

Emotional Well Being  
Report 2010  
A National Voice



## CONTENTS

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### **Executive Summary Key Findings and Recommendations** 1

Background

What the Survey Shows

Key Findings

Our Recommendations

### **Emotional Wellbeing and Looked After Children in Context** 5

Health Needs Assessment and Health Plan

National Review of CAMHS

Strengths and Difficulties and MTFC

### **The Questions and Answers** 7

#### **KEY MESSAGES: the additional effects of being from care** 11

Views in common with wider society

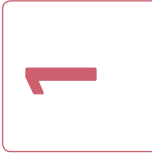
Views specific to children and young people from care

### **Appendix: Methodology and Characteristics of the Sample** 13

The Methodology

The Sample





## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Currently, 45% of all children in care are assessed as having a 'mental health disorder' compared with a figure of around 10% of the general population. [February 2009, DH; DCSF]

Our research into this problem brought our attention to a study made over ten years ago of social workers' views of children and young people in Care and their mental health needs. The study found that 80% of 'looked after' children needed mental health service input, yet only 27% received it. [Phillips, 1997]

### 1.1. Background

For us the reasons for the high numbers are fairly self-evident and the importance of emotional/mental health is surely no more in doubt than that of physical health. These needs then, are obviously needs that must be met.

However, before any progress can be made, the causes of the disparity between the numbers of those that require help and support and those getting it, need identifying. We decided to find out if the young people themselves could shed some light on the issue.

### 1.2. What the Survey Shows

Consequently we (A National Voice) undertook a survey of 106 looked-after children and young people; we asked for their views, thoughts and feelings on how their own emotional health needs were being met.

The collated data indicated several key points:

- The high numbers of 'need' appear unchanged
- The poor 'needs/met' ratio is still evident
- Requests for help are impeded by a perceived general lack of understanding/empathy/experience (of being from Care)
- Few of those that feel able to ask for help would turn to mental health professionals
- Professional mental health solutions are viewed as stigmatising
- A clear majority choose the alternative coping strategies of increased drug/alcohol consumption.

#### Terminology

According to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in a national review of service delivery (2008), there are other terms in addition to 'mental health and psychological well being' that, broadly speaking, cover the same areas of interest e.g. emotional health, emotional and social wellbeing etc. In the interests of consistency, for this report we have used the terms emotional or mental well being and emotional or mental health to reflect the breadth of these issues.

## 1.3. Key Findings

### 1.3.1. How Many are Affected?

A majority of 81% said they found everyday life difficult to cope with (almost a quarter of the total sample chose 'yes' and 59% chose 'sometimes')

Of the overall sample 73% said that their emotional health had affected their home life, relationships, education, work or leisure (49% answered 'yes' and 24% said 'sometimes').

### 1.3.2. Perceptions and Barriers

Of those who responded to the question 'If you had a mental health issue is there anything that would stop you asking for help?', Over half (55%; 35% of the overall sample) felt that there was something stopping them from asking for help. Professional help being a particular issue due to the stigma attached. This was reflected within the majority of the 37 responses.

Despite the fact that 72% of the overall sample of young people felt they had enough information and support for their emotional and mental health needs, 66% said they felt or have sometimes felt like people would not understand their emotional/mental health difficulty (42% said 'yes'; 24% said 'sometimes'). Here there was an emphasis on those without Care experience lacking the insight/empathy needed to establish a successful therapeutic relationship.

### 1.3.3. The Preferred Choice

When ANV asked children and young people who they would talk to if they had an emotional or mental health issue:

- Over half of the sample of young people chose 'friends' (60%) or 'family' (50%)
- 34 % chose 'social worker or aftercare worker'
- 11% of the overall sample chose 'counsellor'
- 9 % chose 'Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services' (CAMHS)
- 9% chose 'no one'

### 1.3.4. Other Options

Of children and young people answering 'yes' to the question 'When you are finding it difficult to cope do you use or increase your use of any of the following?' (*\*see 3.2 for the complete list*)

26% chose 'Alcohol'

25% chose 'Drugs' and

44% chose 'Smoking'.

## **1.4. Our Recommendations**

### **1.4.1. Government action**

Educational interventions need to be introduced nationally for children in Care and Care leavers which aim to challenge perceptions of stigma around mental health and accessing support by increasing understanding of the issues young people face.

For example, local authorities should be providing more accessible learning opportunities for young people around self-help and emotional intelligence. Such services should be widely promoted in a non-stigmatising way.

