

To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board

On: 20 May 2021

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Heading: Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together

1. Summary

- 1.1. The issue of children who are accommodated by local authorities being placed in separate placements from their brothers and sisters was identified as an area which required attention by The Independent Care Review. Children's Services agreed to consider improvements in keeping brother and sisters together as part of the response to The Independent Care Review's Stop-Go campaign. The Stop-Go campaign highlighted areas where services would commit to addressing areas of concern identified by care experienced young people and find solutions to these.
 - 1.2. The Renfrewshire Children's Champions Board carried out a survey to secure the views of care experienced young people in Renfrewshire and have produced a report, "Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together" which contains recommendations on improving practice in this area. A copy of the report is attached at appendix1.
 - 1.3. The Champions Board work has worked with Children's Services to develop the Renfrewshire policy on keeping brother and sisters together on a co-production basis. The draft policy which is attached at appendix 2 contains a pledge "When children come into care Renfrewshire will place brothers and sisters together".
 - 1.4. It is recognised that there will be times when brothers and sisters aren't placed together, and the policy requires Children's Services to report on this. In addition, the policy introduces a clear decision making process for times when brothers and sisters can't be placed together, arrangements to maintain family time and a commitment to regularly reviewing brothers and sisters placed in separate care settings.
 - 1.5. This report seeks the approval of the Policy Board for the Keeping brothers and sisters together policy.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Members of the Board are asked to
- a) acknowledge the leadership of the Children's Champions Board on the production of their report "Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together"; and
 - b) approve the policy on keeping brothers and sisters together which was developed on a coproduction basis by the Children's Champions Board and Children's Services.
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3. Background

- 3.1. The Renfrewshire Children's Champions Board consists of a range of care experienced young people. The Champions Board has in the past met regularly with elected members and senior officers from a range of agencies providing services for children and young people in Renfrewshire. The Champions Board has been reviewing how best to influence and engage further with decision makers.
- 3.2. Whilst developing their proposal on how best to engage with elected members and officers the Champions Board have been busy working with care experienced young people to identify and address some significant issues. The Champions Board developed and undertook a survey with care experienced young people and highlighted a number of priorities. The highest priority identified by care experienced young people was ensuring that if children require to be accommodated by the local authority that they should be able to stay together.
- 3.3. The Champions Board undertook a formal survey on contact between children who are in care and their brothers and sisters and produced a report, attached at appendix 1. In terms of true participation and influencing the development of policy the Champions Board approached the Head of Child Care and Criminal Justice and requested a response to the recommendations in the report. The draft policy, developed in partnership with the Champions Board is attached at appendix 2.
- 3.4. The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 became law in January 2021 and places new duties for local authorities in relation to ensuring that brothers and sisters are supported to be together and where this isn't possible to have their relationship supported on an ongoing basis. The draft policy is compliant with the requirements of this piece of legislation.
- 3.5. It is recognised that brothers and sisters are sometimes placed in separate care arrangements because of availability of foster carers, kinship carers or residential services able to take family groups. The policy pledges that Renfrewshire will place brothers and sisters together. It is recognised, that on occasions for safeguarding reasons this won't be possible. In all other circumstances the policy requires the explicit approval of the Head of Child Care and Criminal Justice to placing brothers and sisters in separate care arrangements and to record fully the reasons for this. In addition, an annual report on delivering the pledge will be produced to hold the service to account for performance in this area.

- 3.6. A range of practice tools have been developed to ensure that in circumstances where brothers and sisters aren't placed together that family time is arranged to promote and maintain relationships.
- 3.7. The first annual report on compliance with the policy, if approved by Board, will be produced as soon after April 2022 as possible.

Implications of this report

1. Financial

No significant financial implications.

2. HR and Organisational Development

Some minor training development work will be required to assist staff when the policy is developed and agreed.

3. Community/Council Planning

Our Renfrewshire is thriving

- Providing good quality care is central to ensuring that the most vulnerable children in Renfrewshire are provided with an opportunity to thrive in a safe and nurturing environment.

Building strong, safe and resilient communities

Providing children and young people with safe, supportive and nurturing placements, increases the likelihood of them becoming effective citizens who contribute productively to the communities in which they live.

4. Legal

The Children (Scotland) Bill is expected to become law in 2021 and places new duties on local authorities in relation to how they support and promote contact between brothers and sisters.

5. Property/Assets

None.

6. Information Technology

None.

7. Equality and Human Rights

The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations.

- 8. **Health and Safety**
None.
- 9. **Procurement**
None.
- 10. **Risk**
None.
- 11. **Privacy Impact**
None.
- 12. **Cosla Policy Position**
None.
- 13. **Climate Risk**
None.

List of Background Papers

None.

Children's Services

JCT

9 April 2021

Author: John Trainer, Head of Child Care and Criminal Justice john.trainer@renfrewshire.go.uk
0141 628 6860

KEEPING BROTHERS & SISTERS TOGETHER



SURVEY REPORT



MAY 2020





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1. Introduction to Champions Board



The Champions Board is a group of Care Experienced young people that meet to improve the experiences of children and young people who are also Care Experienced. We have grown up living in various types of care placements, such as Foster Care, Residential Care, Kinship Care or having a social worker and living at home. We know how it feels to live away from family and have experienced a lot of what many Care Experienced children and young people across Renfrewshire are feeling right now.

We want to hear the important thoughts and views of Renfrewshire's children on different themes. We then want to represent the views shared with us and amplify their voices by talking to decision makers within the council about what we have heard or been told. Ultimately, we want to make things better for Care Experienced young people across Renfrewshire.

The first theme we as a Champions Board chose to work on was keeping brothers and sisters together. We have either all experienced being split up from our brothers and sisters or have been lucky enough to stay with our brothers and sisters and are passionate about others being able to have what we had. This is a theme that is very important to each of us.

