

Young Inspectors' REPORT

My meetings: children and families' experience of social care meetings

2023



It helps us feel more in control and make better decisions about our next steps knowing what our options are.

My Meetings

Children and families' experience of social care meetings.

1. Who are the Young Inspectors?

The Young Inspectors programme of inspections has been providing input to service planning and development in Camden for the past fourteen years. Every year, a team of Young Inspectors undertake research into the views of other service users and professionals about the services provided by partner agencies responsible for safeguarding children.

The approach of the Camden Young Inspectors is to listen to those with lived experiences of the services provided by social care services.

The views gathered from the young inspections and their analysis from the core of this report.

This year, the Young Inspectors were young people aged 17 to 24. The team of five young inspectors applied their own experience of Camden services in the design and conduct of this research.



2. What was the aim of the young inspection of experiences of social care meetings?

Camden wants to make sure that the voices of children, young people and families we work with in social care are heard and that they are fully involved in making decisions about their lives.

'Partnership with families has a long history in services for children and families and partnership principles underpin the 1989 Children Act.

Moreover, the right for children and families to be involved in decision-making about their lives, and for the plans to be focused on their individual needs is well argued in social work literature and practice.'

(What works for Children's Social Care 2019).

An important additional consideration to supporting children's right to participation in decisions that affect their lives is linked to the Children's Act 2004.

'This involves understanding how and when to involve children and young people in meetings, and how, if they are not in attendance at the meeting, their views are represented, and influence decision-making.' (What works for Children's Social Care-Shared decision-making meeting programme theory).

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that *'every child has the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously'*.

The above underpinning principles of involving children, young people and families in decisions affecting their lives have provided the focus of this Young Inspection.

The aims

Exploring the experiences of social care meetings

- 1** To find out about **experiences** of participation by children, young people and parents / carers in children looked after review meetings, child protection conferences and child in need review meetings.
- 2** To identify **main themes** based on the feedback from focus group discussions and responses to questionnaires from children, young people, parents/carers and social workers.
- 3** To develop **standards** to help ensure that young people and parents are more actively involved in the meetings and are supported in shared decision-making.
- 4** To develop **recommendations for the service** based on the responses from families and professionals.

3. How did the Young Inspectors collect the feedback and information?

Young inspections involve a range of research tools such as: desktop research, interviewing professionals, consultation via questionnaires and focus groups to explore the views of young people, parents and carers who use the service as well as staff members.

Approach

The young inspectors' approach to their investigation



Interviewing the managers of Independent Reviewing Service, Family Group Conference Service, Children in Need Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Conference chair to understand professionals' perspectives and experiences of children and parents/carers' participation in meetings.



Focus group discussions with young people and with parents to learn about their experiences of participating in meetings and what makes a good meeting.



Research of publications and videos relating to children, young people and parents/carers' meaningful participation in meetings.



Obtaining feedback from children, young people, parents/carers and social workers to questionnaires developed by the Young Inspectors team.

Research of publications and videos relating to involving children, young people and parents or carers in meaningful decision-making meetings included:

- Camden Children's Safeguarding and Social Work participation policy
- My meeting – young people's standards for participation in review meetings (*Voice of Young People in Care*, 2022)
- Reconceptualising parental non-engagement in child protection (*Research in Practice Frontline Briefing*, 2020)
- Making meetings meaningful: Good practice when involving families in decision-making (*What Works for Children's Social Care*, 2022)
- Supporting shared decision-making meetings delivery, implementation and evaluation (*What works for Children's Social Care*, 2022)
- Ruth's top tips for brilliant meetings with young people (*National Development Team for Inclusion*, 2022)
- Family Group Conference – a child's perspective, Bing videos
- Camden Family Group Conference, Bing videos.

Reflections & Evaluations

of the project by young inspectors

JENNY

Young Inspectors' team leader

Meeting the new team and getting to know each other was one of the highlights of the project. Working as a team and learning about our experiences really consolidated the relationships and experience. Being a part of this project has reaffirmed my passion to work in Camden.

KACEY

Young Inspector

I found interviewing senior members of staff quite challenging as a very introverted person. However, gradually, I became more confident and soon found myself to be comfortable asking questions to senior members of staff.

KYRAH

Young Inspector

The most challenging aspect for me was interviewing parents face-to-face, as parents often have much more to say. The project sparked my passion and showed me that I can do much more than I expected of myself. It also gave me a taste of the office environment, which is a rare opportunity for young people to experience.

HUSSAIN

Young Inspector

I enjoyed doing focus group discussions with young people and with parents.

FYORI

Young Inspector

I enjoyed the teamwork, sharing ideas and working together. The project has helped me to get more confidence to speak English and share my ideas in the group. I have learnt about social care services and different areas of social work.

Emerging themes

From focus group discussions

5.1 Meetings: standards and wishes by young people

BEFORE THE MEETING (Children looked after after review meetings)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>✓ Social workers to meet with young person and prepare together a list of topics for the agenda.</p> | <p>✓ Young person to have the opportunity to discuss the social worker's report before the meeting.</p> |
| <p>✓ Social worker to discuss with the young person the key people that need to attend and who they would like to invite to attend the meeting.</p> | <p>✓ Young person to meet the chair in person or have contact with the chair via email / telephone before the meeting.</p> |
| <p>✓ Discuss with the young person who they would like to invite to support them to express their views at the meeting.</p> | |



From focus group discussions

DURING THE MEETING

- Make the environment of the meeting friendly and relaxing.
- Support the young people to feel listened to and included in decisions.
- Support young people to participate in the meeting, regardless of their age.
- Use a strengths-based approach, highlight what is going well.
- Make meetings solution-focused, aimed at supporting young people to grow and develop their full potential.

AFTER THE MEETING

- Social worker or the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to meet with the young person to reflect on the meeting, explain what will happen next and when; also to discuss how the young person felt about the meeting.
- Social Worker or IRO to check with the young person if there is anything else they would like to ask or discuss after the meeting.
- Once the meeting has finished, allow the young person time to relax and unwind.

