

Permanently Progressing? Building Secure Futures for Children in Scotland

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Looked after children: Permanency and Pathways

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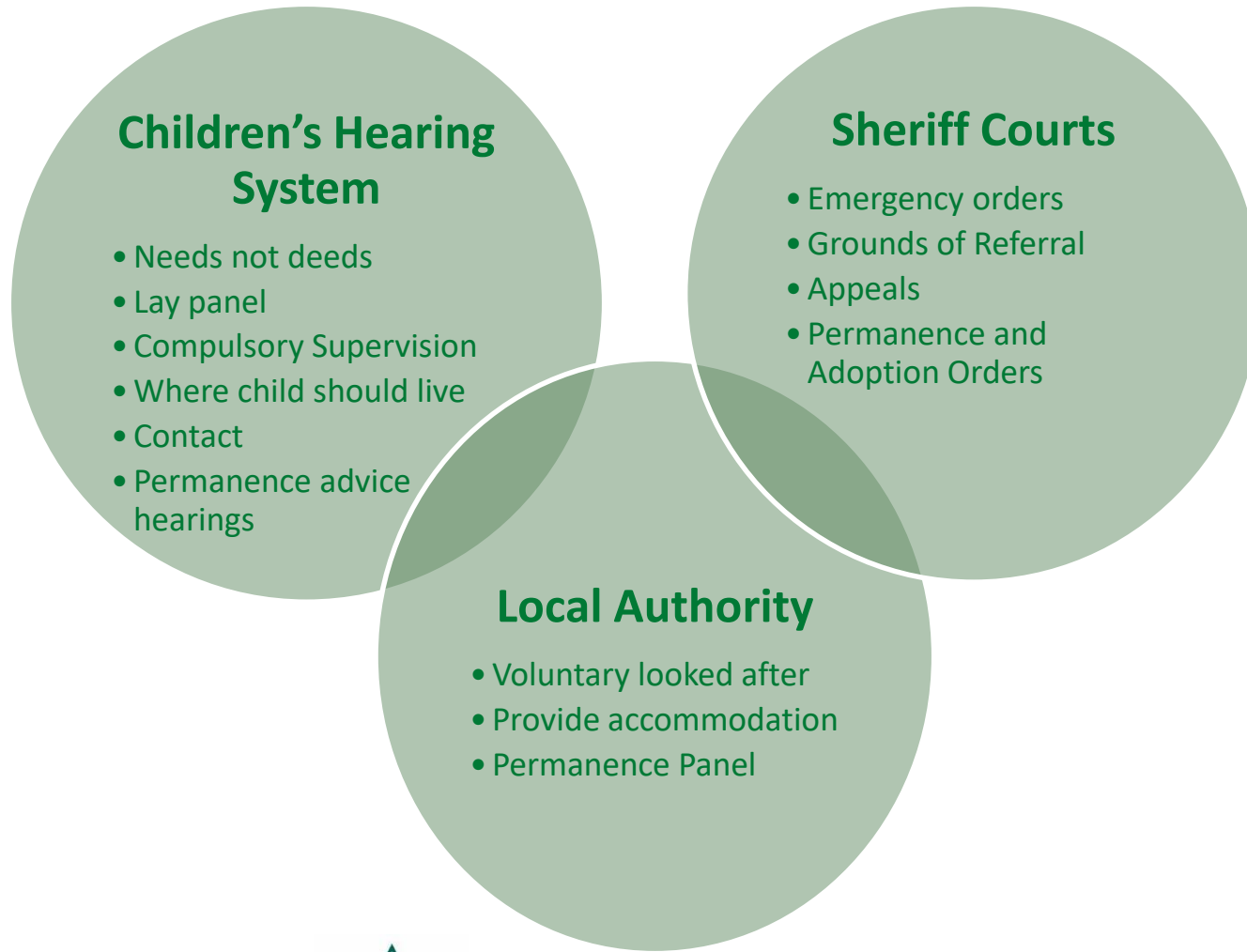