MEET YOUR CHAMPIONS BOARD REPS

	TONI DURNING MY CARE EXPERIENCE 14 years foster care	THEMES IMPORTANT TO ME <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Throughcare.» Brothers and sisters being kept together.» Social worker changes, placement moves, accessing records.	FACTS ABOUT ME <ul style="list-style-type: none">» I love sport.» I'm terrified of heights.» I can play the trombone.
	LEE TOMLINSON MY CARE EXPERIENCE 4 years foster care	THEMES IMPORTANT TO ME <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Keeping brothers and sisters together.» Health and well-being of children in the care system.» The importance of young people's voice.	FACTS ABOUT ME <ul style="list-style-type: none">» I'm a clean freak.» I love to colour in.» I love dogs.
	THOMAS KENNEDY MY CARE EXPERIENCE 12 years Kinship (Adopted) 7 Years residential care	THEMES IMPORTANT TO ME <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Social work changes.» Quality of social workers and relationships.» Throughcare.» Mental health.	FACTS ABOUT ME <ul style="list-style-type: none">» I have delivered a speech on Care Experienced young people directly to the First Minister and two members of her cabinet!» I love snowboarding!» I love reading and movies!
	THEIGHAN MCGIRR MY CARE EXPERIENCE 16 years (Residential, Foster, Kinship & at home)	THEMES IMPORTANT TO ME <ul style="list-style-type: none">» I am particularly passionate about keeping brothers and sisters together.» Continuing care.» The use of restraint.» The Children's Hearing System.	FACTS ABOUT ME <ul style="list-style-type: none">» The number of placements and social workers people have.» I love reading (I read 175 books last year).» I love ABBA.

www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/ChampionsBoard @RenChampions

2. How We Picked The Theme

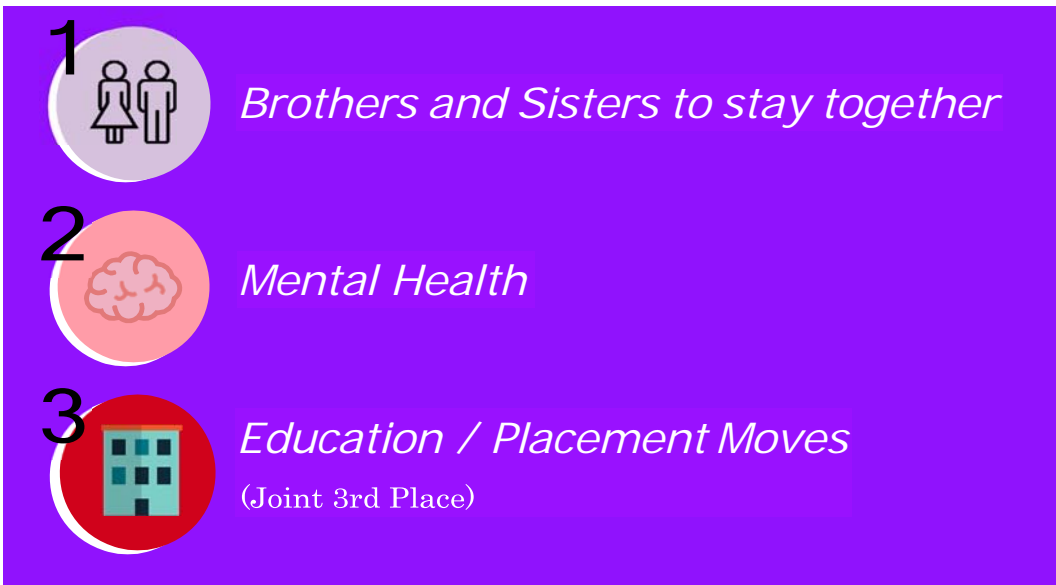


The newly established Champions Board group came together for an overnight residential in September 2019. This time together enabled us to get to know one another a bit better and provided the necessary space for us to explore, consider and deliberate on the themes we collectively wished to start working on.

We took part in an activity that required us to reflect on our own care experience and to identify any themes we felt should be the focus of the group's attention.

To give a broader perspective, we viewed the findings of the 'Care Questionnaire' 2017 which reflected the views of a further 59 care experienced young people from across Renfrewshire. Additionally, data extracted from the last 5 years of Who Cares? Scotland advocacy liaison reports pertaining to the most commonly requested advocacy themes were provided to us to review.

After much conversation and consideration, we collectively decided on the themes below and ranked them in order of importance:



3. Impact on Short/Long Term Health



As a group we discussed, researched and reflected upon the impact sibling separation can have on children and young people's mental health. Research across the board, clearly shows that sibling separation has a massive detrimental effect on mental health compared to those brothers and sisters that are kept together. Please see below some of our own thoughts and experiences:



Short Term Impact of Separation:

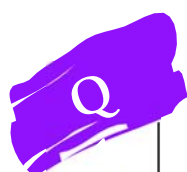
- * Experiencing the trauma of separation
- * Negative impact on mental health
- * Isolation
- * Loss of support from a brother or sister, shared experience
- * Emotional Distress
- * 'Imaginary friend' - personal reflection from Theighan of how her younger sister thought she was her imaginary friend following their separation at a young age
- * Impact on relationships with brothers and sisters i.e. massive difference between living with your brother and/or sister and instead seeing them once a week
- * Mistrust of professionals
- * Grief & Loss