### **1.4.2. Corporate Parents**

Local authorities should develop a robust and effective system to ensure that all young people receive the best support for their emotional and mental health needs, based around the 'Strengths and Difficulties' questionnaires which have now been implemented. Furthermore, this system needs to incorporate a smooth transition for post-18 services that is tailored to the needs of Care leavers.

### **1.4.3. A National Voice**

A National Voice should continue to work nationally with local authorities to establish and maintain effective Children in Care Councils. A National Voice should continue to establish such peer support mechanisms as well as linking in on a regional and national basis to the national CAMHS review and other government initiatives to improve emotional and mental well-being outcomes for children in Care and Care leavers.

### **1.4.4. And Young People**

Children and young people should have a say in which services they want to access and should be given all the choices available to them.



## 2. EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN CONTEXT

### 2.1. Health Needs Assessment and Health Plan

In 2002, the Department of Health issued statutory guidance for the health promotion of looked after children which required local authorities to put in place arrangements to ensure every child in Care has a health plan based on a health needs assessment. However, this guidance was not on a statutory footing for the NHS.

### 2.2. National Review of CAMHS

In 2008, a national review of CAMHS was carried out considering progress since the publication of the National Service Framework, and also considering how services can best meet the educational, health and social care needs of all children and young people at risk of, or experiencing, mental health problems.

### 2.3. Strengths and Difficulties and MTFC

In February 2009, the Department of Health and Department for Children, Schools and Families produced a policy document outlining the broadly accepted fact, within social care, that Children in care are between four and five times more likely to have a mental health problem than other children.

The policy document outlined the several key areas in which the Government is already acting to improve outcomes or proposing to improve outcomes:

- 'Re-issuing statutory guidance to place it on a statutory footing for both health care bodies and local authorities to help remove any inconsistencies and promote more coordinated care'
- 'Fieldwork to inform the development of the revised guidance in relation to current practice in the provision of health services is now complete and Government expects to consult on the revised guidance shortly'
- 'All local authorities are now assessing the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children in care through strengths and difficulties questionnaires'
- 'The pilot programme of Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) for adolescents with complex needs and challenging behaviour is beginning to make a difference to outcomes for those who have been in the programme'



### 3. THE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

#### 3.1. Do you sometimes find everyday life difficult to cope with?

| Answer    | Count | %     |
|-----------|-------|-------|
| Yes       | 25    | 23.58 |
| Sometimes | 63    | 59.43 |
| No        | 18    | 16.98 |

#### 3.2. When you are finding it difficult to cope do you use or increase your use of any of the following? (respondents could select more than one option)

| Answer                                           | Count | %     |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Medicine from the doctor                         | 9     | 8.49  |
| Alcohol                                          | 28    | 26.42 |
| Self-help techniques e.g. yoga, exercise         | 10    | 9.43  |
| Smoking                                          | 47    | 44.34 |
| Drugs                                            | 27    | 25.47 |
| Complementary therapy e.g. aromatherapy, massage | 3     | 2.83  |
| Other                                            | 35    | 3.30  |

'Other' responses included: *'sleeping' 'run away' 'listening to personal development tapes' 'shout, be naughty' 'self harm' 'punch pillow' 'talk to staff' 'throwing chairs' 'walks' 'time out' 'I attend therapy which helps'.*

#### 3.3. Has your emotional health ever affected your home life/relationships/friendships/school or college or work/leisure?

| Answer    | Count | %     |
|-----------|-------|-------|
| Yes       | 52    | 49.06 |
| Sometimes | 25    | 23.58 |
| No        | 29    | 27.36 |

#### 3.4.a. Do you think that young people in care find it difficult to talk about their emotional/mental health problems?

| Answer    | Count | %     |
|-----------|-------|-------|
| Yes       | 62    | 58.49 |
| Sometimes | 36    | 33.96 |
| No        | 8     | 7.55  |

#### 3.4.b. Do you think that young people in care are less likely to go to mental health services or seek help or treatment than other young people who are not in care?

| Answer    | Count | %     |
|-----------|-------|-------|
| Yes       | 36    | 33.96 |
| Sometimes | 29    | 27.36 |
| No        | 41    | 38.68 |