Permanently Progressing? Building Secure Futures for Children in Scotland

- Permanently Progressing? Building Secure Futures for children in Scotland: a collaboration between the Universities of Stirling, York, and Lancaster, with Adoption and Fostering Alliance (AFA) Scotland.
- Phase One (2014-2018) designed to be the first part of a longitudinal study following a large cohort of children into adolescence and beyond
- Study explores decision making, progress, and pathways over four years for children in Scotland who became looked after (at home or away from home) in 2012-2013 when they were aged five and under.
- Draws on data from Children Looked After Statistics (CLAS), from children, foster carers, kinship carers, adoptive parents, and professionals



Scottish tri-partite system



Permanence for looked after children in Scotland: what is permanence?

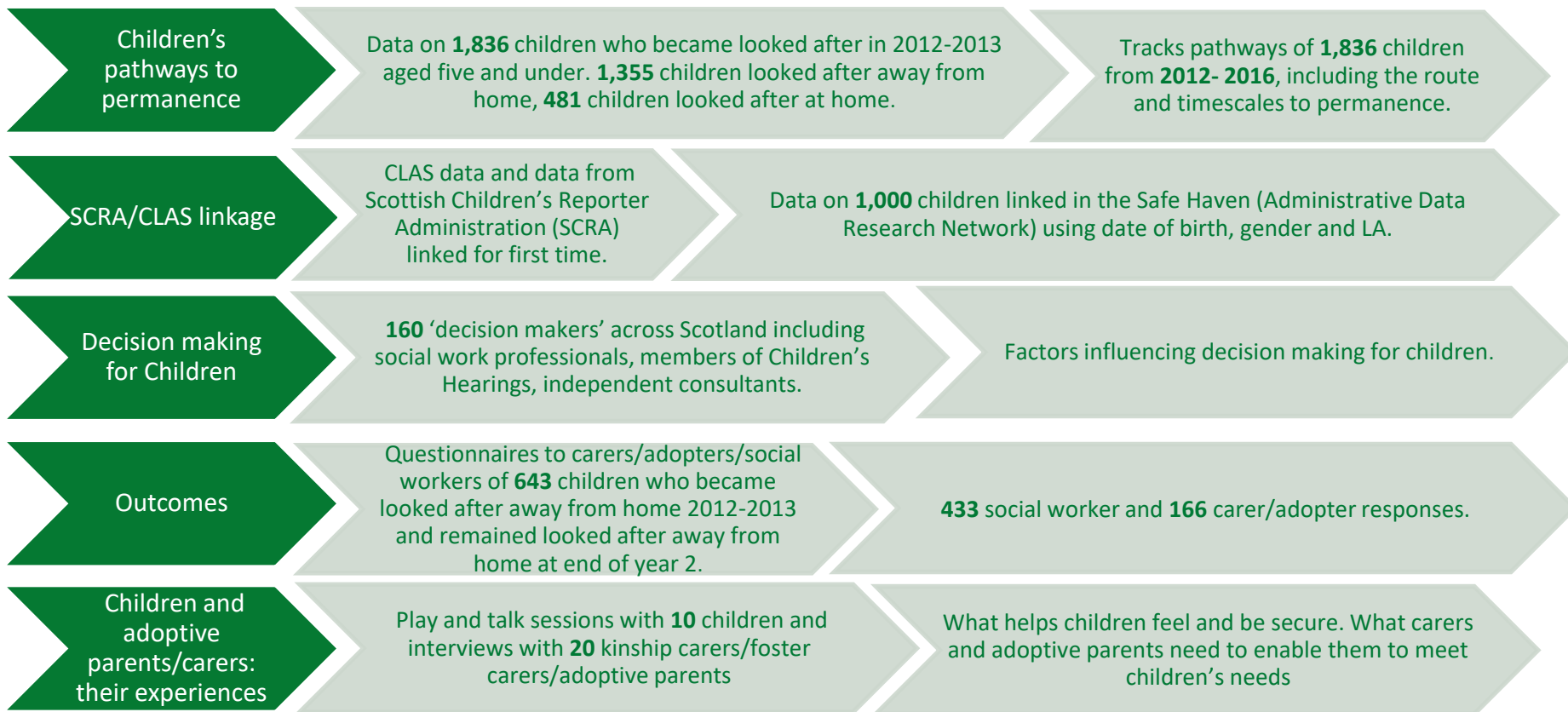
- Returning or remaining at home where family functioning has stabilised and parent(s) can provide a safe, sustainable home which supports the wellbeing of the child
- Permanence through a Permanence Order (kinship care, foster care) under Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
- Section 11 Order (parental responsibilities and rights) under Children (Scotland) Act 1995, or (from April 2016) Kinship care order under Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- Adoption - Direct Petition/POA under Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007

