**Capturing the Voices of Looked-After Children
via Computerised Assisted Self-Interviewing Technology: A Longitudinal
Approach.**

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## Acknowledgments

# Abstract

**Aim:** The study aimed to evaluate and utilise a method which allowed for more widespread views of looked-after children to be captured. As well as exploring these views longitudinally, to offer an understanding of the impact of being in care over time.

**Method:** The views of 171 looked-after children, aged 10-14 years, collected via computerised self-interviewing technology (CASI), were analysed using a mixed method, longitudinal design. The surveys open-questions were analysed using thematic analysis. The themes and subthemes informed which of the closed-questions were explored using frequency tables and a repeated measures analysis, to investigate whether the children's responses changed over time.

**Findings:** The findings from the qualitative analysis revealed that some children felt frustrated with adults not listening, keeping them informed and being unreliable. Many children wish to return home - or at least increase contact with their family, many children miss their friends and home community, and expressed emotional distress as a result. Alongside these findings, there were children expressing positive achievements and experiences of being in care. In contrast, the quantitative findings were encouraging, revealing that over 80% of children express satisfaction with their placement, foster carer, and felt listened to. Over 70% expressed satisfaction with access to their social worker, friends, family and hobbies. Over half of the children reported minimal feelings of anger or frustration and were content with the amount of information they received. The longitudinal analysis showed that these views only slightly change over time, which is positive for those children reporting high levels of satisfaction, but it does suggest a number of children remain vulnerable throughout their time in care.

**Conclusion:** This study makes a valuable contribution to the knowledge base regarding using CASI to capture the voices of looked after children, as well as discussing the impact being in care has on these children over time.

I, Emily Johnson, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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**Table of contents**

# Chapter 1. Introduction

Chapter one provides an overview of the study. It also outlines the definition of a 'looked-after child' and then considers the legislation and guidance in relation to eliciting the views of looked-after children and involving them in the decisions made about their lives. The final part of this chapter argues that this practice can best be understood within the context of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969).

The children's views were gathered using Viewpoint Interactive, which is a computer-assisted, self-interviewing software package. Its purpose as an online survey, is to capture the voice, views, wishes and feelings, of vulnerable populations, to improve their wellbeing and the services provided for them (Davies, 2009). The study aimed to collate, analyse and share the views provided by looked-after children via Viewpoint CASI (from here on only referred to as Viewpoint), using both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Further longitudinal analysis was carried out, investigating whether the children's views changed as a consequence of their experiences of being looked after. Alongside an exploration of the children's views, was an evaluation of the effectiveness of using CASI technology, as an approach to capture the voice of the child. Finally, the study and implications were considered within an attachment theory framework (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016).

## 1.1 Definition of a looked-after child

The Children Act 1989 developed the term 'looked-after' to define the children and young people under 18 years of age who are subject to 'care orders', and those who are voluntarily accommodated by the local authority. The majority of such children become looked after as a result of abuse or neglect (60%) (Department for Education (DfE), 2016). Additional children become looked after due to family dysfunction, the absence of a parent to provide care, disability of a parent or child, or acute family distress (DfE, 2016). The majority of looked after children live with a foster carer (75%). The remaining children either live in residential homes, hostels or secure units, or in other settings (DfE, 2016).

Looked-after children and young people will be referred to as children from here onwards, all references refer to looked-after children unless stated otherwise.

**1.2 National and political context**

The Children Act 1989 was the first formal response which stated that children have the right to be heard, and have valuable information to share. Gaining the views of children in regards to their care situation is of high importance, and they have a right to be consulted when decisions are made about their lives. The Children Act 1989 stresses that the child's care situation should be reviewed at least every six months, and outlines what matters should be discussed and who should be consulted as part of the process. It is mentioned that one way of effectively establishing children's views is to involve them in these review meetings. The Children Act 1989 also states that research which facilitates the voice of the child is essential in helping inform policy.

The Children Act 1989 was one of the first main influences of the development of children's rights in the UK, along with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). UNCRC 1989 declares that children have the right to express their views freely in matters which impact upon them. The child should be given opportunity to be heard in all administrative and legal processing affecting them, either directly or through a representative. In regards to representatives, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 states that all local authorities are required to provide local advocacy services for children looked-after (Department of Health (DoH), 2002).

Furthermore, a number of government policies and initiatives have been developed which mention the importance of increasing the participation and involvement of children in the development, design and delivery of children's services. For example, The Quality Protects (DoH, 1998) initiative aimed to improve the involvement of children in three ways; through their involvement in the planning and reviewing the services provided for them, involving them in

decision making in regards to individual care, and ensuring that there was a suitable complaints system.

In 2006, the UK government's 'Care Matters' Green Paper acknowledged that more needed to be done to improve corporate parenting. The gap between looked-after children and their peers continues to widen. The Green Paper stated that this is unacceptable, and that urgent attention needed to be focused upon promoting positive change (DfE, 2006). The paper suggests that to achieve effective change, the views and experiences of looked-after children need to be listened to and incorporated into the development and delivery of services.

Cosser, Brandon and Jordan (2011) encouraged professionals to acknowledge the legislation and guidance and act upon it, so that children feel heard and are able to engage in the process of protection. Bell (2002) reports that following all the government initiatives, "no-one will now disagree that children have a moral and legal right to participation, protection and provision of services". However, what this means, and how this is operationalised in practice, is problematic. These issues will be explored throughout the current study.

## 1.3 Underpinning psychological theory

A number of researchers have argued that the literature on the views of looked-after children lacks a theoretical base (Berridge, 2007; Stein, 2006; Trinder, 1996). However, Holland (2009) reported that this view may be overstated or has simply become less true over time. In her systematic review she found that only six out of the 44 studies did not have a theoretical basis. She proposed that two of the main theories referred to in this research area were resilience theory and attachment theory. I decided to explore these two theories in detail, in order to establish whether either were appropriate in underpinning the current research.

During the research I came across Schofield and Beek's (2005) paper which suggested that resilience theory provides professionals with a framework for understanding mechanisms and processes across time. However, when exploring the theory and its application in more detail, I found that it was

characterised by an excessive number of definitions of what resilience is (Winkler, 2014). One of the current ways of defining resilience is in terms of a capacity to 'bounce back' from adversity and to have certain qualities of adaptation, although there did not appear to be a consistent view of what these qualities (also known as 'protective factors') might be, or how they can be developed. As a result, many practitioners working with looked-after children have found it difficult applying the concept of resilience to their work (Winkler, 2014). Fraser (1997) found that some social workers felt that the concept of resilience only applied to the psychology profession. Those who saw the value in the theory understood that it was associated with concepts such as self-esteem, competency, or self-efficacy, but they did not understand how resilience develops. Many researchers have agreed that the research on resilience has focused upon the importance of the concept, without explaining how to enhance it (Guest, 2012). Eisold (2005) mentioned that without a theory for how resilience develops, most existing resilience research is of limited use for practitioners. Not only did I establish that a number of practitioners have a limited understanding of how resilience develops, I also felt that due to my use of secondary data, I would not be able to measure the resilience of the current sample. I would only be able to identify whether certain protective factors appeared to be present for these individuals, but this exploration would also be limited by the questions asked in the survey.

Gilligan (2001) suggested that resilience theory is more beneficial than attachment theory, because it moves beyond early attachment experiences to consider the importance of other domains in which resilience may be fostered - such as education, talents and interests (Daniel & Wassell, 2002). However, Daniel (2006), Dent and Cameron (2003) felt that the need for a secure base and a significant adult acting as a confidante, offering consistent support and encouragement, underpins all the domains of resilience. Furthermore, Wyman, Cowen, Work, Hoyt-Meyers, Magnus and Fagen (1999) criticised resilience theory for causing social workers to rely upon the concept to reassure themselves of children's abilities to overcome disadvantage without fully understanding what support is needed in extreme adversity. It is reported by many researchers that attachment theory provides a framework for

understanding the types of support these children require (Atwoll, 2006). It is also thought to provide practitioners with a clearer explanation of how to develop resilience (South, Jones, Creith & Simonds, 2015). Additionally, I found that attachment theory was viewed by many researchers as the key theoretical perspective informing child involvement in decision making (Bowlby, 1973; Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). Therefore, it seemed a more appropriate theory to underpin the current research. However, limitations to the theory were considered.

Attachment theory suggests that it is an infant's instinct to carry out care seeking behaviour, which in turn encourages caregiving responses from adults. When a child consistently receives an appropriate response from an adult, a secure base is developed. This then enables a sense of survival and protection, and promotes an 'internal working model' upon which expectations of - and the capacity for - positive caregiving relationships depend. Children who are uncared for - or who receive unreliable caregiving - are likely to feel anxious, guilty and to lack a sense of security (Bowlby, 1969; South et al., 2015). Rutter (1981) explained that an 'unwanted child' will develop an internal working model of themselves as 'unworthy'. He suggested that these negative effects are likely to be heightened when a child experiences both separation from their attachment figure and a strange environment, a combination of factors common to children entering foster care.

However, this original theory of attachment (Bowlby, 1969) was criticised for suggesting that a difficult start in life is wholly predictive of poor outcomes later, leaving no room for positive change. It was also criticised for placing such an emphasis on the importance of the relationship between a child and their primary caregiver, causing mothers to feel guilty for needing to separate from their children to go to work (Slater, 2007). For example, Belsky and Rovine (1988) claimed that repeated separation between a mother and their child, may interfere with the development of a secure attachment relationship and lead to adverse effects. However, research has shown that children do not selectively attach to just one person, and that several selective attachments are common and often advantageous, particularly for children who are less securely attached to their

parents (Kontos, 1992).

It is felt that in practice, professionals mainly focus on the quality of one significant relationship, which is the one between a child and their foster carer, especially if their placement is a long distance from home (Masson, Harrison & Pavlovic,1997; Millham,1986). Yet, even Bowlby (1988) has developed the theory to state that attachment relationships do not exist in isolation, but develop within a broader context of family and group dynamics, moving the theory from one person to multi person psychology (Diamond & Marrone, 2003). Fromm and Maccoby (1970) agree that children can be understood only as part of an interactional web that involves families, social and cultural institutions. According to Kontos (1992), if children experience insecure attachments to parents, then having a range of secure relationships with non-parental figures may serve as a compensatory function for the insure relationship, thus being developmentally enhancing rather than disadvantageous.

Therefore, the current research considered a reconceptualised theory of attachment, which involves a wide range of significant relationships across a child's lifespan, including those with friends, professionals and romantic partners (e.g. Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kontos, 1992). It is thought that the broadening of attachment figures tends to take place during early adolescence (Allen & Land, 1999), which is the age of the current sample and therefore the research in this area was participially important to consider. This updated theory of attachment is particularly important for looked-after children, who often experience regular placement moves and breakdowns, which separate them from their primary caregiver (Gaskell, 2010) and therefore may benefit from multiple attachment figures to compensate for the loss (Kontos, 1992).

Some researchers have focused on the importance of helping a child develop their attachment to their foster carer, while also maintaining their attachment to their birth parents. Thoburn (1991) and Berridge (1997) believe that this will reduce feelings of loss and abandonment, which as a result will help them to develop new attachments (Colon, 1978; Lee & Whiting, 2007; Littner, 1975;

Tiddy, 1986). Similarly, ensuring children maintain an attachment to their siblings by placing them together - or encouraging regular contact - will reduce loss, provide a sense of continuity with family, and help to buffer the stress of being in care (Herrick & Piccus, 2005; Sholonsky, Webster & Needell, 2003). This research highlights how beneficial it is for many children to maintain relationships with both their birth family and foster family.

Hazan and Shaver (1994) discussed the important role of peers, particularly for adolescents. They explained that during their late childhood and early adolescence, most children begin to spend more time with peers and to seek support from them in order to feel secure. When a peer has consistently proven to be responsive in times of need, the secure base establishes itself by the internalisation of the knowledge that the peer will be available during times of distress. Within this model, parents are not abandoned as attachment figures, but they do move down the attachment hierarchy (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). However, it is thought that children who have experienced insecure attachments are more likely to prematurely select peers in order to fulfil their attachment needs (Freeman & Brown, 2001; Schneider & Younger, 1996). In Freeman and Brown's (2001) study, the majority of adolescents with insecure attachment styles selected a peer as their primary attachment figure. Therefore, it is very possible that looked-after children who have experienced insecure attachments to adults, may turn to peers for support, highlighting the importance of social access and reducing school transfers.

According to McMurray, Connolly, Preston-Shoot and Wigley (2011) adolescents claimed that they can be their 'real' selves with their friends, and that they view these relationships as important sources of emotional support. Their friendships appeared to be ongoing relationships that validated their self-worth. Contrastingly, they viewed professionals as transient figures, which made it difficult to feel comfortable opening up to them. Schofield and Beek (2005) reported that social workers only provided the minimum level of intervention outlined by statutory guidance and sometimes even less, and that this reinforced the view that they are transient. Alongside this, social workers believed that young people did not want to open up to adults. However, McMurray et al. (2011)

felt this was not the case, and actually these young people *did* want adults in their lives, particularly those adults whom they could attach to and seek emotional support from. This was only possible however, if the adults were consistent, reliable and thus not viewed as 'temporary relationships'.

Bell (2002) agreed that is it possible and helpful for children and professionals to build a meaningful attachment, which he named a 'secondary attachment'. Heard and Lake (1997) report two types of existing social worker and child relationships. These are firstly a 'supportive/companionable' relationship which encourages positive development, and secondly a 'dominant/submissive' relationship, which represents the reverse. Bell (2002) explained that children's needs are more likely to be met - and their outcomes improved - when the relationship with their social worker is a 'supportive/companionable' one. Heard and Lake (1997) claimed that this type of relationship is more likely to be effective in engaging and involving children in the looked after process. Bell (2002) agreed it is only within the context and security of a trusting relationship that children can absorb information, make informed decisions as to what their views are and how they are best represented, and be empowered to exercise their rights to participation.

Therefore, the theory associates the value of a long term relationship with the child's need for a secure base and continuity (Daniel, Wassell & Gilligan, 1999; Schofield & Beek, 2006). It is considered to take years for children to trust social workers enough to share their wishes and feelings, a process that should not be rushed (Schofield, 2005; Ward, 2008). Unfortunately, Heard and Lake (1997) suggested that the investment from social workers to develop a long-term relationship with children is not supported by their organisations. Ruch (2005) agreed that a positive child and social worker relationship leads to effective engagement, information sharing and support, and he described the relationship as the vehicle for the whole intervention. Yet, McLeod (2010) reported that social workers are insistent that direct work with children is a luxury that they have limited time for. It seems regardless of professionals' beliefs in the principles of attachment theory, they are often restricted by the demands from their organisations and may need to find other ways to ensuring children feel held in

mind without always being able to be physically present with them.

It seems children are capable of - and benefit from - multiple attachments to peers, family, foster carers and professionals, each serving their own function. Multiple attachments are not only important for looked-after children who often experience a separation from their primary attachment figure, but it is also a healthy, adaptive and natural process for all children during their adolescents (Laible, Carlo & Raffaella, 2000). During this time, all children start to seek attachments outside of their immediate family as they begin to rely less upon their primary caregivers and to seek independence, social support and eventually an attachment to a romantic partner. Attachment theorists have argued that having multiple secure relationships is more developmentally enhancing than having one (Howes, 1999). Therefore, professionals should consider the quality of all the children's relationships, not just the child-foster carer attachment.

One final attachment which receives little attention is place attachment. Place attachment is believed to consist of the feelings, meanings and memories associated with a physical surrounding, and forms part of a person's overall identity (Corbishley, 1995; Lalli,1992; Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983). Research with children showed that place, identity and wellbeing are closely linked (Day & Midbjer, 2007; Green & White, 2007; Irwin, Johnson, Henderson, Dahinten & Hertzman, 2007; Rowles, 1980).

According to Jack (2008), children who have been removed from their home and the area in which they lived, experience dislocation of the self, and this is often reported in terms of wanting to return to where they 'belong' and where their friends are. Research suggested that those who experienced repeated moves, tended to experience a sense of rootlessness and loss of identity (Coles, 1970). During life story work, social workers often focus upon the children's attachments to people. However, more emphasis needs to be placed on children's attachments to their home community, and to having discussions about the places that are the most important to them - and the role that these places play in their sense of self (Jack, 2008).

The current research therefore considered the traditional view of attachment theory in regards to exploring and understanding the importance of relationships between children and their primary caregiver, but it also moved beyond that and considered children's attachments to their birth families, peers, professionals and home communities. These were all seen as important sources of emotional support, and to be contributing to the child's sense of identify (e.g. Jack, 2008; Laible et al., 2000). However, the current research explored existing data collected via a predetermined set of questions. This therefore limited the extent that I could explore the children's range and quality of attachments. I was however, interested in seeing whether when given a general survey which asks about different aspects of being in care, to what extent did the children choose to discuss their relationships to significant people and places in their lives - and if so, what thoughts and feelings did they choose to share.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

Chapter two presents the literature review which provides a framework that forms the foundations underpinning this research. The aim of the review was to gather and explore material from books and journals in order to form a background against which the current research stands (Anderson & Arsenault,1998). Electronic journal searches were conducted through the following databases: PsychInfo, EBOSCO, PsycArticles, ERIC and Web of Science. Key search terms such as 'looked-after' or 'in care', and 'view' or 'voice', along with 'attachment' formed the basis of the database searches. Key search terms also included variations of the words according to the countries in which research was carried out. Studies were included if they were written in English and published after 1989, this date was chosen to reflect the publication of the Children Act 1989 which specified the importance of gaining the views of children and involving them in decision making processes. An additional search was also conducted in which key internet sites - including those of the Department of Education and various children's charities such as Barnardos - were also searched, and the references of key articles were examined.

The literature review is presented in four parts. The first part provides an exploration of the literature focused on gaining the voice of the child, specifically in regards to their views on: placement arrangements; independence; transitioning into care; information sharing; Children's Social Care; and contact with friends and family. The second part considers the literature in regards to the barriers in effectively gaining the voice of the child, and specifically draws attention to issues with: safeguarding; child and professional competence; the arrangement of the Looked-After Child review meetings and organisational restrictions. The third part critically examines the methods commonly used to gain the voice of the child both in research and practice, and specifically focuses upon: qualitative studies, mainly the use of semi-structured interviews with children; quantitative studies, mainly the use of postal surveys; child participatory research; and the use of computer assisted self-interviewing technology in research. All research discussed focuses solely on research which only includes the views of looked-after children. The final part outlines the rationale for the

current study, along with the research questions explored.

## 2.1 Research gaining the voice of the child

### 2.1.1 Children's views on their placement arrangements

Minnis and Walker (2012) found that children want to have more control over the decisions made in regards to their placement arrangements. This is a finding supported by numerous studies on the views of looked-after children (e.g. Golding, Dent, Nissim & Stott, 2006, Munro, 2011; Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2006; Sinclair, Wilson & Gibbs, 2005; Unrau, Seita & Putney, 2008). The children in Golding et al.'s (2006) research emphasised that placement decisions had such an impact on their lives, that their views should be considered. Unfortunately, Gaskell (2010) conducted a retrospective study with care leavers who reported that placement decisions were always made for them, regardless of their view. For example, some of them recalled being surprised when they were placed in a foster home after requesting a residential home, and vice versa. The author concluded that placing children according to the experience of the carer alone may be successful on a skills level, but including the views of the child can allow for a placement to be successful on an interpersonal level.

Sinclair and Wilson's research (2003), reinforced the point that placements are more successful when the child's view is taken into consideration. The children in their research emphasised that if they were given placement options to choose from, they would have been more motivated to make it work. However, due to a lack of involvement over their situation, they became disillusioned and felt the kind of care they needed was not available. The children in Butler and Charles' (1999) research mentioned that placements were often arranged in such a hurry, that when they were given a choice whether to move or not, they felt obliged to accept - and powerless to refuse - especially because they often had limited information about the alternative option.

Children in Sinclair, Wilson and Gibbs's (2001) research reported that they

needed more control over placement decisions, and more support was also needed from social workers following placement moves. However, they acknowledged that this is not always possible due to competing demands on workers' time. Munro (2011) agreed that social workers' inabilities to respond effectively to the individual needs of children is linked to issues such as large volumes of referrals, lack of social workers, poor social work retention rates, and time-consuming system processes.

In Holland, Folris, Crowley and Renold's (2010) research, care leavers described the impact that placement moves had upon their emotional wellbeing. They reported that they had so many moves, it became a "habit that they couldn't escape," and they found it difficult to settle each time. Cooper (2011) agreed that the experience of being separated from their birth family, along with multiple placement moves and the subsequent need to establish new relationships with foster carers each time, is likely to have a significant effect upon their wellbeing, ability to trust others, and development of interpersonal relationships. Gaskell's (2010) research supported this view with the finding that numerous placement moves had a negative impact upon children's abilities to form attachments. Some care leavers found that multiple moves meant that they did not have one significant adult who remained with them throughout their childhood. Additionally, some of them went through an emotional feeling of loss each time they moved foster homes, and over time they felt it was too emotionally difficult to form new attachments. They also reported that even when they built a bond with their carer, on-going contact after a move was discouraged, which heightened the sense of loss. This was a finding supported by Lee and Whiting (2007) and Ward, Skuse and Munro's (2005) research where the children reported only experiencing practical and emotional support from foster carers for a short while after the placement ended.

Despite government initiatives to encourage placement stability (DfE, 2006), the findings suggest that many children are experiencing multiple placement moves and a lack of support to maintain or form new attachments following these moves, which exacerbates the emotional impact upon these children and counteracts the evidence-based practice recommended by attachment theory,

and the importance of having a sense of permanence and belonging (Selwyn, Saunders & Farmer 2010). Packman and Jordan (1991) commented on the close dialogue which exists between policy makers and researchers. However, applying research in practice is not always easy. Berridge (2007) reported that within Children's Social Care services, some practice takes place without supporting evidence due to the context of austerity and issues with stability and retention in the workforce (Munro, 2011).

The importance of children having permanency and a secure sense of belonging was mentioned in numerous studies (e.g. Holland et al. 2010; Selwyn et al., 2010; Sherbert Research, 2009; Sinclair & Wilson, 2003). The children in Sinclair and Wilson's (2003) research reported that placements were less likely to breakdown if they felt cared for, part of the family, and respected as an individual. This was experienced by many of the children in Selwyn, et al.'s (2010) research. Their longitudinal study using questionnaires compared children's views on their placement over a year, and found that at both the start of their placement and a year later, the majority of the children felt safe in their foster home, and that they were cared for and treated the same as everyone else in the family. However, the authors along with Heptinstall et al. (2001) raised concern that research utilising questionnaires may be unrepresentative, due to the possibility that only the children experiencing positive outcomes would be motivated to complete the questionnaires. Additionally, despite promising a level of confidentiality, the children may have been worried that negative comments would be shared.

On the other hand, in an attempt to capture the 'hidden' views of children having potentially negative experiences of placement, Morris and Wheatley (1994) decided to analyse the phone calls made to ChildLine (a free 24-hour counselling service for children). The results revealed that some children expressed how hard it is to adapt to the lifestyle and values of their foster family, and that they did not feel they 'belonged' there. Similarly, in Mullan, McAlister, Rollock and Fitzsimons' (2007) research exploring the factors impacting the mental health of looked-after children, the children stressed that they do not feel 'at home' when they are at their placement, because in reality it was *not* their home. A number of

children reported feeling unattached to their foster parents, and situations such as family gatherings or respite care reminded them that they were 'different' and not fully part of the family. The children who were desperate to feel part of the family reported feeling 'hurt' and 'removed' during these times.

Overall, children appear to want to be involved in the decisions made regarding their placements. However, many children feel this is an area where they lack control (e.g. Gaskell, 2010; Minnis and Walker, 2012; Sinclair et al., 2001). Those who have been involved in the decision-making process, felt more motivated to make the placement work (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003). Furthermore, children felt regularly moving placement had a negative impact upon their emotional wellbeing and ability to form and maintain attachments (Gaskell, 2010; Mullan et al., 2007). Unfortunately, this finding suggests that despite attachment theory emphasising the importance of placement stability, in practice this is not always possible.

### 2.1.2 Children's views on their level of independence and sense of 'normality'

In regards to their day-to-day lives at their placement, a wide range of research has found that children wish for more freedom and control. For example, Morgan (2006) reported that children wanted more control over their bedtime, pocket money, visits from friends and sleepovers. Shaw's (1998) research produced similar findings that children's main placement issues were in regards to their bedtime, pocket money and freedom to go out. These issues were discussed further by the children in Thomas and O'Kane's (2000) research, where they reported that 'simple plans' were turned into complicated issues. For example, not being able to sleep over at a friend's house without their friend's parents being police checked (Blueprint Project, 2005), or foster carers being told to restrict certain foods because of food safety scares (McLeod, 2006), or missing school trips because they needed additional signatures on the permission slip. Some children appreciated that these restrictions existed to protect them, but felt they were extreme and unfair, and took away any sense of 'normality' (Thomas &

O'Kane, 1999). The children in Sinclair's (2005) study emphasised that it is important for them to be treated fairly, and have a similar experience to their non-looked after peers. One way children felt this could be improved is by allowing the majority of the daily decisions to be made by their foster carers, without having to check with Children's Social Care (Blueprint Project, 2005; Thomas & O'Kane; 1999; 2000; Timms & Thoburn, 2003).

Thomas and O'Kane (1999) found that when children start a new placement they have to 'suss' out the rules and boundaries, and if they feel they are being treated unfairly compared to their non-looked after peers, they negotiate and plead with adults to establish a fairer deal and 'push back the boundaries'. The impact of this was explored further in Mullan et al.'s (2007) research, where children reported that the new cultures, rules and boundaries they had to adjust to each time they moved, disorientateed them. Some of the children explained that behaviour which was very 'normal' to them in their family home, was perceived as 'challenging' in their placement context, and this was very difficult for them, especially in regards to their sense of identity. Therefore, some children felt that they should be 'cut a little slack' by carers (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003).

### 2.1.3 Children's views on the transition into care

Although children have voiced many challenges associated with placement restrictions and moves, they claimed the hardest transition and adjustment is the *first* one in which they become 'looked-after' (Mitchell, Kuczynski, Tubbs & Ross, 2010; Whiting & Lee, 2003). Most of the children in Leeson's (2007) research claimed that having no involvement in the process of becoming looked after made them feel frustrated and powerless because they did not understand what was happening. Equally, Thomas & O'Kane (1999) and Munro (2001) found that children who were moved without discussion or explanation, later reported having minimal confidence in their abilities to influence their future.

When Morgan (2009) asked children what would help the process of becoming looked after, a significant number of them said 'knowing what was happening'.

More than half of the children did not know they were going into care until it happened, which was a similar finding in Folman (1998) and Holland et al.'s (2010) research. These children emphasised that they wanted to know why they were being taken into care, how long they would be there, and what would happen while they were in care. The children in Winter's (2010) research were in agreement, and felt that a lack of information heightened pre-existing feelings of shock, sadness and guilt which were a result of becoming looked after, and is supported by numerous studies (e.g. Blueprint Project, 2005; Goodyer, 2016; Leeson, 2007; Mullan et al. 2007; Stanley, 2007) Shaw (1998) and Mitchell et al.'s (2010) research also agreed that children felt that becoming looked after was 'confusing' and 'scary', and that more information and reassurance would have helped reduce their stress.