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### 3.4.c. Who would you talk to if you have emotional/mental health issues? (Respondents could select more than one option)

| Answer                                                                                             | Count | %     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Counsellor                                                                                         | 12    | 11.32 |
| Social worker or aftercare worker (pathway advisor)                                                | 36    | 33.96 |
| Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services: CAMHS-<br>people like psychologists and psychiatrists | 9     | 8.49  |
| Friend's                                                                                           | 64    | 60.36 |
| Family                                                                                             | 53    | 50.00 |
| Foster carer                                                                                       | 16    | 15.09 |
| Residential staff                                                                                  | 26    | 24.53 |
| No one                                                                                             | 14    | 13.21 |
| Other                                                                                              | 10    | 9.43  |

'Other' responses included: *'boyfriend' 'G.P.' 'key worker' 'only some residential staff or my mum' 'support worker' 'teacher' 'therapist'*

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### 3.5.a. Have you ever felt like people would not understand if you had an emotional or mental health difficulty?

| Answer    | Count | %     |
|-----------|-------|-------|
| Yes       | 44    | 41.50 |
| Sometimes | 25    | 23.58 |
| No        | 37    | 34.91 |

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### 3.5.b. We asked those who answered 'yes' to the previous question: Why did you feel like people would not understand?

44 children and young people responded with the majority suggesting that a lack of experience was the key.

For example: *'They have not been through it' 'they have not had the same experiences' 'I find it easier if people have been through the situation and understand it or have any idea how I'm coping or feeling' 'people that have a strong family background do not understand the struggles people in care go through, you are constantly judged and criticised. Furthermore you feel that it's your problem and no one else'*

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### 3.6. If you had a mental health issue is there anything that would stop you asking for help?

Of the 106 children and young people surveyed, 37 (55% of those who chose to respond to the question; 35% of the overall sample) gave an answer to this question whereas 30 (45% of those who responded; 28% of the overall sample) felt that nothing would prevent them from asking for help. 39 (37% of the overall sample) respondents left this question blank.

Responses included: *'I need someone who REALLY understands my situation' 'worried about what people would think' 'people making fun of me' 'people would think I am a nutcase' 'hav-*

*ing a mental health issue affects your credibility when looked at on paper' 'the fact that it goes down on records, e.g. depression tablets go on doctors notes and can come up in job interviews' 'judged by people, decisions made about you' 'not being comfortable coming forwards and telling people' 'getting singled out or treated differently or being too proud to ask!' 'I wouldn't know how to say it to them'*

### 3.7.a. Do you feel you know where to find information and support for your emotional/mental health needs?

| Answer    | Count | %     |
|-----------|-------|-------|
| Yes       | 74    | 69.81 |
| Sometimes | 15    | 14.15 |
| No        | 17    | 16.04 |

### 3.7.b. We asked those who answered 'yes' to the previous question: Where do you find your information and support for your emotional/mental health needs?

60 respondents gave an answer to this question whereas 46 respondents left the space blank.

The responses included: *'friends' 'self help books' 'listening to successful people and through my boyfriend he introduced me to listening to personal development CD's' 'internet' 'information shop' 'library and psychology' 'worker' 'STAFF OR CONNEXIONS' 'social services, designated nurse' 'leaving care had a counselling service that they had referred me to' 'pamphlets, adverts, internet, CAMHS, G.P' 'internet and carer' 'from my head of year! My mum! ... or my girlfriend' 'from my doctors or worker' 'connexions, vysiains, staff (someone who you are close to)'*

### 3.7.c. Do you feel like you have enough information and support for your mental health needs?

| Answer    | Count | %     |
|-----------|-------|-------|
| Yes       | 76    | 71.70 |
| Sometimes | 8     | 7.55  |
| No        | 22    | 20.75 |

### 3.7.d. We asked those who answered 'yes' to the previous question: What else would you want?

Of the 30 respondents who said they felt they didn't have enough information and support for their mental health needs, only 7 chose to give a response to what else they would want suggesting 23 respondents didn't know what they wanted or how it could be achieved. 2 of those who chose to respond indicated: 'No. I can't talk to members of staff so sometimes problems are bubbling away in my head' 'don't know'

The remaining responses included: *'A dedicated mental health team' 'consistency of information' 'helping with my feelings' 'Information on where to go for all the different problems that arise' 'leaflets or a web site address to be known to people in care about what is ok to feel and when to get help or talk'*

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### 3.8.a. Who has helped most with your emotional well being?