The 'Shared decision-making' report by What Works for Children's Social Care (2019) identifies three key stages and processes that have crucial influence on how shared decision-making could be facilitated in order to achieve best outcomes for children and families.

1. **Pre-meeting preparation:** meeting to ensure that the family understands the purpose of the meeting and are involved in the planning.
2. **The meeting itself:** time in the meeting to develop a plan for the family.
3. **Follow-up after the meeting:** time after the meeting, including reviews and adjusting the plan.

Young people and parents discussed the three stages and have developed the following meetings standards and wishes (see page 7).

Emerging themes

From focus group discussions

Meetings standards and wishes by parents / carers

BEFORE THE MEETING (Child protection conferences and children in need review meetings)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>✓ Chair to meet with parents/carers prior to the child protection conference/child in need review meeting to build trust and ensure engagement for ongoing contact and dialogue.</p> | <p>✓ Social worker and parent to work together on a collaborative assessment of risk in the lead-up to the meeting.</p> |
| <p>✓ Social worker to ensure that parents have seen the social work report prior to the meeting and are given the opportunity to discuss and give their views.</p> | <p>✓ Parent routinely offered an advocate and efforts made to include family members in the meeting.</p> |



From focus group discussions

DURING THE MEETING

- Social worker to ensure that only key members of the network attend the meeting so that it is less intimidating for parents.
- Chair and other professionals involved in meeting to ensure that no jargon is used and that signs of safety terms, like Harm and Safety statement, are fully explained.
- Make the environment of the meeting relaxing to promote productive and positive discussion.
- Family Group Conference plan option to be on the agenda of the meeting.

AFTER THE MEETING

- Social worker to meet with the parent/carer to reflect on the meeting and to discuss next steps and support.
- Social worker/IRO/Advocate to make sure that parents/carers understand what has been discussed and the decisions made.
- Report to be written in accessible language and to consider providing a shorter, simplified report for parents and families.

Parent routinely offered an advocate and efforts made to include family members in the meeting.

Main Recommendations

The Young Inspectors' main recommendations which emerged from the analysis of responses to questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews with service managers are as follows:

- 1** Team managers to give further consideration to **embedding a culture of supporting children and families to attend meetings and enable participation in shared decision-making**. Enabling dialogue between professionals and family members.
- 2** **Better pre-meeting preparation** to ensure that children and families understand the purpose of the meeting and are involved in the planning.
- 3** Social workers to ensure that **only key members of the network attend** the child protection and children looked after review meetings, to make them less intimidating for parents and children.
- 4** Providing timely reports to the family and professional network to enable a better understanding of the support for the family.
- 5** Support for and communication with children, young people and families after the meeting to ensure that they understand the plan and to give them an opportunity to reflect and comment on the proposal.
- 6** Make **child protection conferences** more supportive for parents and consider simplified, easy to understand reports and plans.
- 7** Promote **meaningful participation for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children** and ensure reports are provided in a more creative way so they are easy for young people to understand.
- 8** **Training** for social workers, managers, Child Protection Officers and Independent Reviewing Officers on best practice around planning and supporting children and families to participate in meetings.

Details of responses to questionnaires that have informed the above recommendations are included in the next section of this report:

'My meetings: what children, parents, carers and social workers have told us.'

PARTICIPATION



IN MEETINGS

My meetings: what children, parents,
carers and social workers
have told us.

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Key Findings

From the responses to questionnaires

Responses from young people, parents, carers and social workers to questionnaires. Camden offers the following methods of participating in meetings. Please state your preference(s):

PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS

	Children and young people	Parents and carers	Social workers
 Attending in person	47%	38%	45%
 Attending online	14%	22%	21%
 A hybrid of these (in person and online)	23%	22%	30%
 Don't mind / no preference	14%	38%	3%

Children and Young People

What children and young people told us...



1. Which of the following meetings have you been invited to attend in the past?

Child in need
review meeting

12%



Child protection
case conference

12%



Child looked after
review meeting

100%



Core group
meeting

0%

Family Group
Conference

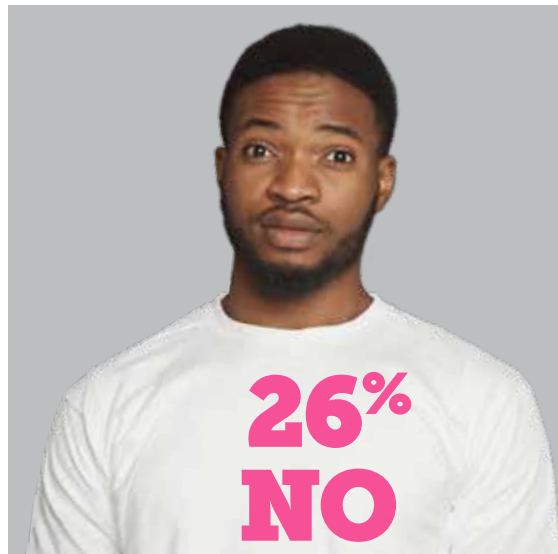
12%



Exploitation
response meeting

0%

2. Did your social worker explain what the meeting was about, what was going to be discussed and why you had been invited?



3. Did the social worker discuss with you any of the following before the meeting?

What support would you like to have at the meeting?

19%



Who would be at the meeting and their role at the meeting?

32%



How your wishes and views were going to be presented (this could be by you, your social worker, your parent/carer).

19%



How your wishes and views would be presented if you were not going to be there.

0%

Your choice of where the meeting would take place.

9%



Meeting with the chair before the meeting.

9%



Other

9%



4. Do you think it is important for children and young people to attend meetings about themselves and their families?



5. If you did not go to the meeting, please say why:

- I did not know who was going to be at the meeting.
- I did not want to go.