One group of children felt that prior to transitioning into care, children should be given an information pack which tells them what is happening, what their legal rights are, and contains photos of their family (Blueprint Project, 2005). However, other children have explained that it is not just enough for them to be provided with information, they need it explained repeatedly until they understand exactly what is happening. Furthermore, they emphasised that the information should be honest and accurate, otherwise it can cause unrealistic expectations and mistrust of the adults who provide the information. Children wanted honest information, even if it was difficult to hear (Mullan et al., 2007).

Children not only wanted information about their first foster placement, but also information prior to each placement move. Children in Goodyer's (2016) research reported that the most organised and 'well planned' moves involved children receiving the information they wanted before the move, as well as an opportunity to visit the foster family beforehand. Schofield, Beek and Ward's (2012)
research agreed that small interventions can be very effective, for example one girl in their study was highly anxious about a placement move, but felt calmed by seeing a photo of her new foster carer. In contrast, there were children in Morgan's (2006) research who had 'sudden' moves without any prior information. The children felt that whether they had a sudden move or a well planned move

depended on whether they had a 'good' social worker, which again links to the research on the importance of the child and social worker relationship (McLeod, 2010).

Goodyer (2016) reported that collecting children from school and taking them to a foster carer without prior warning is clearly non-participatory social work practice. However, although not considered good practice, in reality it is not always possible to fully involve the child and prepare them in advance, especially during fast moving legal processes, where outcomes are difficult to predict and social workers are obligated to prioritise court decisions and the child's welfare over their wishes (Munro, 2011).

### 2.1.4 Children's views on information sharing

Not only did children want clear information at the entry point to care, they also wanted regular information about their care situation and their family. In some studies, this was highlighted as extremely important to them, and when information was not provided regularly, frustration was aimed at Children's Social Care (Shaw, 1998; Morgan, 2009). In Buchannan's (1995) research it was suggested by children that it is not always helpful for updates and information to come solely from social workers due to them not always being 'obtainable'. The children believed that foster carers should be given the role of regularly providing information to them, and children also reported feeling more comfortable receiving sensitive information from their foster carer than their social worker.

In regards to information sharing, a number of studies showed that children want to be informed and asked if information can be shared with others, and that they wanted to know exactly what information will be passed on - and to whom (Mullan et al., 2007). Some children angrily reflected upon times when their views were shared to their family or foster carer without their permission, which then caused problems in their relationships (Duncalf, 2010). Children wanted to know exactly what information would be 'confidential', and what would be passed on. Many children have reported feeling concerned about how little control they have over information sharing, and that they did not appreciate their foster carers

speaking to their social workers 'behind their back' (Blueprint Project, 2005). They also felt that because social workers may need to share information, the children themselves should have access to another adult that they can confide in with confidence, and that the information will not be shared without their permission (Munro, 2011). Some children expressed the impact that a breach of confidentiality had upon their trust and willingness to open up again (Mullan et al., 2007; Mainey, Ellis & Lewis, 2009). Children's Social Care appear to be faced with the challenge of sharing information to protect children's safety, but also wishing to protect their privacy, and in some cases a more effective balance may need to be achieved (Oliver, 2010).

### 2.1.5 Children's views on Children's Social Care

Further frustration was directed towards Children's Social Care in regards to their reliability and consistency (McLeod, 2006). Munro (2001) found that children wanted consistency with their social worker more than their placement. The children acknowledged that at times placement moves needed to happen, but they did not appreciate having a change of social worker. Holland et al's (2010) research on care leavers found that a change of social worker added to their high level of loss, and disrupted attachments with adults, especially if the social worker left suddenly without explaining why. This was likely to heighten their views of adults as untrustworthy, and themselves as unworthy (Rutter, 1981).

The findings from the Sherbert Research (2009) agreed with Rutter's theory (1981). The results revealed that children found it very difficult trusting social workers due to a lack of reliability, paired with the children's pre-care experiences of adults. They wanted social workers to be more reassuring during difficult times, and more available (Blueprint Project, 2005; McLeod, 2006). The children in Morgan's (2006) research expand on what 'more available' meant to them. They wanted to be able to have regular talks with their social worker, and felt that this would stop placement problems from escalating. This was further emphasied in Timms and Thoburn's (2003) research where they found that some children felt social workers were not accessible even when they had problems, and that this caused them to feel angry and frustrated. They felt that if their social

workers were not organised or reliable, it showed that the children were not important to them. Children want social workers to be easier to access, more effective, and to keep promises (Morgan 2006; Leeson 2007; McLeod 2007). They report that when their placement is going well, their social worker is a 'powerful ally' (Munro, 2001). Those who felt supported by their social worker, felt the system was 'looking after them' (Blueprint Project, 2005). Some children felt that because the social worker they have is so influential in the type of care experience they have, they should have a choice in who the social worker is (Morgan, 2006).

One of the key themes that seemed to be recurring in the research was the view that children did not feel listened to by adults (McLeod, 2006; Stevens and Boyce, 2006; Winter, 2010). Research on 225 children from seven local authorities found that they discussed a "societal context in which children are routinely not listened to, but adults expect their full attention" (Thomas & O'Kane, 2000). The Blueprint Project (2005) revealed that a sample of 15 children all valued their social worker, but felt they could improve upon their ability to listen. The results supported Sinclair's (1998) finding that "While social workers may think they are listening, children do not feel as though they are heard" (Sinclair, 1998). McLeod's (2006) research aimed to unpick this theme further by exploring communication between children and Children's Social Care. The results showed that social workers viewed listening as a receptive process, where they ensured they valued and respected the child's views. Children however, viewed listening as 'action', and claimed that if social workers did not action what they had spoken about, then they had not actually listened to them at all. This is an interesting finding because it showed how different children and social workers view this term, which will as a result impact upon their relationship and wellbeing (Holland et al., 2010).

### 2.1.6 Children's views on their contact arrangements with friends and family

One area children felt their views were not considered by their social worker, was in regards to their contact arrangements with friends and family (Buchanan, 1995; Timms & Thoburn, 2006). Timms and Thoburn's (2006) research found that 60% of the children in their study reported not seeing their fathers as much as they wanted, and 40% reported not seeing their mothers as much as they wanted. When children were asked "Looking forward, how would you like things to be different?," the main response was that children wanted to return home, or to increase family contact. In contrast, other research found some children wanted less contact. But importantly, either way children seemed clear what they wanted and yet unhappy with the arrangements (Morgan, 2009). Care legislation highlights the importance of maintaining links for looked-after children with family whenever possible (The Children Act, 1989), therefore Shaw (1998) questioned why children are not satisfied with their contact arrangements.

Munro (2001) found only two of the 15 children in their study were happy with their contact arrangements, and their involvement in the decisions regarding contact. Children wanted not only to be able to have a say in who they have contact with, but also for how long and the type of contact. For example, children wanted contact to be somewhere 'homely' - not in 'meeting rooms'. Children felt that Children's Social Care should be more able to consider what they want in relation to contact as long as it is safe (Morgan, 2009). Additionally, Timms and Thoburn (2006) found that children reported a high level of isolation and distress from limited family contact, and they questioned whether in modern day society - where so many people have such easy access to high speed communications through smart phones - is it really necessary for children to experience this level of distress?

Butler and Charles (1999) reported how becoming looked after is meant to be a positive 'fresh start' for children, but instead they reported an overwhelming desire to maintain and hold on to their existing social networks, which stops them from settling in their new environments. The children continued to view themselves as having a powerful bond with their birth family and friends, no matter how positive their substitute care was. Similarly, Mullun et al., (2007) and McAuley and Young (2006) also found that children emphasised how important

their family and social relationships were to them. They wanted to maintain a connection with parents, siblings, extended family and friends. Many of the children felt these relationships were important because they were individuals they they could talk to and trust. Therefore, it is not surprising children reported wanting to remain within their home community where their social networks exist (Network, 2004; Shaw, 1998).

Research suggested that many children felt leaving their home community and having to change schools had a negative impact upon their ability to maintain friends and their emotional wellbeing (Holland et al., 2010; Selwyn et al., 2010; Shaw, 1998; Timms and Thoburn 2006). The children in Morgan's (2006) research emphasised how important it is for them not to change schools, even when they have to change placement. The Fostering Network (2004) and Steven and Boyce (2006) revealed that some children felt that social workers do not see the importance in helping children maintain their relationships with family and friends, and this is reflected in the child's lack of satisfaction with contact arrangements (Horgan & Sinclair, 1997). However, there are children who acknowledged that it is difficult for Children's Social Care to provide each child with exactly the contact arrangements they want (Network, 2004). Interestingly, Morgan (2009) reported in his research that the children had mixed views about how helpful social workers were with arranging contact. Some children felt that their contact was seen as a priority, and others felt social workers did not give contact arrangements much of their time. Some children suggested Children's Social Care should have a team solely allocated to sorting and supporting contact arrangements (Blueprint Project, 2005), especially as the children recognised that their views on contact arrangements change often, and should therefore be reviewed regularly (Morgan, 2009).

Holland et al's., (2010) research acknowledged that once children became looked after, any thoughts they had about their family triggered a negative emotional reaction. Many care leavers mentioned that their families remained an important presence in their life during their whole childhood, whether it was a physical or emotional presence. This was supported in Winter's (2010) research where the children revealed that even after years of being in care, they still had

strong unresolved feelings of sadness, guilt, anger, worry and a yearning to be with their family. Others felt an extreme sense of loss from the breakdown, and a lack of control or 'normality' (Mullan et al., 2007). In contrast, other children reported a feeling of relief that that they no longer lived at home (Winter, 2010).

The literature review so far reveals a wide range of research which has gained the views of looked-after children, using a variety of different methods. However, there are many challenges associated with this research, which will be explored in the next section.

## 2.2 Barriers to gaining the voice of the child, and involving them in decision making

### 2.2.1 Issues with safeguarding children

One of the main barriers to involving children in decision making is safeguarding issues. McLeod (2006) reported that social workers felt they could not always action children's views because it might not be safe for the child. McLeod (2006) acknowledged that although legislation encourages the voice of the child, it is also clear that child welfare needs to be prioritised over their wishes (The Children Act, 1989). Schofield (2005) believed that allowing children the responsibility for big decisions when they are not developmentally ready is not sensible and 'a recipe for chaos'. This is supported by Holland et al's (2010) research, where a few care leavers mentioned that while they were in care they missed their family and longed to return home, but reflecting back as adults they realised that their parents could not care for them adequately and that social workers were right to override their wishes. However, in McLeod's (2006) research, children reported that social workers should not be able to override their wishes, and every time they did so, they got it wrong. This highlighted how difficult these decisions can be, and how challenging this issue is.

### 2.2.2 Issues with child and professional competence

In Thomas and O'Kane's' (1999) research, the children commented on how the disruptive nature of being in care impacted upon their ability to make appropriate decisions. They felt that being in stable placements makes decision making easier. One child mentioned that he was so preoccupied with thinking about home, that he was not able to think about moving forward until he accepted that he was not going home. In Leeson's (2007) research, the children reported a sense of helplessness from not being involved in decision making, but they also felt that if their views were sought, they would not have the skills to make sensible decisions, or to know who to trust to help them. One child felt so unequipped to making decisions that he believed it was best to let adults continue to do it for him. The other children felt that they should be given clear information and opportunities to practice scenarios in order to learn how to make good decisions.

Interestingly, the children's view of themselves as not prepared to make sensible decisions is reflected in the professional's perceptions. For example, Trinder (1997) and Dyche (2002) suggested that professionals often view children as having limited understanding and 'child-like logic'. The authors claimed, along with Shemmings (2000), that professionals with these views were unlikely to engage children in meaningful participation with the aim of co-constructing their world and wishes. However, Thomas and O'Kane (2002) argued that a child's level of competence is likely to depend upon how well prepared and supported they are by adults, as well as how much information is fully explained to them. Therefore, it is possible for adults to enable a child to develop their competence, which is what the children suggested in Leeson's (2007) research, although Munro (2001) found that social workers were less motivated to develop a child's competence when their views oppose their own.

In contrast, some researchers questioned the professional's competence. For example, Leeson (2007) queried whether social workers have the confidence to establish children's feelings and wishes because their training does not seem to focus on the communication skills needed to have these discussions with children. McLeod (2006) mentioned that is it seen as a key part of a social worker's role to support children to express and explore what could be difficult

feelings, but in reality they do not tend to make reference to a theoretical base, "..it just seemed to be taken for granted as practice wisdom." In Bell's (2002) research, children made comments that would support this finding. They reported that social workers do not know how to gain their views effectively, and that their approach is more 'invasive' and 'threatening'. Again this view is likely to vary based on the relationships between the child and the adult (McLeod, 2007).

### 2.2.3 Issues with looked-after child review meetings

One platform which is designed to involved children in decision making is Looked-After Children review meetings. Thomas and O'Kane (2000) found that more children are attending review meetings than research previously suggested. They discovered that children's attendance at these meetings was correlated with positive relationships with family and social workers.

Considering that review meetings are designed to include children as active participants, and to offer a platform for them to share their views (The Children Act, 1989), it is disappointing that children still do not feel comfortable to express themselves in these meetings (Morgan, 2009). Munro (2011) found that some children were having no difficulty sharing their views in review meetings, and others felt helpless in doing so. The children felt that sometimes their views were simply dismissed by the adults with no understanding why; their concerns were not always acknowledged; agreed actions were not always actioned; and their views were not sought in regards to 'big' decisions. Furthermore, Sherbert Research (2009) reported that children felt review meetings were too formal, and in Buchanan's (1995) research, children reported that the meetings can include too many people - and that this made them feel intimidated. Equally, Morgan (2006) found that children were not comfortable expressing themselves in front of people they did not know. Children felt it is helpful to discuss their views with their foster carer beforehand, and the carer can then adopt an advocate position in the meeting, or support them to share their view (Buchanan, 1995).

### 2.2.4 Issues with organisational restrictions

Furthermore, even when social workers are highly motivated to gain the views of children and involving them in the decision making process, they become restricted by demands and pressure from their service. Munro (2011) reported that the demands of social workers' jobs cannot be underestimated. Pairing this with a high turnover in their staffing makes it hard to invest the time it takes to build relationships with children - and effectively gain their trust and views (Schofield, 2005; Ward, 2008). McLeod (2006) reported that when social workers are "run off their feet," it is quicker and more straightforward to make decisions *for* children, rather than focusing on building a relationship where decisions can be made jointly. Leeson's (2007) research provided us with an insight as to how this could be perceived by children. The children reported that the social workers did not care about the children they were allocated, they were more concerned with paperwork, fulfilling obligations that the children were unaware of, and of being seen to do 'something'.

Finally, researchers reported how difficult it can be to gain the views of looked-after children (Farmer & Lutman 2010; Leeson 2007; McLeod 2007). Leeson (2007) aimed to carry out research gaining the views of children's experience of care, but found negotiating with the gatekeepers of Children's Social Care services challenging. Out of the ten services he contacted, some refused to take part because they did not see the research as relevant. Others did see the relevance, but felt that the research may further impact upon the children's emotional wellbeing, and some felt that the children were too vulnerable and needed protecting. Kirby and Gibbs (2006) reported that not letting children express their views in research is being overprotective and counterproductive. They highlighted how important it is to challenge this view, and encourage these gatekeepers/professionals to view children as capable participants.

### 2.3 Evaluation of the methods used to gain the views of children in research and practice

### 2.3.1 Critique of the qualitative research

Within the literature, a variety of research methods have been adopted. With qualitative interviews being the most common (e.g. Gaskell, 2010; Leeson, 2007). Wengraf (2000) claimed that data collection via semi-structured interviews is the most appropriate way to gaining the respondent's own voice. Goodyer (2016) reported that although this is a valuable approach, it can be difficult to collate and report data if children have discussed different topics and expressed varied views. In Gaskell's (2010) research, this difficulty was further added to because the children did not give permission to have their views recorded. Therefore, Gaskell (2010) took notes throughout the interviews, which could have led to her missing important information. Gaskell (2010) mentioned asking the children to pause - to allow her time to write - when she felt a point was important. This could not only interrupt their flow, but there could also be an element of researcher bias if she was choosing which information is important to write rather than the child. Despite this limitation, she concluded that the views she gained offered significant political importance, even with a small sample group. However, Heptinstall et al. (2001) reported that when samples are small, they should be considered as providing 'tentative' evidence of experience, rather than offering conclusive insights.

The majority of the qualitative interviews included in this review are small scale, which raises the question of representativeness (Heptinstall et al., 2001). However, when gaining the voice of the child, Munro (2001) expressed that whether these samples are representative or small scale, their individual views matter. Barnes (2007) further supported this idea, by saying the aim of his research was not to gain a representative sample, but to gain an in-depth understanding of the child's views and experiences. A number of researchers compared their findings to the large scale research, and felt that they are relatively consistent, despite different sample sizes (Chapman, Wall & Barth, 2004; Selwyn et al., 2010).

Thomas and O'Kane (1998) acknowledged that using a qualitative approach when researching looked-after children is important for ethical reasons. They

reported that research with children can create a moral dilemma because they are generally "less powerful than the researcher". Munro (2001) agreed, and reported that children are often asked by their social worker whether they would like to take part in research, with the power imbalance making them feel they have little choice. Munro (2001) further highlighted that often the samples are selected by social workers, which carries a risk of bias, because it is possible they would choose children who are the most articulate or the least likely to be critical. Nonetheless, researchers found adopting an unstructured approach reduces the power imbalance as far as possible, by allowing the children to direct the discussions (Goodyer, 2016; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998).

Mullan et al. (2007) and Barnes (2007) reported that not only are in-depth interviews the most appropriate method to use for this type of research, but it is important to utilise interactive material to encourage the discussions. Many of the researchers have adapted their interview method to accommodate age, language skills and attention of the children. For example, this may include offering children the option to write, talk or draw their responses (e.g. Christensen & James, 2000; Goodyer, 2016; Hazel, 1995; Punch, 2002; Thomas & O'Kane, 2000).

Although it is suggested that qualitative in-depth interviews are the most appropriate method to use, Selwun et al. (2010) questioned some of the findings when they noticed that in one study there was a higher level of dissatisfaction reported by children in a questionnaire following positive interviews. Ward et al. (2005) questioned whether the power imbalance between the child and the researcher during the interviews impacted upon the child's ability to express what they were really feeling.

### 2.3.2 Critique of the quantitative research

The second most commented research method used is postal surveys. Some researchers have included a survey in the Who Cares? magazine which is distributed to all looked-after children. This method has allowed the researchers

to run large scale studies (e.g. Barnados, 2006; Fletcher, 1993; Timms & Thoburn, 2003, 2006). Although specific return rates could not be calculated as it is unknown how many children actually received the magazine, significantly high response rates to the surveys and questionnaires have nonetheless been received.

Holland (2009) reported that survey data has advantages in that it does provide broad trends, but the pre-defined rating scales do not provide an opportunity for children to describe what concepts mean to them, nor explore the nuances in individual cases. Although this is a limitation, the surveys included in this review have open text boxes to allow children an opportunity for unstructured replies and to expand or explain their responses to the structured tick boxes (Timms & Thoburn, 2003; 2006). Timms and Thoburn (2003) also commented that an advantage of postal surveys is that the samples are not preselected. Instead they are self-selective, which means children have chosen to share their views and experiences of being in care. However, in contrast, Heptinstall et al, (2001) expressed that the children that return these surveys are likely to be those who have a good experience of placement, possibly making the results biased. Timms and Thoburn (2006) acknowledged that they cannot know how much involvement or influence foster carers have had on the children's responses, although they felt the style of writing - mobile text language - and spontaneity of expression would suggest the responses came from the children themselves.

### 2.3.3 Critique of child participatory research

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), not only do children have the right to be consulted on decisions made about their lives, but it is also their right to be involved in research. However, Warming (2006) reported that children in foster care are rarely included in research. Instead, the research often involves retrospective views from care leavers, or the views of those supporting looked-after children, for example foster carers or social workers. When children are included in research, it is often solely designed and directed by the researcher and therefore focused upon answering specific questions which may not be of any interest or importance to the children

themselves.

Warming (2006) mentioned that one of the barriers to child participatory studies is the social worker's view that many of these children are too vulnerable to be involved in the research, let alone contribute to the process. Warming (2006) opposed the view that involving children in research will increase their vulnerability, and instead reported that it will provide them with a sense of empowerment. Furthermore, such involvement can develop their sense of identity and confidence (Eide & Winger, 2005; Kinney, 2005).

According to Holland, Renold, Ross and Hillman (2010), within the literature there appears to be a continuum of existing participatory research involving looked-after children, with researchers using a variety of different approaches to include children in the process. Firstly, some researchers claim that research is participatory simply because children have been asked to take part and offer their perspective, but the process itself has solely been developed by the researchers. Others reported that offering adapted 'child friendly' methods of collecting data is participatory. For example, having the choice to draw or take photos (e.g. Christensen & James, 2000; Goodyer, 2016; Hazel, 1995; Punch, 2002; Thomas & O'Kane, 2000). More so, some researchers have taken it a step further and offered children the opportunities to be involved in the research design or analysis (e.g. Warming, 2006). Finally, some researchers trained children to formally conduct research themselves (e.g. The Blueprint Project, 2005). Each level of participation has advantages, such as increasing the children's sense of empowerment, but alongside this is an increase in the challenges (Holland, et al., 2010). Gallagher and Gallagher (2008) reported that researchers often suggest that their research is participatory and therefore better than other research, but in fact for ease, most of the research has been designed and managed by the researchers. Therefore, when considering the findings and implications of participatory research, it is important to consider the true extent of the child's participation, as well as to acknowledge the facilitators and barriers that are attached to this type of research (Holland et al., 2010).

Unrau et al. (2008) expressed that research has not effectively gained the voice of the child if it was fully directed by adults and does not involve children in the research design. A greater level of child participation is particularly prevalent in The Blueprint Project (2005), where children were trained and encouraged to completely take control of the research, develop it and make it meaningful to them. The children interviewed each other and reported back on the findings to support the development of services. Carr (2004) believed that this level of child participation is the way to effectively improve the quality of services provided to children.

Other researchers developed and directed the majority of their research, but did at least seek advice from the children to informing future research. For example, Leeson (2007) asked the children at the end of their interviews to provide any feedback for improvement, which then informed the questions asked in future interviews. Other researchers such as Mullan et al. (2007) and Barnes (2007) sought input from The Advisory Children Group to help them develop their research design, which they felt ensured the children were kept at the centre of the study (although once they had sought advice, the researchers then took control of the implementation of the research and the analysis). Some researchers believed that children should be involved in the analysis and dissemination of the research, and others found that this came with too many challenges (Holland et al., 2010).

Holland et al. (2010) conducted participatory research which involved children being offered a variety of different means and media in order to explore any aspect of their lives. A selection of the children were then also involved in the analysis and dissemination of the findings. Holland et al. (2010) felt that the young people in general tended to share more intimate experiences or personal perspectives because of the variety of mediums in which to communicate through. Renold and Ross (2008) agreed that allowing children to provide their own visual data gives richer insights into their everyday routines, worlds, relationships and sense of self, thus providing more valuable data. However,

when considering how to involve children in the analysis, Holland et al. (2010) reported that due to issues with confidentiality, they could only allow children to review themes related to their own data. This meant that the children could not be involved in identifying the connections and disconnections between their experiences. This also had implications for disseminating the findings. The researchers needed to restrict the use of some material as participants might be able to identify each other's data, some of which was highly personal. Additionally, when children were offered transcripts to read and analyse, they quickly became bored and some children became distressed when reading sensitive information they had provided. Once completing the research, Holland et al. (2010) concluded that despite some of the difficulties with child participatory research, the advantages still outweigh the disadvantages, and they therefore encourage others to conduct this type of research.

Thomas and O'Kane (1998) agreed that child participation is of high importance, and that when research involves direct contact with looked-after children, it is ethically important to involve them in the research process. This in turn will enhance the value of the findings. Giving children control over the research methodology will help it to align with how they see the world, which is of significant importance when exploring their views. However, although many researchers agree with Thomas and O'Kane (1998) some report that there is no evidence to suggest that child participation makes research better or more valuable, it is simply just different (Smith, Monaghan & Broad, 2002).

### 2.3.4 Research using CASI

More recently, some researchers have moved away from the traditional methods of using surveys and interviews to gaining children's views, towards a new method of Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing (Barrett, Dent & Rogers, 2011).

Tourangeau and Yan (2007) mentioned issues with using surveys to collect sensitive information due to fear of embarrassment or concerns with confidentiality. They found that asking sensitive questions in surveys increased

item non-response rates. They suggested this issue may be reduced if the surveys are conducted using computerised methods. Their hypothesis was supported by research from Newman, Des Jarlais, Turner, Gribble, Cooley and Paone, (2002) who found that CASI systems did elicit increased reporting of 'stigmatising behaviour' compared to interviews.

Morgan and Fraser (2010) researched Viewpoint CASI systems used to collect the views of looked-after children, and found that they felt more comfortable sharing difficult experiences because the privacy of the approach was seen as non-threatening compared to face-to-face interviews. Therefore, possibly accessing the more sensitive views of children which previous survey data was unable to do (Timms & Thoburn, 2006). However, Barrett et al (2011) took this research further by including a control group to compare the children's views collected via a paper survey and a computerized Viewpoint survey. Although the sample size was small, they were able to conclude that children were more likely to disclose greater information about difficulties using Viewpoint compared to the paper survey condition (which had a lower response rate). Furthermore, the feedback from the children in the Viewpoint condition highlighted the benefit of being provided regular opportunity to play games throughout the survey to keep them motivated, as well as suggesting the survey length be kept to a minimum.

Davies and Morgan's (2005) research supported Barrett et al.'s (2011) findings that children value the regular breaks to play games. Additionally, the interactive aspect allowed the children to have the questions read out to them via earphones which supports reading difficulties which has been an issue reported with paper questionnaires (Couper & Rowe, 1996), although Johnson, Fenrch and Mackesy-Amiti (2009) suggested that less accurate reporting may occur for those children who have low levels of computer literacy. Furthermore, Morgan and Fraser, (2010) also acknowledged the benefit of the interactive and stimulating format, which includes questions using colourful and interesting graphics. The process was also made personal by incorporating the child's name into questions. Davies and Morgan (2005) found that children benefitted from these features, it made the surveys more interesting and the process helped to give them the confidence to say what was important to them. They concluded

that the enjoyable and engaging approach may help to gaining the views of more 'hard to reach' children.

Morgan and Fraser's (2010) research included an investigation into Children's Social Care's views on the use of Viewpoint, and compared these views to those of the children. They found that most of the children had an expectation that the views they provided via Viewpoint would be acted upon, which is worrying considering the Children's Social Care managers reported uncertainty with how these views informed their practice. Axford (2008) reported that it is common for needs assessments to be carried out with children with a level of enthusiasm, and then for the information to simply 'sit on a shelf'. Morgan and Fraser (2010) found that generally, the managers were unaware whether - or how - the data collected could contribute to their policy development. They concluded that Children's Social Care are "..holding an evidently powerful resource in their hands," but how they utilised the resource is restricted by organisational constraints.