(Respondents could select more than one option)

| <i>Answer</i>                                                                                      | <i>Count</i> | <i>%</i> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------|
| Counsellor                                                                                         | 11           | 10.38    |
| Social worker or aftercare worker (pathway advisor)                                                | 19           | 17.92    |
| Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services: CAMHS—<br>people like psychologists and psychiatrists | 10           | 9.43     |
| Friend's                                                                                           | 50           | 47.17    |
| Family                                                                                             | 47           | 44.34    |
| Foster carer                                                                                       | 19           | 17.92    |
| Residential staff                                                                                  | 22           | 20.75    |
| No one                                                                                             | 10           | 9.43     |
| Other                                                                                              | 10           | 9.43     |

'Other' responses include: *'college staff' 'doctors' 'GP/designated nurse' 'head of year' 'key worker' 'myself' 'only i can help myself' 'support worker'*

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### 3.8.b. In what ways have they contributed to your emotional/mental health wellbeing?

Of the 106 respondents, 73 answered this question.

Some of the responses reflecting ways in which people have contributed to emotional/mental health wellbeing are: *'been there for me' 'being there for me when I need them' 'given me advice and been there for me no matter what' 'good listening' 'just listening and being patient with me' 'they try to put themselves in your shoes and tell you what they might do in the same position, and they listen' 'by talking to me and helping me to calm down' 'support and a person i can tell anything to' 'Assistance with bills' 'help me do things I needed help with' 'checking my weight'*

Some children and young people reflected the fact that no-one had contributed to their emotional/mental health wellbeing: *'No one, every time I personally been involved with a counsellor been brushed off' 'not much as I don't ask them for help'*



## 4. KEY MESSAGES: THE ADDITIONAL EFFECTS OF BEING FROM CARE

### 4.1. Views in common with wider society

The results of this survey reveal many thoughts and feelings that are likely to come up if one were to pose the same questions to any group in the wider society. Though these views/beliefs are not uncommon, they don't represent the majority of responses to our questionnaire yet at the same time they must be taken into account when finding solutions to the problem at hand.

#### 4.1.1. Labels and stigma

Some of the respondents expressed the concern that seeking professional help can lead to labelling or stigma: *'people making fun of me' 'people would think I am a nutcase' 'I could end up in a mental home' 'worried about what people would think' 'the fact that it goes down on records, e.g. depression tablets go on doctors notes and can come up in job interviews'*

#### 4.1.2. Difficulty talking about stuff

Another concern was that of having difficulties due to their own fears around talking about issues and around not knowing how to express their feelings: *'Not being comfortable coming forwards and telling people' 'yes, I wouldn't know how to say it to them' 'being scared to talk about it'*

#### 4.1.3. Existing support

##### Someone to lean on

On the positive side and again in common with society in general, children and young people said they often turn to non-(mental health) professionals for support. This support was usually provided by family/friends or carers.

It's possibly comforting to know that many of these young people are not entirely cut adrift and have someone to turn to in difficult times. Unfortunately even those with the child/young persons best interests at heart are limited in their knowledge, experience and understanding of mental health issues and the best ways of dealing with the associated problems. This is more pertinent the more severe the problem is/becomes.

##### Being there

Of the 73 responses explaining some of the main ways in which others have positively contributed to their emotional/mental wellbeing, strong themes of 'being there', talking and 'listening' emerged: *'My mum, I trust her most' 'Being there and listening to me' 'friends listening to you when you are feeling down and by being there' 'my friends and I listen to each other and sometimes offer non judging advice' 'talking and listening to me'*

##### A silent minority?

It is worth considering that maybe the 10 percent who said that 'no one' helped with their emotional well-being or those who gave such responses as *'myself'* and *'only I can help myself'* are more at risk than the rest of the group. It may well be that the reasons why they don't/can't reach out are indicated here in this research.

## 4.2. Views specific to children and young people from care

It's no surprise that a large number of the responses reflected beliefs held by those in the wider community. However, extra sensitivity to what is being communicated is required when dealing with children and young people and especially those with experiences that lead to a period or periods of Care or the Care experience itself.

