



Staying Put: An Unfulfilled Promise

The Fostering Network, November 2018

Foreword

In 2014, after campaigning led by The Fostering Network, the law was changed to allow young people in England to stay on with their foster carer until 21. This was a significant and positive shift in the care system. Government, charities, foster carers and young people recognised the unfairness in the fact that the average age for a young person to leave home is 24 and yet those in foster care had to move on six years earlier. All stakeholders recognised that we needed to do more to support care leavers in the transition to adulthood, and the new law sought to offer this stability.

Four years on though, and research by The Fostering Network shows that many young people still have to move out before they are ready. They also found that this is largely due to a lack of funding and poor planning, with too many young people not being given the option to stay with their foster family or being lured into “independence” with the offer of their own flat. While Staying Put will not be right for every young person, evidence suggests many more care leavers could benefit from the arrangement than currently have the opportunity if it was fully adopted and properly funded.

Staying Put was a flagship piece of legislation which had – and still has - the potential to change the lives of generations of young people leaving care for the better. It is great news that some young people have benefitted from the new law, and we are delighted to hear the success stories. But the failure to implement this policy properly – by the Government and by local authorities – means that too many of these young people are continuing to miss out on stability and support after they turn 18. This is simply not good enough and not what we, and thousands of others, campaigned for.

We are deeply frustrated by the findings of the survey outlined in this report and that there are woefully few young people benefitting from the opportunities Staying Put provides. The Fostering Network will continue to play our part in holding to account those responsible for the implementation and funding of Staying Put. This and future generations of care leavers depend on it.



Kevin Williams

Chief Executive, The Fostering Network

Jane's story

There have been several times we wanted to offer a Staying Put arrangement to a young person we were fostering but haven't been able to. Staying Put offers a reduced fee and allowance. As fostering is our main income and we only have one spare room, we could not afford to offer it to a care leaver.

It is a sad reality that most of the young people we have supported struggle for up to a year when they move from us and are in fact still emotionally and sometimes financially supported by us.

Introduction

Since the introduction of the Children and Families Act 2014, fostered young people have had the right to stay with their foster family from the age of 18 until 21, should this be what they and their foster carers want. However, Department for Education figures (DfE) published each year have consistently demonstrated a disappointing percentage of care leavers Staying Put with their foster carers aged 18 – when the majority will still be in education, training or an apprenticeship – and even fewer staying at 19 and 20.

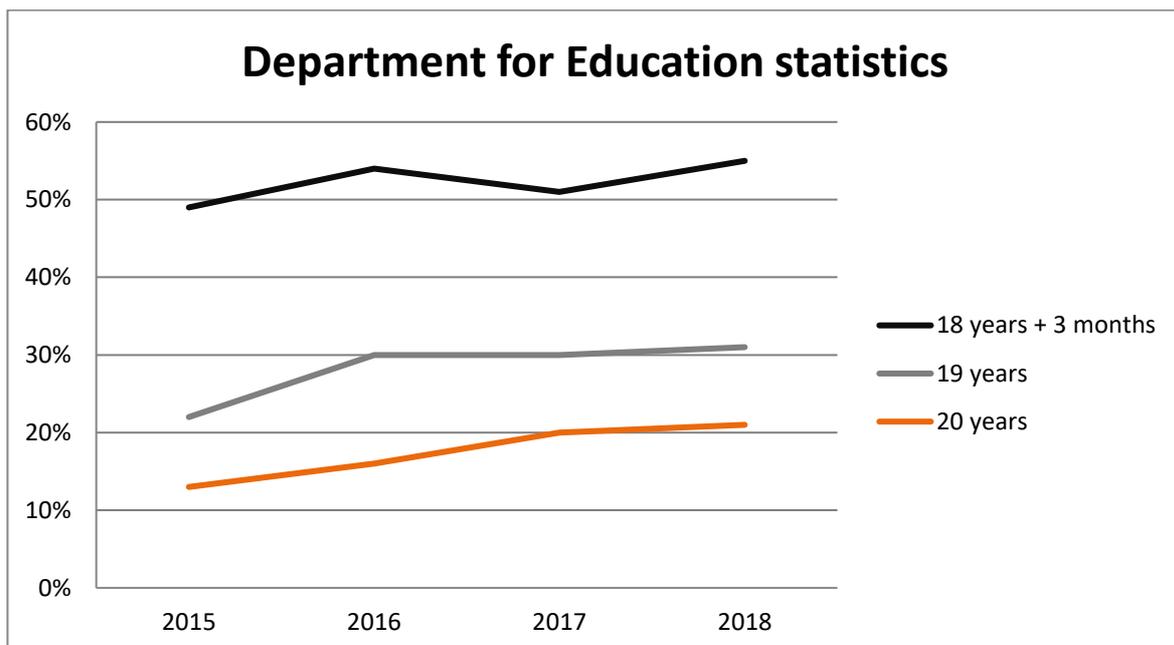
As part of The Fostering Network’s State of the Nation survey carried out in the summer of 2018, we asked foster carers a range of questions relating to their experience of looking after a young person turning 18 in their care. 903 foster carers completed these questions. The findings, along with the latest DfE figures on the take up of Staying Put, have formed the basis for this report, and add weight to our calls to action for central and local government and fostering services outlined in section 3.