Davies and Morgan (2005) are enthusiastic about the usefulness of the system, but feel more research needs to be conducted to help encourage its use. Barrett et al.'s (2011) research found that it is a useful tool that could improve the practice of not only Children's Social Care, but also educational psychologists. The authors recommended future research could utilise the method to carry out longitudinal studies. The limited research using this method is surprising considering that in some local authorities data is being collected continuously and thus gathering rich, valuable information on the views of children in care (Davis & Morgan, 2005). Additionally, due to the consistency of data collected over time, there is scope to carry out a rare longitudinal analysis of the views of these children.

**2.4 Rationale for the current study**

As Barrett et al. (2011) explained, there is minimal research exploring children's views via Viewpoint. The research that does exist mainly focuses on evaluating

the effectiveness of the approach and less so on the voice of the child in regards to their care experience (Barret et al., 2011; Davies, 2009; Davies & Morgan 2005; Morgan & Fraser, 2010). Therefore, more research needs to be carried out on the usefulness of this method. But even more importantly, using the existing data collected in local authorities too, to ensure these children's voices are listened to and show that their views do matter.

Furthermore, Barrett et al. (2011) highlighted the need for longitudinal research to be carried out using Viewpoint, which is the unique characteristic of this study. The fact that there are no published longitudinal studies using this method is surprising, considering some local authorities have been collecting children's views via Viewpoint for years (Morgan & Fraser, 2010). Additionally, it appears across all the research on looked-after children, that longitudinal research is limited due to difficulties gaining consistent access to this population (Fernandez, 2007). However, the ongoing use of Viewpoint in the two local authorities where I was a trainee educational psychologist, allowed for this rare analysis to be carried out.

The majority of research on the views of looked-after children is retrospective or cross sectional, however longitudinal research has the advantage that it can capture developmental sequences and measure the impact of care over time (Fernandez, 2007). More longitudinal research is needed to help understand the impact of being in care (Leslie, Hurlburt, Landsverk, Rolls, Wood & Kelleher, 2003). There are contrasting views in the literature, Birch (2005) stated that the poor outcomes of looked-after children is being blamed on their care experience, and Stein (2006b) agreed that the poor outcomes faced by this population result from their difficult pre-care experience, as well as a failure of the care system to compensate for these difficulties. In contrast, The Department of Education (2006) claimed that being in care can transform the lives of these children and provide them with good life chances. Therefore, Woodler (2011) suggests that to fully understand the impact of being in care, more research needs to follow these children over a long period of time. This will enable a clearer understanding of what can bring about positive change and improved outcomes for these children. The current research aimed to unpick this debate further and gain an

understanding of the impact of being in care. But solely from the perspective of the children, in order to ensure their voice is prominent.

Therefore, the current research aimed to utilise a method which enabled a unique longitudinal approach to understanding the experiences of looked-after children over time. It was hoped that the findings will add to the existing limited evaluations on the use of Viewpoint, as well as informing policy development and the professional practice of not only social workers and foster carers, but also educational psychologists who are even less aware of this programme.

### 2.4.1 Research questions

The research explored the following questions:
1. Is Viewpoint an appropriate method for gaining the voice of the child?
2. What are the experiences of children in care?
3. Are the children's views consistent over time?
4. Does attachment theory help to understand the experiences of looked-after children?

# Chapter 3. Methodology

Chapter three includes details of the current research design, including the epistemological and mixed method approach. It then goes on to explain the measure used, the data collection process, relevant ethical considerations, the sample and participant characteristics, the quantitative and qualitative data analysis process, and the current hypothesis.

## 3. 1 Research Design

### 3.1.1. Epistemological and methodological approach

The approach adopted within this research is one of pragmatism (Burke Johnson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003;). The common mutually exclusive paradigms generally adopted in research include positivism and interpretivism. Pragmatism rejects these contrasting epistemological stances and their beliefs that quantitative and qualitative methods are incompatible (Burke Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Pragmatism claims that research can integrate multiple approaches and strategies within the same study. This is due to the recognition that there are a number of ways of interpreting the world and undertaking research, that no single point of view will ever provide the entire picture, and that there are likely to be multiple realities. Pragmatism judges the value of research on how effective it is in addressing the research problem. Therefore, it prioritises achieving this in the most appropriate way, above adhering to a particular paradigm or method (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

By adopting this approach within the current research, I was free to study what I felt was interesting and valuable in the way I deem appropriate (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Therefore, pragmatism provides a philosophical foundation for mixed methods research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

### 3.1.2 Mixed methods design

Broadly speaking, mixed methods research is considered the combination of quantitative and qualitative research (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989), and its main principle is that the combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach could achieve by itself (Creswell & Creswell, 2005). While some researchers consider the two methods incompatible, it has been argued by others that they are complementary, and together can produce more detailed findings (Burke Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Silverman, 2000; Twiddy, 2006). Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) claimed that mixed methods are superior to single approach designs because they are better able to answer research questions which single methodologies cannot, they allow the opportunity to report a greater range of divergent views, and they provide stronger conclusions.

The current research questions were explored using survey data. A survey is an investigation of the opinions or experience of a group of people, based on a series of questions (Fowler, 2013). Within the literature, the use of surveys is generally considered a quantitative methodology (Wang, 2014). Most definitions of surveys within research methods books tend to comment upon their numerical and statistical characteristics, and acknowledge the approach as a quantitative strategy which is not suitable for exploratory qualitative research (Andres, 2012; Jansen, 2010). However, the use of qualitative elements in surveys has more recently been considered by researchers, with some questioning whether they can have a place within an approach traditionally focused on providing representative and generalisable findings (Wang, 2014).

Robson and McCartan (2016) explained that one of the reasons why surveys are unlikely to include open ended questions is because coding the responses from large scale samples is an ineffective and inefficient use of time. However, they did consider that when surveys are drawing upon smaller samples, it may be worthwhile to use a qualitative approach to engage in an inductive exploratory analysis. Wang (2014) mentioned that a shift towards more data collected via the internet may increase opportunities to include qualitative elements in survey research. She reported that research methods are continuously developing, and that we have come to a point where qualitative parts of survey research are seen

as valuable tools in aiming to answer research questions. Andres (2012) agreed that surveys should not be limited to quantitative research, but can include qualitative components – would then makes it possible to conduct a mixed method design. Within the current research, the use of the data collected by an online survey has allowed for an efficient use of qualitative elements, and enabled a more inductive exploratory analysis to take place.

The Viewpoint survey utilised in the current research consisted mostly of closed-questions, but includeed a number of open-ended questions. The use of open-ended questions in surveys has been controversial, for two main reasons, to do with time and effort to analyse the data and the generalisability of the answers. However, on the first of these, Erikson and Kaplan (2000) noted "Their current limited use in survey research appears to be more of an artefact of the greater time, cost, and difficulty of coding and analysing responses to open-ended questions than to serious flaws in the method itself" (p.831). Geer (1991) was rather dismissive of this difficulty: "Such pragmatic concerns are important, but the crucial issue should be whether open-ended questions provide important insights about public opinion" (p.360). However, it is the development of software to support the analysis of large number of textual data that has made this analysis more feasible.

The second criticism is more difficult: are the answers given to open-ended questions representative of the whole population? Much research has shown that responses to open questions are often more negative in tone than responses to closed questions (e.g. Borg & Zuell, 2012). This would seem to undermine one of the arguments for 'triangulation' of qualitative and quantitative data, namely that the qualitative data can 'illustrate' the reasons for the quantitative data: "Although triangulation is often perceived as an approach for obtaining convergence (i.e., agreement from different methods), there is a possibility that information obtained using different methods will produce conflicting or inconsistent results" (Poncheri & Thompson, 2007). However, this inconsistency may not be a criticism of this type of data. Instead, open-ended questions may reflect "important concerns of respondents" (Geer, 1991). They thus provide a different kind of data.

Responses to open-ended questions may not be typical or representative, but they reveal important issues for those who respond: "…because the topics covered by free-text comments are determined by individual respondents, it cannot be assumed that an issue raised by one respondent is not important to others who did not raise it. …Because of the unrepresentative and self-selected nature of free-text comments, any findings emerging from the comments section of the questionnaire are not generalisable to the study population, unlike the rest of the data" (Garcia, Evans & Redshaw, 2004: 122). So in this sense the comments are not 'generalisable', as the respondents are self-selecting: "Findings from such free-text comments cannot therefore be used to estimate the prevalence in the population" (Garcia et al., 2004). Therefore, the results cannot be used to carry out a statistical analysis, nor perhaps to explain the quantitative data, but they do have their own important role. In the next section I explain how the quantitative and qualitative data will be integrated together. Creswell and Clark (2007) argued that simply conducting a quantitative and qualitative analysis does not necessarily make a design mixed method. What is important is how the two approaches are integrated together in order to provide insights into a more in-depth understanding of phenomena.

### 3.1.3 Structure of the study

The current study aimed to move away from the view that survey research is a quantitative strategy (Robson & McCartan, 2016), to a more pragmatic view that it can include qualitative elements, making the approach worthy of exploratory analysis and more useful for answering the current research questions (Andreas, 2012; Jansen, 2010). Mixed method approaches can be categorised by both the order and dominance which is given to each aspect of the methodology (Creswell, 2014). For example, in this research the qualitative and quantitative data was collected together via one survey, but the qualitative data was analysed initially and independently and then informed which closed-questions were analysed and reported in order to complement or contrast the qualitative results. As such, this represents a triangulation design, which is the most common and

well-known approach to mixing methods (Creswell, Clark, Gutmann & Hanson, 2003).

The aim of the triangulation design is to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic, to best understand the research problem (Morse, 1991). This design has been discussed extensively in the literature as an approach adopted when researchers want to directly compare and contrast quantitative statistical results with qualitative findings, or to validate or expand quantitative results with qualitative findings (e.g., Greene et al., 1989; Jick, 1979; Morse, 1991). The purpose of using this design is to bring together the different strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses of quantitative methods - such as large sample sizes, trends and generalisation - with those of qualitative methods, such as small samples, detail and depth (Patton, 1990).

The triangulation approach has four variations which are presented in Figure 1. In Figure 1, *a* is a general example of a triangulation model, *b*, *c*, *d* and *e* are specific variants of the triangulation model. The four variants include *b* - the convergence model, *c* - the data transformation model, *d* - the validating quantitative data model, and *e* - the multilevel model. Models *b* and *c* differ in regards to how the two data types are merged, either during the interpretation or the analysis stage. Model *d* is used to enhance findings from a survey, and model *e* is used to explore different levels of analysis. Therefore, model *d* was the most appropriate method to use in the current research. Researchers tend to use *d* – the validating quantitative data model when they want to validate and expand upon the quantitative findings from a survey, by including some open-ended qualitative questions (Creswell, 2006). Creswell (2006) explained that when using this model, the researcher will collect both types of data within one survey instrument, however the survey is seen as mainly a quantitative approach, with a few qualitative items 'added on'. Thus, the qualitative findings do not tend to provide a rigorous qualitative data set, but they do provide some interesting findings that can validate or elaborate the quantitative results

However, the current research adopted a pragmatic approach that believes qualitative data is equally as valuable as the quantitative results from a survey,

and in the current study the qualitative data seemed more appropriate to address the research question "What are the experiences of children in care?". Therefore, I adapted the validating quantitative data model to a validating qualitative data model. In this study the quantitative data wass used to validate or expand upon the qualitative findings from the survey. I felt the qualitative data analysis should be conducted first, due to the literature consistently agreeing that qualitative approaches allow children more of an opportunity to speak for themselves on their own terms in research, and allows them more freedom to provide an in-depth understanding of their experiences (Barnes, 2007; Christensen & James, 2000;). Additionally, the quantitative data analysis wass also more appropriate for answering the research question "Are the children's views consistent over time?" due to change or consistency being more effectively measured using a numerical, statistical approach. The *qualitative* findings helped to understand the context surrounding these results (Wang, 2014).

Some of the advantages of the triangulation model were considered. The design makes intuitive sense (Jick, 1979), and it is an efficient design due to both types of data being collected at the same time. The responses to the open and closed-questions can also be analysed independently using separate methods that are the most appropriate for the data type (Creswell & Clark, 2007). However, one of the disadvantages of this model is that the aim is convergence, and therefore researchers at times have to face the question of what do to when the results do not agree (Creswell & Clark, 2007). This was a challenge in the current research, which is discussed in detail in Chapter five.
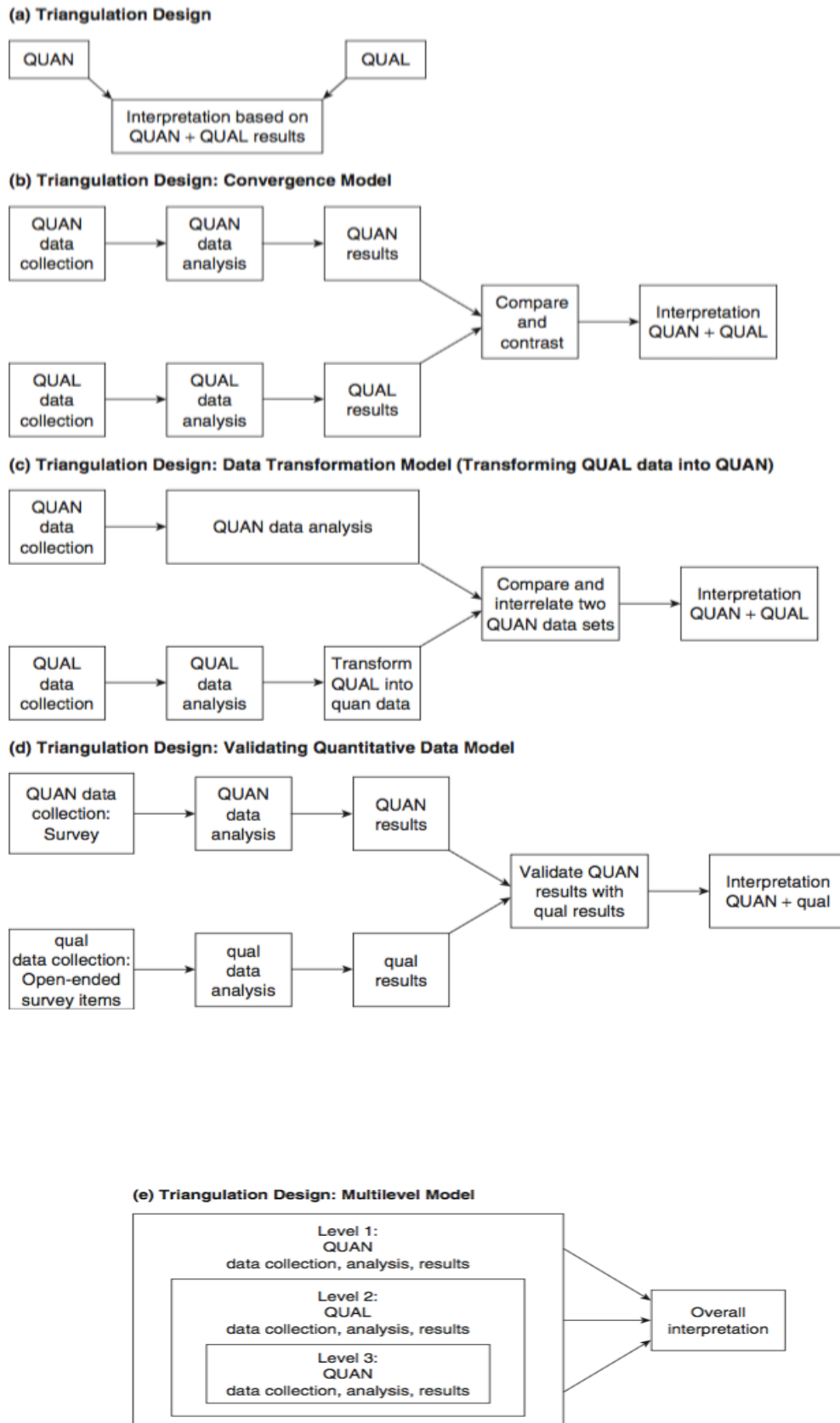
*Figure 1: Four variations of the triangulation model (Creswell & Clark, 2007)*

## 3.2 Measure

### 3.2.1 Viewpoint Interactive – CASI technology

The research findings were obtained using secondary data collected via Viewpoint Interactive. Viewpoint is an audio, computer-assisted, self-interviewing software package that has been used in over 130 local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland since 1995 (Performance & Research Team, 2007). According to the director of The Viewpoint Organisation, the software was set up to improve communication with young people in care. Its purpose is to capture the looked-after child's voice, views, wishes and feelings, and to improve their participation in the decisions made about the services provided for them (Davies, 2009). According to the Viewpoint Officer based at the two local authorities where *this* research takes place, the Viewpoint Interaction system is used to consult with young people in care, providing them with the opportunity to contribute their views prior to their Looked-After Child Review meeting.

Viewpoint is an interactive survey tool, delivered on a computer, laptop or tablet with internet access. All the written text that appears on the screen is read out loud by animated characters, and this is a feature of the software that can support those with reading difficulties. Many laptops and tablets additionally offer a microphone function which converts the user's speech to text, and additionally the Viewpoint Officer may offer to type for the child with literacy difficulties - although this would impact upon their level of privacy. The children can choose from a selection of animated characters, and from a selection of animated and colourful screen backgrounds. The software also offers time-limited breaks for the child to play computer games in order to maintain overall engagement (see Figure 2 for example) (Butler, 2006).

*Figure 2: Example of Viewpoint CASI*

### 3.2.2 Looked-after children 10-14 years Interactive Survey

According to Davies (2009) and Butler (2006), some advantages of using an interactive online survey include: the ease and speed with which the looked-after children population can be reached; the children have more time and less pressure to consider their own circumstances; the enhanced sense of privacy and thus increased disclosure of sensitive or 'embarrassing' information (Morgan & Fraser, 2010; Newman et al., 2002); decreased fatigue or respondent error, and the ability to engage children in more complicated surveys, thus providing richer data than other self-report approaches (Tourangeau & Smith, 1996).

The current survey was first implemented by the two local authorities in 2005. According to the Viewpoint Officer, the survey was developed in a working group, which consisted of herself, Independent Reviewing Officers, Child Protection Chairpersons, Children in Care Council members, social workers and the Youth Service Operations Manager. The Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004) policy was used as a framework to help choose appropriate questions. The survey covers the child's perception of their health, education, emotional and behavioural development, identity and self-image, family and social relationships, social presentation, self-care skills, a review of their care plan, placement arrangements, contact arrangements, and complaints. Four different surveys were developed to ensure each child completes a survey appropriate for their age. The four surveys include: looked-after children, age five-seven years; looked after-children, age seven-nine years; looked-after children, age 10-14 years; looked-after children, age 15 plus years. The current research only

explored the looked-after children survey for ages 10-14 years (see Appendix B for the full questionnaire).

The survey for children aged 10-14 years contained 75 items. There are 20 open- questions with no pre-existing response categories, allowing children the freedom and opportunity for more in-depth answering (Rea & Parker, 2014), although the children are directed to a specific topic to discuss, which does reduce flexibility (Robson & McCartan, K. (2016). Sixteen of the open-questions were included in the research. Two questions were excluded from the research because it was felt they did not help to effectively address the research questions. These were "What do you spend your pocket money on?", and "Can you say what worries you about your health?". The other two questions were excluded because the responses included a list of adults' names. To ensure confidentiality, these questions were removed from the dataset at the start of the research. These questions were: "Do you see anyone else as well as your social worker?", and "Who do you want at your review? / Is there anyone you would not like to have at your review?". Table 1 provides a list of the sixteen open-questions which were included in the research.

| Open-questions |
| --- |
| What hobbies or sports do you like doing? |
| Is there anything you want to change about contact with family and friends? |
| When does this happen? (follow up from- 'Are there ever times when you get angry or frustrated?') |
| What information would you like? (follow up from the question 'do you have a life story book, or information about people you know?' |
| Why do you miss school? (follow up from- 'Do you go to school every day?' |
| Can you say what you worry about? (follow up from- 'Is there anything at school that you worry about?' |
| What makes you happy? |
| What makes you sad? |
| Is there anything that you are not happy about where you live now? |
| Is there anything that would make things better for you where you live now? |
| Why not? (follow up from 'are you going to your next review?) |
| What decisions would you like to see made at your review? |
| What has gone well for you since your last review? |
| What has been difficult for you since your last review? |
| Is there anything else you would like to say for your review? |
| Is there anything you would not like to be discussed at your review? |

Table 1: Open-questions included in the study

The survey contained 45 closed-questions, which provided quantifiable elements within the survey, allowing comparability between respondents, and insight into relationships between the participants' attitudes (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The response options included three or four categorical choices. Only the closed-questions which closely related to the qualitative findings were explored in detail and included in the study. Each quantitative finding was reported after the linked qualitative finding. Table 2 provides a list of all the closed-questions which were included in the research.

| Closed-questions |
|---|
| **Do you feel settled, where you live now?** |
| Not at all          Just about |
| Not really          Yes, completely |
| **Do you feel safe where you live now?** |
| Not at all          Just about |
| Not really          Yes definitely |
| **Are there ever times when you get angry or frustrated?** |
| Not at all          Most of the time |
| Not really          All the time |
| **Does your social worker help you when you have problems?** |
| Not at all          Yes, but I'd like more help |
| Not really          Yes definitely |
| **Can you do your hobbies as often as you like?** |
| Not at all          Just about |
| Not really          Yes, completely |
| **Do you have a life story book, or information about the people you know?** |
| Not at all          Some, but I want more          Yes, as much as I like |
| **Are your friends able to visit where you live now?** |
| Do not have any to visit me          Sometimes |
| No, they can´t                          Yes, as much as I like |

| **Does your foster carer or someone else notice when you have done well at something?** | |
|---|---|
| Not at all | Sometimes |
| Not really | Yes definitely |
| **Do you have problems sleeping?** | |
| Not at all | Most of the time |
| Not always | Yes always |
| **Do you see your social worker as often as you like?** | |
| Not at all | Just about |
| Not really | Yes definitely |
| **Are you keep in touch with your family as much as you want?** | |
| Not at all | Just about |
| Not really | Yes definitely |
| **Do you think your views and opinions are listened to?** | |
| Not at all | Usually |
| Not really | Always |
| **Are you going to your next review?** | | |
| No | Not sure | Yes |

*Table 2: Closed-questions included in the study*

## 3.3 Data collection

Prior to starting the research I met with the Viewpoint Officer in order to gain an understanding of the data collection process. She explained that the aim is for the children to complete the survey every six months, as well shortly after a placement move. She also mentioned that most of the children over the age of 10 years will complete the survey independently, following a reminder email. Other children she will visit with a laptop and stay with them while they complete the survey. She reported a number of factors which influence her decision as to whether to visit the child to complete the survey. These included: distance to placement, how long they have been looked after, and whether there are any concerns about their placement. Although this individualised approach in practice is important because it allows both independence and privacy when completing

the survey - as well as adult support when necessary - it does add variability in the way the data is collected.

Each child has an individual log-in which they use to access the survey, and once they complete the set of questions the system stores their responses and notifies the Viewpoint Officer that it has been completed. The system also automatically alerts the Viewpoint Officer if responses suggest safeguarding issues, so that these can be viewed immediately. The software creates a profile for each child which includes the following information: their username; allocated social worker; name of foster carer; care status; type of placement; gender; ethnicity; year of birth; questionnaire date, followed by their responses to all the closed and open-questions.

Viewpoint Interactive allows the Officer to log-in, and review or download each child's profile. For research purposes, I was provided a username and password which enabled me to log-in and view all the survey responses. The software also allowed me to extract all the data for children aged 10-14 years, and to open it in a statistical analysis software package (SPSS, version 21).

### 3.3.1 Challenges with secondary data research

One of the challenges to using this secondary dataset is that although I was informed that the surveys are conducted every six months, on close inspection of the data, it seems this is not consistent. Instead, the length of time between children's responses varied greatly. For example, some children had survey responses a month apart, and some children had responses collected eight months apart. Additionally, I was informed by the Viewpoint Officer that the children often agreed to complete the survey, but their participation is optional. Unfortunately, there is no record of refusal rates, which makes it difficult to accurately know how representative the sample is. Nonetheless, a reasonable sample size has been obtained using this method ($n= 171$).

Furthermore, I am aware that the data collection process is not consistent. The

children receive different levels of support when completing the survey. The majority of children complete it independently, while some children go through the survey with support from the Viewpoint Officer. I was unable to establish whether, or to what extent, this influences their responses. According to Phelan and Kinsella (2013), when collecting data, the way that the adults present themselves, the clothes that they wear, the language they use, and the way they interact with the child, will all influence the balance of power. Ethical researchers are called to be reflexive about how to create conditions where children have agency and share power to the greatest extent possible (Punch, 2002). Unfortunately, I had no control over this interaction, and thus the impact it had upon the results.

However, Davies (2009) reported that the issues of research bias are removed when the children complete surveys independently - which is an advantage to the method - and when they complete the survey with the Viewpoint Officer some local authority managers perceive this is as a positive process because children express that they value the commitment and consistency made by their local authority (Davies, 2009). Additionally, Davies and Morgan (2005) reported that the 'bystander effect' is reportedly reduced and better regulated, due to the visiting assistants being viewed by the children as neutral data collectors, rather than as authority figures who may potentially influence their responses. This is seen as a different role of support from the situations where children are supported to express their views by their foster carer or social worker (Davies & Morgan, 2005). However, there is still a possibility that children may associate the Viewpoint Officer with Children's Social Care, or be apprehensive that the officer may communicate their views on to them.

The current secondary dataset is unique, due to it containing a large quantity of data which has been collected regularly since 2005, but never analysed in depth. According to the Viewpoint Officer, the two local authorities where *this* research takes place have been using Viewpoint to collect information about each child to ensure that they are safe, that their needs are being met at an individual level, and to inform the plans made at their Looked-After Child review meeting. On a more systemic scale, the Viewpoint Officer produces quarterly reports which

provide 'snap shot' percentage summaries of all the responses from the children during that quarter of a year. The data analysis does not go beyond this, which may partly be due to the Viewpoint Officer not feeling skilled enough to carry out a more in-depth analysis. Davies (2009) mentioned this is common in local authorities. Similarly, Children's Social Care managers felt that using aggregated Viewpoint data to inform policy development would be a particularly complex process.

Burton's (2000) research acknowledged the challenges with secondary data analysis, and reported that one of the significant problems is data handling. This was certainly the single most problematic issue with this research. The quality of the data was pretty poor in parts, so this had to be tidied up before it could be analysed. For example, all the children had to be given a unique ID because there were occasions when the same child was given a slightly different username; some of the survey responses were not in chronological order; and there were occasions when the response options were misspelt - which needed to be checked and changed prior to recoding the response options. There were also issues with missing data, 19 survey responses had to be removed due to the majority of the responses being missing. Therefore, all the cases had to be manually checked for mistakes that could impact upon the analysis before it could be carried out. Additionally, all the questions asking children to name adults were removed to ensure confidentiality. I then went through the rest of the dataset and deleted all names or personal information which could be used to identify the children, and replaced the information with an X.

