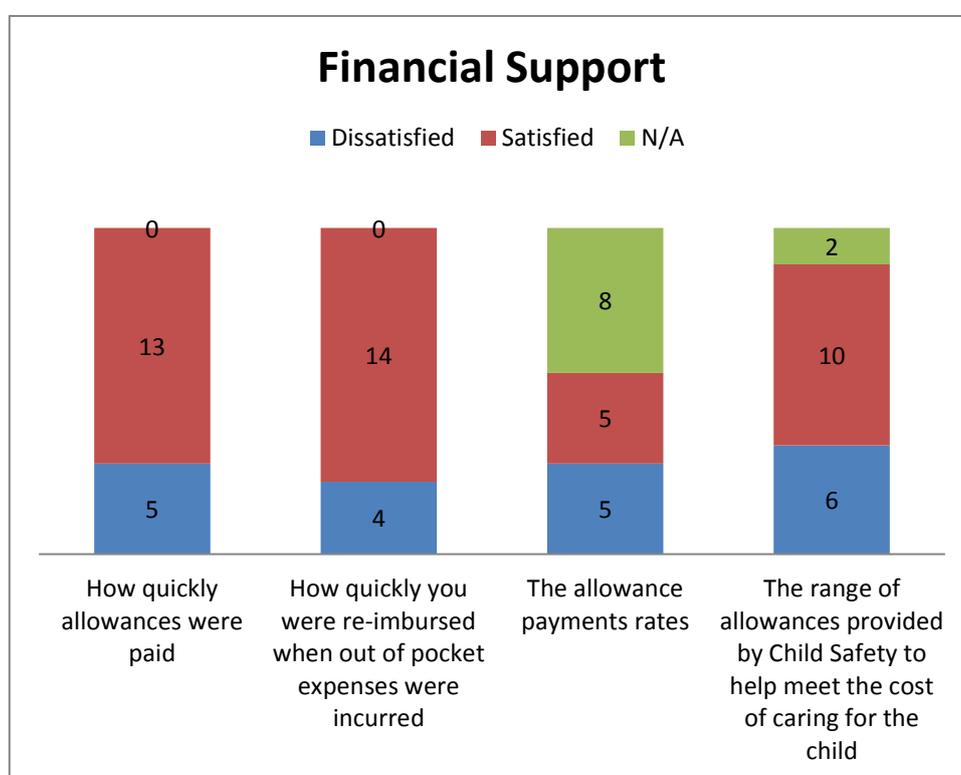
- We did not have a Foster and kinship care support worker assigned to us. I did not know about respite care and it was not offered to us
- None requested
- I made no requests
- Respite offered, but did not need it. I was offered anything I needed.
- Did not request
- Friends
- Family and school
- We just had the foster carer payment given to us after we had already cared for the child for over 2 months. We were told that they would pay us after the court case. We are on a state disability payment and had to pay for the needs of the child, nappies, food, clothing baby equipment and toys out of our own pocket despite being unrelated to the child. We also did not receive a one off start up payment as the court case went on too long.
- The staff at the agency were always supportive and checked in to see how the placements were going. Great staff.

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

- Evolve psychologist.
- No my agency services were really great but it took child safety quite a while for them to send the paper work through for them to be assigned. So I would have liked support a bit earlier.
- It would have been nice to have had a support worker to tell us about the system and how it operated.
- No.

**Question: The Experience of Caring – Financial Support**

Experience of caring in relation to financial support.