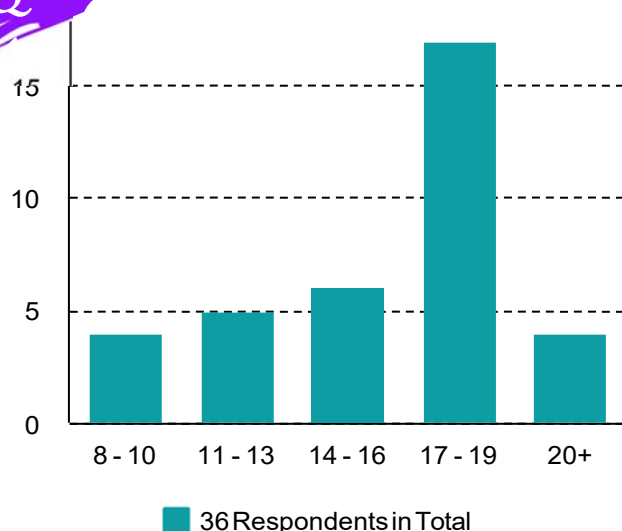
Long Term Impact of Separation:

- * Impact on lifelong relationships, a higher risk of brother and sister relationships deteriorating over time and becoming estranged
- * Negative impact on wider relationships in general, leading to attachment issues
- * A lost sense of identity once the family unit is fractured
- * Developmentally - 'How do I be sister or brother if I've not had the chance to because we were split up?
- * Avoidance of conversations / situations involving shared personal details re. family dynamic. i.e. it's easier to say I don't have a brother / sister than try to explain I have family but I don't see them
- * Questioning self-worth
- * Lost sense of identity i.e. memory of people, family history etc
- * Lost memories
- * Unresolved trauma and pain
- * High end ACES

4. Survey Data / Results



How Old Are You?



Comments on Age:

- Collectively we were happy that there was representation from each of the age group categories within the survey. However, the limited uptake of only 36 participants was very disappointing, given how widely it was promoted across each of the area teams.
- We wondered if the limited uptake possibly because social workers/other supporting adults thought this would be a difficult topic for younger young people to discuss?
- In the context of Psychology surveys, where the data is statistically analysed, a LARGER sample size is desirable so the data is generalisable to the rest of

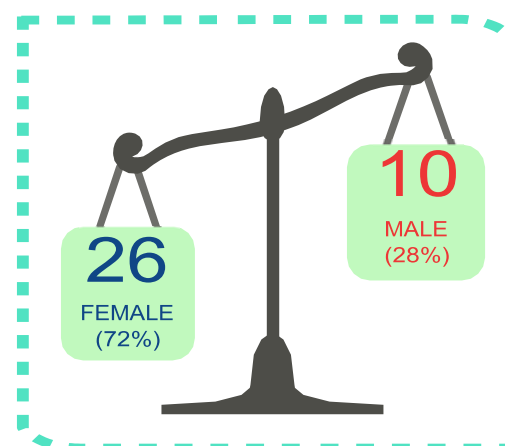
the population. However, with customer service surveys for example, the survey still gives you valuable answers without having a sample size that represents the general population. We feel that this survey can fall under the “customer service survey”. We are basically reviewing the care system and the practises within it so I’m not too concerned about the number of responses.



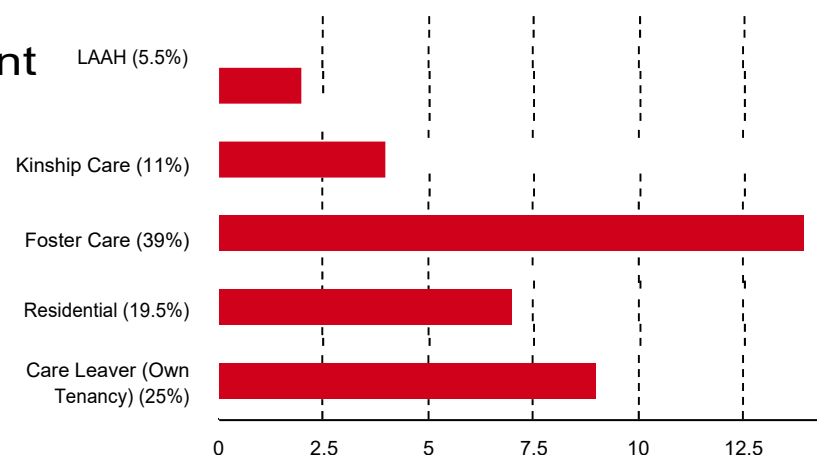
Are You Male Or Female?

Comments on Gender:

- We were not overly surprised by the increased female uptake of the survey as they felt that females would probably be more likely to complete the survey
- Whilst it would have been good to have a greater male involvement, we are content that there is sufficient male representation within the survey.



Which Placement Are You In Just Now?





Comments on Placement Type:

- Importantly, there was representation and voice from all of the placement types included within the survey.
- We would have liked to have captured a wider perspective from those young people living within LAAH and Kinship placements, as we feel that they are a population who are harder to reach
- From the outset, we felt the success of survey would depend upon it being introduced by someone holding an established relationship with each young person as opposed to a leaflet drop. Hence why it was

clearly highlighted and promoted at each of the area team meetings.

- We felt that the spike in participation from young people in foster care was interesting and quite possibly linked to the supportive relationships held with their carers promoting the survey.
- There is learning from our first survey, we would like any future survey to come with the caveat that every social worker supports at least one of their young people to complete it.

39%
of participants

currently live in Foster Care

Looked After At Home and Kinship Care placements combined only accounted for 16.6% of responses..



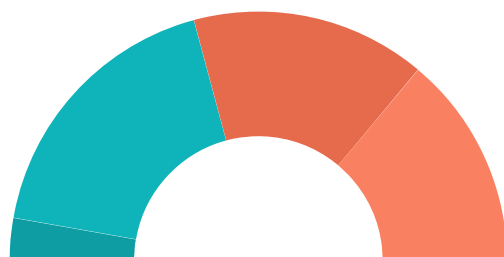
Do You Have

Brothers And/

Or Sisters?
✓ 34 ✗ 2



How Many Brothers And/ Or Sisters Do You Have?