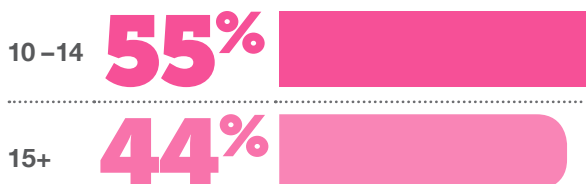
Comments:

- They should attend because it is really important to discuss what needs to happen.
- I feel that children need to have their voices heard.
- I think it's important to hear the young people's and families' points of view.
- It can be beneficial for children and their families.
- I was told about the meeting and have agreed to come.
- I had the choice where the meeting would be and what time. I did not want to miss college.
- I was asked if I wanted to join the meeting and if it was ok for the meeting to be at home.
- At the meeting they are asked what they want to do in the future.
- It is important to come to meetings to know what is going on with me.

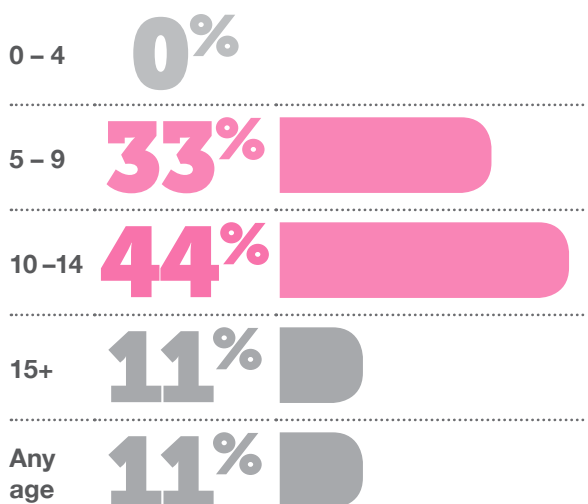
I think it is important as young people need to know what is changing and what is happening to their own futures, especially in care reviews, as independence becomes the most important aspect of their lives going forward. It also helps us feel more in control and make better decisions about our next steps knowing what our options are.

6. From your experience, at what age would you have felt comfortable to attend meetings about you? Choose the one you have attended.