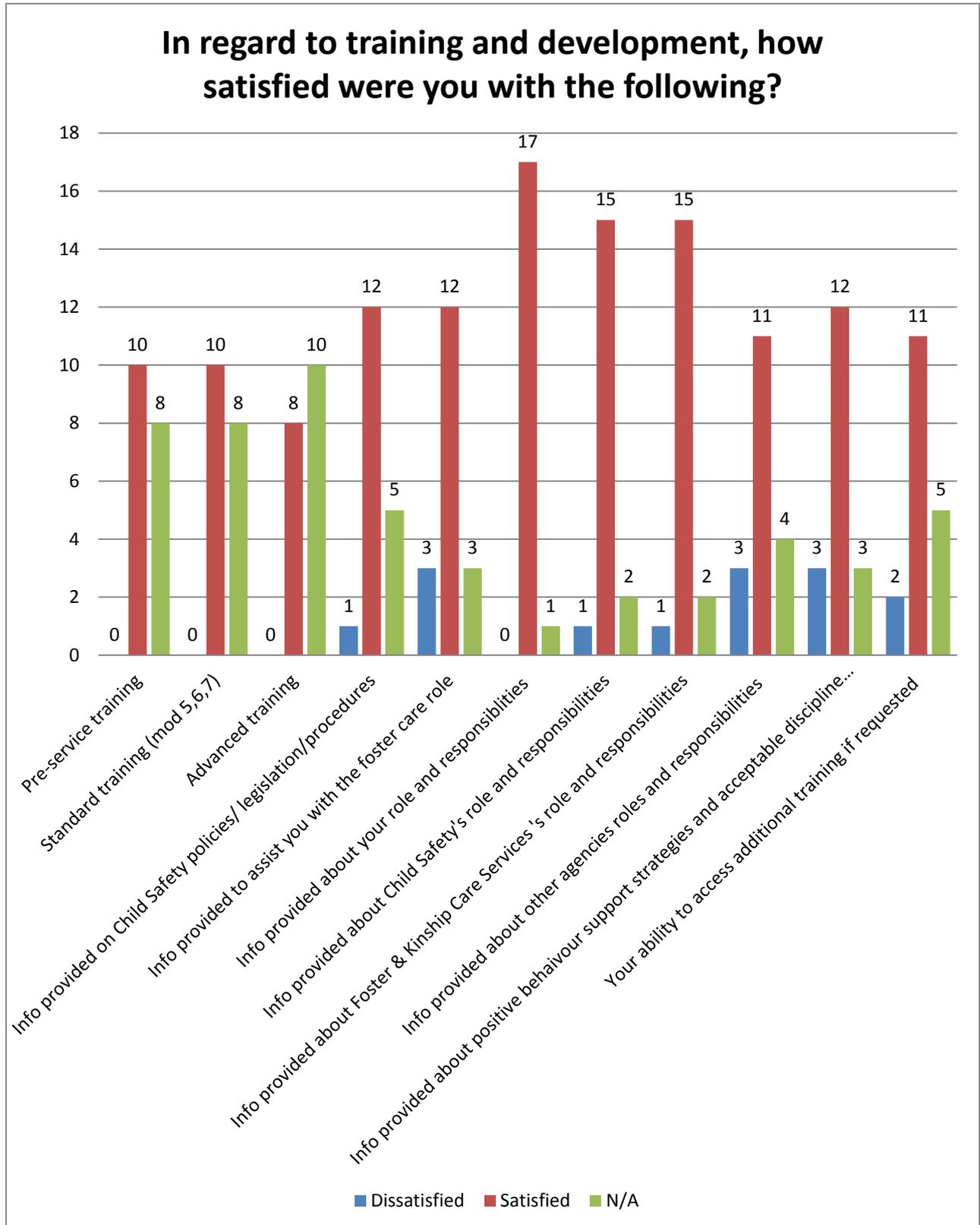


**Responses from carers in relation to financial support:**

- There was an initial problem with day care cost but once this was sorted it was OK
- I took on the child within days of her mother’s death and so I know we had to fast track my approvals but there was confusion from child safety over the forms I had to complete and there was holdup with payment. It was months before I say my first payment. Child safety did supply me with a few Woolworth’s vouchers to cover my food bill which was helpful.

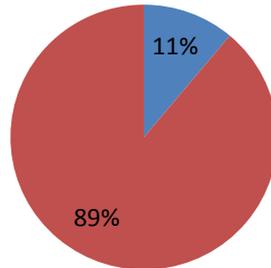
### Question: The Experience of Caring – Training and Professional Development

Experience to training and development.