### 4.2.1. 'Care Specific' Barrier

By far the most prevalent view with regard to asking for/getting the help they need, indicated a barrier which could be described as 'care-specific'. Many of the responses suggest that being from care adds a unique quality to the issue of mental health/emotional well-being. Tied to this is a perception that those without their care experience, including mental health professionals, are unlikely to understand or empathise/identify with their special circumstances: *'I need someone who REALLY understands my situation' 'because I find it easier if people have been through the situation and understand it or have any idea how I'm coping or feeling' 'as they have not been through what I have been' 'people that have a strong family background do not understand the struggles people in care go through, you are constantly judged and criticised. Furthermore you feel that it's your problem and no one else' 'if they have not had the same experiences' 'because they are not in my shoes' 'because you feel that they misinterpret what you are trying to saying or they won't understand or don't trust anybody' 'because they don't know what it is like to be us'*

#### References

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- Department of Health (2002) *Promoting the Health of Looked-After Children* London
- Department of Health and Department of Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Healthy lives, brighter futures: The strategy for children and young people's health* London
- Phillips, J. (1997) *Meeting the psychiatric needs of children in foster care: social worker's views* *Psychiatric Bulletin*, 21: 601-611

## APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

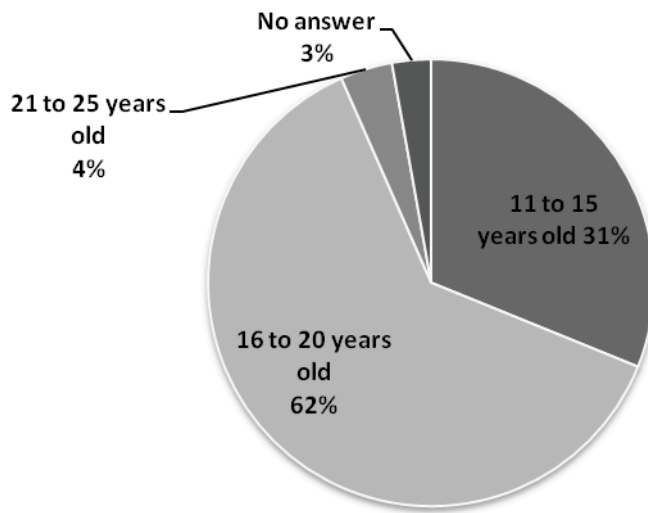
### The Methodology

- In 2009 ANV worked alongside Care leavers to devise a set of questions to explore the views of children and young people about mental and emotional wellbeing and the support that they receive
- We then sought advice on the quality and structure of the questions from social care professionals, including a representative from SCIE, a CAMHS Psychologist and a statistical analyst
- Only people under the age of 25 and over 11 living in England and with at least 3 months personal experience of the Care System were eligible to take part in the poll.
- The questions were made available as both a paper and an online questionnaire and were distributed via email as an attachment/link and by post through ANV's networks. In addition we asked ANV's networks of young people and friendly social care professionals to inform other young people about the survey.
- The answers could be filled in online, emailed back or printed out and sent back via our freepost address
- Returned questionnaires were then added to the database of the online version and all results were analysed using database and pivot table software
- 106 responses were received in total

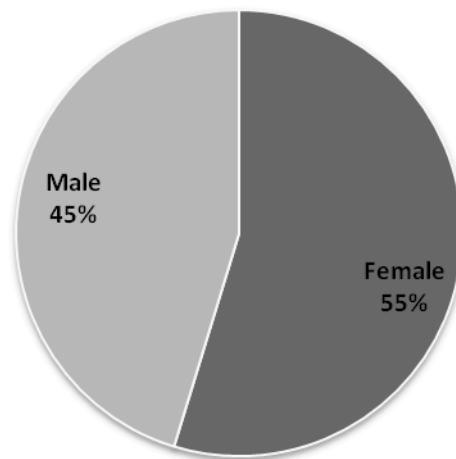
### 4.3. The Sample

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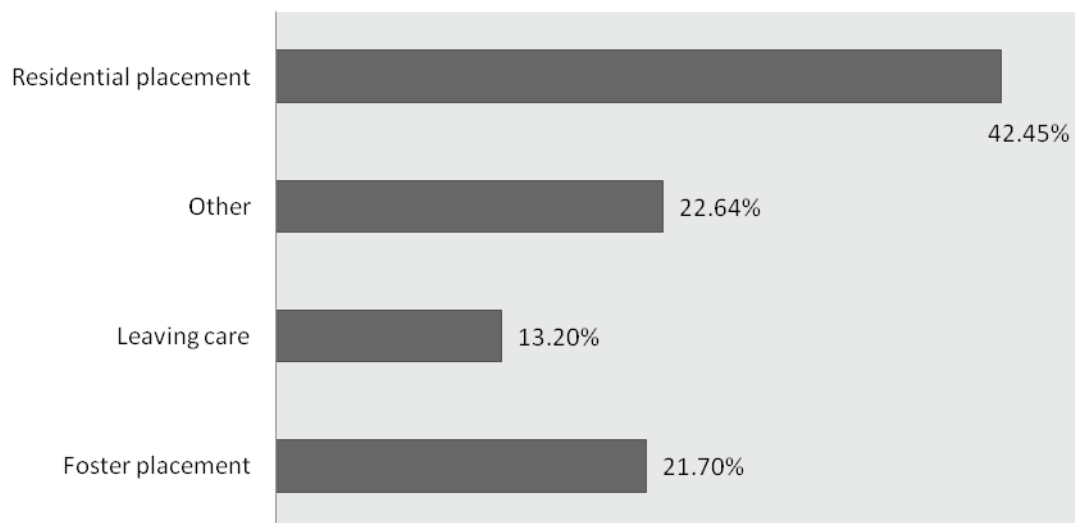
#### Age