Comments on Number of Siblings: of young people

95% who responded had at least 1 sibling.

- The high number of respondents with siblings highlights that this theme impacts upon the majority of the care experienced population across Renfrewshire. Whilst 2 participants did not have any siblings, views gave a valuable perspective related to future priorities of the Board.

0 (5.56%) 1-2 (36.11%) 3-4 (30.56%)
5+ (27.78%)

61% of respondents had 3 or more siblings. 30% had 5 or more.

The significantly high number of young people with 3 or more siblings should be explored further by decisions makers and highlights the need for a new approach in how the Authority keep larger family groups together.

-

The group felt it would be interesting and important to know the percentage of families accommodated by Renfrewshire Council over the course of a year, in order to have a sense of scale of this.

-



Have You And Your Brothers And Sisters Ever Lived Apart?

82%

of participants

with brothers and sisters (28) said they had experienced separation from their siblings.

18% (6) had not experienced sibling separation.

Comments on Living Apart:

- Given the small sample size it was felt that this was a high and very telling statistic. We felt this highlighted the potential scale of this theme and of the numbers of young people who have been impacted by it.
- Based on our calculations and a sample size of 28 participants who have experienced sibling separation, it could be estimated that at a minimum, 84 young people are directly impacted. This number rises starkly when you consider the worst case scenario.
- We felt that where brothers and sister have been separated, that it should continually be reviewed and not be a static decision but be regularly reviewed and almost an expectation that they are reunited at the earliest opportunity.
- We would be keen to understand the Authority's views on the short and long-term effects of sibling separation.

One of our group members shared her experience of living with two brothers from the same family group (not her own) but at separate periods of time. She lived with one brother for a period of time who then moved on, and the other brother moved in some time later. The younger brother later asked her what it was like living with his older brother. He had no point of reference or previous experience that he could remember of staying with his brother.

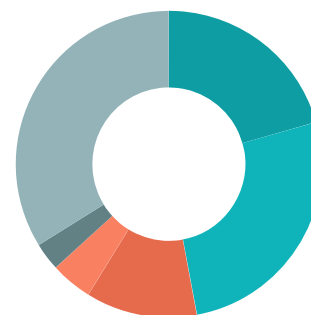


Do You Currently Stay With Your Brothers And Sisters?

79%

of participants

do not currently stay with their brothers and sisters



- Yes (20.59%)
- No - They are in other foster placements (26.47%)
- No - My brothers and sisters stay at home (11.76%)
- No - They stay with extended family (4.41%)
- No - They are in other residential placements (2.94%)
- No - They are older and live by themselves (33.82%)

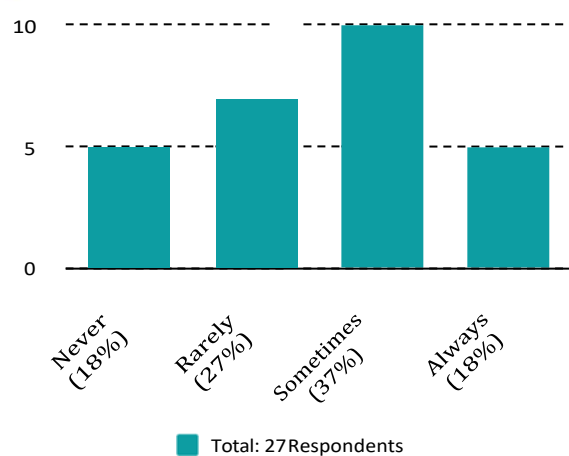


Comments on Currently Living Apart:

- We considered the impact sibling separation can have on individual identity i.e. it can be very painful knowing that you have a brother or sister in the world who you have no connection with because of a decision that was made in the past. One of our group members shared that when she talks with friends about her family that it was easier just to say she has no brothers or sisters than to explain her sister was adopted. Over time, this can lead to a sense of guilt, frustration, anger and low sense of self.
- For transparency, in some cases participants reported staying with brothers and sisters as well as being separated from others. In this instance, their score was split in half so the number tallied up to 34
- Whilst a number of participants indicated that their brothers and sisters lived by themselves, we decided to include them in the overall 79%, as we know that care experienced young people largely move towards independence well before their non care experienced peers. The average age of leaving home in Scotland is 25yrs, compared to 16-18yrs for care experienced young people.



If You Answered No to Q7, Do You Get To See Your Brothers And Sisters As Often As You Would Like?



82%

responded that they do not get to see their brothers and sisters as often as they would like

Comments on Seeing Siblings:

- Results sparked different responses from the group, for example some members of the group felt that 18% reporting as 'Always' being able to see their brothers and sisters as often as they would like, as really high and positive. Whilst, there was a different response from those facilitating the discussion, they were quite struck and surprised at how low this number was, so there was a real contrast of opinion and interpretation
- Of those that reported 'never' and 'rarely', 66% were age 17+, we would like to understand what this tells us for our care leavers.
- The group felt that the equal number of participants reporting 'Always' and 'Never' being able to see their siblings was quite a contrast - so for every young person that has plenty of time and connection with their brothers and sisters there is one young person who has none. i.e. 50/50.
- An example was shared of when some social workers used to arrange annual family holidays for individual sibling groups who were living apart. Sadly, this is now quite a rare thing. We feel that it is highly probable that such experiences being arranged would depend upon who your S/W is i.e. some go the extra mile and see their job as a vocation compared to others who see it as a job.
- Based upon our own personal experiences, we feel that the quality and frequency of young people seeing their brothers and sisters very much depends on who your social worker is.



How Did It Make You Feel Being Separated From Your Brothers And Sisters?