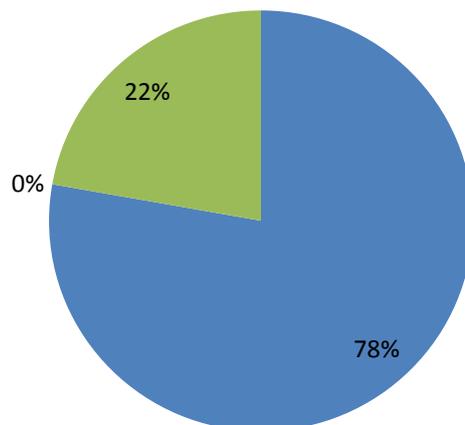
### Have you attended any training in the last 12 months

■ Yes ■ No



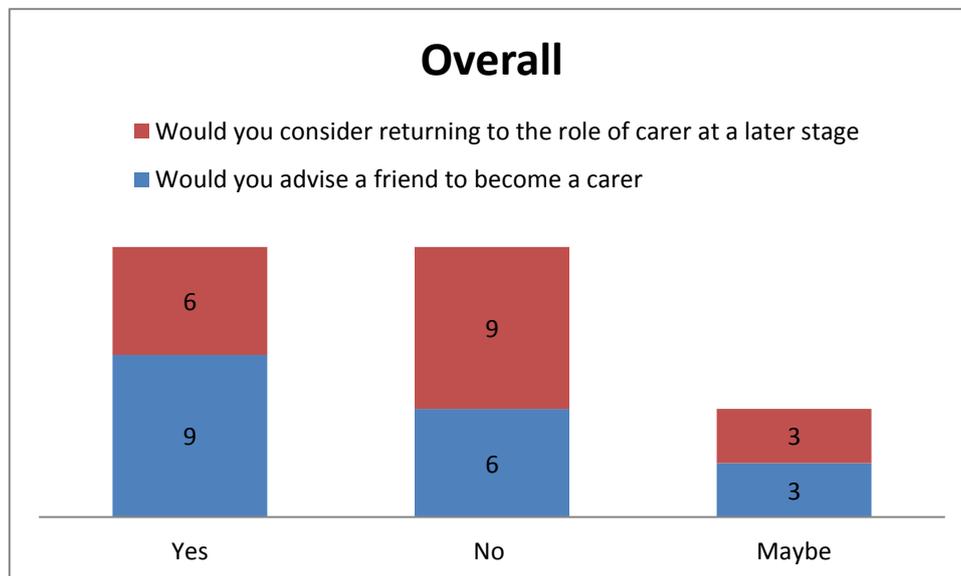
### If you were approved as a Foster Carer, was there a Foster Care Agreement in place?

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know



## Question: Overall Experience

### Overall experiences.



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

- Lack of timely support from Department of Child Safety combined with complexity of children's behaviour and overall demands on time mean I would not advise a friend to become a carer

### Carers were asked to provide comments in relation to their overall experience as a carer, the responses were as follows:

#### Q2. Did your experiences of providing care meet the expectation you had when you decided to become a carer?

No responses

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

- Dealing with the complexity associated with birth parent desire to reunify and Child Safety management of this.
- Dealing with teenager difficulties with inadequate support.
- Managing challenging behaviour.
- Dealing with Child Safety. For me, I have an insight into a system that I believe needs to be reformed and felt incredibly frustrated with the process. I found myself stereotyping caseworkers based on my observation of the ones from the office which I caught myself doing which is not fair on all caseworkers. My comments are from these observations only so please consider that from the feedback in this survey. What I observed was department caseworkers

interacting with the children in a very patronising way. It was as if they viewed all children - current, past and future in the same polarising way which is from a context of there is no hope for them.