Scottish Government (2015) Planning and Decision Making for Looked After Children in Scotland

- Some children with carers (foster carer/kin) under s25 Children (Scotland) Act 1995 or Compulsory Supervision Order s83 Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011



Overview of data





The Child's Journey : Becoming Looked After

Children's pathways: About the children

- 1,836 children became looked after aged 5 or under in 2012-13
 - 1,355 became looked after *away from home*
 - 481 became looked after *at home*
- Half male, half female
- Children of mixed ethnicity slightly over-represented
- More of children looked after *away from home* recorded as having a disability (8%) than those looked after *at home* (5%)
- Virtually all babies under 1 year initially placed *away from home*
- Nearly half of *away from home* group under 1 year old



First away from home placement

- Efforts were made to work with families on a voluntary basis
 - Overall, nearly half of all children initially on voluntary s25
 - Most others initially on emergency or interim measures
- 60% of children were initially placed with unrelated foster carers
 - Higher for babies under 6 weeks old
- 35% of children initially placed with kinship foster carers
 - Around half of 4-5 year olds, but only 15% of babies under 6 weeks old

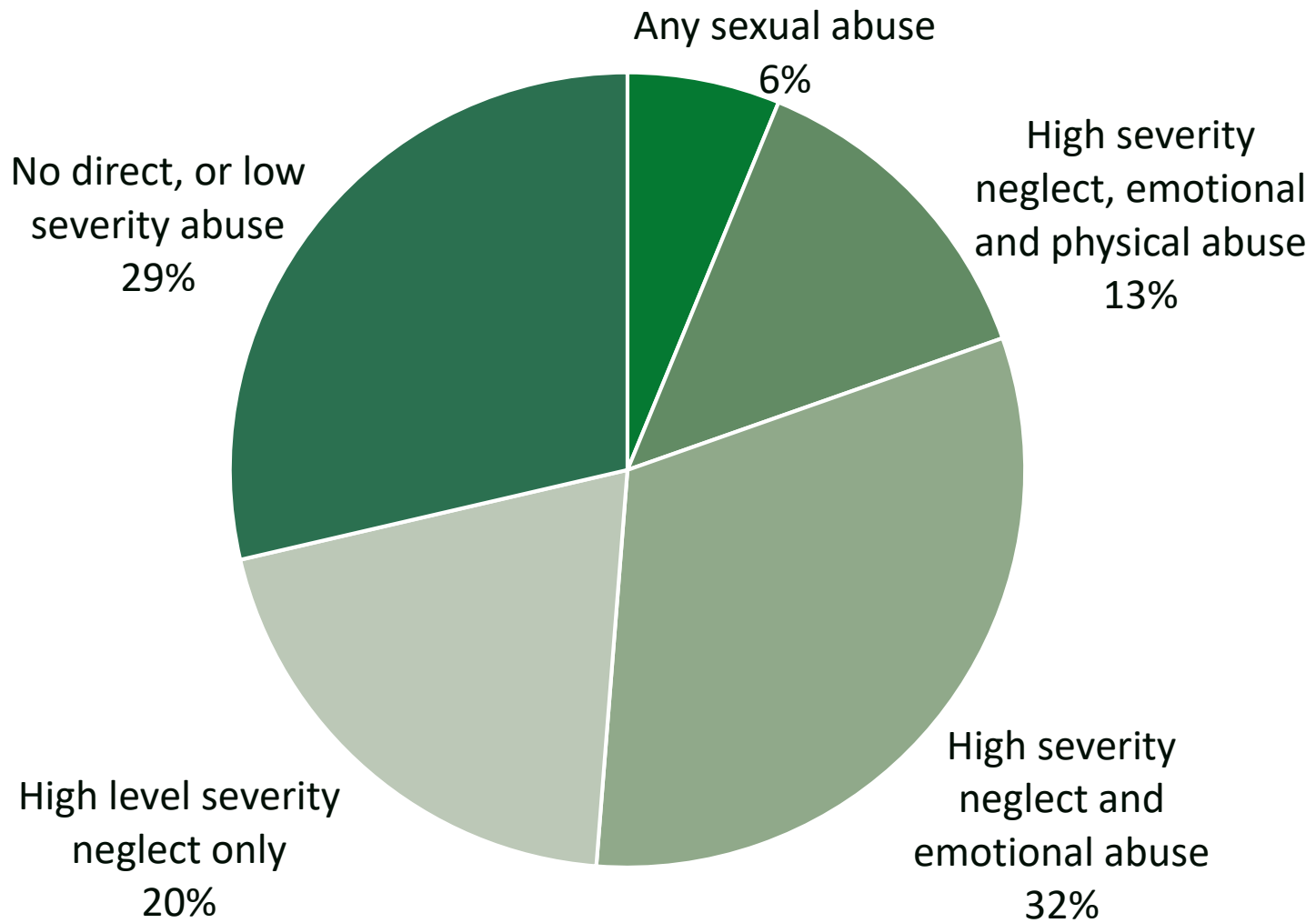


Outcomes: Children's experience of maltreatment

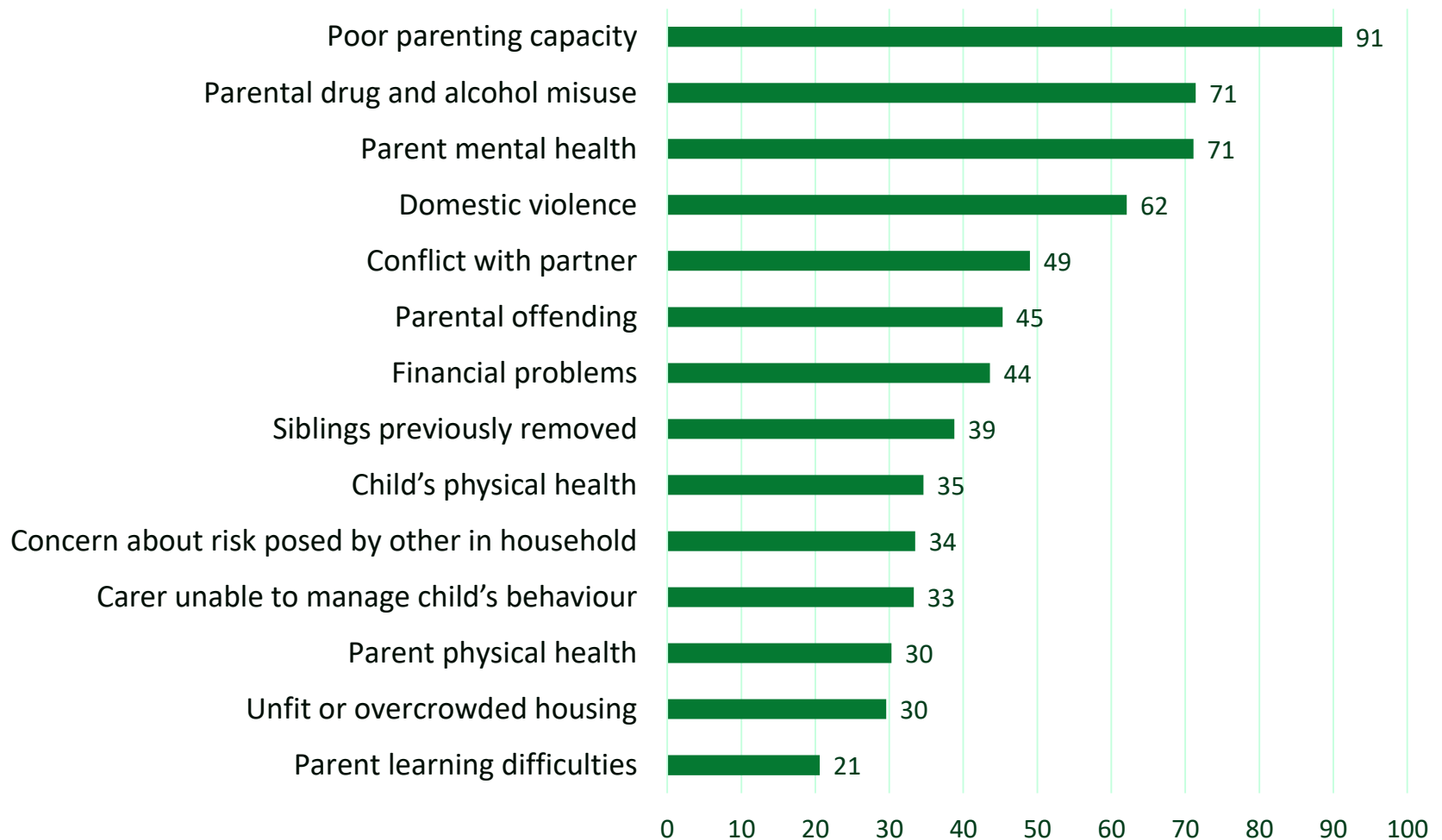
- For 9 out of 10 children there were concerns they had directly experienced abuse or neglect
 - 81% neglect
 - 65% emotional abuse
 - 27% physical abuse
 - 6% sexual abuse
- Around two-thirds of children experienced more than one type of maltreatment
- More children experienced higher severity neglect and emotional abuse than physical or sexual abuse