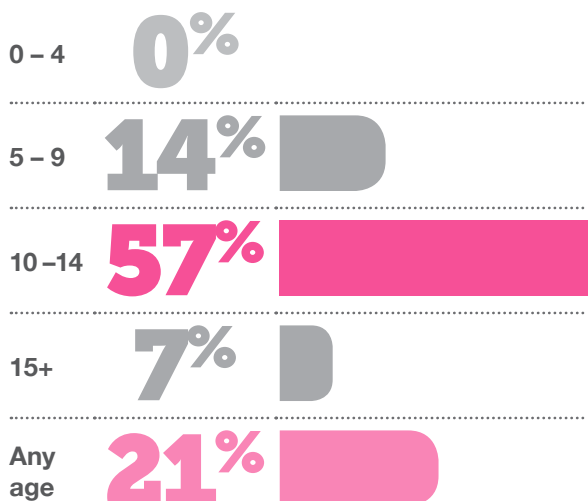
Child protection meeting



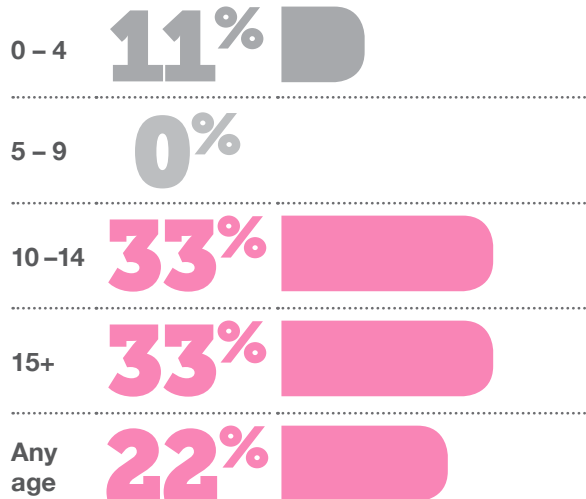
Children in need review meeting



Children looked after review meeting



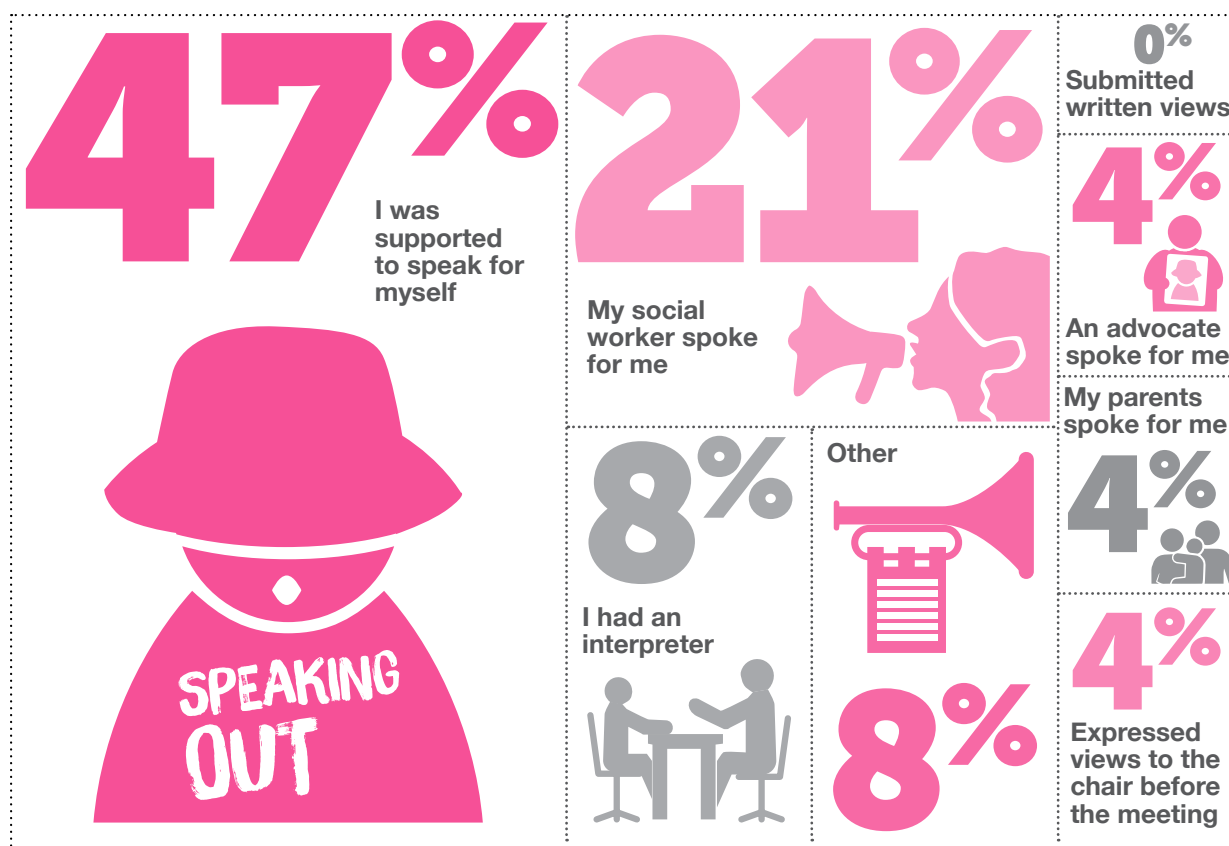
Family Group Conference



**It depends on the
child. Each child
is different.**



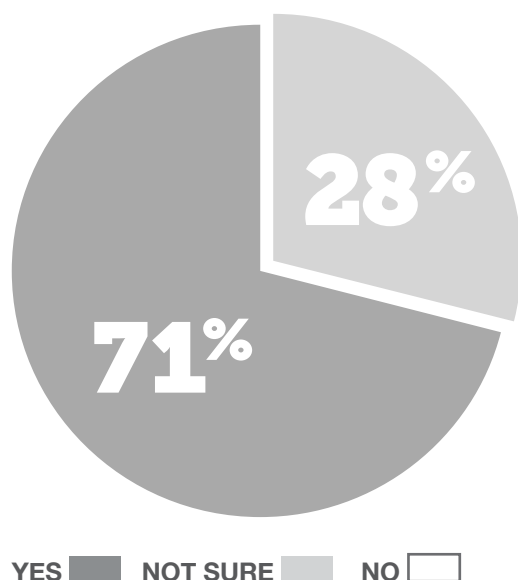
7. What help and support did you have during the meeting to get your views across?



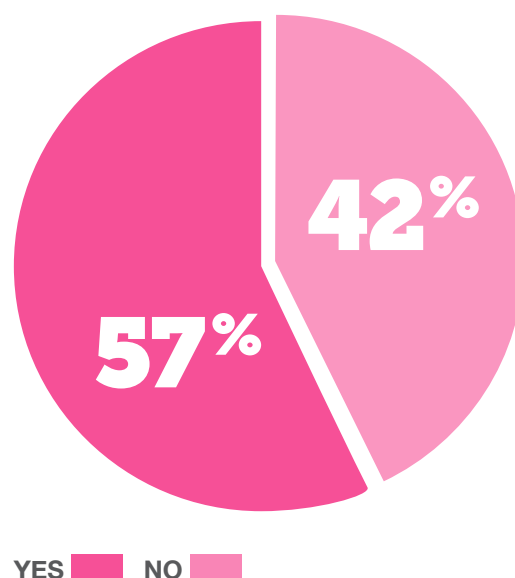
Other:

- Having someone who I felt understood me well enough to be an advocate.

8. Do you feel it helped to get your views across?



9. Did your social worker talk to you about the outcome of the meeting and how you felt about it?



10. Overall, how was your experience of the meeting?

I feel I was involved in the decision making

29%

I feel my views were listened to and respected

29%

I feel that the meeting helped to make things better for me

22%

Other

18%

Other comments:

- I feel the meeting helped me to make things better.
- I felt the meeting was less about me; arguments started up and it made me feel uncomfortable.

11. What would you change to make these meetings a better experience so you can have more control over decision-making and planning?

- More preparation before the meetings to discuss what the purpose of the meeting is, what will be discussed and to have space to reflect on feelings.
- Make meetings more relaxing, provide refreshments.
- More time spent reviewing the child's needs and wishes and taking their views into account.
- I feel some meetings would have been better with fewer people.
- Some meetings would have benefited from a clear plan. It felt a lot like it was just gossiping and not really planning out what would have helped me.
- Provide clearer explanations of processes, ensure active involvement of all participants.
- To have more control over decisions and plans made.



Parents and Carers

What parents and carers told us...

1. Which of the following meetings have you been invited to attend?

Child in need
review meeting

19%



Child protection
case conference

31%



Child looked after
review meeting

17%



Core group
meeting

14%



Family Group
Conference

17%



Exploitation
response meeting

0%



2. If you did not attend the meeting you were invited to, please say why.

- I nearly did not attend because you do not always feel like you get your say. These meetings can be difficult and upsetting.
- I attended with a phone call.

3. Did the social worker explain why the meeting was being held?

YES

94%

NO

5%

4. Were you offered a meeting or a phone discussion with the chair before the meeting?

YES

66%

NO

33%

5. Do you think it is important for children and young people to attend meetings about themselves and their families?

YES

70%

NO

29%

6. Please say why not:

Comments:

- I have been happy with children's views being gathered by the social worker before the meeting.
- It can feel like everyone is against you.
- Because my son is only 12, he is too young to attend children in need review meetings.
- Children can attend if they are old enough to understand. To have a separate meeting for the child.
- Child attendance needs to be age appropriate.

Younger children run around during the meeting and it is destructive.