1. Staying Put in numbers

1.1 Latest numbers of young people Staying Put

Figures from the Department for Education for 2018 show that only 1,800 care leavers still lived with their foster families three months after they turned 18. This is just 55% of those eligible. This fell to 31% for 19-year-olds, and dropped to only 21% for 20-year-olds. In other words, four in ten young people who were still living with their foster carers at 18 had moved on by the time they were 19.

This is part of a disappointing trend. The number of young people entering Staying Put arrangements only rose by 4% from 2017 to 2018 and the number remaining with the family until they are 19 years old increased by a mere 1%.



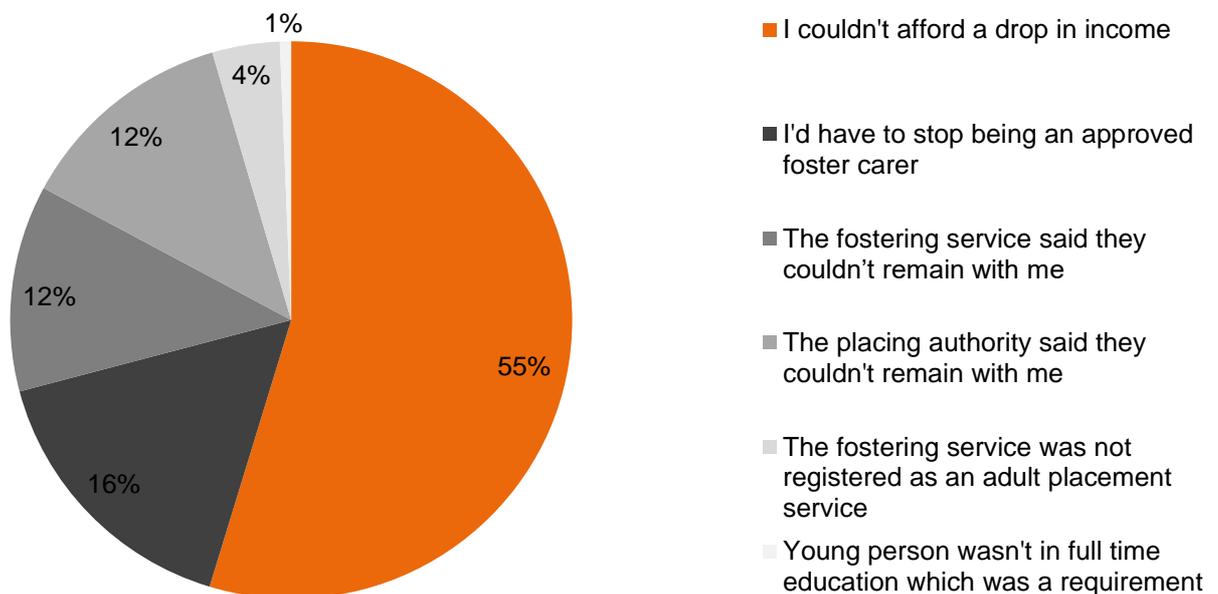
1.2 Reasons for not Staying Put

In our 2018 State of the Nation survey, 34% of foster carers told us they had been prevented from entering a Staying Put arrangement with a young person in their care, despite both the foster carer and young person wanting it.

388 foster carers said they had entered into a Staying Put arrangement since 2016. There were an additional 699 cases where a care leaver did not enter Staying Put, of which 29% were because the young person had not wanted to stay. Less common reasons for a young person moving on included that the placement broke down, the young person returned to family or there was a preferable arrangement.