I was devastated, it has made a big impact on my life and I'm upset with the fact that I won't get to see her until she is 16 years.

It suited me because we didn't get on.

I find it sad but I also find it ok because I can talk about things that they shouldn't hear.

It wasn't a good feeling.

Sad

Upsetting

The separation is hard and relationships have been lost due to the lack of time

Upset but I didn't really know them that well.

Not the best.

When my two youngest brothers got adopted it was really upsetting because we got told we wouldn't be able to see them or contact them until the youngest ones turns 16 years.

Don't really care.

There was so much going on in my life at that time that I didn't pay much attention.

Really sad.



Sad

Sad but when I get to see him sometimes happy and sometimes angry.

It was very difficult and distressing for me, it's hard to build up bonds again with them.

Horrible, I was the only one who was by myself, so I felt isolated. I was bullied as others didn't believe I really had siblings. I felt resentful to them as they had each other and it had ruined my mental health.

It was difficult as I had no connection with my family.

I didn't like it at all knowing we were all going to be separated from each other and I hate that my wee sister is young enough to forget family members who were close to her at birth.

Don't mind it.

I felt like my siblings became strangers when I went to live with a family members, although my relationship with my Dad was ok there was still some strain and we didn't see each other much.

Abandoned.

Lonely and emotional.

It was sad at first but after a while I got used to it but I still get to see my siblings.

Sad



Q1

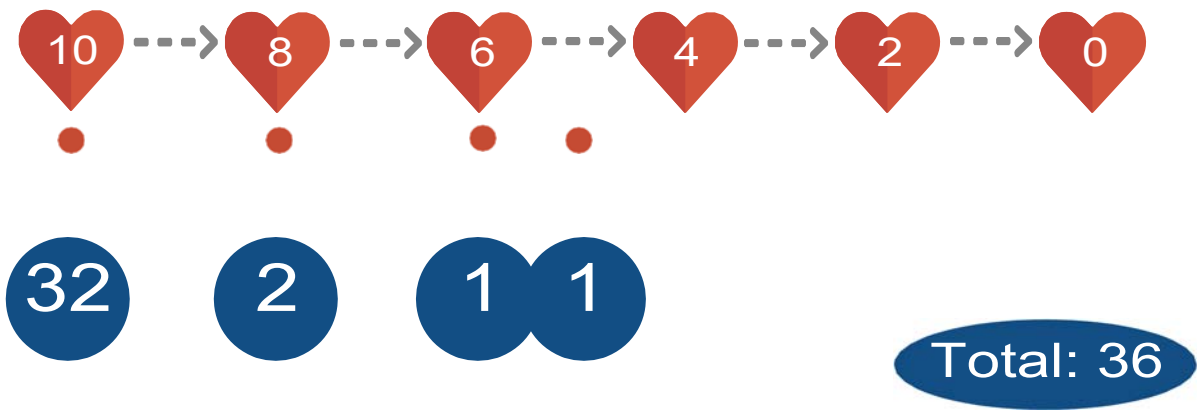
If Separated, Should Brothers and Sisters Be Supported To Keep Relationships With One Another?

- ✓ Yes 34
- ? Sometimes 2
- ✗ No 0



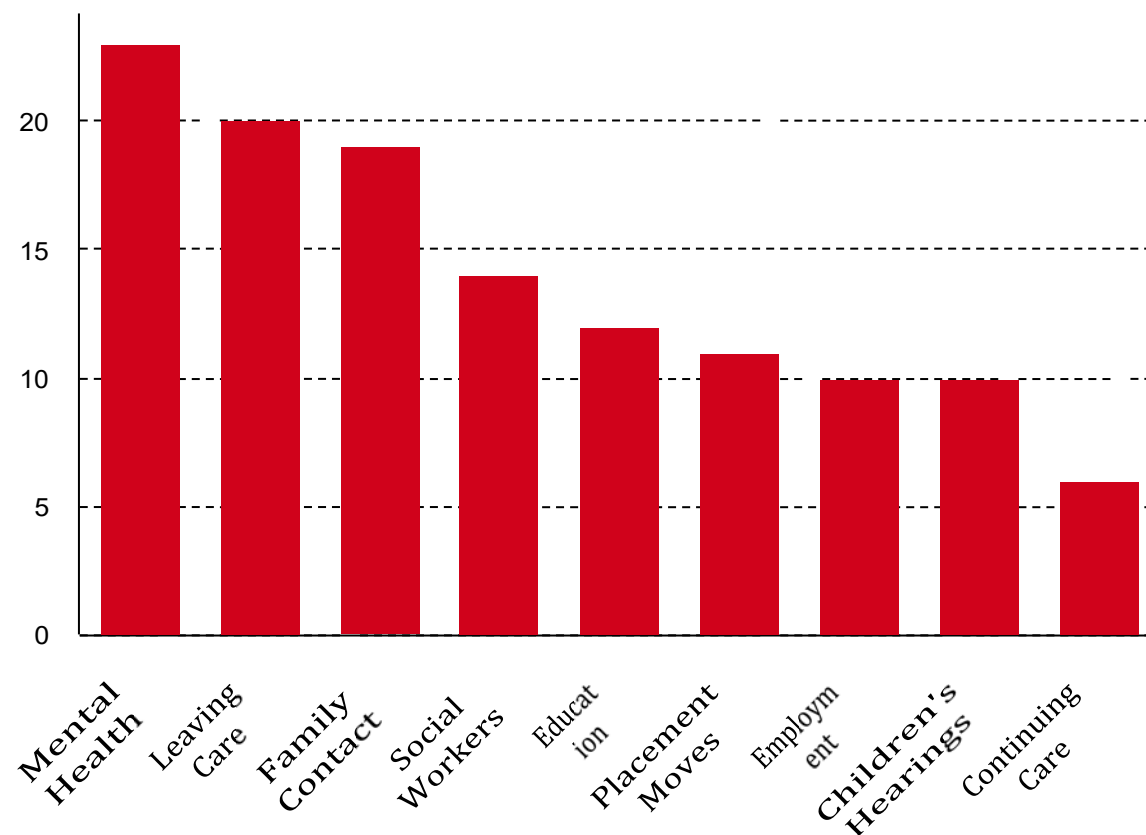
Q1

How Important Is It For Brothers And Sisters To Be Kept Together When In Care (Score Out Of 10)





What Other Themes Are Important To You That The Champions Board Could Work On To Improve Next?