**3.4 Ethical considerations**

The current study is an exploratory analysis of secondary data. Secondary analysis is defined as "...an analysis of an existing data set which presents interpretations, conclusion of knowledge additional to, or different from, those presented in the first report on the enquiry as a whole and its main results" (Hakim, 1982). I intended to carry out an analysis of existing data collected by the Viewpoint Officer. Therefore, I had to establish whether ethical issues were

considered when the data was originally collected, these included; informed consent, confidentiality and right to withdraw.

### 3.4.1 Informed consent

The British Psychological Code of Human Ethics (2014) states that "for data from existing datasets where consent was properly gained in the initial collection and this consent covers the uses of data proposed, no further consent will normally be needed." The implication is that, once granted, the researcher has consent for the ongoing use of data within the spirit of the original agreement. This is the case within the current research; the children provided informed consent that they agreed to take part in the survey via Viewpoint, and agreed that their information could be shared anonymously. The Viewpoint Officer engaged in a discussion with them to ensure they understood what this means. According to the UK Data Archive guide (2009), one-off consent is simple, practical, avoids repeated requests to participants. However, renewed consent for further analysis ensures active informed consent from participants, although it may be too repetitive or annoying for the participants. Grinyer (2009) mentioned that updating consent each time the data is analysed can risk causing unnecessary anxiety, and there are also practical problems such as the inability to trace all the participants. A further point made by Grinyer (2004) is that it can also be important to participants that their data is used to the full. It may be that it is the volume of output and continued use of their data that makes the demands of participation worthwhile. On this basis it is not ethical to use people's time and effort to produce data if they are not going to be used. This suggests that the more use that is made of the data in publications, the more ethical it is to collect it in the first place. This point resonated with me.

There are clearly ethical issues with not obtaining updated tailored consent for the current research, but there is also ethical value in ensuring that their voices are shared beyond their local authority in order to ensure their repeated participation in Viewpoint is truly worthwhile and their views are heard more widespread than they are currently, further ensuring all relevant professionals

absorb and reflect upon their views. When conducting secondary data analysis, an ethical judgement has to be made which considers the ethical guidelines alongside the context of the research (Grinyer, 2009). I concluded that the initial consent obtained from the children was specific enough to allow for further research to be conducted as long as it maintained the children's anonymity.

### 3.4.2 Confidentiality

To ensure anonymity, the dataset was extracted from the Viewpoint website onto a password protected laptop provided to me by the local authority where this research took place. Immediately I deleted the columns which included information about the children's foster carers and social workers, and I gave each child a unique ID which allowed me to delete their username. I then went through the dataset and replaced any names or location with an X to ensure no child could be identified based upon the information they shared. Once the research is completed, the dataset will be deleted from the laptop.

### 3.4.3 Right to withdraw

The children were informed by the Viewpoint Officer that their participation in the survey is optional and that the information they share will inform the discussion at their review meeting, but they can choose to not share information in this way without any consequences. The children were also aware that once they began the survey, they could stop their participation at any point. Since the survey is an online tool, the children had the opportunity to start the survey and return to it another day if they are having mixed views about their participation.

Alongside the above ethical issues, the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) were adhered to. Furthermore, this research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Education, University College London (see Appendix C).

### 3.5 Sample and participants

The sample includes 171 looked-after children from two local authorities (83 females and 88 males). The total number of survey responses from the 171 looked-after children is 441. The earliest year of birth is 1993 and the latest is 2008, and all the children were between the ages of 10 and 14 years at the time they completed the survey. I was unable to calculate the children's exact ages because only their year of birth was provided. However, I have provided a summary of their approximate ages based on their year of birth and the date they completed their first survey (see table 4). The secondary data did not provide information on the length of time the children had been in care, therefore this information could not be included.

The first survey was completed on 11th June 2005, and the latest on 16th October 2015. Therefore, the sample is a snapshot of children between the ages of 10 to 14 years over a changing context for 10 years.

 The sample numbers were compared with the local authority numbers published by the Department for Education (e.g. DfE, 2016). However, the comparisons are only approximate as the published figures include *all* children looked-after, and the study dataset has only counted the first survey, which could have been completed at any point during the child's time of being looked-after. Furthermore, the published age ranges are different to those for the sample and in fact, one category (10-15) covers the whole sample. Over the period 2005-2015 the two local authorities had an average of about 110 male children looked-after and 90 female. Whilst there was not much variation for females (the standard deviation was just 5.4), males showed more variation (sd 17.8), and an increasing trend over the period. Thus, the balance of looked-after children was slightly more males than females, and this was the same for the sample. The numbers of looked-after children aged under five in the published figures were too small to give reliable estimates (many are supressed in the published figures). The average number of children aged 5 to 9 who were looked-after was just under 30; aged 10-15 was 75; and aged 16 and over was just over 60. The numbers in the five-nine age groups were always below the other two, and showed little variation. However, 10-15 and 16+ both showed an increasing trend. As all the sample children were aged 10-14 when they completed their first survey, it was

not possible to compare the age distribution of the sample with that of the looked-after population.

From November 2015, the two local authorities started using a newly developed survey. Therefore, from that date no more responses could be included in the research. From the 171 participants, 62 children (33 females and 29 males) had completed a survey 12-24 months after their first responses, and therefore these children were included in the repeated measures analysis

## 3.6 Data Analysis

### 3.6.1 Qualitative analysis

The most appropriate method chosen to explore the qualitative data was Applied Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). Thematic analysis is viewed as a "rigorous, yet inductive set of processes, intended to identify and examine themes from text in a way that is credible and transparent" (Guest et al., 2012). An advantage of thematic analysis is its theoretical freedom, meaning it is not attached to a particular theory and therefore it is well placed within a pragmatic framework.

Braun and Clarke (2006) explained that qualitative analysis can be data driven and/or theoretically driven. In the current research, the initial stage was data driven, therefore the coding was conducted at a semantic level, simply representing descriptive elements of the children's responses (Boyatzis, 1998). This allowed for the validity of the data to be preserved, whilst minimising any subjective interpretation of the participant's comments. Once the data was coded and recoded, an inductive approach was applied whereby the identification of themes was driven by the data and considered alongside the research questions and underpinning theory (Patton, 1990). At this point, the themes were reviewed and refined in supervision. This means that the analysis involved a progression from 'description' to 'interpretation'. Combining these two approaches provided a research tool, which enabled a complex and rich account of the data to develop (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This account was then able to be considered and

explored further alongside a quantitative approach. Therefore, this technique was chosen as the most appropriate approach to apply in this research over other qualitative analyses.

I will now explain the thematic analysis process in more detail, with an example of coding which took place. Initially, all the children's responses to the open questions were copied and pasted into individual word documents. I titled each document with the question which was asked, for example "Is there anything you want to change about contact with family and friends?" This context helped me to understand the children's responses when coding.

Each document was then treated as a transcript, and I uploaded all the transcripts to the NVivo software system where I was able to read through them multiple times before I started coding, to familiarise myself with the data. I chose to keep all the comments in their original format, including any punctuation used, spelling mistakes, use of capital letters, or 'text' speech. This was in order to maintain the children's voices, and to keep their comments exactly as they chose to express them. Although in some cases it may have not been intentional (e.g. capital letters left on accidently) I did interpret all aspects of the comments, for example, if a child used all capital letters, followed by numerous exclamation marks, I viewed this as the child wanting to emphasise their point.

Once I began coding, I allowed each comment to be coded multiple times if necessary, because it was apparent that many children made numerous points in each individual comment they provided, and I wanted to ensure all the information and views were captured. Many comments included other people's names or locations which I had previously anonymised. Often it was clear within the context what the child's relationship to such person X was, or the type of location they were referring to, for example, foster home or parents home. If not, I chose a more general code, such as 'missing people', rather than 'missing siblings'.

Initially, I created a vast number of codes, due to a desire to capture every thought, feeling or wish provided. Once I felt this was achieved, I then started to

'drag and drop' similar codes into 'parent nodes'. I continued to do this until all the initial codes were situated within a parent node. NVivo allows you to click on each parent node and view all the initial codes within it. I was able to use this function to continue to check that the name of the parent node reflected the individual codes it contained. Once this was completed, I then started to combine the parent nodes that shared similarities and renamed these 'higher level' parent nodes. I ensured each high level parent node was given a name that represented all the codes it contained. It was at this point that I moved from a data driven semantic approach, to an inductive theoretical approach and I developed the names of the themes and subthemes, based upon the collection of final higher level parent nodes.

Some of the initial codes included were as follows: increase contact with mum; increase contact with dad; increase contact with siblings; reduce contact; wanting contact with extended family; wanting more contact with friends; dislike the location of contact; dislike supervised contact; alternative contact locations; wanting to change the day of contact; requesting overnight contact. These initial descriptive codes captured a variety of different thoughts in regards to the children's contact arrangements. These codes were combined to create parent nodes, which included: frequency of contact with friends and family; views on supervised contact and contact location. I then combined all three parent codes and renamed the higher level parent node 'specific views on contact arrangements'. This became a subtheme which was renamed 'voicing specific preferences', which fell within the theme 'involvement in decision making'.

Due to the high number of comments provided by the children and the level of similarity and patterns which emerged across the data, each subtheme had a large number of supporting quotes. However, the style and length of the quotes varied greatly. I chose to include 10 quotes per subtheme because I felt that this was a reasonable number to reveal to the reader how the quotes lead to the subtheme, and how valuable and insightful the information provided by the children was. I felt that just one or two quotation examples per subtheme would not have enabled the reader to see the level of challenge this population face on a daily basis. Despite individual situations, there are clear patterns which indicate

that the children experience some similar challenges as a result of being looked-after.

Braun and Clark (2006) outline six phases of data analysis. Table 3 shows these phases and how they relate to the analysis in this study.

| Phase | Process in this study |
|---|---|
| **Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data** | <ul><li>The open-text box comments were extracted from the dataset and collated into one document, then read and re-read to familarise myself with the responses.</li><li>Initial notes were made.</li></ul> |
| **Phase 2: Generating initial codes** | <ul><li>Once familiar with the data, I began the process of segmenting the text into codes using the NVivo software programme. Codes are the most basic element of raw data that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998)</li><li>I worked systematically across the dataset, ensuring attention was given to aspects which were repeated within the text.</li><li>A large quantity of initial codes were created.</li><li>Using NVivo, a codebook was created which included a hierarchy of codes and sub-codes. I also kept a running log of 'memos' reflecting on the data as I was conducting the analysis.</li></ul> |
| **Phase 3: Searching for themes** | <ul><li>Once all codes had been created I then began to identify where codes were repeated and how these could be grouped into themes and subthemes and whether an</li></ul> |

| | overarching theme was present. |
|---|---|
| | ▪ At this point I discussed both codes and early themes during supervision sessions with my supervisors and considered them in relation to the research questions. |
| | ▪ I then created a thematic map to help to organise the themes and subthemes. |
| **Phase 4: Reviewing themes** | ▪ At this phase I reviewed the themes and subthemes themes. Some themes were discarded where it was felt there was insufficient data to support them. |
| | ▪ Themes and codes were again discussed during supervision. An example of a discarded subtheme from this stage was 'school activities'. Whilst many children did list activities and subjects they enjoy at school e.g. maths, it was felt that this did not suitably address the research question regarding children's views on being looked after. |
| **Phase 5: Defining and naming themes** | ▪ Appropriate and precise theme names were developed so that these were informative, but also accurately described the data. |
| **Phase 6: Producing the report** | ▪ Chapter five provides a description of each of the themes and subthemes. |
| | ▪ Due to many of the comments being short in length, numerous quotations have been provided from the survey to offer a good illustration of the theme. |

*Table 3: The six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006)*

### 3.6.2 Quantitative analysis

Once I received the data I immediately assigned each child a unique ID. For most of the cases this was straightforward, but for some cases it was less clear. For example, some of the children's names were misspelt. Or their first name was placed where their surname should be, which meant that their survey responses - which were in alphabetical order based on first names - may not have been tied in together. Therefore, I needed to go through the data several times, familiarising myself with all the participants, and checking that the same child was not given two unique ID numbers. To help me identify whether two names spelt slightly differently were the same child, I referred to the other information they provided, such as their year of birth and foster carers' names etc. Once this was completed, I was able to delete all the words or comments that would actually identify the children, for example, their first name, surname, foster carers' names and placement locations.

I then checked whether each child had any inconsistent information, for example one child had one year of birth different to all their other responses. I reviewed all the child's responses thoroughly, and changed the inconsistent information to match the majority of their other responses.

Next I reviewed all the dates that the children provided survey responses, and ensured that these were all in chronological order (which was not always the case). I then created a new column which I used to include the time between each survey response in years and months. This had to be done manually because the variable was recorded as a string. In a word document, I also recorded how many years and months were between the child's first and last response. I colour-coded the response durations, red if the child had only one response, or two less than six months apart, yellow if they had two or more responses between six months to 11 months apart, green if they had two responses 12 to 24 months apart and purple if they only had responses more than 24 months apart. These were titled short, medium, long and extra long term.

I then went through the dataset and deleted all the cases which only had one

survey response, and all the responses which were more than 24 months after the first response. I then created a syntax which I used to develop a new dataset which included each child's first and last response. In both datasets, I went through all the information and ensured the responses to the questions were spelt correctly. For example, the word 'completely' was spelt incorrectly on the survey, which would cause an error when recoding the responses.

I recoded all the response options to ensure that they were numerical. I did this using manual recoding to ensure certain responses were always assigned the same number regardless of whether there were three or four response options. I also created a label for each variable, which included the question and the question number to aid the analysis.

At this stage I focused on the missing data. If any responses included missing data from the first or last response, I took the information from the next closest response, as long as it fell within the selected time frame, i.e. I would not choose responses from a survey completed only six months after their first response, and in these cases the children's responses were removed from the dataset completely. At this point, I created a syntax to complete the analysis.

### 3.6.2.1. Frequency tables

Once the qualitative analysis was complete and reported, the quantitative questions which closely linked to each subordinate theme were selected, analysed and reported under the related qualitative finding. The quantitative analysis was conducted using SPSS. The first part of the analysis involved transforming the variables. The variables are categorical and ordinal, which means the categories can be ordered or ranked (Field, 2013), for example, 'not at all', 'not really', 'just about' and 'yes completely' can be ranked from negative to positive responses. To be able to produce frequency tables and carry out a repeated measures analysis, the variables had to be recoded to transform them to interval variables. For example, not at all = 1, not really = 2, just about = 3 and yes completely = 4.

Once the variables were recoded, the frequency tables were produced. I decided to only include the children's first responses within the frequency tables. This decision was made because the number of responses per child varied greatly, with some children only having one survey response in the dataset, and other children having up to five. Therefore, I felt if all the responses were included in the analysis, the results were at risk of being skewed by some children providing numerous responses to the same question compared to other children providing single responses. For consistency, it felt appropriate to only include the children's first responses. It was hoped this would reduce participant bias and the influence that different durations in care could have on the responses, although I was unable to completely reduce this influence because some of the children had been in care for a period of time before their first responses in the age 10-14 years dataset. For example, they may also have three survey responses in the seven-nine years dataset, but unfortunately because the questions in the other surveys are different, these responses could not be included in the current research.

### 3.6.2.2 Repeated measures analysis

Once the frequency tables were produced to show all the children's first responses to each question (*n*=171), I manually went through the dataset and identified the children who provided responses to the same questions 12-24 months later in order to explore whether there were any changes to their responses over time. I chose 12-24 months after the first response because I felt this was an appropriate length of time to measure whether there had been any positive change from their initial response. If I selected the children who provided responses three to four years later, the sample size significantly reduced, and possibly an increase in confounding variables. If I chose the children who responded six months after their first response, the sample size would increase, but I felt six months was not long enough to expect positive change. Therefore, it was felt that 12-24 months was the most appropriate timeframe to choose.

At this point, all the children who only had one response in the dataset were removed, as well as all the children who had more than one response that fell

outside of the 12-24 month timeframe (for example - a second response exists but is only six months after the first response). The hope was that this would reduce variability among the follow up responses. When children had more than one response that was collected between 12-24 month after their first response, the date closest to the 24 month was selected, to ensure consistency. If this response contained relevant missing data, the child's earlier response within the time frame was selected.

The McNemar test was identified as the most appropriate statistical test to carry out the analysis. The McNemar test is a nonparametric, repeated measure (matched pairs) test, specifically for categorical data. Therefore, it can be used to explore responses to a survey which participants have completed twice (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993).

Assumptions of the McNemar test include:

- The two groups must be mutually exclusive. This means that no groups can overlap.
- There must be only one categorical dependent variable with two categories (a dichotomous variable), and one categorical independent variable with two related groups, which would lead to a 2 x 2 contingency table (Elliott & Woodward, 2007).

The first assumption was met, but in order not to violate the second assumption, the variables had to be transformed to dichotomous variables. This meant that the four response categories had to be combined into two. With all the questions which offered four categorical response options I decided to combine to the first two response options, and the second two response options, and rename them as positive and negative responses.

Firstly, I considered combing the three response options which suggested a need for further improvement and comparing these to the one fully positive option. For example, combining the three response options 'not at all', 'not really' and 'just about' and having 'yes completely' as one option. This would mean that to be able to conclude that there has been a positive change over time, children would need to select 'yes completely' at time two. This would ensure the

research was measuring whether children were receiving a high level of service and not assuming 'just about' was good enough. However, in this case, if children initially selected the response option 'not at all' in their first survey and 'just about' in their second, I would have to conclude that there was no positive change over time, even though this would not be the case and actually they have moved up two points on the four-point scale. Therefore, it seemed more appropriate to separate the four categories into two at either end. This combined the two most negative categories in one group and the two most positive in another group. It therefore takes the middle scale at the diving point. The limitation to this is that if there is a significant change over time, there could potentially still be room for further improvement i.e. some children may initially select 'not really' at time one and 'just about' at time two, which would indicate a positive change which is encouraging, but the child is still not completely satisfied, which the findings would not show. This was important to be mindful of when interpreting the findings.

Two questions had three categorical response options which could not be divided equally. In these instances, I was unable to combine the responses into a positive and negative option. Therefore, these responses remained at three options, which violated the second of the McNemar assumptions. This meant these two questions were then analysed using the McNemar-Bowker test. This test is an extension of the McNemar test, and can be used when there are more than two categories available (see for example Krampe & Kuhnt, 2007). Although this extension test could also have been carried out on the questions with four response options, the sample size meant conducting the McNemar test was more robust, because in the 2 x 2 contingency table the four cells were more likely to contain counts that meet the expected frequency criterion (Elliott & Woodward, 2007).

McNemar or McNemar-Bowker tests were carried out on each relevant question to see if there was a statistical difference between the children's first responses (time one) and their responses 12-24 months later (time two). These results were presented as percentages in graphs. *p*-values below *p*= .05 were considered significant. However, just knowing the statistical result did not provide a lot of

information, and therefore the patterns of data in the contingency table were described in detail (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993) in order to establish how many children provide negative responses at both time one and time two; how many children provide positive responses at time one and time two; how many children provide positive responses at time one and negative responses at time two; and how many children provide negative responses at time one and positive responses at time two. These patterns were discussed using frequencies, alongside the contingency tables. The following hypothesis and null hypothesis are appropriate for predicting all the McNemar test results (Elliott & Woodward, 2007).

*Null Hypothesis*: The probability of a child having a positive time one response and a negative time two response, is equal to the probability of having a negative time one response and a positive time two response.

*Hypothesis*: The probability of a child having a positive time one response and a negative time two response, is not equal to the probability of having a negative time one response and a positive time two response.

The results are presented in Chapter four.

# Chapter 4. Results

Chapter four details the findings from the study. It begins with the participants' characteristics, followed by the thematic map, which summarises all the themes and subthemes which emerged during the qualitative analysis. The themes and subthemes are then described in detail. Each subtheme is supported with a table of example quotes from the open-text boxes. The quantitative result then follows, which includes details of the most appropriate and related closed-question. These findings are supported by a frequency table, which shows all the children's initial response to the question. A graph which shows the children's initial response (time 1) and their response 12-24 months later (time 2), to show the overall change over time, in percentages. Finally, more detail is then provided by the McNemar contingency table, which reveals the pattern of change, including both the frequency counts and percentages (the total percentages are shown in the graphs).

## 4.1 Participant characteristics

| Characteristic | N | All participants (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | | |
| Male | 88 | (51.5) |
| Female | 83 | (48.5) |
| Age | | |
| 10 years | 23 | (13.5) |
| 10-11 years | 23 | (13.5) |
| 11-12 years | 24 | (14.0) |
| 12-13 years | 31 | (18.1) |
| 13- 14 years | 30 | (17.5) |
| 14 years | 40 | (23.4) |
| **Ethnicity** | | |
| Asian or Asian British | 8 | (4.8) |
| Black or Black British | 13 | (7.7) |
| Mixed Background | 29 | (16.9) |
| Other Ethnic groups | 10 | (5.8) |
| White or White British | 111 | (64.9) |
| **Total** | 171 | |

*Table 4: Participants characteristics*

**4.2 Thematic map**

The Voice of the Child

**Expressing Frustration with the Children's Social Care System**

The need for regular updates

Expectations of Children's Social Care

**The Importance of Identity**

Interest in family and background

A desire to return to their home community

**Emphasising the Need for Stability**

Reducing placement moves

Inconsistency of adults

**Involvement in Decision Making**

Voicing specific preferences

Wanting to be heard

Restricting freedom

Embracing
personal change
and achievements

Issues with
gaining the voice
of the child

*Figure 3: Thematic map*

**4.3 Overarching theme: The voice of the child**

'The Voice of the Child' was identified as an overarching theme because I felt that throughout the data analysis the voice of the child was being captured. Four themes emerged from the data, each one representing views in regards to a different aspect of being looked after.

The children's thoughts and feelings were generally expressed in relation to the questions they were asked. However, occasionally they expressed views that had no direct link to the question. This suggests that despite the directive nature of the open questions, some children still felt they could express any thought that was triggered in that moment.

I posed the research question "Is Viewpoint Interactive an appropriate method to gain the voice of the child?" because based upon the existing critique of survey methodology and the limited research on the use of CASI I was unsure how effective the approach would be. But I feel the findings revealed that for many of the children, Viewpoint offered them a space to express their inner thoughts and feelings which ranged from encouraging and pleasing, to highly emotive and upsetting to read. Hence, permitting an overarching theme entitled 'The Voice of the Child'. However, some children - due to reasons unknown - did not feel this was the platform for them to provide detailed views. This finding is discussed in more detail in Chapter five.

Although patterns have been identified in the data and collated to create four key themes, it became clear throughout the analysis that despite recurring themes, the children all have very unique individual views and experiences to share. I therefore felt to fully capture their individual differences, numerous quotes needed to be provided throughout the chapter. The quotes are provided with the date the response was given, and the child's gender and unique ID in brackets.

The four emergent themes from the research are as follows: 1. Expressing frustration with the Children's Social Care system. 2. The importance of identity.

3. Emphasising the need for stability. 4 Involvement in decision making (see Figure 3: thematic map)

## 4.4 Theme one: Expressing frustration with the Children's Social Care system

Theme one was identified due to various children outlining aspects of the Children's Social Care system which they found frustrating. Occasionally the frustration was explicitly directed towards Children's Social Care, while other children's comments did not directly make this link, but the difficultly they were describing was associated with the systems and procedures of being looked after. The different frustrations described were separated into three subthemes: 1. The need for regular updates. 2. Expectations of Children's Social Care. 3. Restricting freedom.

### 4.4.1 Subtheme one: The need for regular updates

This subtheme was observed within the data because a number of children were asking questions about their current situation, and seeking more information and updates from adults. For example, some children wanted to know why they were having restricted access to their family, how long they could expect to be at their current placement, as well as wanting know what might be happening to their siblings. In some cases, this uncertainty and frustration was directed towards Children's Social Care, with children possibly hoping for answers to their questions. Many of the quotes highlighted feelings of frustrations and uncertainty (see Table 5).

| Example quotes |
| --- |
| *Why am i here? (05/14; female; 63)* |
| *i just want to know whats going to happen (02/09; male; 9)* |
| *if im going to live in full time foster care. if im going to get the laptop to help me more with my education. help me find my father (04/11; male; 94)* |
| *how long i am going to be in care (07/10; male; 13)* |

*About were im gunna live for a start! (01/09; female; 15)*

*i want more answers (06/14; female; 142)*

*when social services dont tell me things (01/08; male; 120)*

*When i am going home , how long im going to be here for , when i can go to mainstream , when can i have a phone (11/14; female; 36)*

*i have not been given enough information about what´s going to happen (04/15; female; 4)*

*will I be allowed to go back and when (01/15; female; 104)*

*how long I will be up here for? (12/14; male; 41)*

*I would like to know where i am going to live until i am more than 18 What high school i am going to go to. When am i going to see my family again (11/14; male; 86)*

*Who I should live with because I would like to know who I might live with. I get really bored not knowing anything (10/15; female; 141)*

*My Future , whats happening next and when its going to happen (09/14; female; 148)*

*where i am going ,and for how long (01/14; female; 36)*

Table 5: Example quotations

The comments showed that there are children who need more information and updates about their situation, and children unsure why they are in care. Therefore, it seems more information is needed to reduce their levels of uncertainty and frustration. Due to the high levels of frustration being expressed, I decided to explore the question "Are there ever times when you get angry or frustrated?" (see Table 6).