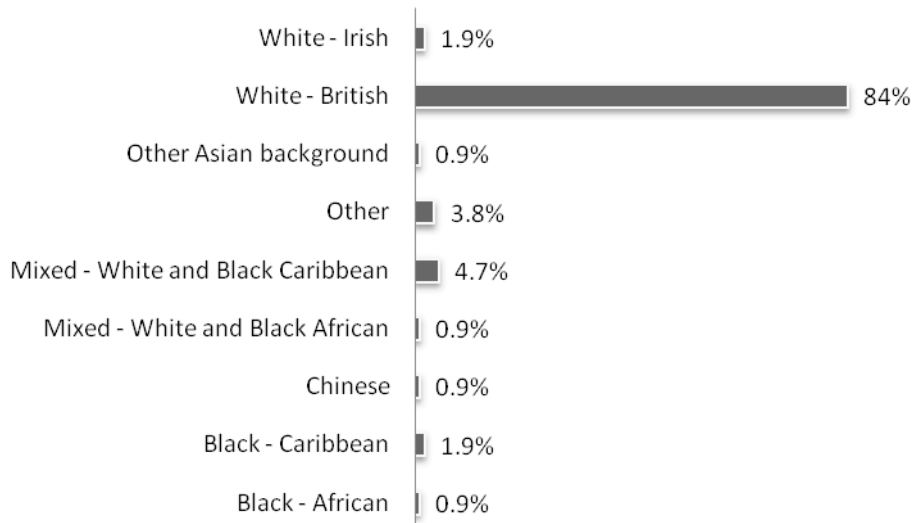
#### Gender



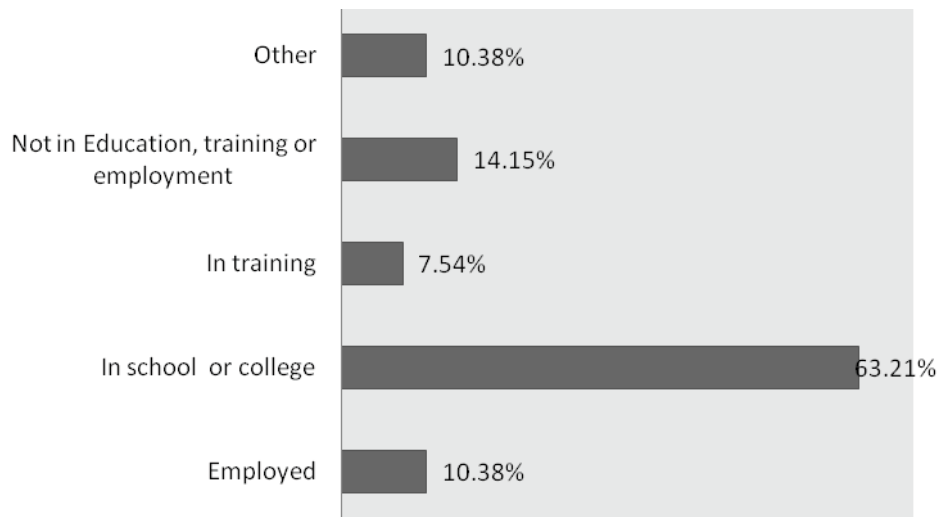
#### Placement type



### Ethnic Background



### Current Education/Employment Status





ANV would like to say a big thanks to: All the young people who took part, ANV forum members, friends of ANV and social care professionals for helping us get such a great response and as ever, a special thanks to John Dotchin @ Resurv



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