Comments on Other Themes For The Champions Board:

- Again, whilst we would have liked to have had a greater uptake of the survey to make it even more representative, we recognise that we are now mandated by those that took part.
- Mental Health' was the top scoring theme and is already linked to our current focus of work. We will continue to explore this theme in a broader sense.
- We were a little surprised that 'Family Contact' wasn't the highest scoring theme, however it was suggested that participants may have thought this just meant seeing the parents and didn't include seeing their brothers and sisters. Irrespective, it was still a very high scoring theme.
- We will begin to consider and focus on other top scoring themes such as mental health and leaving care, as soon as there is progress made with the existing theme.



Fina

Any Other Comments?

It's unfair..

When I feel bad my brother always makes me happy and laugh.

I think it's so important for brothers and sisters to stay together in care and not to be separated. It's very daunting having to be in care, especially if you're also having to be separated from your brothers and sisters.

It's just better for siblings to stay together because they are able to support each other when social workers can't.

I wouldn't ever want to be separated from my sister because I love her.

This should be supported for siblings to live together as you are put in care to find a 'family' who love and support you and that you really do have family out there like brothers and sisters

I think it would be very important that brothers and sisters stay together in care to at least try to see how it goes.

5. Recommendations - Ideas



Alternative Care Pilot/Study:

In the spirit of the Independent Care Review (ICR), we would like the Council to launch a pilot project based on the ICR 10 Principles of Intensive Family Support model to keep a family group together.

Longcroft House is a great example of a family recently being kept together, we would like a case study to be conducted to consider any learning, the costings and whether this is a viable model to support larger family groups in staying together? We would suggest that the council do a price comparison of accommodating a sibling group of 5 in a house together versus the same family being separated and going to different foster carers.



Public Pledge Promise:

We would like Renfrewshire Council to be the first local authority to publicly commit to introducing that brothers and sisters will no longer get separated in Renfrewshire and to set timescales for this to be fully implemented.

Policy Change Commitment:

We would like Renfrewshire Council to introduce policy that requires them to officially record

the separation of any brothers and sisters, the reasons for this, and to introduce a mechanism whereby this is automatically regularly reviewed with a view to re-unification.

Mental Health Resource Commitment:

Given the impact that separation from your brothers and sisters can have on both your short and long term mental health, we feel consideration needs to be given to a tailored resource (separate from CAMHS) that is easily accessible for young people to get the support that they need.

Official Review of Separated Brother & Sister Relationships:

The survey revealed that 82% of participants were not happy with how often they get to see their brothers and sisters. We feel that this has to be explored by way of an official review.

6. Detailed Recommendations



#1

Public Pledge Promise

- We would like the council to be the first Local Authority to publicly commit to introducing that brothers and sisters will no longer be separated when they come into care in Renfrewshire. We recognise that this may not happen overnight and will take time to be fully implemented, so we would like a work plan to be devised to map out how this will practice will be concluded with a 50% reduction in numbers over an initial agreed period.

#2

Alternative Care Pilot/Study

- The Champions Board recognise that foster care is not the answer for all family groups that are received into care, and that alternative options are required to keep larger family groups together. Renfrewshire Council have recently demonstrated their ability and desire to keep family groups together by placing one such family group of 5 at Longcroft Children's House.
- The Champions Board would like the local authority to conduct a case study in relation to the Longcroft example and to explore and consider the learning from this. i.e. the associated financial cost, the view of the family had they been separated, the views of the staff group on keeping the family together and whether this could be viable model that could be replicated for future larger family groups coming into care across Renfrewshire.
- As part of this process, we would suggest that a price comparison of accommodating a family group of 5 in a house likened to that of Longcroft, be contrasted against the financial commitment for the same family being separated and going to different foster placements. The outcome of which should be measured against the emotional impact of the family being separated.
- The Champions Board believe that keeping brothers and sisters together is of monumental importance and this too is echoed by Independent Care Review (ICR). We would like to recommend that Renfrewshire Council commit to launching a pilot project that is built upon the learning from the Longcroft case study whilst incorporates the '10 Principles of Intensive Family Support' model as identified within the Care Reviews 'The Promise' report.



#3

Policy Change Commitment

- Whilst Renfrewshire Council works towards ending sibling separation, we would like to request that council introduce a policy that requires sibling separation to be officially recorded along with the specific reasons for as to why. A mechanism should also be devised that automatically ensures that these decisions are reviewed on a regular basis, with a view to supporting re-unification. 82% of participants within the survey who had brothers and sisters advised that they had experienced separation from their siblings. We feel that this is far too high and highlights how widespread
- Leaving your family home and coming into care is a traumatic experience for any young person, coming into care with your brothers and sisters and being separated from them significantly deepens this trauma. Sibling relationships are uniquely strong, especially for young people coming from backgrounds such as ours. Keeping siblings together can massively improve emotional wellbeing, reduce the associated trauma and help them to settle in quicker to their new environment.