7. At what age is it appropriate for a child to attend the following meetings?

Child protection meeting



Children in need review meeting



Children looked after review meeting



Family Group Conference



8. Did you have an advocate to come to the meeting with you?

YES

27%

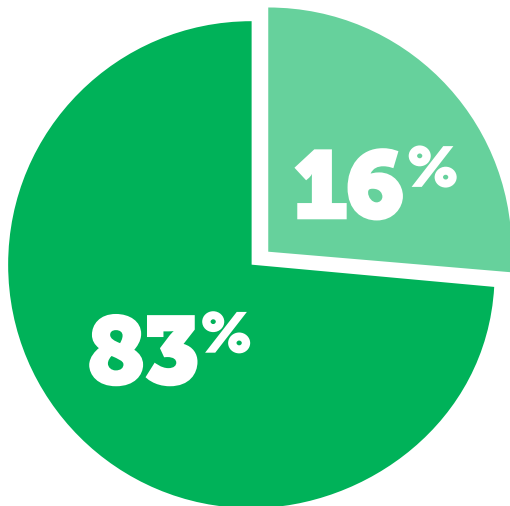
NO

72%

**I did not need
an advocate.**



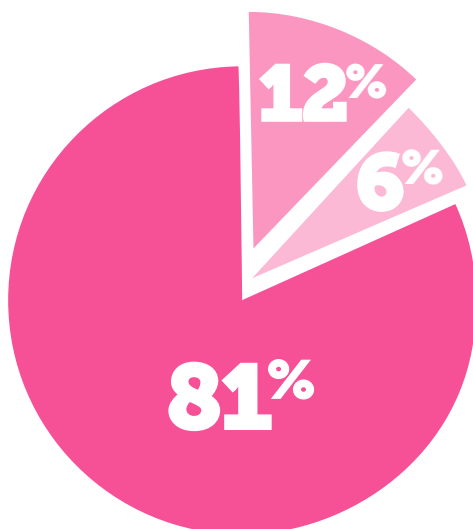
9. Did you feel you could speak up at the meeting and have your views listened to?



Comments:

- I felt overwhelmed. There were too many people at the meeting.
- I feel better to share my views.
- I was listened to but I am not sure if my views were taken into account.
- I feel it helps to have a good relationship with the social worker. She always keeps in touch with me.

10. I had an interpreter to help me with my English.



N/A ■ NO ■ YES ■

11. Professionals made sure I understood what was being discussed.

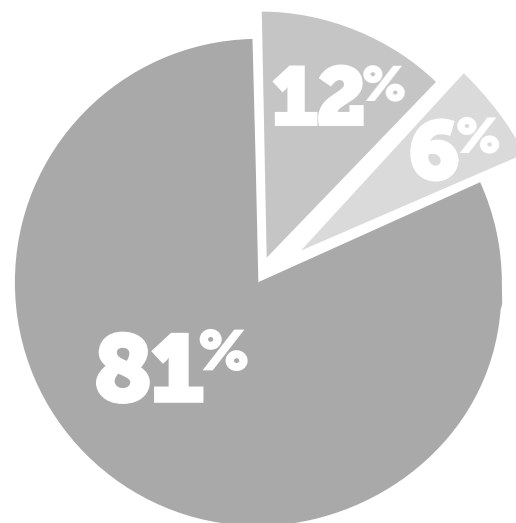
YES

77%

NO

22%

12. My disability was taken into consideration.



N/A ■ NO ■ YES ■

13. The right people who knew my child were at the meeting.

YES

75%

NO

25%

14. I felt involved in decision making.

YES

77%

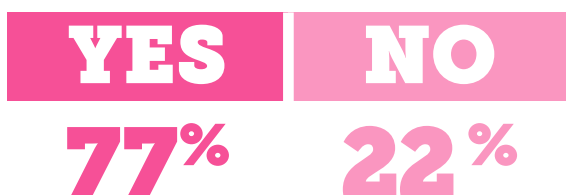
NO

22%

15. I felt my opinions and values were respected.



16. I felt the meeting helped to address the issues.



17. Did your social worker discuss with you the **outcome of the meeting?**



18. What would you have liked to happen **after the meeting?**

Comments:

- A discussion to explain next steps.
- After the meeting I wanted to have time to reflect and to take everything in.
- My social worker always comes back to me after every meeting to make sure I understand the process and allows me the opportunity to clarify any points.
- Put into action any decisions made.
- Social worker was very good, clear and transparent.
- It was a good experience.

19. What would you like to change to make these meetings a good experience that makes you feel you had a choice and more control over the decisions and plans that were made?

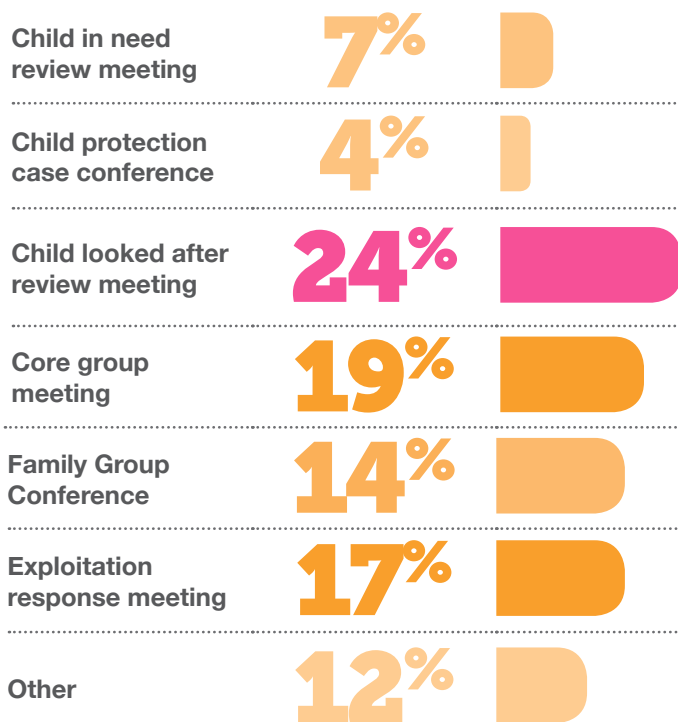
Comments:

- Social workers to listen to the needs of the parents.
- I found everything a bit scary because this was the first time I had social services in my life. I had to attend the child protection conference and it was scary but over time, working with the social worker, I became more relaxed. They helped me to understand the reason for the conference in terms of the children's position and they tried to support me.
- Social workers following up on set targets.
- Be listened to, let me speak and to be involved.
- Provide support and not to be judged. Do not expose my personal issues to my network.
- To have someone to go over the plan and help me to understand the plan.
- Making sure that advocates are offered to parents.
- Working well together with the social worker and having good communication.