Maltreatment clusters (type and severity)



Experience of family problems (% of sample)



Decision makers: Themes

Those who participated* said:

- Supports put in place to prevent child being looked after away from home and promote reunification
- Where children were looked away from home, kinship care was generally 'first option'
- Professionals said they looked for tangible improvements
- Complex systems: Range of professionals involved and different decision making forums and forms

*Decision Making Strand: 160 'decision makers' across Scotland



Children*: Why I became 'looked after away from home'

- Some children were able to remember and recall experiences of neglect and abuse
- Other children had been told by social workers and carers that their mummy/daddy could not keep them safe
- Some parents/carers uncertain of what to share and when

*'Play and talk' sessions with 10 children and interviews with 20 carers/adoptive parents



Why I became looked after away from home



Interviewer: *Is that why you were taken into foster care?*

Lewis: *Yeah, because they would fight and stuff.*

Interviewer: *Right, okay, shouting or hitting?*

Lewis: *Hitting and shouting. They would...my mum and dad here told me that they hid drugs in my socks.*

Interviewer: *In your socks? Gosh.*

Lewis: *And they drank lots of alcohol.*

Lewis* (aged nine)

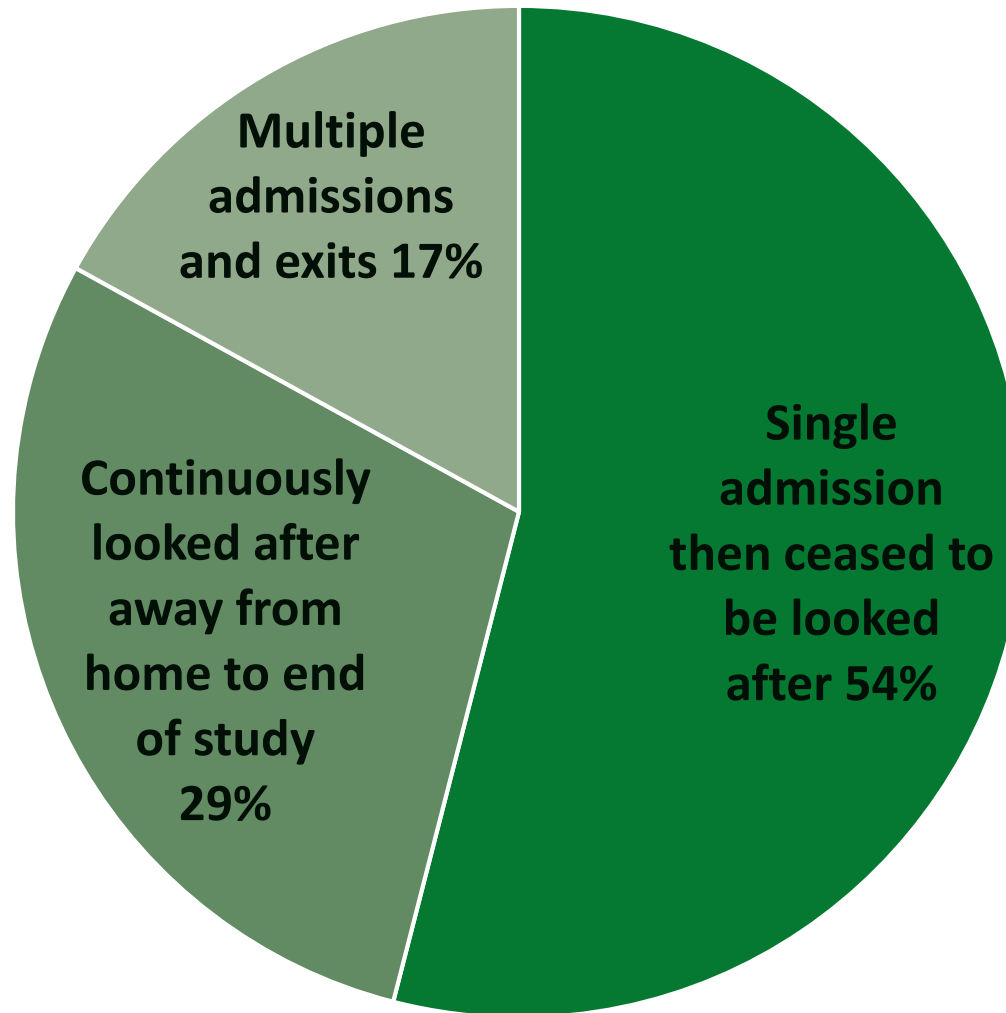
* All names changed. Where we have used more than one quote from one child, we have used different names





The Child's Journey : Moving to Permanence

Pathways over 4 years: *away from home group*



Pathways, placements and destinations

- Number looked after away from home fell each year
 - From 1,079 at the end of Year 1 to 533 at the end of Year 4
- Returning home was the most common destination, in some cases with CSO
- Numbers ceasing to be looked after and living with relatives on s.11 order increased year on year
- The number of children adopted slowly increased
- Number looked after at home fluctuated
 - Between 72 and 163



Moving to permanence: Route and timing influenced by

Participants* told us that route and timing influenced by:

- “Place-ability of child”: included child’s age and whether she/he had brothers and sisters; type and amount of ongoing contact with birth family; and uncertainty about long term health implications – *“It’s the unknown isn’t it?”*
- Resources and time involved
- Where adoption was identified, the legal route varied geographically

* Decision Making Strand: 160 ‘decision makers’ across Scotland



Children: their memories of moving to permanent carers/adopters

- Children shown photo albums with space for future
- Visits for lunch/tea
- Sleepovers like the example Skye describes:

“I remember Sandra that used to be a foster carer. She gave me to Ann and then, I started having sleepovers and then, I started getting used to her and everyone and then, they went to a meeting to say that I could stay here and then, they said yes. So now, I can stay here”.