**"Are there ever times when you get angry or frustrated?"**

| Responses | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Not at all | 21 (12.3%) | Most of the time | 48 (28.1%) |
| Not really | 88 (51.5%) | All of the time | 14 (8.2%) |
| **Total** | **109 (63.8%)** | | **62 (36.3%)** |
| *n*= **171** | | | |

Table 6: The children's initial responses

The results showed that 63.8% of children did not report feeling angry or frustrated very often, compared to 36.3% of children who did most, or all, of the time. The results are overall more positive than negative. However, there is a group of children who are feeling angry or frustrated at times. I was interested in whether children who reported initially feeling angry or frustrated at times 1 responded more positively at time 2 (see Graph 1; Table 7).
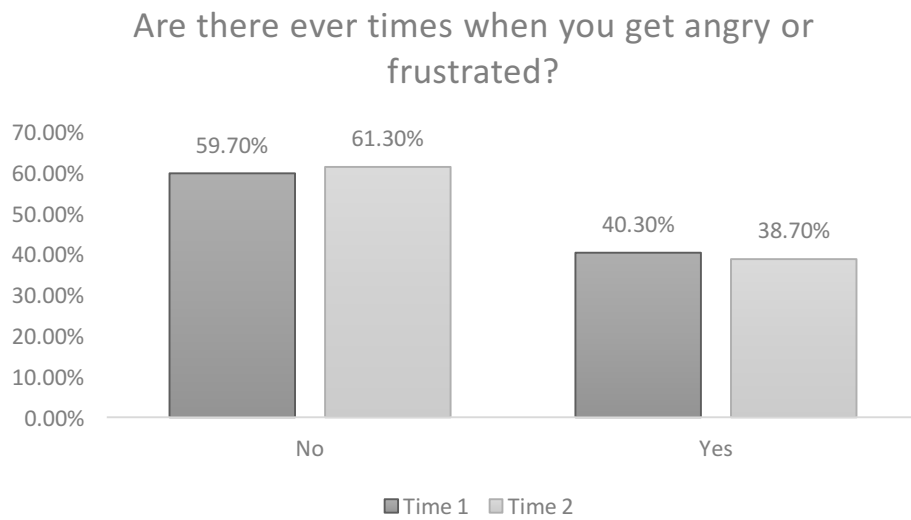


Graph 1: The children's time 1 and time 2 response

| | | | Felt angry or frustrated 12-24 months later | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Time 2 No | Time 2 Yes | |
| **Initially felt angry or frustrated** | Time 1 | No | 26 (70.3%) | 11 (29.7%) | **37** |
| | Time 1 | Yes | 12 (48%) | 13 (52%) | **25** |
| **Total** | | | **38** | **24** | |
| **n= 62** | | | | | |

Table 7: The McNemar contingency table

The McNemar test revealed that there is no significant difference between the children's time 1 and time 2 responses, *p = 1.0*. The results showed that most of the children who initially said they get angry or frustrated most, or all, of the time

(40.3%), remained feeling this way at time 2 (38.7%); 12 children had an improvement in their mood over time; but 11 children's moods had declined. Therefore, almost as many children's moods improved as declined, and led to minimal change overall.

### 4.4.2 Subtheme two: Expectations of Children's Social Care

The subtheme 'expectations of Children's Social Care' was identified due to a number of children suggesting that "nothing ever gets done". This comment along with similar variations suggested that many children are frustrated with a lack of change to their current situation, despite being asked to provide an alternative preference. Possibly these children have repeatedly requested a change which is not possible, or it is possible but has not yet been actioned. Other children may not have been vocal about a change that they hope for, but are just feeling helpless about their situation and lack of control. Again, some of this frustration is directly aimed at Children's Social Care, and seems to have caused a number of children a high level of distress (see Table 8)

| Example quotes |
| --- |
| *when people lie to me or give me false information or lead me to think and believe things that are not going to happen e.g apparently i am not going to be here longer that a year which is not true (11/14; female; 36)* |
| *I HATE IT HERE I ALWAYS EXPRESS THAT I WANT TO MOVE (03/15; female; 14)* |
| *i always ask and nothing has ever been done (02/09; male; 9)* |
| *II WOULD LIIKE TO CHANGE SOCIIAL WORKER II AM REALLY STRESSING THISS POINT! SO PLEASE TAKE MY VIEW IN CONSIDERATION! BECAUSE I WONT TALK TO X AT ALL! EVEN IF ITS HELOO (04/07; female; 89)* |
| *Also someone from social services is mentioned as she dosent do anything. I feel nothing is being done for me, at all that si just really fustrating me (06/14; female; 142)* |

*X has not done anything, he has not contacted them. X makes appointments, then cancels appointments that day, because he has another child in another borough (12/14; female; 16)*

*2 years i have been doing this and nothing ever gets done, i would also like to see my files (02/09; male; 9)*

*the stuff that should hapen nevr hapens or never did happen (08/07; male; 120)*

*when i am on my own  when social services let me down (10/07; female; 62)*

*When I realise that my social worker can´t do her job properly and how I feel I haven´t been moved on (06/14; female; 142)*

*I am so angry at X for not doing anything for me. Making excuses. It may fustrate me (06/14; female; 142)*

*Knowing that X makes excuses for not doing anything. Feeling as if I need a new social worker ddespratly . I though I´d be moved since the last one but X makes exuses up all the time (06/14; female; 142)*

*placement...I have wanted a new foster placement for months and I have asked X and nothing happens. I shouldn)t have to live with people I don)t want to live with (09/13; male; 160)*

*Table 8: Example quotations*

Due to a number of children suggesting that requests or plans have not been actioned - or their situation has not changed the way they hoped it would - I felt it was important to explore the question "Does your social worker help you when you have problems?" (see Table 9).

**"Does your social worker help you when you have problems?"**

|  | | Responses | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Not at all | 20 (11.7%) | Yes, but I'd like more help | 23 (13.5%) |
| Not really | 21 (12.3%) | Yes, definitely | 107 (62.6%) |
| **Total** | **41 (24.0%)** | | **130 (76.0%)** |
| ***n* =171** | | | |

*Table 9: The children's initial responses*

The results showed that 76% of children reported that their social worker helps them, although 23 of these children wanted more help. 24% of children reported

that they do not receive help from their social worker. Further analysis investigated whether children reported that they receive more help at time 2, after requesting more help at time 1 (see Graph 2; Table 10).

Does your social worker help you when you have problems?
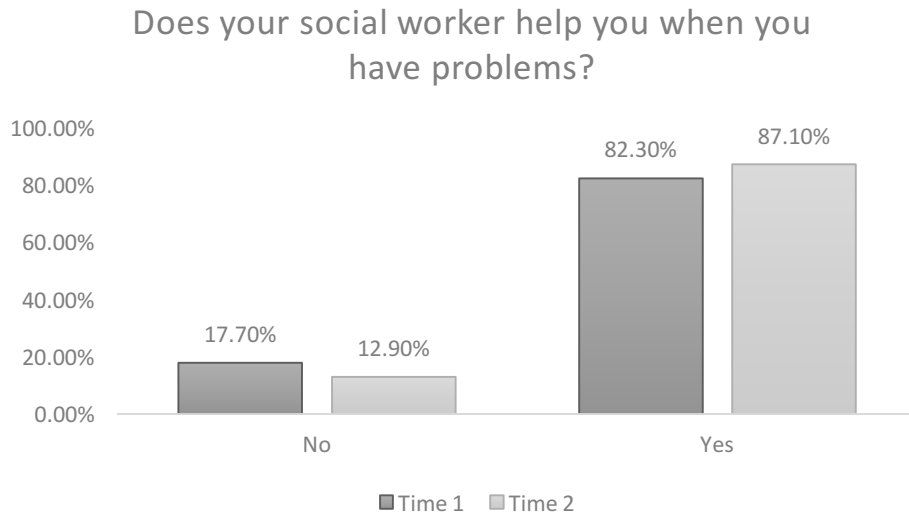


*Graph 2: The children's time 1 and time 2 responses*

| | | | Received help 12-24 months later | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Time 2 No | Time 2 Yes | |
| **Initially received help** | Time 1 | No | 3 (27.3%) | 8 (72.7%) | **11** |
| | Time 1 | Yes | 5 (9.8%) | 46 (90.2%) | **51** |
| **Total** | | | **8** | **54** | |
| ***n= 62*** | | | | | |

*Table 10: The McNemar contingency table*

The results showed that 3 children who initially reported that their social worker does not help them, continued to feel this way at time 2, and 8 children who initially reported that they did not receive help, positively reported that they do at time 2. However, 5 children went from feeling supported by their social worker to

not at time 2. The overall score is positive and showing a slight change over time, although this change is not significant, *p = .58.*

### 4.4.3 Subtheme three: Restricting freedom

The final subtheme 'restricting freedom' emerged from the data, due to a variety of children commenting on the restrictions placed on them since becoming looked after. For example, many children seemed to find it frustrating that they have to have certain plans approved by Children's Social Care. Some children were comparing their level of restrictions to their non-looked after peers and felt that their lack or freedom was unfair or not 'normal'. Additionally, some children reported that the rules and boundaries they are set are stricter than what they were used to in their family home. Finally, many children commented on how they valued having independence and freedom. Again, a number of the children were directing a high level of frustration towards Children's Social Care, as well as their foster carers (see Table 11).

| Example quotes |
| --- |
| *social services envolvment. wen social serveces push me to do things that i dont want to do (08/07; male; 120)* |
| *being with my mates like a normal girl not some1 under a care order (07/07; female; 116)* |
| *nothing much!  just that i want to go out with my friends and how X and X dont let me do anything.   I STARTED PACKING A SUIT CASE ONCE! (12/14; female; 134)* |
| *i would like more than an hour with my friends, because normal teenagers DO NOT HAVE A BLOODY STAFF MEMBER FOLLOWING THEM EVERYWHERE THEY FLIPPING GO (11/14; female; 36)* |
| *i want my old freedom back but i know i wont because its ´not normal for a 13 year old´ (03/15; female; 104)* |
| *I would to have sleep overs at friends, without going through all the police checks (02/12; male, 77)* |
| *Everytime I go out someone, a parent has to speak to my carer, I am annoyed with that (05/15; female; 111)* |

*not being able to have my freedom as in not having to plan things and just go with the flow, not being able to have my own space when needed (03/15; female; 104)*

*I´m not given as much freedom as I am used to basically (01/15; female; 104)*
*When I just want to go out, they ask me so many questions about where I am going and with who. When I lived with my Mum I didn´t have to do that . All the questions are annoying (04/15; female; 168)*

*1.when they don´t lisnt to me or ignore me 2. Don´t let me reset the wifi /// I stay in my room apart from getting drink or eating times due to the lack of stuff i am able to do, when they don´t allow me to reset the wifi I have f\*\*k all to do which means I am unable to do anything because I have exhausted all DVDs 5 times over and all my toys (04/15; male; 152)*

*i am happy when i can get out of the house!!!   because all i do is work work and work.   X knows what im talking about! (12/14; female; 134)*

*I want do more activities and get involved with other kids and doing more sports (03/15; female; 58)*

Table 11: Example quotations

The results showed that many children were frustrated with their lack of freedom, and they compared their experiences to non-looked after peers. There was not a closed question directly addressing this issue. However, because some children requested to engage in activities that they felt would be 'normal' for their age, I decided to investigate the question "Can you do your hobbies as often as you like?" (See Table 12).

**"Can you do your hobbies or sports as often as you like?"**

| | | Responses | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not at all | 4 (2.3%) | Just about | 44 (25.7%) |
| | Not really | 31 (18.1%) | Yes, completely | 92 (53.8%) |
| **Total** | | **35 (20.4%)** | | **136 (79.5%)** |
| ***n*= 171** | | | | |

Table 12: The children's initial responses

The results showed that 20.4% of children reported they cannot engage in their hobbies as much as they would like, compared to 79.5% of children who said they can. Further analysis explored whether these responses changed over time (see Graph 3; Table 13).
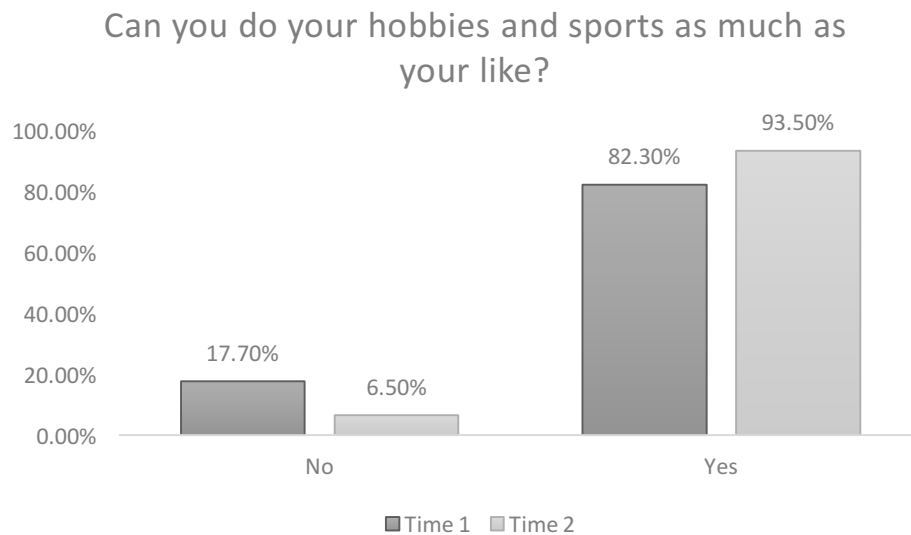


Graph 3: The children's time 1 and time 2 responses

|  |  |  | Access to hobbies 12-24 months later | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  | Time 2 No | Time 2 Yes |  |
| **Initial access to hobbies** | Time 1 | No | 3 (27.3%) | 8 (72.7%) | **11** |
|  | Time 1 | Yes | 1 (2%) | 50 (98%) | **51** |
| **Total** |  |  | **4** | **58** |  |
| **_n_= 62** |  |  |  |  |  |

Table 13: The McNemar contingency table

The results showed a significant difference between the time 1 and time 2 responses, _p < .04_. Therefore, the number of children reporting that they cannot engage in their hobbies significantly reduced over time. There were still 3 children who initially reported that they could not engage in their hobbies as much as they

would like, that remained feeling this way at time 2. But 8 children who initially felt this way no longer did 12-24 months later.

## 4.5 Theme two: The Importance of identity

This theme emerged from the data due to numerous children seeking information, pictures and mementos of their family and childhood. Secondly, many children showed a desire to return to their home community, to be surrounded by their friends and family, or simply to be in the area they grew up. However, there were also children embracing a fresh start and highlighting their achievements since they became looked after. The theme was separated into three subthemes 1. Interest in family and background. 2. A desire to return to home community. 3. Embracing personal change and achievements.

### 4.5.1 Subtheme one: Interest in family and background

This subtheme was identified due to numerous comments from children which involved them requesting information about their family and background. What was interesting about these comments was that many children not only wanted information about their immediate family, but also their extended family, or family members that they may have had minimal contact with before they became looked after. Is it possible that having restricted access to your immediate family provokes an interest in knowing more about the rest of your family? Additionally, many children wanted to know about their childhood and birth, as well as having access to photos and forms of identification, such as their birth certificate or passport (see Table 14).

| Example quotes |
| --- |
| *info about my family like my mum and pictures of me when i was a baby (04/08; female; 29)* |
| *my family time line, pictures and just basic infomation of my past life ,like when i was younger and stuff (07/13; female; 88)* |

*i want to find my Father, i have never met him and don)t know anything about him. he has two son)s (04/11; male; 94)*

*To know more about my birth Mum´´s family. To know how my father died in a car crash and when? (11/14; male; 163)*

*Their phone number . If they´re well . Where they live . If they want to see me (07/15; male; 157)*

*who my dad is (08/12; male; 151)*

*What was I like as a baby  What time was I was  born  How much did I way Pictures of me (07/14; female; 134)*

*i would like to have more information about my family and none about my culture (05/15; female; 27)*

*i want to know more about my parents and my REAL family!!!!  i also want to know more about what my parents are doing!! (12/14; female; 134)*

*anything about my real Dads family  i want to know about my mums real dad (08/13; female; 82)*

*my culture and where im from and how are my parents (06/15; male; 38)*

*What time i was born,where my family,I´ll like some photo (04/15; male; 86)*

*Some more about my birth family and some pictures of them kept in my room so I can remember them. Not for staff to see though as they are my family I wouldnt have to show them if I didnt want to (06/14; female; 142)*

Table 14: Example quotations

The results showed that it is clearly important for many children to have more information about their family and background, and it is sad to see many children with limited information. I was therefore interested to see how the children responded to the question "Do you have a life story book or information about people you know?" (see Table 15).

**"Do you have a life story book or information about the people you know?"**

| | Responses | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Not at all | Some, but I want more | Yes, as much as I like |
| 69 (40.4%) | 29 (17.0%) | 73 (42.7%) |
| **Total** | | |

*Table 15: The children's initial responses*

The results showed that over half of the children (57.4%) wanted more information about their family, while just under half (42.7%) have as much information as they would like. The follow up analysis helped to see if the children requesting more information had access to this,12-24 months later (see Graph 4; Table 16).

## Do you have a Life Story book or information about people you know?
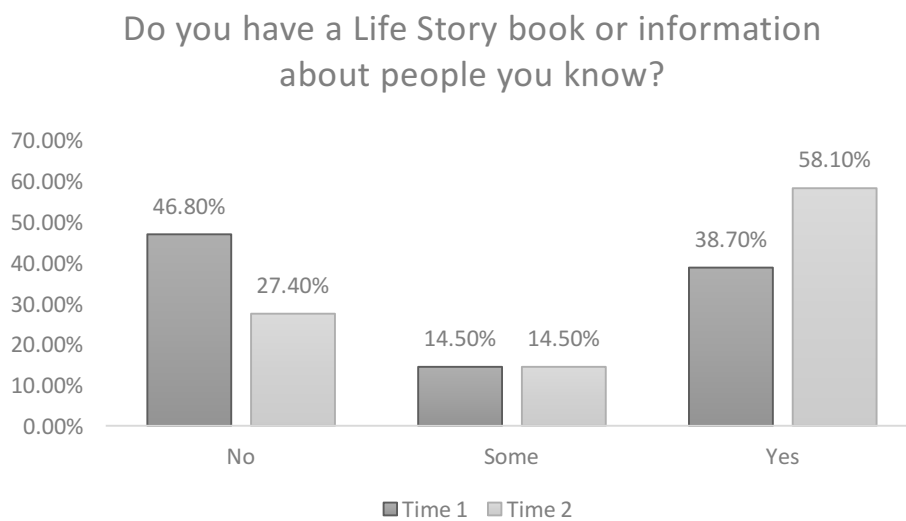


*Graph 4: The children's time 1 and time 2 responses*

| | | | Access to information 12-24 months later | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Time 2 | Time 2 | Time 2 | |
| | | | No | Some | Yes | |
| **Initial access to information** | Time 1 | No | 13 (44.8%) | 5 (17.2%) | 11 (37.9%) | **29** |
| | Time 1 | Some | 2 (22.2%) | 1 (11.1%) | 6 (66.7%) | **9** |
| **Total** | Time 1 | Yes | 2 (8.3%) | 3 (12.5%) | 19 (79.2%) | **24** |
| *n*= 62 | | | **17** | **9** | **36** | |

*Table 16: The McNemar contingency table*

The results revealed a positive significant difference between the time 1 and

time 2 responses, $p < .036$. Therefore, there is a reduction over time in the number of children reporting that they do not have a life story book or information about the people they know, and an increase in the children who reported that they have as much as they would like. Although this is a positive change, 62% of children who initially reported that they do not have information - or that they have some but they want more - remained feeling this way at time 2. Therefore, there are still a considerable number of children who would like more information.

### 4.5.2 Subtheme two: A desire to return to their home community

The subtheme 'a desire to return to their home community' was identified due to an overwhelming number of children commenting that they wanted to return to their family home. Some children were requesting to live with other family members if they couldn't return to their parents. Furthermore, numerous children reported distress in moving away from their home community, school and friends. One child even mentioned that she liked her placement, but wished she could pick up the house and place it in her home community (see Table 17).

| Example quotes |
|---|
| *I want to know when I can go back to live with Nan. I need to live with my Nan as soon as possible. I happy with my Nan. How would you feel living with a stranger for five weeks? (01/15; female; 58)* |
| *Seeing mum more seeing my old friends more and getting out of X as much as possible (04/07; female; 15)* |
| *if i could pic the house up and move it to X (03/11; female; 20)* |
| *moving without my sister and her being so far (10/14; female; 64)* |
| *I want to see my friends more and I want to see my family more but everything´s so far away,I really like X and X don´t get me wrong but I just want to move back to the area and be with my mum (04/15, female, 4)* |
| *Not being able to go home, going back to X's because Its so far and it´s not my real home (01/15; female; 104)* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *I WANT OTHER NIGHT STAYS AND BE ABLE TO GO X TO SEE MY FRIENDS BECAUSE SOME OF THEM CANT TRAVEL UP HERE (03/15; female; 14)* | |
| *Its like green and leavey and wierd. Its like boring and its just like motorway i mean what the hell is a motorway they didn´t have those were i lived i mean just say it it sounds weird (09/07; female; 15)* | |
| *it)s far from my school and friends (08/12; male; 7)* | |
| *cant be bothered to go and i perfer my old school (07/10; female; 20)* | |
| *YES BECAUSE I HAVE MOVED OUT OF MY HOME TOWN X (01/14; female; 36)* | |
| *Yeah, the fact that it´s far from all my friends and where my school is and where I usually hang out and stuff (01/15; female; 104)* | |
| *Yes I am not with mum or my old friends and X is quite boring (04/07; female; 15)* | |
| *I´m far away from everyone (04/15; female; 4)* | |

*Table 17: Example quotations*

The results showed how difficult it is for children living in a new location, away from established connections. Therefore, I felt it was important to explore the question "Are your friends able to visit where you live now?" in order to understand the extent to which social connections are maintained (see Table 18).

**"Are your friends able to visit where you live now?"**

| | **Responses** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Do not have any | 14 (8.2%) | Sometimes | 62 (36.3%) |
| No, they can't | 39 (22.8%) | Yes, as much as I like | 56 (32.7%) |
| **Total** | **35 (20.4%)** | | **136 (79.5%)** |
| ***n*=171** | | | |

*Table 18: The children's initial responses*

The table indicates that 8.2% of children reported that they do not have any friends to visit them, and 22.8% said that their friends cannot visit them where they live now. However, 36.3% reported that they sometimes can, and 32.7% reported that they can visit as much as they like. I carried out further analysis to see whether there was an increase in social access for the 35 children not seeing

friends (see Graph 5; Table 19).

## Are your friends able to visit where you live now?
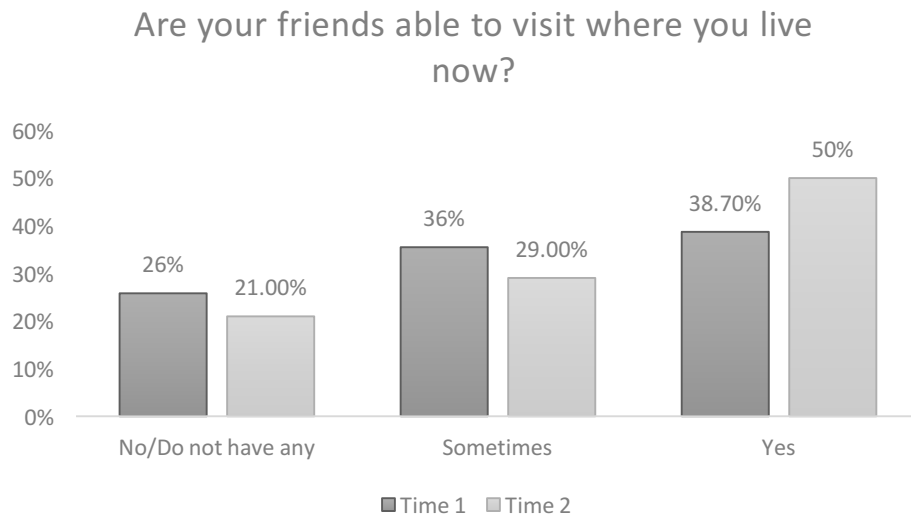


Graph 5: The children's time 1 and time 2 responses

|  |  |  | Access to friends 12-24 months later | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  | Time 2 | Time 2 | Time 2 |  |
|  |  |  | No | Some | Yes |  |
| **Initial access to** | Time 1 | No | 7 (43.8%) | 4 (25.0%) | 5 (31.3%) | **16** |
| **friends** | Time 1 | Some | 6 (27.3%) | 8 (36.4%) | 8 (36.4%) | **22** |
| **Total** | Time 1 | Yes | 0 (0.0%) | 6 (25.0%) | 18 (75.0%) | **24** |
| ***n*= 62** |  |  | **13** | **18** | **31** |  |

Table 19: The McNemar contingency table

The results showed no significant difference between the time 1 and time 2 results, *p = .13,* although the results have moved in a positive direction over time, with 50% of children saying their friends can visit as much as they want at time 2, compared to 38.70% previously. 7 children who initially said their friends cannot visit, or they do not have any, remained with this view at time 2, and 9 children who initially reported their friends not being able to visit, reported that they can at least sometimes visit at time 2.

### 4.5.3 Subtheme three:  Embracing personal change and achievements

This subtheme emerged because there were many children providing positive comments about their placement and how they felt cared for by their foster carer. A number of children felt things have improved for them since they became looked after; they have engaged in new hobbies and interests, and commented on personal achievements both in and out of school (see Table 20).

| Example quotes |
|---|
| *my language moving here has been good for me (04/08; female; 103)* |
| *i feel i have more help at school, i am going to do piano and singing lessons like we said before, i have more of an idea about what is going to happen in the future and when (06/11; female; 123)* |
| *Being with  X,being looked after properly (08/07 ;female; 59)* |
| *I feel happy at school. I just feel happy all the time (05/14; female; 78)* |
| *X and X take me to holidays, X or X play with me at home, i feel all cosy and safe at home (04/15; male; 86)* |
| *"school got better X and me have got on a bit better"* |
| *I am really proud off myself that i have changed alot that makes me happy (02/11; female; 96)* |
| *In the two weeks that I´ve been here I have settled in and I have a routine (03/10; female; 123)* |
| *My behaviour is changing a lot. All the staff have said, that instead of walking out of X, I have gone upstairs and used my sensory toys (07/14; female; 148)* |
| *im more happy i feel like i can talk to people about what i need i feel more confident people are listening to what i have got to say (04/11; male; 94)* |
| *My engilsh has improved, I´ve registerd with GP, Dentist, Option. I have joined the Gym. I have a bike and I cyscle a lot and I´m very fimiliar with this area (03/14; male; 156)* |
| *I feel that I am fully supported by X's family (04/14; male; 131)* |

*im happy where I am now.  and when I see my dads and siblings (rarely) spending time with foster family  seeing mum ( when we are getting on) (06/15; male; 161)*

*Being with my foster family makes me happy because it is fun. Getting good results at school makes me feel  proud (01/15; female; 128)*

*Table 20: Example quotations*

The results showed that many children were having a positive care experience, and these comments are pleasing to read. Alongside these positive comments, I felt it was important to explore the question "Does your foster carer or someone else notice when you have done well at something?" (see Table 21).

**"Does your foster carer or someone else notice when you have done well at something?"**

| | | Responses | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Not at all | 1 (0.6%) | Yes, sometimes, it depends | 39 (22.8%) |
| Not really | 7 (4.1%) | Yes, completely | 124 (72.5%) |
| **Total** | **8 (4.7%)** | | **163 (95.3%)** |
| ***n*=171** | | | |

*Table 21: The children's initial responses*

The results are very positive and showed that 95.3% of children felt someone notices when they do well. A small percentage of children (4.7%) did not feel this way. I carried out further analysis to see if things improved for this small group of children and whether the majority of children remained positive (see Graph 6; Table 22).