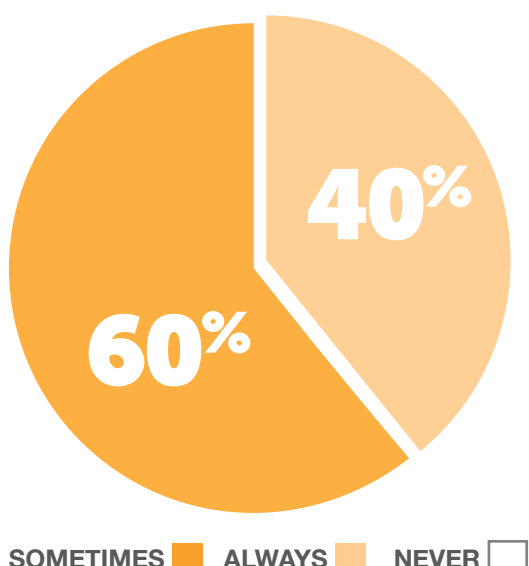
Social Workers

What social workers told us...

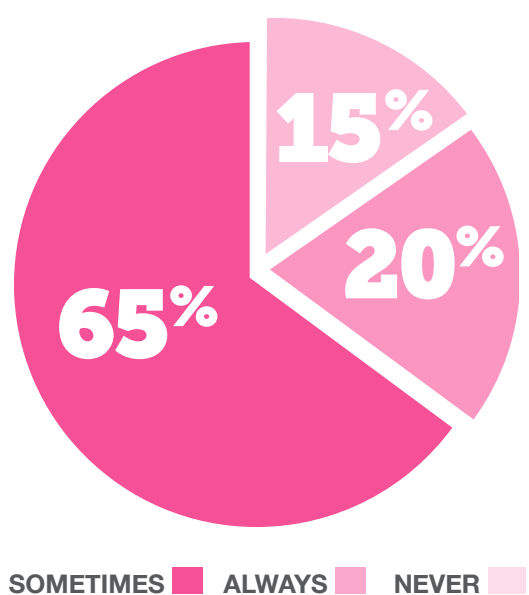
1. What type of meeting are you most likely to convene or chair?



2. I am able to help and support children and families to plan and prepare for meetings so that they know what meetings are being held and what to expect.



3. I am able to give children and families control over the meetings, for example who attends, items for the agenda etc.

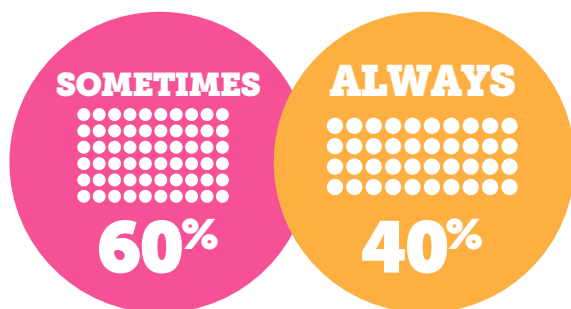


Comments:

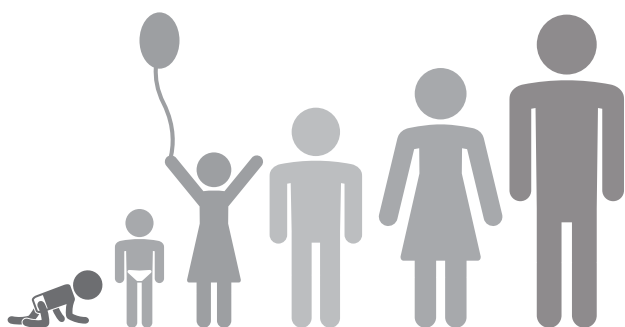
- I wish that I could answer 'always' to this question. However, sadly, we do not always have the time to fully prepare children and families in the way we may like.
- Due to child protection meetings time constraints and to ensure that deadlines are met, it has not always been possible to prepare in an ideal manner.
- I feel that there is confusion on who can be a part of these meetings; whether to have parents involved and/or Supervising Social Workers and/or schools or advocates. I think it would be helpful to have more training on best practices for these meetings.
- Being able to support them sometimes depends on their engagement and willingness to attend.
- System needs to be created for prompting social workers to complete and share social work reports for Children Looked After Reviews before the review in good time.
- I let children and families take the lead in the meeting but it is not possible to give them full control of the process.

Lots of people who don't need to be at Child Protection Conferences are invited. This is intimidating for parents.

4. I am able to make adequate arrangements for children and families to be represented in meetings by advocates or other representatives or provide alternative ways for them to get their views across.

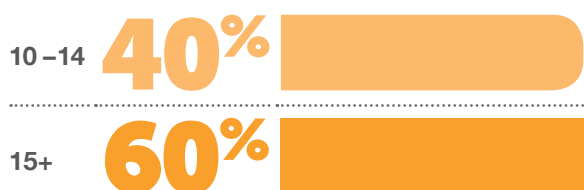


SOMETIMES ■ ALWAYS ■ NEVER ■

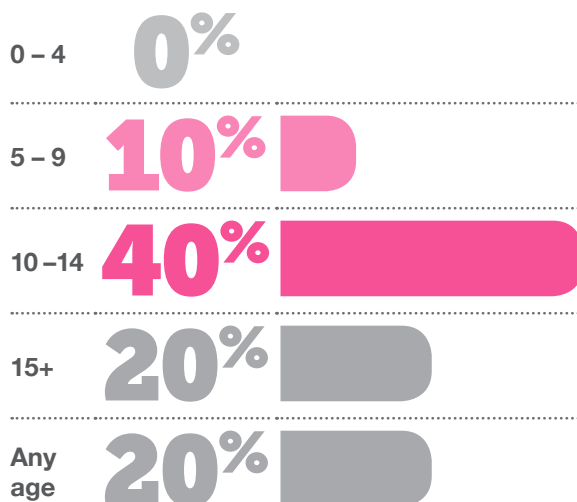


5. What ages do you feel it is appropriate for the child to attend meetings such as child protection, children in need, children looked after and Family Group Conference?