- Dealing with child safety.
- The System.
- The support provided after the situation had ended where the help was most needed.
- Dealing with child safety. Being an effective advocate for the children.
- Seeing the child go through some very rocky family visits. Visits with her extended family went fairly smoothly but there was a relative who she was her former carer whom she had been removed from. She still had to go to monthly visits to this woman and the visits caused a lot of stress and anxiety to the child. The relative has been given so many warnings for her behaviour - but unfortunately the child must still go through monthly visits. I feel like the needs of this former carer have been put before the needs of the child.
- Financially we struggled due to child care costs.
- Because it was a grandchild - it was hard at times dealing with the parents.
- Working with a variety of agencies... not everyone knew things going on about the baby.
- Dealing with upset 10 year old in the middle of the night, when my ability to function is diminished due to lack of sleep.
- Understanding their way of thinking.
- Developing relationships with the children.
- Waiting for a child to be brought to my home after hours.

#### **Q4. What was the most positive aspect of being a Carer?**

- The Joy the kids brought to our lives.
- Knowing you made a future for them that they wouldn't have had.
- Seeing positive changes in child's behaviour.
- Being there for a child in their most vulnerable time of need.
- Supporting and caring for the children.
- Having the child in our care and witnessing him thrive. The bond and love given and received in the relationship was very special and fulfilling.
- Seeing positive change and development in both children and their parents.
- Seeing this child develop and build a relationship with her.
- Helping the kids.
- Making a difference in a child's life for the better.
- Helping when I could.
- Seeing the development of the child over our 3 years of respite.
- Being able to be a positive role model and help him make good choices.
- Feeling of satisfaction.

#### **Q5. What helped you feel supported in your role as a Carer?**

- An engaged and supportive family.
- The level of support varied greatly.
- Talking to parents of other children with complex needs (not necessarily just other carers).
- Knowing I had a person at the agency who understood my case that I could call if I needed it.
- My friend who was caring for the other sibling.

- Foster care agency workers
- My friends and family.
- Foster Care Australian employees.
- No comment.
- The agency staff were lovely. Also as I did a couple of respite placements, talking to the other carers was great too.
- Social worker.
- I could look after my own nephew.
- Training, newsletters, conference attendance at Twin Waters.
- The role of my foster carer support officer through the agency

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

- In complex cases, better communication. We don't need to know the detail but we need to know the plan and our part in it.
- More staff is needed as when urgent matters (not life threatening) occurred, timely support was not available.
- Timely reimbursement of funds More regular support from therapeutic agencies, More timely and proactive communication responses from Dept of Child Safety - I felt like I was always initiating and following up communication
- Regular sharing of information across all parties involved in the child's care around a common goal for that child. Foster and kinship carers shown more respect for the service they provide and giving them a voice that is listened to.
- To be heard.
- The carers input about visitation times that fit in with the needs of the child. eg: bedtime routines for young children who have day time sleeps. Our child would often be so tired after attending two visits in one day to have supervised visits with each parent that he was often too tired to eat dinner after missing his day time sleep.
- get support that we needed.
- Realistic plan for care of children - access to full childcare rebates - and contact arrangements - too much pressure on carers to take care of travel.
- Steady respite care that is organised in advance so they can make plans.
- Better communication with Child Safety.
- I found that there was some aspect of the system that were not relative to our situation and therefore a waste of money as it could have been used for other cases that were more in need than ours.
- Having more information before taking a placement but I also know that they don't always have that information.
- Nothing
- They do an amazing job already.

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

- The support and attitude of difference officers varied. My department were mostly pretty good. Another department not so much. We were grateful but would have continued to care these children anyway.
- Why is there limited adoption in Queensland? When a child is taken away at birth when there is little chance of reunification why are they not offered for adoption by an approved family. A family who would then have control of choices for children, who has a vested interest in them. It would free up Child Safety to focus on the more difficult cases and invest in up-skilling caseworkers.
- Child safety put the parents' needs before the child's. Returning a child to his mother who is not able to meet the child's emotional need, and is mentally unstable.
- Prioritise what is in the best interests of the child first.
- Contact with family is important if it is a positive experience. I believe if people involved in visitations have been warned more than once about their behaviour - visitation should cease. The interest of the child should be put first instead of wishes of family members.
- We had such a terrible experience due to the child safety team leaders and coordinators assigned to our case.
- No comment.
- I will take it up again in Canberra hopefully.
- No.
- Nothing to Improve.