Does your foster carer or someone else notice
when you have done well at something?
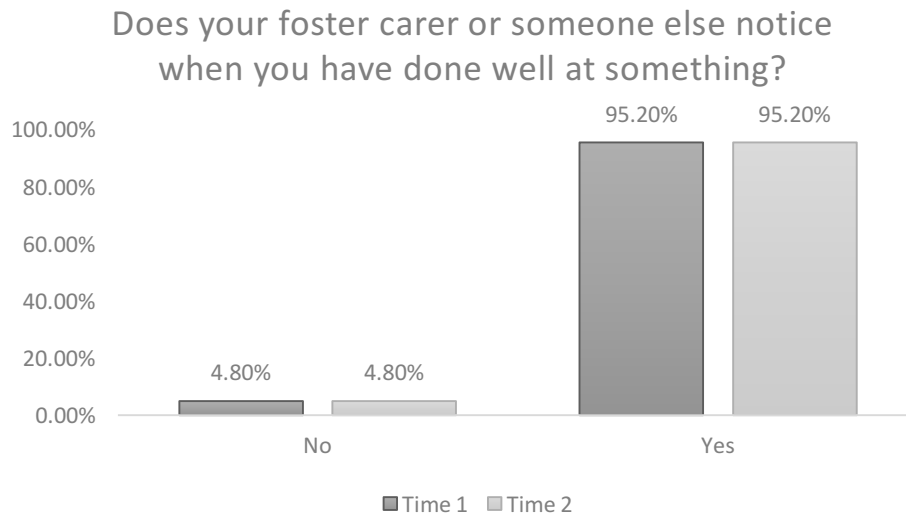


*Graph 6: The children's time 1 and time 2 responses*

|  |  |  | **Praise 12-24 months later** | | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  | Time 2 No | Time 2 Yes |  |
| **Initial praise** | Time 1 | No | 0 (0.0%) | 3 (100%) | **3** |
|  | Time 1 | Yes | 3 (5.1%) | 56 (94.9%) | **59** |
| **Total** *n= 62* |  |  | **3** | **59** |  |

*Table 22: The McNemar contingency table*

The results were highly positive, although indicated that there is no change at all between the time 1 and time 2 responses, *p = 1.0*. Looking at the responses in more detail, it seems all 3 children who initially said they did not feel someone noticed when they do well, later report that they did. However, 3 children who initially felt someone does notice, later reported that they do not. Due to this equal movement, the overall responses stay exactly the same at time 1 and 2.

**4.6 Theme three: Emphasising the need for stability**

The third theme captured the comments of children who appeared to be wishing for more stability in their life. For example, there were comments from children

asking to stay at their current placement and to not have to move again, or in some cases return home. Some children also wanted to be able to go back to school, since a placement move had disrupted their school attendance. There were also children mentioning how inconsistent and unpredictable the behaviour of social workers and their parents could be. The children seemed to value stable placements and consistent, predictable adults. The theme was separated into two subthemes: 1. Reducing placement moves 2. Inconsistency of adults.

### 4.6.1 Subtheme one: Reducing placement moves

This subtheme emerged due to a variety of children requesting to remain at their current placement, and not have to move, or return home. In some cases, this seemed to be because they were happy there, and/or they did not want to have to go through another move. Either way, they were hoping for placement stability. Some children commented upon how difficult or disruptive it is to move and how it impacts upon their wellbeing. Other children commented on how being moved resulted in them not having access to education, which most of them wanted to be sorted as soon as possible by their social worker (see table 23).

| Example quotes |
|---|
| *LIKE WERE I  LIVE NOW AND WOULD LIKE TO STAY HERE (05/13; male; 166)* |
| *good things like staying where i am and also sta the way they are (01/11; male; 42)* |
| *me not moving would be nice (09/11; female; 88)* |
| *Being told I have to move to X was annoying.And being told I have to move school (02/08; male; 118)* |
| *Placement to continue and me to stay here (09/08; female; 59)* |
| *not moving MAYBE (09/11; female; 88)* |
| *For mi to stay here n not go back to mi other home..!  ;col '-> (05/08; female; 45)* |
| *i want to be left were i am until i am happy and there is NO RUSH! (06/08; male; 105)* |

| |
|---|
| *I DONT WANT TO MOVE (09/11; female; 88)* |
| *Stay here wiv X n X for as long as possiple..! (see my parents on Sundays and sleepova once a week.. preferably Mondays) (08/08; female; 45)* |
| *I get to spend a lot of time at home and getting a place at school would be one thing (03;14; male; 156)* |
| *that I am not moving to X end of and I am staying in this area ive moved schools far to much and im staying at X (06/15; male; 161)* |
| *i love my foster parents dearly and would hate to lose them (02/12; female, 88)* |
| *I want to stay at X, sort out my school for September (07/15; male; 166)* |

*Table 23: Example quotations*

The results showed some pleasing comments from children who were satisfied with their placements and therefore wishing to remain there. Other children have highlighted how unstable their lives can be, and how much they long for permanency - both in their home and school. I decided to investigate this subtheme further by exploring the responses to the question "Do you feel settled where you live now?" (see Table 24).

**"Do you feel settled where you live now?"**

| | | Responses | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not at all | 6 (3.5%) | Just about | 38 (22.2%) |
| | Not really | 9 (5.3%) | Yes, completely | 118 (69.0%) |
| **Total** | | **15 (8.8%)** | | **156 (91.2%)** |
| *n=171* | | | | |

*Table 24: The children's initial responses*

The overall results were highly positive, with 91.2% of children reporting that they felt settled where they live. This seems to align with the comments from children wishing to maintain placement stability. However, it aligns less with the previous comments from children requesting to return home, suggesting that children may feel satisfied with their placement, but would still prefer to return home if given the choice. Further analysis was carried out to see whether placement satisfaction remained consistent over time (see Graph 7; Table 25).
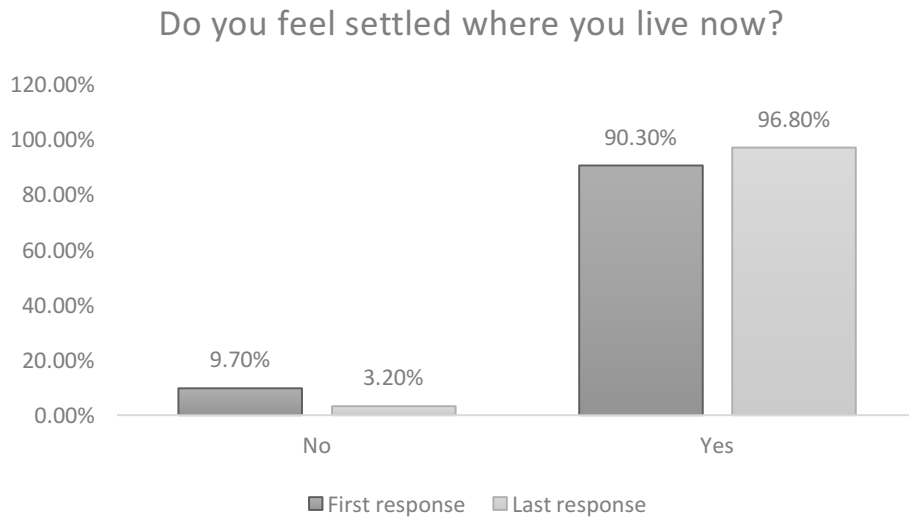
Graph 7: The children's time 1 and time 2 responses

| | | | Satisfaction with placement 12-24 months later | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Time 2 No | Time 2 Yes | |
| **Initial placement satisfaction** | Time 1 | No | 1 (16.7%) | 5 (83.3%) | **6** |
| | Time 1 | Yes | 1 (1.8%) | 55 (98.2%) | **56** |
| **Total** | | | **2** | **60** | |
| **n= 62** | | | | | |

Table 25: The McNemar contingency table

The overall results were highly positive, but showed a very slight non-significant change from time 1 to time 2, $p = .22$. 5 children who initially reported that they did not feel settled where they live, later reported that they did feel settled, 1 child remains unsettled, and 1 further child initially felt settled but later reported feeling unsettled. Overall, 98.2% of children felt settled at time 1 and 2. I decided to also explore the question "Do you have any problems sleeping?", to see whether placement moves and instability impacted upon children's sleep (see Table 26).

**"Do you have problems sleeping?"**

| | Responses | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not at all | 85 (49.7%) | Most of the time | 22 (12.9%) |
| Not always | 41 (24.0%) | Yes, always | 23 (13.5%) |
| **Total** | **126 (73.7%)** | | **45 (26.4%)** |
| **n=171** | | | |

*Table 26: The children's initial responses*

The results showed that over 70% of children reported that they were able to sleep well, but 26.4% of children had problems sleeping. I carried out further analysis to see if over time children were having less problems sleeping (see Graph 8; Table 27).
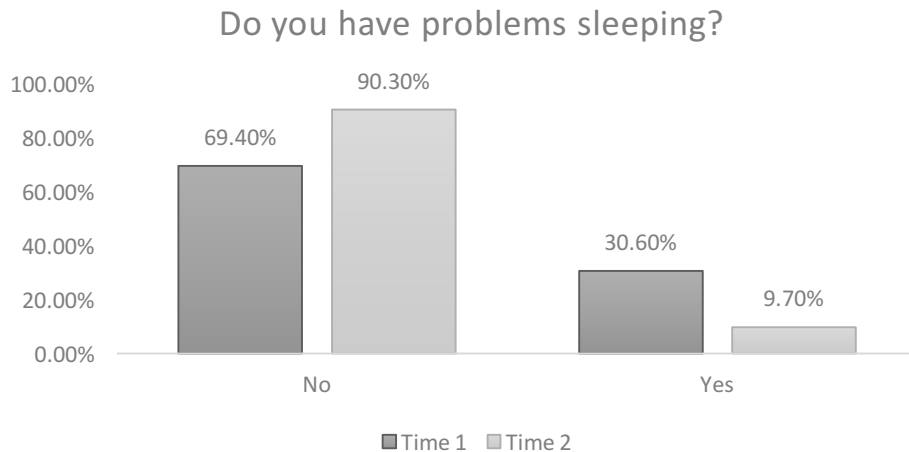


*Graph 8: The children's time 1 and time 2 responses*

| | | | Problems sleeping 12-24 months later | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Time 2 No | Time 2 Yes | |
| **Initial problems sleeping** | Time 1 | No | 41 (95.3%) | 2 (4.7%) | **43** |
| | Time 1 | Yes | 15 (78.9%) | 4 (21.1%) | **19** |
| **Total** | | | **56** | **6** | |
| **n= 62** | | | | | |

*Table 27: The McNemar contingency table*

The results showed a significant change over time in the number of children reporting that they did not have problems sleeping $p < .00$. The number of children reporting that they no longer had problems sleeping increased from 69.4% to 90.3%. 4 children who identified as having problems sleeping remained with this difficulty at time 2. 15 children, who initially reported having problems sleeping, no longer did after 12-24 months. This is a positive significant change over time.

### 4.6.2 Subtheme three: Inconsistency of adults

This subtheme emerged because not only were some children seeking a stable placement and school, they were also seeking stability from adults. A number of children commented on issues with their social worker changing, or being unreliable. Other children commented upon their parents' behaviours being unstable or unreliable. Additionally, some children commented on how they valued consistency and reliability from adults (see Table 28).

| Example quotes |
| --- |
| *if my mum would come to my contact instead of making up excuses like she has been delayed on the way down from X, or she said that she was hit by a car and was in hospital but i don´t know whether that is true (07/14; female; 16)* |
| *i dont want to go home untill i know that my parents are stable and its safe for me to go home  i dont want to go home and for things to turn back to the way they where (11/09; female; 11)* |
| *It´s sad X left my social worker but I like X and X so I don´t want another social worker again and tell all my business over (02/15; male; 138)* |
| *Im not sure nothing has really improved. Everything it going backwards rather than foward I see no difference with X being my social worker. X way much better (10/15; female; 141)* |
| *This year I wanted to go camping and I gave X and my carer all the information and my carer left it right until the last minute before she paid. I felt it was really out of order and it really upset me. Next year I want her to pay on time and I* |

*really want to go again because I don)t want to feel worried again (09/13; male; 161)*

*X to be more reliable and know what she is doing tell mum the decisions before she tells anyone else (04/11; male; 94)*

*Mum does not turn up for contact (12/14; female; 16)*

*social workers changing all the time (10/07; female; 113)*

*my mum say´s she coming down and she don´t (06/09; female; 48)*

*I am happy with X who was only started working for me. I want X to continue to work for me and I do not want to have new social worker (04/14; male; 131)*

*Table 28: Example quotations*

The results showed numerous children feeling distressed by unreliable behaviour from both their parents and social worker, and wished for more consistency, due to the influence the adult's behaviour has on their lives. Therefore, I felt it was important to investigate the question "Do you see your social worker as often as you like?" (see Table 29).

**"Do you see your social worker as often as you like?"**

| | | Responses | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not at all | 14 (8.2%) | Just about | 39 (22.8%) |
| | Not always | 26 (15.2%) | Yes, definitely | 92 (53.8%) |
| **Total** | | **40 (23.4%)** | | **131 (76.6%)** |
| *n*=171 | | | | |

*Table 29: The children's initial responses*

The results showed that 23.4% of children did not see their social worker as often as they would like, but 76.6% of children felt they do just about, if not more. Further analysis was carried out to see if those who reported not seeing their social worker as often as they would like, had an improvement in their access after making this need known (see Graph 9; Table 30).
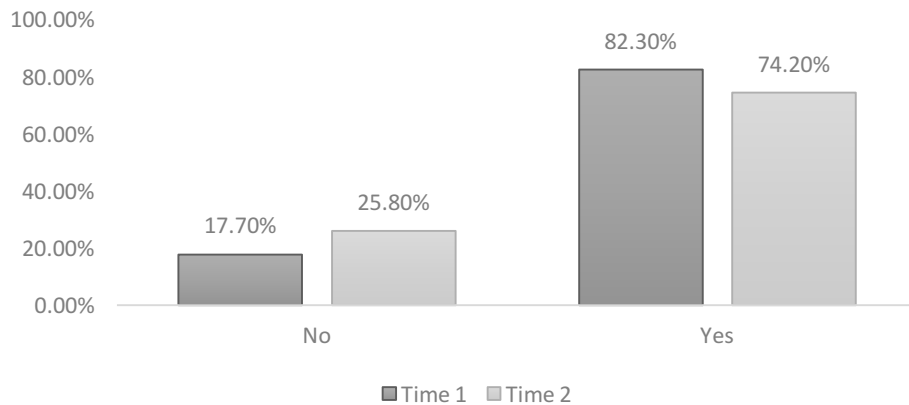
*Graph 9: The children's time 1 and time 2 responses*

| | | | Access to social worker 12-24 months later | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Time 2 No | Time 2 Yes | |
| **Initial access to social worker** | Time 1 | No | 3 (27.3%) | 8 (72.7%) | **11** |
| | Time 1 | Yes | 13 (25.5%) | 38 (74.5%) | **51** |
| **Total** | | | **16** | **46** | |
| ***n= 62*** | | | | | |

*Table 30: The McNemar contingency table*

The results showed no significant difference between the time 1 and time 2 responses, *p = .38*. Although the change is not significant, the results have negatively changed over time, with the number of children reporting that they do not see their social worker as much as they would like increasing from 17.5% to 25.8%. Looking at the results in more detail, it revealed that 8 children who initially reported that they do not see their social worker as much as they would like, later reported that they do. But 13 children who initially felt they did, later reported they do not. This negative change over time, aligns with some of the children's comments hoping for more consistency from their social worker.

## 4.7 Theme four: Involvement in decision making

The theme 'involvement in decision making' arose from the data due to some children highlighting their wish to have their views listened to and understood by adults. Frustration was expressed by children who felt they were not listened to and their preferences were not acknowledged or actioned. There were also children who voiced a dislike for Viewpoint, as well as disliking attending review meetings, due to the nature of the approach, or issues with confidentiality. Therefore, these two approaches - which are in place to gather children's views - are currently not effectively meeting these children's needs. The theme was separated into three subthemes: 1. Voicing specific preferences. 2. Wanting to be heard. 3. Issues with gaining the voice of the child.

### 4.7.1 Subtheme one: Voicing specific preferences

This subtheme emerged because it was clear that many children were utilising Viewpoint to express their preference in regards to their contact and placement arrangements. It is highly likely that these children assumed their views would inform decisions made about their current arrangements. As a result, many of the children offered very specific views about what changes they wanted. For example, detailing the duration, frequency, location and type of contact (i.e. supervised or unsupervised) they would prefer (see Table 31).

| Example quotes |
|---|
| *yes I would like it to be a bit longer because the 1hour goes so quick and I would like the supervisor no to stay in the room as much (05/14; female; 60)* |
| *I would like to contact Dad more, message him, not nessesarily see him, he has a busy schedule, a letter or a text, a photo or soomething like that (05/14; female; 78)* |
| *I would really want to see my grand'-parents because I want to keep building relationship between us (03/15; female, 58)* |
| *no but i just dont want nothing to do with my mum and i dont mind if i dont have more contact with my dad (05/15; female, 78)* |
| *I wish that i could meet other people in my family not just my mum (04/15; male; 86)* |

| |
|---|
| *I want to see my Mum, my brother and more of my sister. I think my brother 8 yrs old, my sister is 12, I want to see them (03/15; male; 125)* |
| *I wont to change with my mummy I don´t wont my mummy colling enemor (03/14; female; 127)* |
| *I would like to change it that if mummy can´t make it, then nanny or Uncle X or someone could come. If granddad X could come, then the answer would be yes as we don´t see him as much as we used to (10/15; female; 141)* |
| *I want to be allowed to see everyone. I have spoken to my social worker about this, everyone in X (03/15; male, 56)* |
| *I dont enjoy not seeing my mum when i can only see her 3 times a year. I want to see more often because i barley see her. In my opinion thats not fair (05/14; female; 63)* |
| *Maybe sending a letter to my sister, to say how are you, how are things doing. If there is a power cut and we can´t use the telephone (04/14; male; 163)* |
| *yes i want to have my own time with my mum where we can enjoy ourself than being listend by a stranger and that i dont feel comftable with the supervision as though i might not attend the next one (03/14; female; 167)* |
| *No, not really, I have contact with my friends. I contact both sides of the family, my black side and my white side, through Nan. Sometimes my Dad rings, he is in prison (10/14; female; 58)* |

*Table 31: Example quotations*

The results showed extremely varied, but quite clear contact preferences from the children. Therefore, based on their motivation to express these preferences, I felt it was important to explore the question "Are you able to keep in touch with your family as much as you want?" to understand whether these contact needs were are being met (see Table 32).

**"Are you keep in touch with your family as much as you want?"**

| | | Responses | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not at all | 13 (7.6%) | Just about | 29 (17%) |
| | Not really | 36 (21.1%) | Yes, definitely | 93 (54.4%) |
| **Total** | | **49 (28.7%)** | | **122 (71.4%)** |
| ***n*=171** | | | | |

*Table 32: The children's initial responses*

The results suggested that 28.7% of children do not keep in touch with their family as much as they want, compared to 71.4% who felt they do. I carried out further analysis to see whether there was an improvement over time, which could suggest the children's preferences had been taken into account (see Graph 10; Table 33).

Are you able to keep in touch with your family as much as you like?
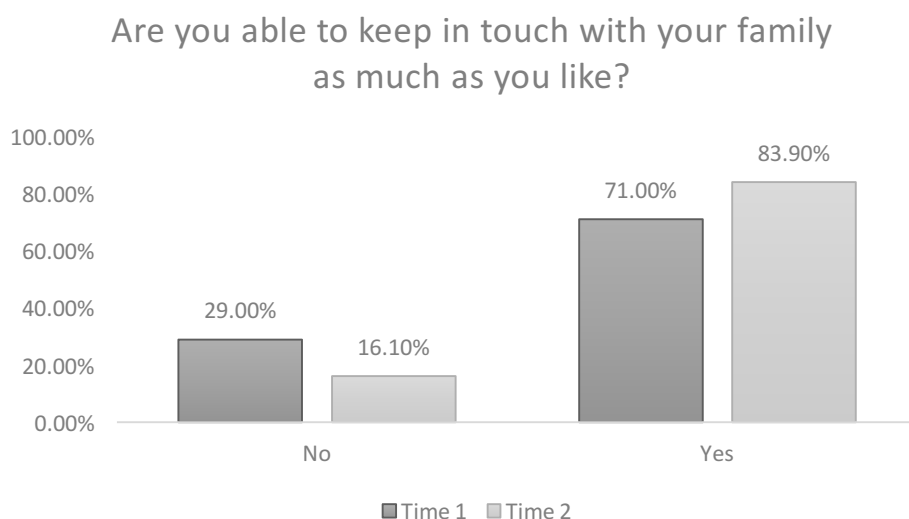


Graph 10: The children's time 1 and time 2 responses

|  |  |  | Family contact 12-24 months later | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  | Time 2 No | Time 2 Yes |  |
| **Initial family contact** | Time 1 | No | 4 (22.2%) | 14 (77.8%) | **18** |
|  | Time 1 | Yes | 6 (13.6%) | 38 (86.4%) | **44** |
| **Total** |  |  | **10** | **52** |  |
| ***n*= 62** |  |  |  |  |  |

Table 33: The McNemar contingency table

The results showed no significant difference between the time 1 and time 2 responses, *p* = .12, although the results were moving in the right direction, with 83.9% of children reporting that they could keep in touch with their family as much as they want, compared to 71% previously. Furthermore, 14 children who

initially reported that they could not keep in touch with their family as much as they wanted, later reported they can. Four children remained feeling unable to, and 6 children changed their response from positive to negative. However, overall this is a positive change over time.

### 4.7.2 Subtheme two: Wanting to be heard

The subtheme 'wanting to be heard' emerged from the data due to some children commenting that they did not feel they were being listened to, or understood by adults. As a result, a sense of helplessness and disempowerment echoed through the data, which in some cases could be due to children feeling they are repeating themselves, but not really being heard. One child mentioned how she felt she is speaking for no reason if her requests are never actioned. Furthermore, there were some children commenting that they valued adults listening to them (see Table 34).

| Example quotes |
| --- |
| *when i say a point or something, that they listen to it but dont do anything about it so i feel like i have said it for no reason (09/14; female; 60)* |
| *my social worker does not listen to my opinions or to what i want to do (08/12; male; 7)* |
| *evry time people are telling me i am moving and when they are aparently taking my feelings into consideration (02/12; female; 88)* |
| *my family telling me im not special and not wanted  not being listening to or no one understanding me (11/09; female; 11)* |
| *well when i´m not listened to by people i shall not name (07/12; female; 88)* |
| *Nobody listens (08/15; male; 41)* |
| *Not being listened to by X. I am pleased I can talk to you because I am being listened to. X would stop me, she would say "no no no" (07/14; female; 148)* |
| *I know how much I want to go home and nobody seems to be listing to me or listening to what I want everything just seems to get me upset when all of my friends are sleeping over each others and going out and my just over here. There´s so many reasons why I need to be back home and I know why they´re* |

*contemplating it but I know everything will be different, good different (04/15; female; 4)*

*i hate you all because you have made my life a living hell . Because You all do not listen to want i would like to happen , and you all say i´´m doing well, but then you all always bring up the past when it was like a year ago , and i do not want to be at X any longer and its scary not knowing a time scale (11/14; female; 36)*

*oh i dont know but maybe to let me stay and to lissen to my point of view and other childrens as i feel i am not lised to well lets hope that the press doenst hear this but manybe if this changed then maybe they wont find out (02/12; female; 88)*

*Kind of, listen to my rules, you don´t listen to my rules so why should I listen to your´s. If you show respect I will (03/14; male; 125)*

*for me to have more of a say in what happens (04/07; female, 85)*

*Table 34: Example quotations*

Again, the results revealed a level of frustration from not being listened to, which appeared to have led to a sense of helplessness for some children. To understand the extent of this finding, the question "Do you think your views and opinions are listened to?" was explored (see Table 35).

**"Do you think your views and opinions are listened to?"**

|  | **Responses** |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|
| Not at all | 8 (4.7%) | Usually | 65 (38%) |
| Not really | 25 (14.6%) | Always | 73 (42.7%) |
| **Total** | **33 (19.3%)** |  | **138 (80.7%)** |
| *n=171* |  |  |  |

*Table 35: The children's initial responses*

The result showed that just under 20% of children felt their views were not really listened to, and 80% felt they were. This may seem surprising considering the comments made. The result were explored further, to see if those who felt their views were not listened to, felt differently 12-24 months later (see Graph 11; Table 36).

## Do you think your views and opinions are listened to?
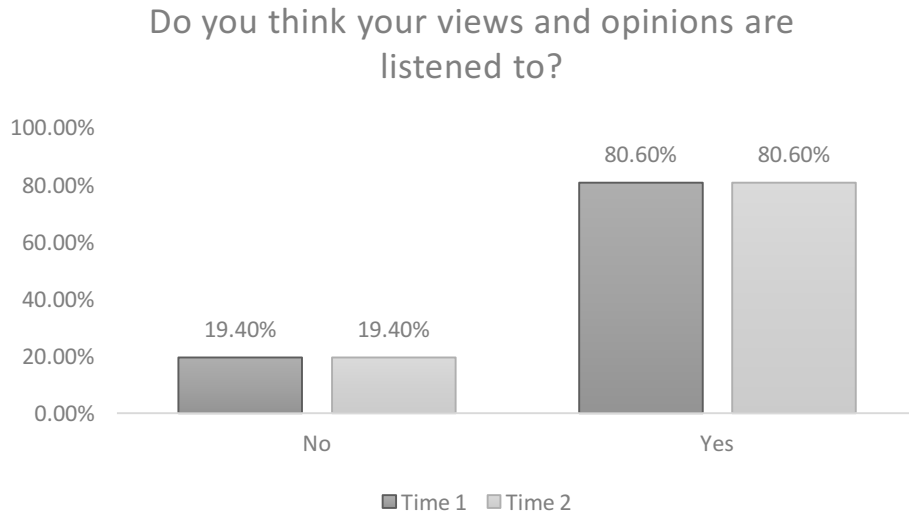


*Graph 11: The children's time 1 and time 2 responses*

| | | | Feel listened to 12-24 months later | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Time 2 No | Time 2 Yes | |
| **Initially feel listened to** | Time 1 | No | 5 (41.7%) | 7 (58.3%) | **12** |
| | Time 1 | Yes | 7 (14.0%) | 43 (86.0%) | **50** |
| **Total** | | | **12** | **50** | |
| ***n= 62*** | | | | | |

*Table 36: The McNemar contingency table*

The results showed no significant difference between the time 1 and time 2 responses*, p* = 1.0. There is no overall change in the responses over time, although looking at the results in more detail, it is clear that 7 children who initially felt that they were not listened to, later reported that they were. Equally, 7 children who initially felt they were listened to, later reported that they were not. Therefore, the overall responses stayed exactly the same. Although there is no change, the result is positive, with 80% of children reporting that their views and opinions were listened to.