- Marked day with particular food





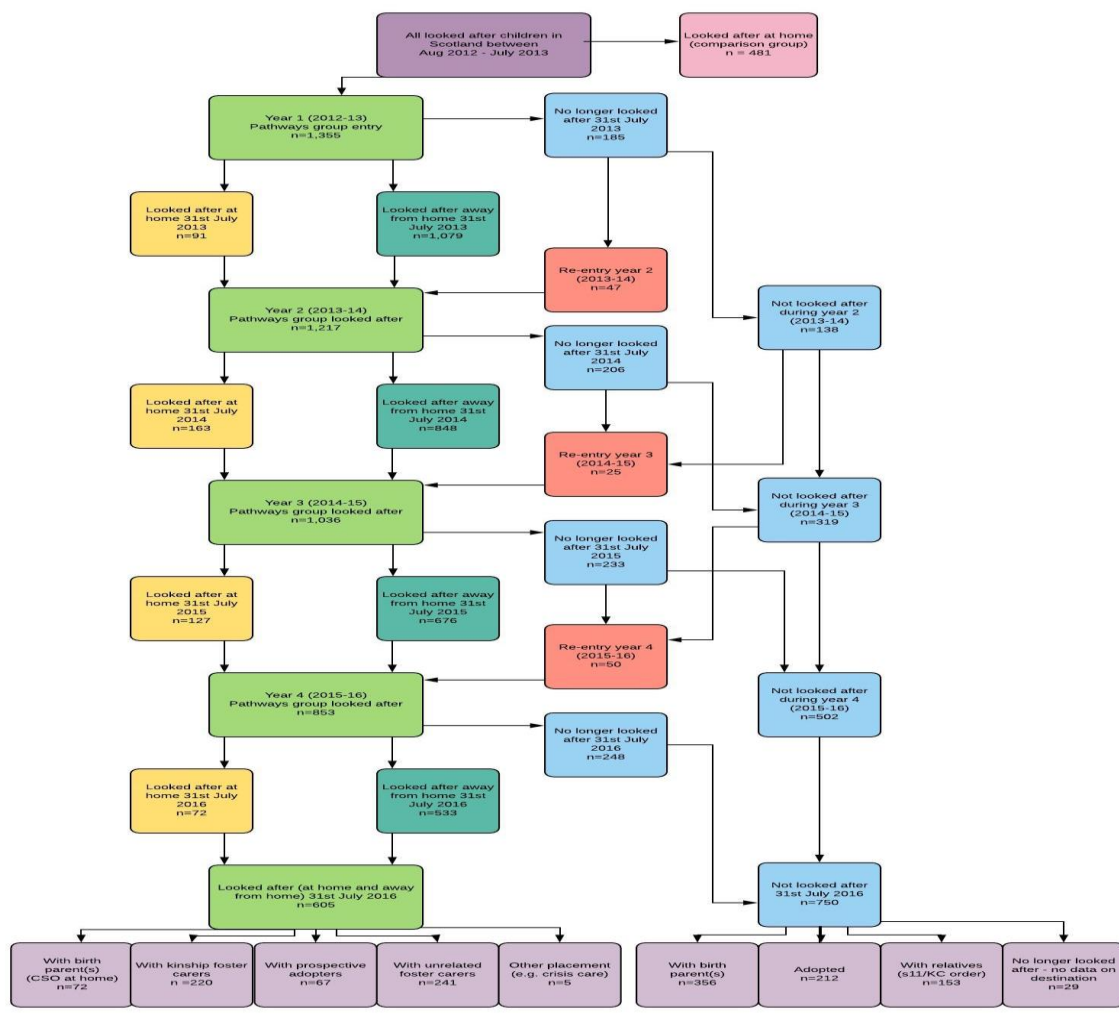
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The Child's Journey :
Where Are the
Children Now and How
Are They Doing

BE THE DIFFERENCE

Children's pathways through the looked after system



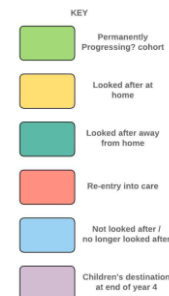
1,836 children became looked after in Scotland between 1 August 2012 - 31 July 2013. Of these children, 1,355 were looked after away from home and form the *Pathways* cohort, while 481 children were looked after at home and form the *Comparison* group. This flowchart shows the pathways for the 1,355 children who were looked after away from home over a four-year period from 2012 – 2016.