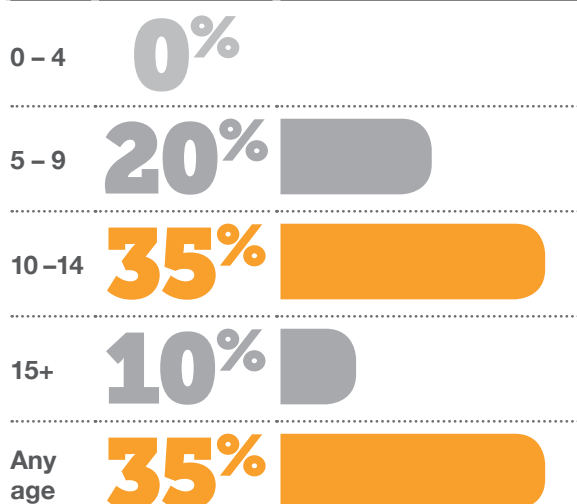
Child protection meeting



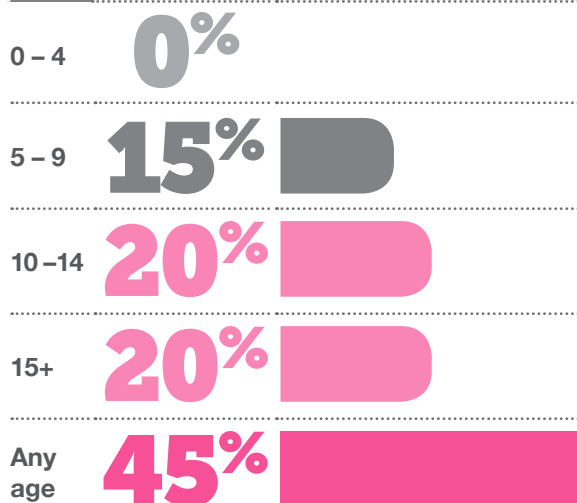
Children in need review meeting



Children looked after review meeting



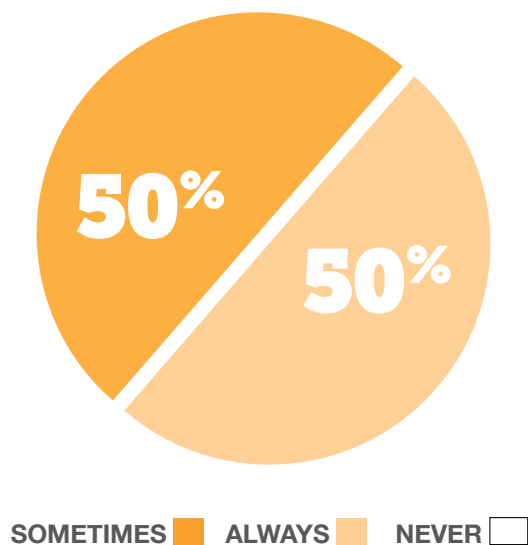
Family Group Conference



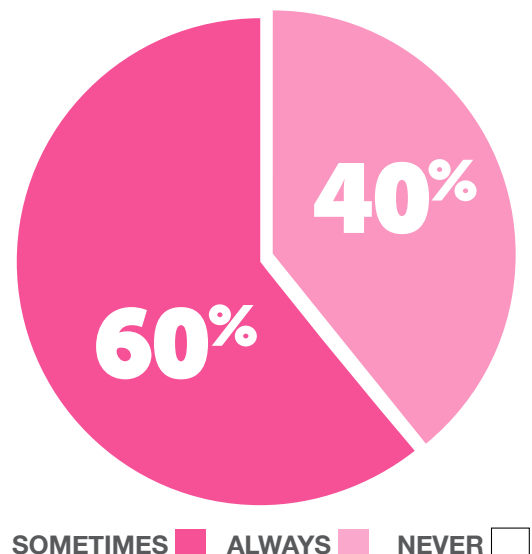
6. Children and families understand why the meeting is being held and what the goals are.



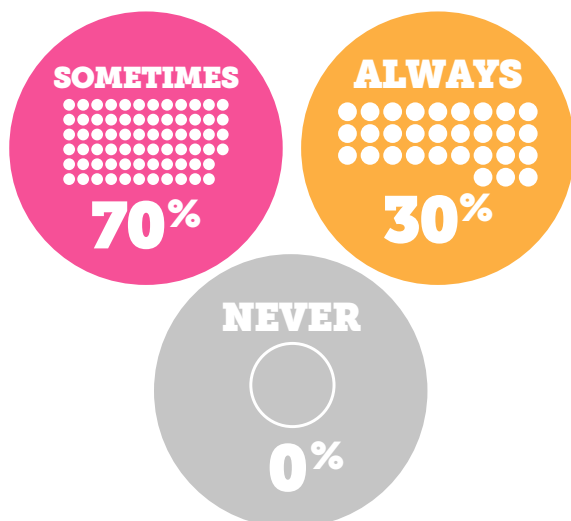
7. Children and families are supported to take part and speak freely and their views are heard and respected.



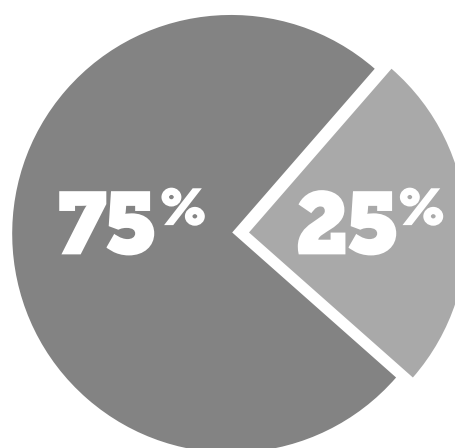
8. Children and families know in advance who will be attending the meeting and what information will be discussed.