#4

Mental Health Resource Commitment

- As a group we know all too well the significant impact being separated from your brothers and sisters can have on mental health, be it through our own experience or that of our care experience friends. Mental health was identified as the top scoring theme for the Champions Board to work on next via the survey, following 20 participants nominating it. However, we feel that sibling separation has a significant impact on both the short and long-term mental health of care experienced young people, that in some cases can have life-long consequences.
- As a result, what we would like to recommend that the council give consideration to commissioning a tailored resource for children and young people across Renfrewshire that is separate to CAMHS. We feel that there is a real need for care experienced children and young people to be able to access mental health support exactly when they need it most and not be required to wait for a prolonged period of time to get the support that they require. We feel that a helpline or dedicated service that can provide immediate support and counselling to our children and young people would be really beneficial and provide a much-needed additional layer of support.



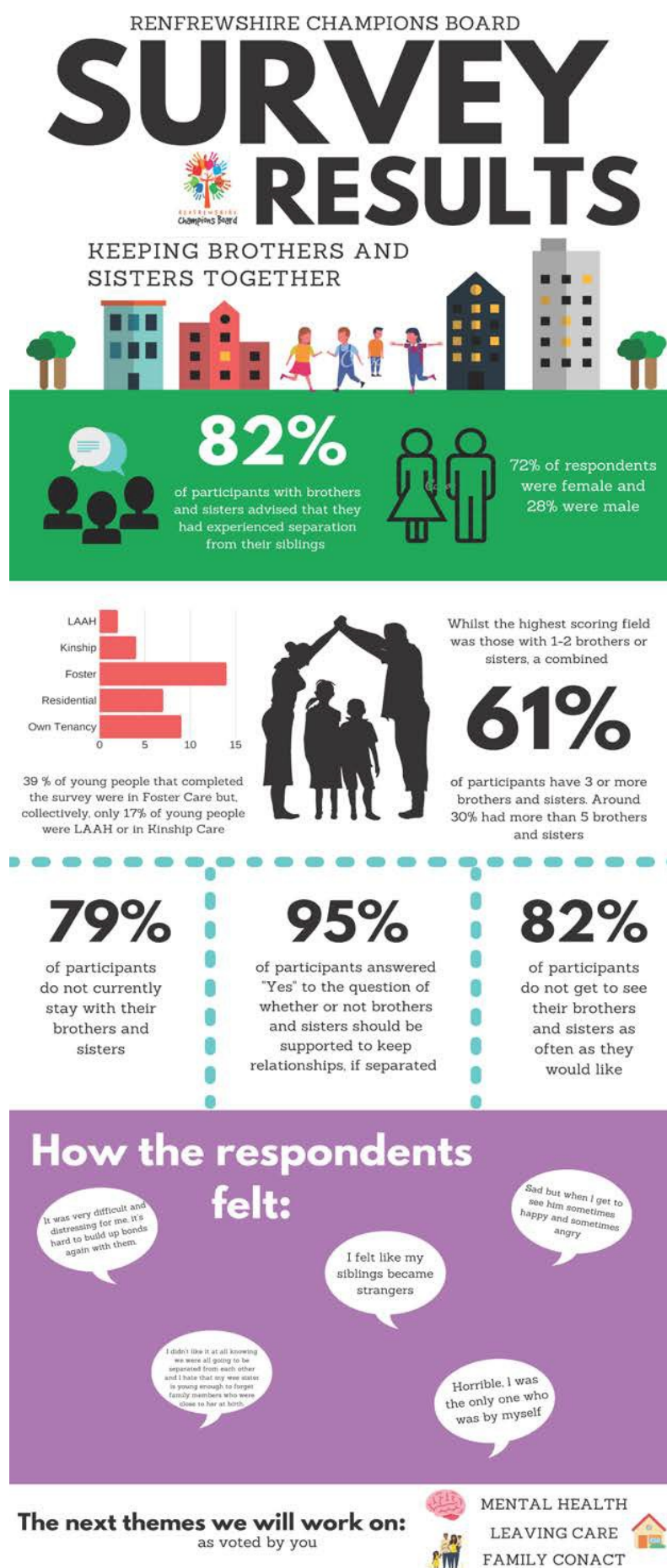
Official Review of Separated Brother & Sister Relationships



In response to the survey we would like to request an official review of the quality of individual contact plans for our young people. The survey highlighted that 18% of participants get to see their brothers and sisters as much as they'd like, whilst a similar 18% of participants have NO contact. In addition, a further 63% indicated that they either 'rely' or only 'sometimes' got to see their brothers and sisters as much as they would like. Ultimately, 81% percent of survey participants indicated that they do not get to see their brothers and sisters as often as they would like.

This is a stark statistic that has shed light on something so fundamentally important to our young people, we feel it is our responsibility to request a formal review to explore this and to consider how this can be made right. The processes behind how sibling relationships are monitored, reviewed and encouraged should also be evaluated. Those young people who have been separated from their brothers and sisters should be supported to maintain healthy, consistent, and lifelong relationships with their brothers and sisters.

7. Infographic



8. Conclusions



Brother & sister relationships are of huge importance to us all, these relationships are integral to who we are and are lifelong. For most of us our first friend is our brother or sister, we learn from one another, we teach one another, we share our lives with one another. The effects of our sibling relationships in childhood echo throughout our lives. This is even more so for those who have had adverse childhood experiences, brothers and sisters in these contexts develop uniquely strong bonds that can prove so vital in overcoming such experiences.

Coming into care is an equally traumatic experience for any young person, but coming into care with your brothers and sisters and then being separated from them by the people that are meant to be helping you is completely wrong and needs to change. We shared earlier with you the short and long-term impact on mental health of those separated from their brothers and sisters, the consequences of which can be felt long into adulthood, we feel this is tragic and needs to change.

