

# Permanently Progressing?

Building secure futures for children in Scotland

## Information sheet for children

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### Introduction

Permanently Progressing? is the name of a big research project about children which has been running for four years. This information sheet tells you some of the things we found out.

Many children grow up safely with their mums, dads, brothers and sisters. Sometimes their parents need help to bring them up safely and social workers have to visit them. This is called being looked after at home. When children aren't safe at home they might need to go to live with someone else, and are looked after away from home. Sometimes this is just for a little while so their mums and dads can make changes, but sometimes it is until they are adults.

This study is about all the children in Scotland who became looked after in 2012-2013 when they were five years old or younger.

There were 1,836 children. Of those, 481 were looked after at home and 1,355 children were looked after away from home.

Over the next few months and years many children went back to live with their parents. Other children were cared for by people in their family, foster carers, or adoptive parents.

- What did we want to find out?
- Why children became looked after away from home?
- How many children went home, and how many did not?

For children who couldn't go home, we wanted to find out:

- How long did it take until they were with adults who could look after them until they were grown up?
- Who are they living with?
- How are they getting on?
- What helps them feel settled?



## What did we do?

The Scottish Government collects information on all children who are looked after. We looked at this for the 1,836 children from 2012 until 2016. This helped us find out how many children went home, were in foster care, with family, or adopted. But it didn't tell us why children became looked after or how they were doing. To try to find this out we:

- Talked (and played) with ten children. Two children were living with other people in their family (known as kinship carers). Three children were living with foster carers and were not going to move anywhere else. Five children had been adopted. Some children were living with their brothers and sisters but not all.
- Talked to 160 people who make decisions about children like social workers and members of the Children's Hearing.
- Looked at questionnaires which had been filled out by 433 social workers and 166 carers or adoptive parents

When people are worried about children, they can tell the Reporter to the Children's Hearing who may arrange a Children's Hearing. We were able to get information about children who had been to a Children's Hearing and link this with the information the Scottish Government collects to find out more about children's lives.

## What did we find out?

### Why children became looked after away from home

Most children didn't tell us much about what their life had been like before they became looked after. For some children this was because they were very young when they became looked after, so they couldn't remember it. Other children remembered being hungry, and not being safe. Their carers and adoptive parents said they had not been cared for properly.

Social workers who filled out questionnaires said children mostly became looked after away from home because they had been hurt or neglected, and their parents were affected by problems with alcohol, drugs, illness, and violence.

When children first became looked after away from home, they went to live with other family members or with foster carers. Very young children usually went to foster carers.

When it is safe or can be made safe, social workers try to return children to their parents. Between 2012 and 2016, about one third of the 1,355 children went home. The average time this took was nine months.



### When children couldn't return home

Deciding children can't go back to live with their mum or dad is a big decision, and was not something which people rushed. Decisions are made at Children's Hearings, local authorities, and courts, and this sometimes took a long time.

When children can't go home, social workers usually ask other family members to care for them. This is because they are likely to know each other already, and it keeps them within their family. By 2016, of the 1,355 children, 373 were living with family members.

Some children will stay with foster carers. By 2016, about a third of the children were living with foster carers. It wasn't always clear whether they would be there until they were adults or if they would move somewhere else.

Some children who can't go home or stay with other family members are adopted. By the end of 2016, 212 children were adopted, and 80 others were living with adults who planned to adopt them.

Between 2012 and 2016, some children had lived in one or two places, but quite a few had moved three or four times, and some had moved five times.

### How were children getting on

Some children were too young to remember moving to where they lived but others could remember moving. Moving sometimes meant changing nursery or school as well, and could be scary as well as exciting. For some children, when they moved they had to wait a while before they knew that they would be staying there. This was hard for children and adults.

Some of the adults caring for children said they would have liked to know more about the child's history so that they could help them as much as possible.

When children have not been cared for properly or have moved between different carers, it can take a while to trust adults. Starting school or nursery and making friends can also be difficult. Children who had been with their carers or adoptive parents for longer, who became looked after away from home before they were a year old, and who hadn't moved between lots of carers were more settled.

Some children had help from teachers, speech therapists, and social workers. Carers and adoptive parents had help from family, friends, and social workers. Kinship carers and children living with them seemed to get less help.

### Seeing birth family

Some children saw their birth parents or other members of their birth family or spoke to them on the phone. This was more likely to happen if they were living with kinship carers or foster carers, and not so likely if they were with adoptive parents.



While some children were living with their brothers and sisters, many of them were not. Where children were not living together they were more likely to see each other if they were living with kinship carers or foster carers. Some children told us that not seeing their brothers and sisters made them feel sad.

### **How carers or adoptive parents showed children they were safe and loved**

Carers and adoptive parents tried to help children feel safe and loved by telling them that they wouldn't be moving again. They had day-to-day routines so children knew what was happening and when. This included who would collect them from nursery and school, as well as what happened on special times like birthdays, Christmas, and holidays.

Some carers and adoptive parents felt okay talking to children about what had happened to them when they were younger. Others wanted advice about how to explain difficult things - including why children couldn't live with their birth parents

### **What next?**

We want to see where the 1,836 children are and how they are doing when they are a bit older. In 2020 we will go back to the information the Scottish Government collects. We will also write to social workers, carers and adoptive parents who filled out questionnaires to ask how children are doing.

We would like to meet the children, carers and adoptive parents who took part and see how they are getting on. We would also like to speak to more children, who might have been too young to meet us last time.

### **Thank you**

Thank you to all the children, carers, adoptive parents, and professionals who took part.

### **More information**

If you want to read the full reports and summaries on all five strands of the study you can find these at:

<https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/faculties-and-services/social-sciences/our-research/research-areas/centre-for-child-wellbeing-and-protection/research/permanently-progressing/>

<https://afascotland.com/learning-zone/2-static-content/124-permanently-progressing>

<https://www.york.ac.uk/spsw/research/researchproject-permanentlyprogressing/>

<https://www.cfj-lancaster.org.uk/projects/permanently-progressing>