### 4.7.3 Subtheme three: Issues with gaining the voice of the child

The third subtheme was identified because although there were children confidently using Viewpoint to voice their thoughts, feelings and wishes, there were other children commenting that they would prefer to tell someone their view in private - as well as some children concerned with whom their views would be shared with. Furthermore, some children explained reasons why they disliked Viewpoint and attending review meetings. This is concerning, considering both approaches were designed to involve children in the decision making process (see Table 37).

| Example quotes |
| --- |
| *ill let you know at the time, if there is anything brought up i will stop it being said (08/08; female; 89)* |
| *I do not want my answers seen by X and Nan. Social Services can see them. Just in case they say something is wrong. Nan might call me a liar (06/15; male; 164)* |
| *Loads, but I can´t explain, it´s seriously hard. I you were in a review and you were young you would find it hard, as me you would (03/14; male; 38)* |
| *no now just leave me alone , stop asking me the same question (11/14; female; 36)* |
| *No everything is ok. You can ask about my past (10/14; female; 58)* |
| *i dont want to disgust the fact that i dont like foster care (11/14; female; 63)* |
| *I don´t want to talk about some of the answers I´ve given (03/14; male; 125)* |
| *everything that i have said about me getting really annoyed at them! I DINT WANT THEM GETTING UPSET.! i kinds dont like it here!  dont want to heart there feelings. PLEASE dont share this!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (12/14; female; 134)* |
| *yes, sometimes, i never tell strangers. i do not want to write it. I worry about my parents a lot. Next time you come I will tell you (03/14; male; 154)* |
| *No not really as I feel everything I say should completely be looked at (06/14; female; 142)* |
| *not having to fill in these stupid reports !!!!!!!!!! (02/14; female; 37)* |

*I don´t know, I can´t explain. It´s hard (03/14; male; 38)*

*i do not like going and sitting in the room with everyone talking about me, it makes me feel un comfortable (04/14; female; 61)*

*sometimes, but I don´t want to put it down on this questionnaire (05/14; male; 169)*

*I went to one and it was boring, sitting around and just getting bored (11/14; male; 163)*

*NOT SURE I WILL SPEAK MY MIND ON THE DAY (10/07; female; 89)*

*I DONT LIKE MEETINGS BECAUSE I DONT LIKE LISTENING TO PEOPLE I HARDLY KNOW (06/14; female; 167)*

*because i havnt been invited! (12/14; female; 134)*

*Table 37: Example quotations*

The results showed some of children's views on the issues with both Viewpoint and looked-after child review meetings. I felt it was helpful to explore the question "Are you going to your next review?" in order to understand whether these issues impact upon the children's attendance at these meetings (see Table 38).

**"Are you going to your next review?"**

| | Responses | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | No | Not sure | Yes |
| | 23 (13.5%) | 58 (33.9%) | 90 (52.6%) |
| **Total** | | | |
| **$n$=171** | | | |

*Table 38: The children's initial responses*

The results showed that around half of the children reported that they were going to their next review meeting, and the other half were not going, or were unsure. I carried out further analysis to see whether attendance at review meetings improved over time (see Graph 12; Table 39).

## Are you going to your next review meeting?
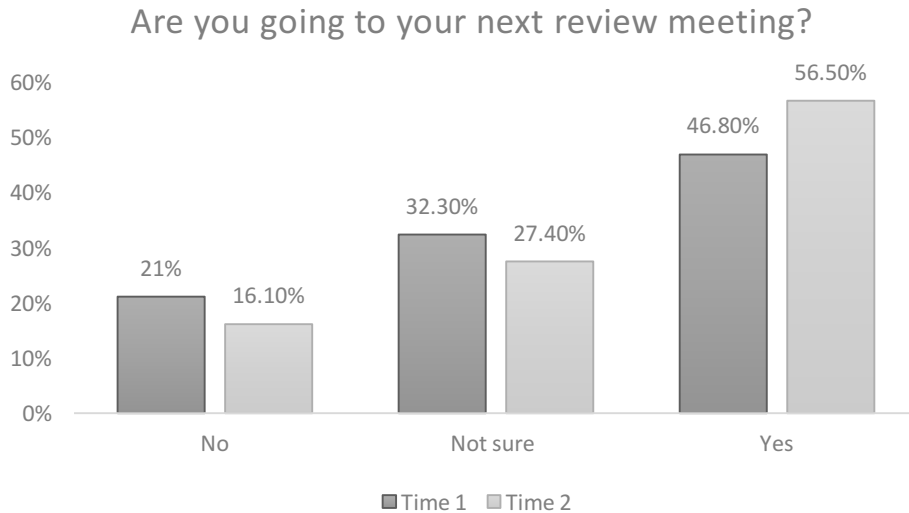


Graph 12: The children's time 1 and time 2 responses.

|  |  |  | Attendance 12-24 months later | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  | Time 2 No | Time 2 Not sure | Time 2 Yes |  |
| **Initial attendance** | Time 1 | No | 5 (38.5%) | 3 (23.1%) | 5 (38.5%) | **13** |
|  | Time 1 | Not Sure | 2 (10.0%) | 11 (55.0%) | 7 (35.0%) | **20** |
|  | Time 1 | Yes | 3 (10.3%) | 3 (10.3%) | 23 (79.3%) | **29** |
|  |  |  | **10** | **17** | **35** |  |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ***n*= 62** |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Table 39: The McNemar contingency table

The results showed no significant difference between the time 1 and time 2 responses, $p$ = .51. Looking closer at the results, it seemed slightly more children (56.5%) said they were going to their review meeting than previously (46.8%). This suggests more may need to be done to improve attendance at these meetings, if they are to be effective in gaining the voice of the child. This issue is discussed further in Chapter five.

**Chapter 5. Discussion**

Chapter five discusses each of the research questions in light of the findings identified in the current study, as well as linking to the literature discussed in chapter one and any additional relevant literature which further adds to an understanding of the findings. Therefore, chapter five is split into four sections which includes: a discussion of whether Viewpoint is an appropriate method for gaining the voice of the child, focusing on the strengths and barriers of using the approach; a discussion of the children's experiences of being in care, specifically the challenges they face and the importance of identity and stability; a discussion regarding whether the children's views are consistent or change over time; and finally a discussion of whether attachment theory helps to understand the children's experiences.

**5.1 Is Viewpoint an appropriate method for gaining the voice of the child?**

### 5.1.1. Strengths to using Viewpoint

It has been suggested that the voice of the child should only be captured using qualitative approaches - mainly semi-structured interviews - in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences (Barnes, 2007). Munro (2001) claimed that whether small scale or representative, all means of capturing children's voices matter. I feel the current research, which explored existing survey responses collected via Viewpoint, has been invaluable in gaining the views of children from two local authorities. The concurrent use of open and closed ended items has provided a level of representativeness, as well as capturing personal, meaningful comments, to support our understanding of some of the significant challenges these children face, as well as allowing us to celebrate some of their success (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). This methodological approach is supported by Darbyshire, MacDougall and Schiller (2005), who reported that reliance upon one single method is unlikely to reveal insight and understanding of a child's world. I would agree that the quantitative and qualitative findings when viewed alone tell very different stories, but together are complementary and provide a more holistic

understanding of the children's experiences. Therefore, I feel Viewpoint should continue to include open and closed-questions if it is going to remain a useful and effective tool for gaining the voice of the child.

According to Creswell and Clark (2007), it can be a challenge attempting to make sense of mixed method research when the two findings contrast. However, I found the difference between the quantitative and qualitative findings both important and intriguing. The quantitative findings are remarkably positive, even more so than the existing positive research collected via postal surveys (e.g. Timms & Thoburn, 2003, 2006). Some researchers reported that postal survey data may be positively biased due to foster carer support, or the risk that children motivated to self-select for this research are those having a positive experience (Heptinstall et al., 2001). Both these risks were reduced in the current research due to the majority of the children having the option to complete the survey independently in private, and the CASI method allowing for easy, accessible, widespread data collection, using an engaging, interactive programme, as part of ongoing regular practice (Davies & Morgan, 2005) This tool has allowed for a sample that may include children often not motivated to complete and return postal surveys, children who may find paper questionnaires boring, and children likely to not be pre-selected by professionals due to being considered too vulnerable, or lacking the ability to articulate their views (Munro, 2001). Therefore, this approach has gathered widespread views, gaining the voice of looked-after children, hopefully including some of the 'hard to reach' / 'hidden' group previous research may not have been able to effectively capture.

Yet, despite reducing the commonly acknowledged risks to positive participant bias, the current quantitative findings are still very encouraging, revealing that over 80% of children expressed satisfaction with their placement and foster carer, and felt that their views and opinions are listened to. Over 70% of the children in the study expressed satisfaction with access to their social worker, friends, family and hobbies. Over half of the children reported that there were minimal times when they felt angry or frustrated, and that they were content with the amount of information they had received about their family. However,

in contrast, the findings from the qualitative analysis revealed that some children felt frustrated with adults not listening, being unreliable, and not keeping them informed. Many children wished to return home - or at least to increase contact with their family, many children miss their friends, family, home community, and expressed emotional distress as a result of becoming looked after. There were numerous children reporting positive comments about being in care, but the negative comments were overwhelming in comparison due to their detail and emotive tone, rather than frequency.

Poncheri, Lindberg, Thomas and Sufrace's (2008) research offered explanations for why the qualitative responses may be disproportionately negative. They discussed the 'negativity effect', which means that when exposed to positive and negative stimuli of the same intensity, the negative stimuli will have a higher impact upon affect. Furthermore, individuals are likely to be more curious about negative stimuli, and therefore engage in a more extensive cognitive elaboration of negative events compared to positive (Lewicka, Czapinski & Peeters 1992). Borg (2005) explained that this provides a theory for why the comments made on open-ended questions are often negative in tone. It is possible in the current research that children who were having a difficult experience were more likely to provide detailed, lengthier and emotional comments, compared to the children who felt things were going well.

Similarly, Dasborough (2006) reported that when individuals are aware that a survey is being carried out to inform change, they will concentrate on the negative information in order to bring attention to the areas where they perceive improvement is most needed. This could be the case for some of the children in the current study, especially if they perceived Viewpoint as an approach to informing decision making in regards to future plans. It may be that children are commenting on ways things could be improved, but this does not necessarily mean they are not content with their current arrangements. This theory would support the current findings, for example there were children who responded "Yes, as much as I like" when asked "Can you keep in touch with your family as much as you want?". Although then when asked

"Is there anything you would change about your contact arrangements?", they commented upon ways it could be improved further. This is an important finding because it shows that Viewpoint had offered these children an opportunity to suggest ways their current situation could be improved. For professionals, being able to acknowledge and incorporate the children's views into their care plan will not only empower the children (Munro, 2001) but also help to ensure their experience of care is not simply 'good enough', but individualised to meeting their needs as best it can. The current research shows that Viewpoint allows for personalised planning. This may be a step towards changing the narrative that the care experience itself adds to the children's risk of poor future outcomes (Stein, 2006), and instead promotes positive outcomes. However, this approach is likely to be restricted by professionals' capacity and organisational issues (Munro, 2011), which is a barrier discussed in the next section.

### 5.1.2 Barriers to using Viewpoint

It is important to be aware of the influence of non-responses, or short responses such as '*yes'* or '*no'*, which featured a significant number of times in the comment boxes. Sax, Gilmartin and Bryant (2003) reported that this is a common problem with survey data. They suggest that the concluding results could be affected by the different views between respondents and non-respondents. The current results include numerous children choosing to provide single word responses, which did not allow for an in-depth understanding of their experiences compared to the children who have offered detail. The are a number of hypothesis about why this may be. For example: as mentioned previously, a positive experience of care may not provoke a heightened emotional reaction, leading to a lengthy detailed comment (Lewicka et al.,1992) In contrast, although CASI is known to reduce non-reponses and increase the reporting of sensitive information (Newman, et al., 2002), some children may still not feel comfortable using this platform as a place to voice difficulty, particularly if they fear information sharing; and some children may struggle to express their feelings in writing, both comments

made by some children in the study. Although there was the option to have support from the Viewpoint Officer, there are added issues with sharing sensitive information with a adult present, despite the adult being independent from Children's Social Care (Davies, 2009). However, despite some hypotheses, no final conclusions could be made in regards to these limited or non-responses beyond the information they have provided. It is helpful to be aware of these children when considering the methods used to gain children's views, because it may be that for these children Viewpoint is not the most effective tool for them in it's current form. Adaptations to the programme, or alternative methods, could be more appropriate. This is discussed further in chapter six.

The extent that children will provide their views seems to be impacted upon by issues with confidentiality. Children were told the information they provide will be shared at their Looked-After Child review meeting, but are also asked if there is anything they would not like to be discussed. This seemed to cause some children to have reservations about being truly open and honest. Previous research states that children worry about information sharing and the impact it can have upon their relationships with their foster carers and family (Blueprint Project, 2005). The children in Munro's (2011) research reported that they understood social workers and foster carers often need to share information, therefore they should have a third person that they can confide in with confidence. This issue remains an ongoing challenge with successfully gaining children's views and wishes because of the balance between information sharing for effective safeguarding, and respecting a child's privacy. It seems the most respectful approach from the views of children, is for adults to be honest with what information will be shared and with whom, with no surprises, which is reflected in Mullan et al's (2007) study.

Along with issues of information sharing, some children commented upon the repetitive nature of Viewpoint, which is consistent with the previous research (Barrett et al., 2011). Some children were requesting to stop being asked questions, and other children mentioned how much they disliked completing Viewpoint. Therefore, it is helpful to note that there are possibly children

frustrated with the frequency or length of the questionnaire, which could be heightened if they also felt it does not make a difference to decisions made about their life.

However, it must be acknowledged from a research point of view that the data collected has provided informative and valuable findings which help to understand the children's experiences, and in turn can inform policy and practice, which would be more challenging to achieve if all the children shared their views in numerous different ways, for example some children providing drawings and others providing video recordings (Goodyer, 2016). Therefore, an alternative possibility is to involve children in reviewing and updating the questionnaire to ensure that it is as engaging as possible and not only captures responses related to Children's Social Care priorities, but also explores aspects that are important to the children, and is kept it a length that does not impact on thier level of engagement. The Blueprit Project (2005) showed that children appreciate - and are more likely to participate in - research if the development of it is participatory.

As mentioned, the way the information provided is used, is likely to impact upon the children's view of the approach. For example, the children who share their views - and then feel they they are acknowledged and considered in decision making - are more likely to engage in the process again (McLeod, 2007; Munro, 2001). Unfortunately, there are children expressing frustration due to repeatedly voicing the same view, but having no influence on their situation. For children, simply having a process that seeks their view is not enough, they do not want to share a view if it will have no impact on the outcome (Archard & Skivenes, 2009) and children do not perceive seeking their view as truly listening, if it does not involve action (McLeod, 2006). Although I feel Viewpoint has effectively captured the voice of many children and potentially provided information which can inform individualised joint planning and a more systemic impact on policies and practice, the limited research on professional's views of Viewpoint suggested that social workers do not know whether the children's views inform policies and practice, and their managers do not not how they would do this effectively (Morgan &

Fraser, 2010)

At an individual level, although Viewpoint gains personal views and wishes, professionals struggled to acknowledge each child's preferences and incorporate them into the decisions made about their lives, because of issues such as a large volume of referrals, lack of social workers, poor social work retention rates, and time-consuming system processes, which all impact the amount of time social workers can directly spend with children (Munro, 2010).

In regards to research, the individuals collecting the data often do not have the skills to carry out an in-depth analysis of the data (Davies, 2009), especially not longitudinally, which was the case in the current two local authorities. Therefore, there is a benefit in more skilled professionals such as educational psychologists conducting this research across the country. As well as more research focusing upon the barriers to professionals embedding children's views in their practice and policies and less emphasis on carrying out a needs assessment unless it will be utlised, to avoid further disempowering and silencing these children.

**5.2 What are the experiences of children in care?**

### 5.2.1 Challenges of being a 'looked-after' child

When children were asked if their social worker helped them, and whether they visited as much as they wanted them to, the majority of children responded positively. Yet, the qualitative data suggested that some children were frustrated with Children's Social Care and aspects of being looked after. One of the main findings was in regards to receiving information. A significant number of children wanted more information, whether it was about their family, why they are in care, how long they should expect to stay there, or just a general update. Similar findings were reflected in Butler's (2006) and Holland et al's (2010) research. Across the data there was an overwhelming sense of uncertainty, likely caused by a lack of information and

understanding. Previous research highlighted the value children placed upon information, with some children describing how powerless and helpless a lack of information made them feel (Leeson, 2007), and how important information is for alleviating some of the 'trauma' associated with becoming looked after (Winter, 2010). The current findings support Schofield et al's (2012) view that small interventions, such as providing a child with a photo of their new foster carer prior to a placement move, can significantly reduce stress. The children in *this* study would clearly value this approach.

Alongside this desire for more information, some children were highlighting a limited sense of control and power over their situation, and felt that when they express wishes to professionals, "nothing ever gets done", which is echoed in the Sherbert Research, which leads children to find it hard to trust their social worker (2009). Research suggested that children complete Viewpoint assuming that their views will be taken into consideration (Morgan & Fraser, 2010), and that if they then feel it brings about only minimal change, this may add to a sense of helplessness. The current findings revealed an overwhelming level of anger, frustration and in some cases a sense of helplessness from the children. Thus, supporting the research suggesting that the lack of control children experience once they become looked after has a direct impact on their emotional wellbeing (Leeson, 2007; Mullan et al., 2007). It is important to acknowledge that the qualitative results captured these feelings of not being listened to, helplessness, lack of control, and uncertainty - which the quantitative information does not seek, thus does not capture, emphasising the importance of using both methodological approaches in voice of the child research, to avoid a distorted picture. Furthermore, the level of distress present for some of these children further highlights the importance of acknowledging and effectively acting upon these findings, in order to reduce levels of distress.

Additionally, the qualitative findings revealed issues with maintaining a sense of normality. Some children were frustrated with the restrictions associated with being a looked-after child. They felt they had less freedom than what they were previously used to, or than their non-looked after peers, findings which

were expressed in Thomas and O'Kane's (1999; 2000) research. Mullan et al. (2007) reported that such findings are unacceptable and that these children's voices need to be listened to by policy makers and professionals if we are to make being in care a more 'natural' and 'normal' way of life. Whilst they acknowledged that it is difficult to create normality in a system that is artificial, we must consider new creative ways of enhancing the daily experiences of these children in order to support their wellbeing.

### 5.2.2 Importance of identity and stability

Another interesting finding was the lack of stability - highlighted by many children in the qualitative data - and yet a high sense of stability in the quantitative data, with almost all of the children reporting that they felt settled where they live. A lack of stability seemed to be caused by placement moves, which in many cases led children to change school and community, a similar finding was noted in Holland et al's (2010) research. In many cases children were requesting to remain at their current placement, which could be because they felt settled and did not want to go through another disruptive move.

Across the data, both the quantitative and qualitative responses are relatively positive in regards to views about foster carers and placements, which reflects the findings from Selwyn et al's (2010) longitudinal study, although they raised concerns that children's responses could be positive, due to the risk that their views would be shared with their carers, which could be an issues in *this* research*, particularly because some children requested for this to not happen. However, Chapman et al. (2004) and Timms and Thoburn (2006) also found that children often expressed feelings of satisfaction with their foster carer and placement, although it is alongside a co-existing message that given the choice they would return home. This mixed message is present in the current research. For example, along with positive views regarding foster carers, there is a strong desire from many children to return home, with children reporting that they feel happy when they see their family and they want to increase the frequency and duration of contact time with them. Chapman et

al. (2004) concluded that practitioners and policy makers need to acknowledge these findings and focus on building strong relationships with carers, whilst also promoting relationships with parents. They commented that for this to happen, children's thoughts and wishes need to be fully understood and regularly sought to inform arrangements which meet their dual needs. The current research showed that Viewpoint is an effective platform for children to express exactly what their contact preferences are, but accommodating these varied views may be the challenge (Network, 2004).

Similarly, Butler and Charles (1999) found that regardless of how positive the children's care experience was, they still maintained a powerful bond with their family and an overwhelming desire to stay connected with their friends and community. This study supports their findings with many children striving to feel connected to their family, with some children seeking contact with - and information about - family members they had never met before. A similar finding is mentioned in McAuley and Young's (2006) study, but with no exploration as to why this may be. It could be due to the children aiming to re-establish or develop their identity.

The quantitative results showed that the majority of the children felt settled where they live, but within the qualitative results, many children wished their placement was within their community, nearer to their friends and school. A few children reported that a placement move has separated them from their friends, and meant they do not have access to a school. This is likely to heighten their lack of identity, permanency and to impact upon their emotional wellbeing (Mullan et al., 2007). Previous research revealed children emphasising that keeping them connected to their community, friends and school should be a priority, but not always is (Holland et al., 2010; Selwyn et al., 2010 Shaw, 1998; Steven & Boyce, 2006). However, the qualitative finding revealed that 69% of children reported that their friends can 'sometimes' or 'often' visit them where they live now, which suggests that for some children social access may have been prioritised, and for others it was not possible. Or perhaps, the children who were reporting that their friends are able to visit them at time two, are friends they have made in their new

community and not their older established friends, although at least still an improvement in social access.

In regards to the stability and consistency of adults, in Munro's (2001) research, children commented that they would prefer to have a placement move over a new social worker. The current results show that this is still an on-going request from children. Additionally, children have voiced their frustration with their social worker cancelling plans or not following up on agreed actions. Alongside this, some children reported that their parents are unreliable, which further added to their view of adults as inconsistent and untrustworthy. This highlighted how important it is for professionals to be as consistent as possible for these children, and to start to challenge these preconceptions they have developed over time (Bell, 2002; Rostill & Myatt, 2005). Unfortunately, for a selection of children, these preconceptions may have instead been reinforced.

Overall, it seems placement moves, separation from established community, reduced contact with friends and family, limited information and inconsistent adults, all heightened children's senses of instability and identity, which emphasised that more may need to be done to develop their sense of permanency and trust in professionals. In contrast, children generally reported satisfaction with their foster carers, and felt settled at their placement.

**5.3 Are the children's views consistent over time?**

In general, the majority of children responded positively at 'time one'. Therefore, the focus is on whether the small proportion of children who were experiencing difficulties at time one, reported feeling positive at 'time two' (12-24 months later), which would suggest an improvement in their care experience - as well as hoping that those who felt positive at time one, remained feeling this way at time two. The findings revealed a significant change over time in regards to children's views on their problems sleeping, access to hobbies, and information about their family. These findings accept

the hypothesis that the probability of a child having a positive time one response and a negative time two response, is not equal to the probability of having a negative time one response and a positive time two response, due to the findings having a positive directional changing over time.

It is promising to see a significant improvement in children having access to their hobbies and sports, because this is likely to help them to feel they are experiencing a 'normal' life, similar to their non-looked-after peers. Previous research also showed that access to hobbies is important in regards to developing a child's sense of identity, resilience and a positive relationship with foster carers (Daniel & Wassell, 2002; Schofield & Beek, 2006).

It was also reassuring to find a significant improvement in children's sleep, due to the concerning number of children overall reporting difficulties with sleep and the link between sleep disturbances and mental health difficulties in the literature (e.g. Stanley, Riordan & Alaszewski, 2005). The reported problems with sleep may also reflect the trauma experienced when entering care or having a placement move. Therefore, it is encouraging to know this difficulty significantly reduced over time. It is also important for educational psychologists to acknowledge this finding and share it with carers and teachers, so they are aware that any emotional or behavioural difficulties observed could be linked to a lack of sleep.

Finally, it is comforting to know that there was a significant reduction in the number of children requesting more information about their family at time two. Especially as a lack of information has been highlighted in previous and the current research as causing children high levels of uncertainty and distress (e.g. Blueprint Project, 2005; Leeson, 2007). The finding suggests that providing children with the information they wish for about their family from the moment they enter the care system would be highly appreciated by children, and help reduce the impact being in care has upon their emotional wellbeing. When I looked at this finding in more detail, it became apparent that 26 children were still hoping for more information about their families at time two, which suggested that there are still children longing for more, and more

attention could therefore be paid to fulfilling this need.

In regards to the remaining results, the McNemar tests showed that there seemed to be minimal, or no change between the time one and time two responses, which is not too concerning in part because many of the initial responses were positive - and therefore minimal change over time means that these children are likely to have remained feeling positive. However, it does also mean that the small number of children feeling negative at time one, are likely to have also remained feeling this way at time two. Therefore, these results reject the hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis that the probability of a child having a positive time one response and a negative time two response, is equal to the probability of having a negative time one response and a positive time two response.

This becomes clearer when looking more closely at the McNemar distribution tables. It seemed that for some children their responses to questions suggests an improvement in certain areas, but for other children their situation appeared worse. Therefore, overall the results would suggest a small change over time, but the individual change is equally as positive as it is negative. For example, the responses to the question "Does your foster carer or someone else notice when you have done well at something?" were consistent over time, the results revealed no change. However, three children did change their view from positive to negative, but three other children changed their response from negative to positive. This finding emphasises how individual and varied these children's experiences are, and also highlights how important it is to conduct a more in-depth analysis to fully understand their complex and personal needs. Gaining this understanding is helpful for developing the services these children need.

Two findings which were particularly distinctive were the responses from the questions "Are there ever times when you feel angry or frustrated?", and "Do you see your social worker as often as you like?".  The question "Are there ever times when you feel angry or frustrated?" had the second highest number of children responding negatively at time two ($n$=24). This showed

that many children initially reported feeling angry or frustrated at times and remained feeling this way after 12-24 months, and some children reported feeling positive, but over time started to feel angry and frustrated. This finding alone does not provide much information, but paired with the qualitative findings, it is not surprising considering the level of frustration that echoes through the data. It also suggests more needs to be done to reduce this frustration, or to avoid it from negatively developing over time.

The analysis of the second question "Do you see your social worker as often as you like?" provided an interesting finding because this question had the most children switch from feeling positive to negative ($n$=16/62), which means this result is the only finding to have an overall change in a negative direction. Although the change is very small (approx. 10%), it is not surprising that a negative change over time has resulted from the question regarding social worker availability, based on previous and current qualitative findings revealing that children want more reliability and consistency from their social worker (Blueprint Project, 2005; McLeod, 2006). Unfortunately, although children expressed this need, research claims that social workers can be constrained by organisational issues which limit the amount of face-to-face time they can have with children (Winter, 2009).

Feelings of frustration and lack of availability from social workers are two areas often discussed together in literature - as well as the current research - which is unfortunate as Munro (2001) emphasised how important this contact is for building a secondary attachment with children. The relationship between adults and children has been mentioned numerous times in this research, and will be considered further in the next section.

## 5.4 Does attachment theory help to understand the experiences of looked-after children?

The current findings repeatedly raise issues around the type of relationships these children have with adults, with the conclusion that they value good

quality relationships, based on consistency, reliability and trustworthiness. Therefore, attachment theory is likely to be a useful framework to refer to when aiming to obtain and understand these children's views (Atwool, 2006). Dozier, Stoval, Albus and Bates (2001) reported that the child's primary attachment should come from their foster carer. The current findings are promising in that they suggest that many children felt positive about their relationship with their foster carer, particularly those children who have commented upon their achievements, opportunities and the encouragement they have received since becoming looked after.

The findings also suggest that children reported feeling settled in their foster home, which according to South et al. (2016) is important to support children to develop a secure base which nurtures resilience. Belsky and Fearon (2002) agree how important this primary attachment is for children who have been through adversity. Unfortunately, the findings revealed a level of distress from some children as a result of placement moves. Gaskell (2010) reported how disruptive placement moves are to children's attachment relationships, and how important it is to avoid placements moves in order to enable these secure relationships to be maintained - thus supporting their sense of self-worth (Kennedy, 2008), self-esteem and emotional wellbeing (Mullan et al., 2007).