As you will know, when a child comes into care, the council becomes their Corporate Parent. Put simply, the term “Corporate Parent” means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by you. The Scottish Government recently stated its ambition “to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up for all babies, children, mothers, fathers and families.” In the same spirit, we would like Renfrewshire to become the best place in Scotland for babies, children, brothers & sisters and families to grow up and we feel this can be started by keeping brothers and sisters together when they come into care.

We hope you will endorse our recommendations and we look forward to working in partnership with you moving forward to make these a reality.

Yours,
The Champions Board



Children's Services - Social Work

Keeping brothers and sisters together policy

Our Pledge

“When children come into our care Renfrewshire will place brothers and sisters together.”

Background

The Independent Care Review highlighted the frequent separation of brothers and sisters in care and heard evidence from care experienced people and professionals about the profound, lifelong consequences this estrangement from siblings causes.

The Care Review Promise states:

“Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so and belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as needed. There is already the presumption that children will stay together with their brothers and sisters if they have to be removed from their family. This is a significant step in nurturing vital loving relationships. Brothers and sisters keep each other safe and loved. There will be few circumstances where it is not appropriate for brothers and sisters to stay together, but these will be the exception.”

As part of the Care Review's 'Stop: Go' workstream, Renfrewshire committed to STOP separating brothers and sisters unless there are clear safeguarding reasons to do so.

Our Champions Board recently undertook research with local care experienced children and young people and produced a report which detailed experiences of children and young people being separated from their brothers and sisters when they came into care or during their care journey. The Champions Board report spoke about the emotional distress and long-term harm this caused to some young people. This report has strengthened our resolve to get it right for brothers and sisters in care.

This policy sets out the steps Renfrewshire Council will take to ensure that brothers and sisters are kept together. As a service we are committed to ensuring that when a child comes into our care our default position is that we will keep them with their brothers and sisters.

There will be some circumstances where for safety reasons children might need to be placed separately from their brothers and sisters. These circumstances will be the exception and when this happens, we will support brothers and sisters to maintain positive and consistent relationships with each other. We will do this by listening to our children and young people to come up with a tailored and individual plan for them which includes their wishes, aspirations and preferences.

Scotland already has a presumption that children will stay together with their brothers and sisters when they're placed in care. In common with other Scottish local authorities, our approach in relation to this has developed considerably over recent years. The Care

Review, along with ongoing conversations with our Champions' Board, has led us to critically examine our approach and to identify areas for improvement. Renfrewshire can and will do more to ensure that our practice properly reflects the value of family relationships, both as a fundamental right and a source of wellbeing. Moreover, we will establish procedures to ensure rigorous scrutiny of our practice and continuous improvement.

Rights approach

This policy is based on Renfrewshire complying with the Scottish Government's commitment to embedding the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This policy particularly meets the authority's responsibility to meet children's rights under the following:

Article 3 – best interests of the child;

Article 9 – separation from parents;

Article 12 – respect for the views of the child:

Article 20 – children unable to live with their family: and

Article 25 – review of treatment of children in care.

How we define brothers and sisters

Renfrewshire Children's Services recognises the diversity of family relationships and the fact that care experienced children and young people have different biological, emotional and social relationships which they experience as sibling relationships. We also appreciate that many children and young people with an experience of care have relationship networks which are large, diverse in age and spread over multiple households and care types.

Renfrewshire uses the following definition for brothers and sisters:

- Children who share at least one birth parent; and/or
- Children who currently live or have lived together with other children in a family group. This explicitly includes half, step and adoptive brothers and sisters.

Getting it right for brothers and sisters in Renfrewshire

"All children must be supported to continue relationships that are important to them, where it is safe to do so." (Care Review 2019)

Renfrewshire Council recognises the fundamental importance of relationships with brothers and sisters for all children and for those with a care experience in particular.

Leaving their family home and coming into care is a traumatic experience for any young person. Coming into care with their brothers and sisters and being separated from them significantly deepens this trauma. Therefore, we are committed to ensuring that these uniquely strong bonds are nurtured and protected for those brothers and sisters that experience separation. We understand that if the relationship between brothers and sisters is not protected, the effects of this can echo throughout their lives, sadly resulting in brothers and sisters who do not have a relationship as adults. So, we therefore

recognise our responsibility in ensuring that the children and young people in our care are supported to maintain regular, healthy and loving connections with their brothers and sisters.

In practice this means:

- Renfrewshire will place brothers and sisters together, unless there are clear safeguarding reasons not to. This can include being with the same foster carer, kinship carer or in the same residential house.
- Brothers and sisters will not be separated without the express agreement and authorisation of the Head of Child Care & Criminal Justice.
- Before agreeing that brothers and sisters can't be placed together the Head of Child Care and Criminal Justice will be made aware of the clear safety reasons as to why keeping them together at this time isn't possible. A report will be provided outlining what actions have been taken to keep the children together.
- Where it is decided that brothers and sisters cannot be placed together, a high-quality assessment will produce an individual plan (leading to a 'Family Time' plan) reflecting how the children will be supported to maintain their relationship with each other. This will be based on the wishes and views of the individual children.
- Where brothers and sisters can't be kept together, we will make sure we minimise the physical distance between where the children are staying, unless there are clear safeguarding reasons not to.
- Where children and young people aren't placed with their brothers and sisters, the "Looked After Review" process will consider whether they still need to live apart at this time. This will be subject to ongoing review and include the views of each of the children. 'Family Time' plans will also be reviewed to ensure that they reflect the needs and wishes of the children in consistently seeing one another.
- Children's services will monitor compliance with our pledge on a regular basis. This will be done by establishing a procedure counting the number of children placed separately from their brothers and sisters and tracking the completion and review of 'Family Time' plans and the recording of the child's views.
- We will provide an annual report to the Champions' Board setting out our progress towards getting it right for brothers and sisters in Renfrewshire.