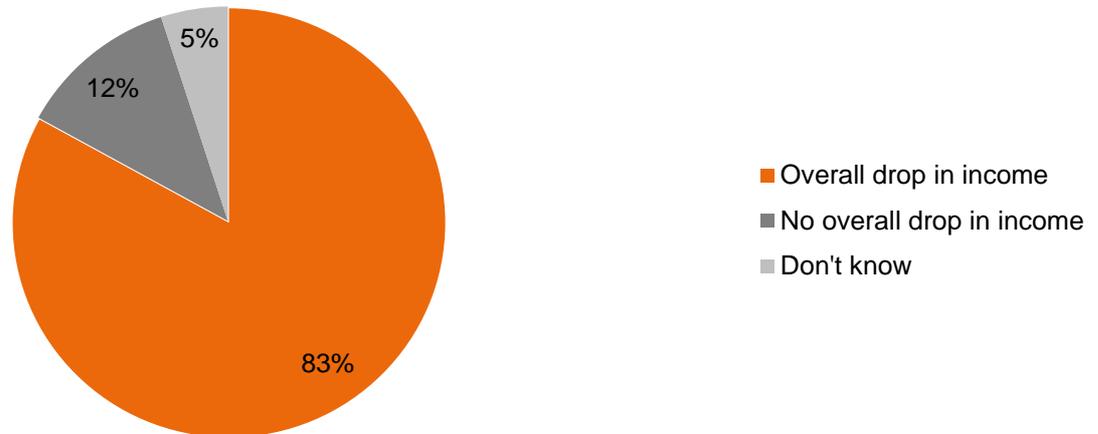
However, in 44% of cases where Staying Put arrangements did not go ahead, it was because they were prevented by local policies and payments. More than half of these were prevented because the foster carer could not afford the drop in income. Just within our sample, 169 foster carers had looked after at least one young person who missed out because the scheme was not properly funded. The next most commonly cited reason that foster carers could not accept an arrangement was because it would have meant losing their approval as a foster carer.

Why otherwise acceptable Staying Put arrangements were prevented



Of those foster carers who had taken on a Staying Put arrangement, most had lost out financially. 83% reported that they had experienced an overall drop in income.

Did you experience an overall drop in your income when you entered a Staying Put arrangement?



In 2017 we undertook a separate survey of local authorities, which supported this finding.¹ In 55% of local authorities the Staying Put allowance was lower than that for 16-18 year olds and just 13% offered a separate fee payment for Staying Put. Therefore, even foster carers whose allowance remains the same or is raised upon Staying Put commencing are likely to see a drop in their overall income once their fee is stopped.

Jenny's story

Staying Put has enabled Jenny to support her two grandchildren through university, offering them a home in the holidays and somewhere to come back to for a weekend when they need it. She is a kinship carer and has been looking after her grandchildren since they were taken into care 10 years ago.

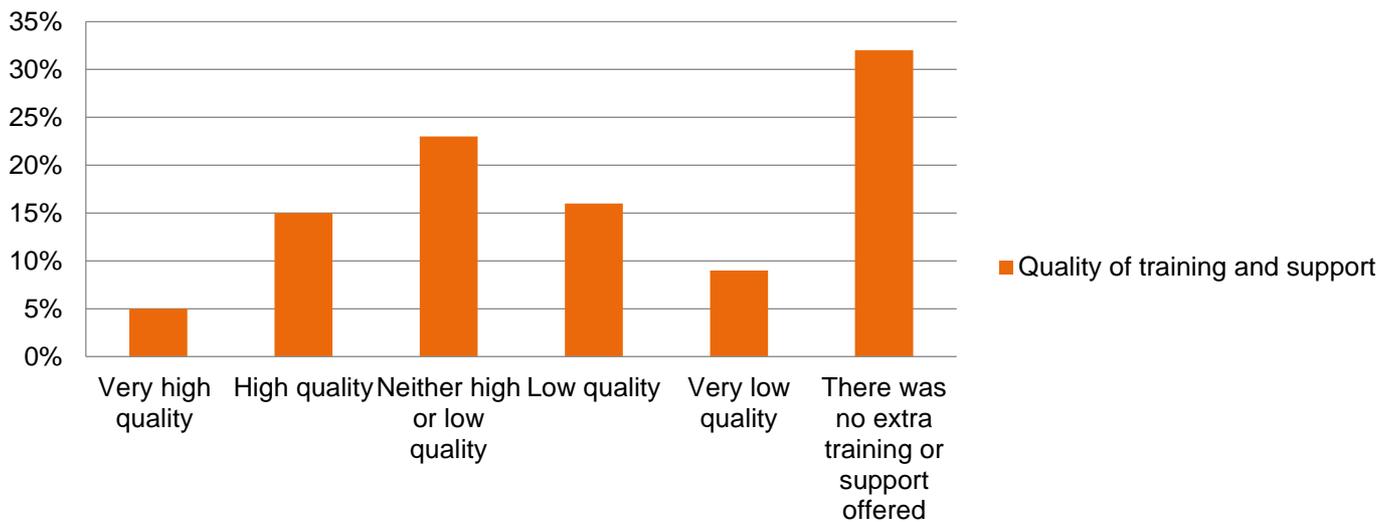
Through her perseverance, Jenny's local authority now recognises the vital role she still plays in their life, supporting them emotionally and financially while they are at university. She therefore gets a retainer during term time and an allowance throughout the holidays. It is this support that has helped her grandchildren to persevere with their studies, even when it has been tough.