South et al. (2016) reported that a secure base alone is sufficient to support children who have had difficult early experiences. These children need to engage in relationships with other significant adults (Atwool, 2006), siblings and peers (Dunn, 2004), which would suggest it is important to help children maintain a connection to birth family and friends. This view was expressed by the children throughout the qualitative data, but is a view debated in the literature. Loxterkamp (2009) argued that family contact prevents children from forming a new attachment to their foster carer. However, research by Fratter, Rowe, Sapsford and Thobum (1991), and Berridge (1997), suggested that children are capable of sustaining strong positive relationships with both parents and foster carers at the same time. The current findings would suggest that children are also capable of expressing exactly how much contact they feel is appropriate and sufficient to meet their needs. Research

suggested that allowing children the contact that they feel they need is likely to improve their emotional wellbeing (Cantos, Gries & Slis, 1997), help them cope with feelings of abandonment and loss, and establish new positive relationships with others (Colon, 1978; Lee & Whiting, 2007; Littner, 1975; Tiddy, 1986). This reinforced Chapman et al.'s (2004) point that professionals need to listen to the children's contact preferences and support this need, a process which could be facilitated by the information provided via Viewpoint.

In the current research, some children spoke fondly of their social worker, and others were unhappy with the amount of help and contact time they received. Comments included social workers not listening, being unreliable or untrustworthy. This is concerning as previous research suggested that when children feel their social workers are attending to their needs, it is highly beneficial for their involvement in decision-making and future outcomes (Munro, 2001).

Bell's (2002) research described the key role of the social worker as a secondary attachment figure for the child, with the most effective relationship adopting a supportive/companionable style (Heard & Lake, 1997). It is possible that the children expressing a sense of helplessness and lack of freedom are experiencing a dominant/submissive interaction with their social worker. This interaction style does not motivate children to express their views, or facilitate involvement in decision making. The children who were more positive about the adults in their lives and that expressed success and achievements since becoming looked after, may be experiencing a supportive/companionable style interaction, which includes a secure, mutually respectful and unthreatening relationship with an adult they trust. This style is more likely to lead children to feel involved in decision making (Bell, 2002; Heard & Lake, 1997).

In contrast, it was important to consider the attachment theory framework when thinking about the vulnerable group within the research who reported feeling negative at time one and remained feeling this way 12-24 months later, and who provided detailed - and emotionally distressing - comments.

Bell (2002) explained that when supporting such a vulnerable group, it is important to be aware that in many cases these children have been exposed to abuse or neglect from an adult, which can lead them to view *themselves* as unworthy and untrusting (Kennedy, 2008). Therefore, it is important that professionals and foster carers do not reactivate or heighten the child's sense of worthlessness. This will otherwise not only impact upon their emotional wellbeing, but also lead them to feel their views are unworthy of sharing and unlikely to bring about any change (Munro, 2001). It is important that these children who were identified though the use of Viewpoint are provided the mental health and emotional wellbeing support they need - an area which educational psychologists could be involved with - to offer therapeutic support to children and training to school staff and carers, and ensure these children's needs are more effectively met.

## Chapter 6. Conclusion

Chapter six offers my own self reflection and personal journey during the research process, implications for educational psychology practice, along with a consideration of the strengths and limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, and an overall conclusion.

### 6.1 Personal journey and self-reflection of the research process

I started this research journey with an excitement and interest in the opportunity to carry out a large scale statistical analysis of important and valuable existing data, which had been collected over the course of a decade. I began exploring the quantitative data, enjoyed the process, and I was both surprised and pleased by the positive findings that were initially apparent. At this point, I began to familiarise myself with the qualitative information, with the expectation that I would collect some positive comments to complement the quantitative responses. However, I was immediately shocked and confused by the contrast between the two types of data collected. Many of the comments from the children were highly emotive and gave me a greater, real insight into their world. I began to build up a picture of what it must feel like to be a looked-after child. Due to my experience

as a trainee educational psychologist, I was aware of some of the challenges these children face and how vulnerable they are, but reading comments which had come directly from them, really brought their distress to life. I felt perplexed that these children were providing such open and emotional responses on an online survey, and I did not previously expect such a strong sense of helplessness to echo through the data. At that moment, I felt strongly empowered to do something meaningful with their comments in order to ensure it was not a waste of their time, and with the hope that others would not only feel equally moved by their honesty, but motivated enough by their distress to strive to bring positive change for this population.

Many of the children's  comments changed my mindset, from initially starting the journey expecting to carry out a valuable statistical analysis of the views of looked-after children, to ending the journey hopeful that I did justice to the qualitative information, and that I may have produced research that would equally inspire other practitioners to reflect - and improve - upon their own practices. What was very interesting was that the children's comments not only effectively highlighted their own challenges, but also included helpful suggestions of how services could be improved. I was indeed able to collate these suggestions, use them to raise awareness, and to incorporate into consideration and implementation of my own thinking and practices.

Having completed this research journey, I feel strongly that there is a place in research for statistics, and I greatly enjoyed developing my statistical skills and knowledge further. I will continue to do so, but I also feel I experienced a personal transformation as a researcher who now appreciates the value of qualitative data. I feel all data collection via surveys should consider including open questions, following each closed question, to allow participants such as children the space to express themselves more freely. Without the children's comments, I would not have had the level of insight into their lives that I have now. The high level of distress that echoed though the data would not have been captured, and I would have concluded that overall the children's experience of being looked-after is very positive, but their comments enabled me to uncover and highlight the areas which still need to be improved upon from their point of view, and I hope to

continue this work.

**6.2 Implications for EP practice**

### 6.2.1 Adopting attachment theory principles

The current findings highlighted the usefulness of adopting an attachment theory framework when supporting and engaging with looked-after children. I hope the findings remind educational psychologists to regularly reflect upon their practice in order to ensure it aligns with attachment theory principles as much as possible (Bowlby,1969). Educational psychologists are also well placed to offer professionals and foster carers training on the usefulness of the attachment theory framework in underpinning the way in which to support these children. This should focus upon taking the time to build positive relationships based on consistent, reliable and trustworthy behaviours. Providing honest and regular accurate information, and reducing placement moves, changes of social worker and cancellations, will also help the child's world to be as predictable and stable as possible (see Bell, 2002; Bowlby,1973; Gaskell, 2010; Mullan et al., 2007; Munro, 2001; Winter, 2009).

It is also helpful to stress how important it is to keep the children regularly informed, to reduce their levels of uncertainty, and to support them to feel contained and 'held in mind' (Bell, 2002; Blueprint project, 2005; Mullan et al., 2007; Ruch, 2005). Carers and similar others should be encouraged to share as much information with children as is appropriate and readily available, as well as being honest in disclosing to children when there is *no* new information (Mullan et al, 2007). When working with children, educational psychologists should as much as possible, provide information about their role prior to meeting the children, be available to answer questions whenever required, and to offer feedback at the conclusion of the involvement.  Clear, honest, agreed expectations are likely to help children feel a sense of security and trust in the relationship and involvement (Mullan et al., 2007).

Educational psychologists should also incorporate into their training, methods to support these children to develop or maintain their sense of identity and 'normality'. The current findings would suggest this could be achieved through maintaining strong connections with their home community, school, friends and family as much as possible (Holland et al., 2010; Selwyn et al, 2010; Shaw, 1998). Furthermore, support in allowing independence which is developmentally in-line with their peers (Mullan et al, 2007; Thomas and O'Kane, 1999; 2000), and encouraging access to hobbies will also help, along with providing the child with regular information about their family (Daniel & Wassell, 2002; Schofield & Beek, 2006).

Alongside the importance of educational psychologists offering training, there is also the potential to work more closely with Children's Social Care, possibly as part of a looked-after children team, as well as offering therapeutic emotional wellbeing support to the highly vulnerable children identified through Viewpoint, and support to the adults working with these children to ensure their needs are more effectively met.

### 6.2.2 Gaining the views of the child

The current research has highlighted how important it is to use individualised approaches to gaining children's views. The findings revealed that some children appreciated completing surveys in private, whilst other children prefered to discuss their views with an adult in person. It is helpful to offer children a variety of methods in order to ensure that they have access to the most appropriate tool for *them* to feel comfortable (e.g. Christensen & James, 2000; Goodyer, 2016; Punch, 2002). Additionally, in order to ensure the most effective approaches are used to gain the views of the children, it is helpful to seek regular feedback from them following involvement, and this will inform future practice (Barnes, 2007; Blueprint Project, 2005; Leeson 2007).

It is also important to ensure that gaining children's views is not simply a 'tokenistic', mandatory practice. Children do not want to be asked their view if

it is not going to be taken seriously, and will not inform decision making (Archard and Skivenes, 2009). The current findings have shown how powerful a tool Viewpoint is in capturing the views and wishes of children in care, enabling individualised support to meet their diverse needs, and yet professionals who have access to this resource are unsure how to use it effectively (Morgan & Fraser, 2010). There is a role for educational psychologists to share these findings with Children's Social Care teams and support them with ways the programme could be more effectively operationalised. Due to its engaging and private approach, there is also value in educational psychologists utilising the tool in their practice, to capture the views of children who may be less confident or willing to discuss sensitive information with an adult in person.

Finally, the current findings have reinforced some ongoing issues with confidentiality, power imbalance and 'boredom' in Looked-After Child review meetings (Buchanan et al., 1993; Morgan, 2009; Sherbert Research, 2009). It is important to be aware of the anxiety which may be associated with adults sharing information which the children themselves feel is confidential, and professionals should ensure that children are regularly consulted before *their* views are discussed in meetings and similar (Munro, 2001). This may not only encourage the child to more confidently share their views at such events, but also increase their trust in professionals and to feel that they are an important part of the decision process - and not just the 'content' (Mainey et al., 2009).

Additionally, the research showed that since Thomas and O'Kane's research in 2000, around half of the children are still not attending review meetings - which were specifically designed to include and encourage opportunities for children to share their views (The Children Act, 1989). The current findings support the previous research outlining why this may be and educational psychologists can use this available information to inform the set up of any meetings discussing a child in care. For example, ensuring the child is invited, asking whether they would like an advocate or a friend present in the meeting, if they would like to lead the discussion, what room they would prefer the meeting to take place in, etc. Focusing upon individualising the meeting as

much as possible and offering the child more control of the situation will ensure that they feel comfortable, worthy and empowered to participate in the discussions (Blueprint Project, 2005; Buchanan et al., 1993; Morgan, 2009; Sherbert Research, 2009). This is turn may increase the amount of value the child places upon meetings with professionals - and hopefully improve their attendance and contribution.

## 6.3 Limitations

It has to be acknowledged that there are limitations with using surveys to gain the views of the child. Barnes (2007) suggested to truly see the world through a child's eyes you should carry out an unstructured qualitative analysis. Robson and McCartan (2016) claimed that closed questions with pre-determined response options will not effectively gain a child's view, and open questions asking them to expand upon a specific topic is again a barrier to effectively establishing the child's view. Additionally, Thomas and O'Kane (1998) claimed that due to these children experiencing a lack of control in their lives, it is ethical to allow them control over the topics discussed and the direction the discussion takes, and unfortunately *this* approach does not allow for this to happen.

Furthermore, although the majority of the children had the opportunity to complete Viewpoint independently, some children were supported by the Viewpoint Officer and in these instances, I am unaware what level of support and guidance the children received and whether this skewed their responses. Additionally, this raises issues of power imbalance, especially if the children associate the Viewpoint Officer with Children's Social Care (Davies, 2009; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998).

Due to the research involving secondary data, there were also issues with it not being developed with the intended research purpose in mind (Burton, 2000). The main challenges were in regards to the inconsistent frequency of the data collection, with some children providing survey responses two

months apart, and others 12 months apart. Further, due to the surveys including different age appropriate questions, I was only able to carry out an analysis of one age group (10-14 years), which does mean that the 'time one' responses for some children will be when they entered care, and for others it will be the first time they completed that particular survey, although they may have previously competed the age five-seven or seven-nine survey. Therefore, the sample of children are likely to vary greatly in the length of time they have been in care, as well as varying in their placement type, number of placement moves and pre-care experience, etc. Thus, when conducting longitudinal research on this population of children, it is difficult to obtain a consistent data collections approach and reduce variability because these children are not a homogenous group, they have complex lives, but I feel this is more of a reason to not be discouraged from carrying out this type of research (Fernandez, 2007).

## 6.4 Strengths

This study has demonstrated the value of using data collected via Viewpoint in order to explore in detail the views of children in care. For many children this software has offered them a platform to share their experience, request information and suggest changes to their current arrangements. Not only has the research captured the views of children having a positive experience, but also those who are feeling angry and frustrated about being in care and in some cases, the impact this is having upon their emotional wellbeing.

The strength of the current study is that it has reduced the risk of participant bias, due to all the children in the two local authorities having the option to complete the survey (most of them choosing to do this independently in private), and the CASI method allowing for easy, accessible, widespread data collection, using an engaging, interactive programme, as part of ongoing regular practice (Barrett et al., 2007; Davies & Morgan, 2005). Therefore, this tool has allowed for a sample, that may include children often not motivated to complete and return postal surveys, and who may find paper questionnaires

boring, and online surveys more motivating due to the interactive features and games. It has also gained access to the children unlikely to be put forward by social workers due to being considered too vulnerable, or lacking the ability to articulate their views (Munro, 2001). This approach has also therefore gathered widespread views, hopefully including some of the 'hard to reach', 'hidden' group, previous research may not have been able to effectively capture. The challenge is now to ensure that this voice is heard and acted upon, in order to inform ways of working that are responsive to the needs of these children.

Although the current sample size is not as representative as the samples obtained from postal surveys distributed to all looked-after children across the country (e.g. Timms & Thoburn, 2003; 2006), it has offered an indication of some of the broad trends across two local authorities, and provided a larger sample than previous research using solely qualitative approaches (e.g. Gaskell, 2010; Leeson, 2007). The mixed method approach allowed the researcher to explore the broad trends across two local authorities, but also to gain a more in-depth understanding of how complex and varied these children's experiences are - as well as gaining contrasting and complementary perspectives which would not have been possible without both closed and open-questions. This method has enabled a more holistic and accurate understanding of the children's experiences and wishes.

Furthermore, although children's views have been collected by Viewpoint in the two current local authorities for over a decade, these have only been explored at an individual level – or to provide 'snap shot' quarterly reports. Therefore, not only has *this* research allowed the children's views to be heard and to provide implications for professional practice, it has also allowed a rare longitudinal analysis to be carried out. This approach is beneficial in understanding the changes in views and experiences over time for these children, thus informing professionals of the areas where more can be done in order to achieve a significant positive change (Woodier, 2011), as well as acknowledging the areas where minimal change is occurring, or areas which become more challenging over time.

## 6.5 Future research

Firstly, with some children commenting upon aspects of Viewpoint they dislike, e.g. confusing questions or length, it may be helpful to carry out child participatory research to evaluate and develop the tool (Lundy, McEvoy & Byrne, 2011). This may enable surveys to be as enjoyable and engaging as possible, and could include questions which the children themselves feel are the most important to ask.

A similar exploratory analysis should be carried out on the other survey datasets to establish what the experiences are for children across the age groups, especially as there is minimal research gaining the views of children under the age of eight at present (Holland, 2009). It would also be valuable to gain the views of care leavers who have used Viewpoint, to both discuss their perceptions of the approach and also to gain further insight into the views they provided when they were looked after. This retrospective approach – reflecting on prospective information they previously provided - would offer interesting and unique research.

Viewpoint data is collected in over 130 local authorities (Davies, 2009). Therefore, it may be possible to carry out a larger scale study to gain the views of children across the country, in order to provide a more representative analysis. Alongside this, it would be helpful to gain an understanding of how social workers utilise the data collected in each local authority and how it informs policies and practice, and if it is not being embedded into their service effectively, what are the barriers?

I also feel a more detailed analysis of the current data would be beneficial, exploring the children's journeys at an individual level and noticing whether there are any patterns in regards to gender, ethnicity or age. As well as looking closely at the children who provided the most negative responses and investigating whether there are any patterns amongst these children. It would

also be helpful to extend the longitudinal analysis to help understand the impact of being in care over a longer period of time, including an analysis of the survey responses provided three or four years after the initial responses.

## 6.5 Final conclusion

The current study adds to a limited evidence base supporting the use of Viewpoint to gain the views of looked-after children, as well as offering a unique contribution by exploring these views over time using a longitudinal design. The study has also adopted a mixed method approach, which enabled an understanding of how different narratives can emerge, depending on the method used. Therefore, emphasising the importance of using a variety of methods to truly capture the voice of the child and avoiding distorted findings. Despite the mixed method approach capturing contrasting narratives, the quantitative and qualitative findings are complementary when integrated together and provide a more holistic understanding of these children's complex experiences.

Although I feel overall the current method has effectively gained the voice of the child, the findings have also revealed areas where Viewpoint could be improved, along with the review meetings that this data is used to inform.

The results revealed that some children value the approach and utilised it to express encouraging views in relation to positive change and achievements they have experienced since becoming looked after. As well as emphasising some of the challenges of being in care, such as a lack of identity, stability and loss of connection to their family, friends and community and the high levels of distress this causes. The findings also offered ways that their situations could be improved, however it is not clear the extent to which these views are listened to and inform decision making, policy and practice. The results suggested many children do not feel heard, which has lead to an overwhelming sense of frustration, disempowerment and helplessness.

To reduce this frustration, the children would value more information and consistency from adults and to be listened to and understood. Therefore, it was felt that attachment theory does appropriately underpin these findings and offer a framework to draw upon to effectively meet their individual and complex needs and involve them in the decisions made about their lives.

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# 7. Appendices

## 7.1 Appendix A: Table of figures, tables and graphs

### Table of figures

### Table of tables

**Table of graphs**

### 7.2 Appendix B: Looked-after children 10-14 years Viewpoint survey

1 Hi, <users User First Name>. Click the forward arrow, at the bottom of the screen, to move on.

2 Your answers to these questions will help make plans for you at your Review meeting. Click the forward arrow to start.

3 Do you feel settled, where you live now? Click on your answer, and then click the forward arrow to move on.

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Just about |
| Response 4 | Yes, completely |

4 Do you have new clothes bought for you?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Most of the time |
| Response 4 | All the time |

5 Who goes shopping with you for clothes?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Friends |
| Response 2 | Carer |
| Response 3 | Brother or Sister |
| Response 4 | Other family member |
| Response 5 | Nobody |
| Response 6 | Someone else ( Use Notepad ) |

6 Do you have the things you need for your personal care?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Some but I want more |
| Response 4 | Yes, as much as I like |

7 Can you have the sorts of food and drink you like?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Yes, but I want more choice |
| Response 4 | Yes, definitely |

8 Can you keep your own things safe where you are?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Most things |
| Response 4 | Yes, definitely |

9  Are you able to follow your religion and customs where you live?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | No |
| Response 2 | Does not apply to me |
| Response 3 | Yes |

10 Do you feel safe where you live now?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Just about |
| Response 4 | Yes definitely |

11 Does anyone bully or pick on you, where you live now?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | A bit |
| Response 3 | A lot |
| Response 4 | All the time |

12 What hobbies or sports do you like doing? Click on the screen, and type in your answer.

13 Can you do these as often as you like?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Just about |
| Response 4 | Yes, completely |

14 Does <users Foster Carer or Key/Link Worker> or someone else encourage you to do hobbies or sports?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Just about |
| Response 4 | Yes. completely |

15 Are you able to make and keep friends of your own age?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Most of the time |
| Response 4 | All the time |

16 Are your friends able to visit where you live now?

    Response 1               Do not have any to visit me
    Response 2               No, they can´t
    Response 3               Sometimes
    Response 4               Yes, as much as I like

17 Do you see your friends as much as you want?

    Response 1               Not at all
    Response 2               Not really
    Response 3               Just about
    Response 4               Yes, definitely

18 Are you able to keep in touch with your family as much as you want?

    Response 1               Not at all
    Response 2               Not really
    Response 3               Just about
    Response 4               Yes, definitely

19 Do you have overnight stays with anyone?

    Response 1               Yes
    Response 2               No

20 Are you happy with the arrangements for staying overnight with friends or family?

    Response 1               Yes, completely
    Response 2               Just about
    Response 3               Not really
    Response 4               Not at all

21 Is there anything you want to change about contact with family and friends?

22 Are there ever times when you get angry or frustrated?

    Response 1               Not at all
    Response 2               Not really
    Response 3               Most of the time
    Response 4               All of the time

23 When does this happen?

24 Do you have a life story book, or information about people you know?

    Response 1               Not at all

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 2 | Some, but I want more |
| Response 3 | Yes, as much as I like |

25 What information would you like?


26 Okay, thanks. Now you can have a game break if you want. Click the game button to play, or the forward arrow to move on.


27 Do you see <users Principal worker (Social Worker/Leaving Care Worker/PA)> as often as you like?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Just about |
| Response 4 | Yes definitely |

28 Do you see anyone else as well as <users Principal worker (Social Worker/Leaving Care Worker/PA)>?


29 Is <users Principal worker (Social Worker/Leaving Care Worker/PA)> someone you can talk to?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Yes, sometimes, it depends |
| Response 4 | Yes, completely |

30 Does <users Principal worker (Social Worker/Leaving Care Worker/PA)> help you when you have problems?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Yes, but I´d like more help |
| Response 4 | Yes, definintely |

31 How do you think you get on with <users Foster Carer or Key/Link Worker>?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not very well |
| Response 2 | Okay |
| Response 3 | Fairly well |
| Response 4 | Very well |

32 Is <users Foster Carer or Key/Link Worker> someone you can talk to?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Yes, sometimes, it depends |

Response 4                Yes, completely

33 Does <users Foster Carer or Key/Link Worker> or someone else notice when you have done well at something?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Sometimes |
| Response 4 | Yes, definitely |

34 What do you spend your pocket money on?

35 Do you have a bank account?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | No |
| Response 2 | Yes |
| Response 3 | Don´t know what this is |

36 Do you go to school every day?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | No |
| Response 2 | Yes |

37 Why do you miss school?

38 What do you like most about school?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Friends |
| Response 2 | Learning |
| Response 3 | Teachers |
| Response 4 | P.E. |
| Response 5 | Lunch |
| Response 6 | Something else (Use note pad) |

39 Is there anything at school that you worry about?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | No |
| Response 2 | Maybe |
| Response 3 | Yes |

40 Can you say what you worry about?

41 Does anyone bully, hurt or upset you at school?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | No |
| Response 2 | Sometimes |
| Response 3 | Yes |

42 Who do you talk to about this?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Parents or carers |
| Response 2 | Social Worker |
| Response 3 | Teachers |
| Response 4 | Friends |
| Response 5 | Nobody |
| Response 6 | Someone else (use notepad) |

43 How do you think you are getting on at school? Drag the slider to where you want it on the scale.

| | |
|---|---|
| Minimum Value | 0 |
| Minimum Text | Not very well |
| Maximum Value | 100 |
| Maximum Text | Very well |
| Increment Value | 10 |

44 Would you like any extra support in any of these? You can choose more than one.

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Literacy |
| Response 2 | Numeracy |
| Response 3 | Anything else (write in notepad) |

45 Do you get any help from <users Foster Carer or Key/Link Worker> or someone else with school work?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | No |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Some, but I want more |
| Response 4 | Yes |

46 Is there a quiet place for you to do your homework, where you live?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Just about |
| Response 4 | Yes, definitely |

47 Do you have the books and other things you need for school, where you live?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Some, but I´d like more |
| Response 4 | Yes, as much as I´d like |

48 Are you able to use a computer for your school work where you live?

| | |
|---|---|
| Response 1 | Don´t have a computer |

| Response 2 | Not very often |
| Response 3 | Quite often |
| Response 4 | Yes, as much as I like |

49 Do you have a Personal Education Plan (PEP)?

| Response 1 | Yes |
| Response 2 | I don´t know |
| Response 3 | No |
| Response 4 | What is a PEP? |

50 Okay, now you can have another game break, if you want. Click the game button to play, or the forward arrow to move on.

51 Do you have any worries or concerns about your health?

| Response 1 | No |
| Response 2 | Maybe |
| Response 3 | Yes |

52 Can you say what worries you?

53 Do you have any problems with sleeping?

| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not always |
| Response 3 | Most of the time |
| Response 4 | Yes always |

54 Do you have a health plan?

| Response 1 | No |
| Response 2 | I do not know what this is |
| Response 3 | Yes |

55 Do you have someone to talk to about your health?

| Response 1 | No |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Yes for some things |
| Response 4 | Yes |

56 Do you receive enough information to enable you to make decisions about your future?

| Response 1 | Not at all |
| Response 2 | Not really |
| Response 3 | Some but I´d like more |

Response 4                  Yes, as much as I need

57 Do you think your views and opinions are listened to?

Response 1                  Not at all
Response 2                  Not really
Response 3                  Usually
Response 4                  Always

58 What makes you happy?

59 What makes you sad?

60 How often do you exercise or play sport?

Response 1                  Not at all
Response 2                  Hardly ever
Response 3                  Less than once a week
Response 4                  Once a week
Response 5                  Twice a week
Response 6                  Three times a week or more

61 Do you enjoy the food you´re given where you are living?

Response 1                  Yes
Response 2                  Often
Response 3                  Sometimes
Response 4                  Never

62 Do you know why you are living with <users Foster Carer or Key/Link Worker>?

Response 1                  No
Response 2                  I think so
Response 3                  Yes

63 Do you know that you have a care plan?

Response 1                  No
Response 2                  Yes

64 Are you helped to understand your care plan?

Response 1                  No
Response 2                  Just about
Response 3                  Yes

65 Is there anything that you are not happy about where you live now?

66 Is there anything that would make things better for you where you live now?

67 Has <users Principal worker (Social Worker/Leaving Care Worker/PA)> talked to you about your review meeting?

    Response 1               Do not know what it is
    Response 2               Not at all
    Response 3               Not really
    Response 4               Yes, but I want to know more
    Response 5               Yes, completely

68 Who do you want at your review?

69 Is there anyone you would NOT like to have at your review?

70 Are you going to your next review?

    Response 1               No
    Response 2               Not sure
    Response 3               Yes

71 Why not?

72 What decisions would you like to see made at your review?

73 What has gone well for you since your last review?

74 What has been difficult for you since your last review?

75 Do you know that if you are not happy about something, you can get help to make a complaint?

    Response 1               No, I did not know
    Response 2               No, but I would like to know how to
    Response 3               Yes, I know

76 If you were worried about something would you be able to use a telephone in private?

    Response 1               No
    Response 2               I think so
    Response 3               Only my mobile

Response 4                Yes

77Is there anything else you would like to say for your review?


78Are you aware that this information will be shared with people at your review?

Response 1                Yes
Response 2                No

79Is there anything you would not like to be discussed at your review?


80Thank you for answering the questions. You can play one last game if you want.