9. The language used in the meeting is inclusive, accessible, systemic and avoids shaming parents.

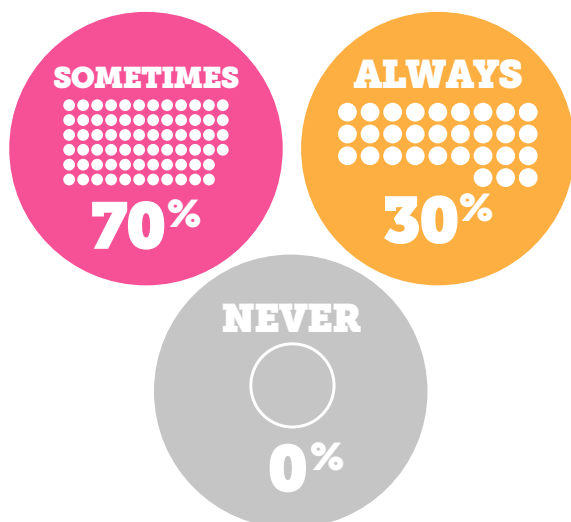


11. The meeting is a 'safe space' for children, families and professionals to explore issues and exchange views.



SOMETIMES ■ ALWAYS ■ NEVER □

10. Conflict and dissent are well managed within the meeting.

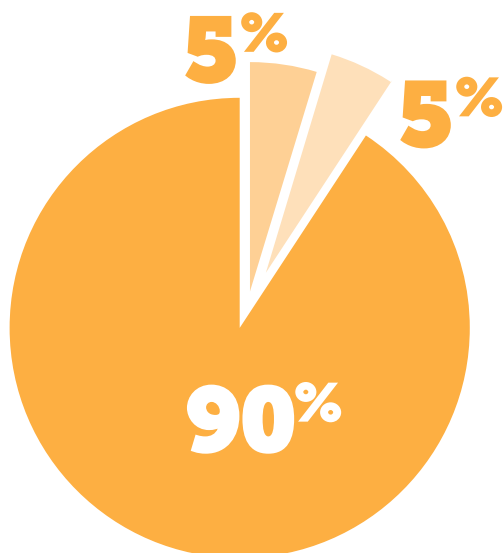


Comments:

- There needs to be flexibility in how these meetings are run to account for variables such as: relationship between the child and the parent, parents ability to regulate themselves, issues of confidentiality and ability of the family to support the placement.
- Paramount is the children's welfare and not being exposed to undermining of their feeling of safety or false hope.

Although I would like it to feel like a safe space, sometimes it may not always feel like that for children and families.

12. Is it appropriate for younger children to attend this type of meeting?



SOMETIMES ALWAYS NEVER

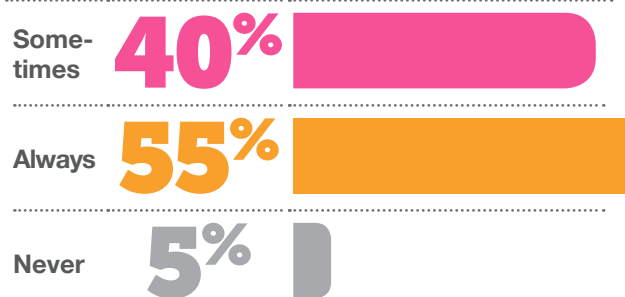
Comments:

- It depends on their individual needs and circumstances. Children are supported to prepare for the meetings via direct work and reviews are held as a process.
- Sometimes the younger children may find these meetings very distressing and this can trigger undue stress and internal dialogue of self-blame and shame.
- I understand that childcare can be issue at times and there isn't always someone to look after a baby while attending these meetings.
- This response is dependent on the individual child or the young person. Does the person have the emotional capacity to manage what will be discussed and what the purpose of the meeting is.

13. Children and families have an opportunity to shape the child's plan.



14. I am able to discuss the outcomes of meetings with children and families so that they are able to understand what has been agreed.



It may not always be appropriate but this is dependent on the child's mental capacity and complexities of the case.

15. Further reflections on meetings

- Unaccompanied asylum seeking children meetings don't flow well and it is difficult to promote meaningful participation. Quality of engagement is variable. Consideration to be given to how to support **engagement in the process in creative ways**.
- I do update the children looked after to ensure they understand the outcome of the meetings. It also helps to understand **how the young person feels about the meeting**.
- It helps when the Independent Reviewing Officer has a conversation with the social worker **ahead of the time to plan these meetings well**.
- **Plans need to be clear** during the meeting and it is helpful for **expectations to be set out** by the chair at the outset.
- My view is to work in a **family centred approach** and in an inclusive way. Depending on the child, family and professional meetings can be planned to ensure the views are heard of all involved.

16. Please give your views on whether you feel our meetings are purposeful and the extent to which they achieve good outcomes for children. Give any reasons and state if there is anything you would change:

- Children are often not invited to such meetings and though there are cases where they do not want to, I feel there could be more done to encourage participation.
- Generally, meetings are purposeful and achieve good outcomes. Young people and children can be listened to and their views taken into consideration. I think there needs to be better preparation. Reviews can be arranged last minute and young people unaware they are taking part in the meeting let alone who should be there. **There needs to be some flexibility about how meetings are managed so that the young person gets the best experience.**

- I think child protection conferences can sometimes be too overwhelming for families and parents sometimes leave without fully understanding what is expected of them and just feel deflated and like bad parents. I think more could be done **to make the conferences feel more supportive**. Plans can be simplified to ensure that parents understand what is required of them.
- I would like to see more work being done to **prepare children and families for meetings** so they understand the purpose and can contribute to the agenda; there should also be more work with social workers to help them to think about how to support children and families with this.

When social workers have spent time preparing and planning, the meetings work better and are used effectively to ensure that those attending are clear and informed of care planning, have a voice to share their views and ask any questions they may have.