1.3 Training and Support

In the State of the Nation survey we asked foster carers how they would rate the specific training and support they received for their post-18 arrangement. Just one fifth said that it was of a high or very high quality, while almost a third of respondents said there was no extra support or training offered.

¹ The Fostering Network, 2018, *England Foster Care Allowances and Fees Survey 2017-18: Summary Report*

How would you rate the specific training and support you received for this Staying Put arrangement?



2. Conclusions

These statistics reveal the practical failing of an important policy. The introduction of Staying Put in 2014 should have brought care experienced young people stability and security as they finish their education and plan their futures, but insufficient funding combined with a lack of planning and promotion of Staying Put to young people is seeing too many 18-year-olds forced to move on prematurely. Moreover, given that four in 10 young people who do enter a Staying Put arrangement leave before they turn 19, we would like to see more research into why so many are staying such a short time.

The Government should introduce a national minimum Staying Put allowance that covers the full cost of offering a home to a care leaver. Without a recommended minimum allowance for Staying Put, young people are in a postcode lottery, reliant on a system propped up by foster carers' goodwill and selflessness.

Foster carers should also continue to receive a fee payment to ensure that they do not lose out financially from supporting a care leaver.

It is not just financial barriers preventing Staying Put placements. Four years since its introduction, it is yet to become the norm in local authorities and independent fostering providers. Our State of the Nation survey found that fostering services are preventing acceptable Staying Put placements from going ahead, with obstructive policies.

Some foster carers did not want to enter a Staying Put arrangement because it would mean losing their approval as a foster carer, although there is no reason why this should be the case, as a fostering service can maintain a foster carer's approval during a break in fostering should they chose to. Others felt unable to offer an arrangement because their fostering service needed them to foster a younger child.

In many cases it was simply a case that it hadn't been introduced to the planning process early enough or hadn't been properly considered. This is evidence that Staying Put has not been properly embedded in local authorities.

For those that did choose to take a placement, the support and training they received was inadequate, in fact a third of foster carers say they were not offered any at all. Looking after 18- to 21-year-olds offers new challenges and if Staying Put arrangements are to be successful, foster carers must be offered relevant training and support.

Despite committing to review Staying Put in the *Keep On Caring* report in 2016, the Government has not reviewed the policy since its introduction and the fostering stocktake failed to properly consider the policy or the barriers preventing it from becoming the norm.² Nevertheless, the Government has since committed to refining the policy based on emerging findings in *Fostering Better Outcomes* and we look forward to working with them to make this a reality.

Staying Put has the potential to transform the lives of thousands of young people every year. When introducing the policy, the Government acknowledged the positive difference three extra years in a stable home can make to a care experienced young person. Now it is time to ensure that every young person has the opportunity to stay living with their former foster carer if they want to. We need to create a culture where it is the norm, not the exception, that young people stay on with their foster family after 18, just like their peers who are not in the care system.

The change to the law in 2014 was a huge step forward but, to give those leaving foster care the best possible life chances, Staying Put must be properly implemented and funded.

3. Calls to action

3.1 Actions for Government:

- Government should carry out a full review of how Staying Put has been implemented.
- Government should ensure that Staying Put is properly costed and then fully funded as part of the comprehensive spending review in 2019, especially given that existing funding for Staying Put is only guaranteed until 2020. Additionally, there should be monitoring of the implementation of the policy to ensure practice is in line with national requirements and to share learning from best practice models.
- Staying Put minimum allowances should be introduced across England, with such an allowance being sufficient to cover the cost of looking after a young person.
- Government should make it clear that if a foster carer wishes to maintain their approval they should be supported to do so for the duration of the Staying Put arrangement.

3.2 Actions for local authorities and fostering services:

- Local authorities in partnership with independent fostering providers should establish contractual arrangements which include Staying Put arrangements.
- All fostering services should have a Staying Put policy in place. The policy should explain how placements will be funded and supported.

² HM Government, 2016, *Keep On Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence*

- Staying Put must be introduced as an option in the care planning process as early as possible and should be raised with prospective foster carers during the assessment process.
- All former foster carers providing Staying Put placements should be provided with a Staying Put allowance and paid a fee in recognition of their time, skills and expertise.
- All fostering services should provide training and support to meet the needs of those offering Staying Put arrangements.