At the end of four years, of the 1,355 children, 750 were no longer looked after. Of these children:

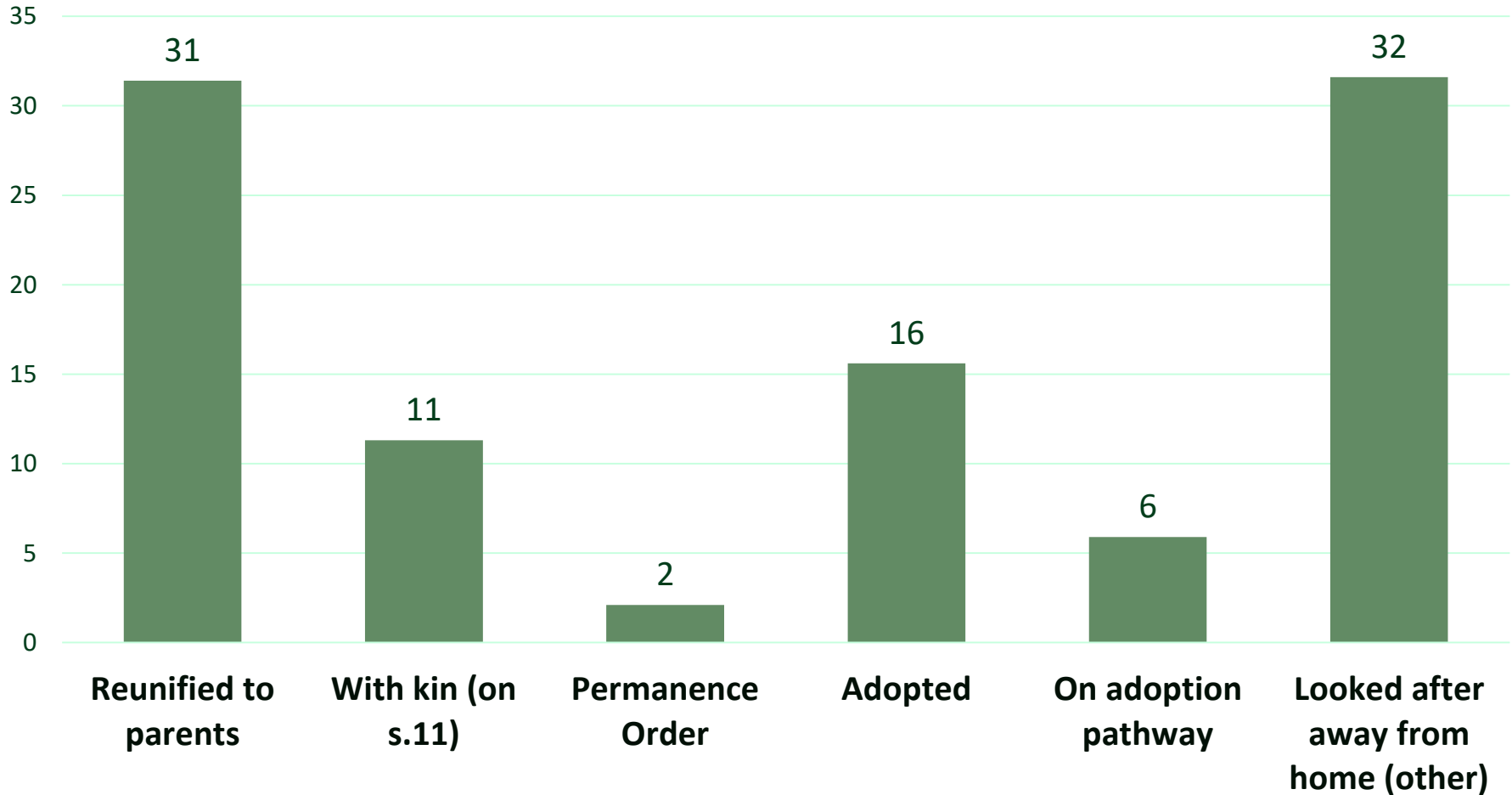
- 356 were living with birth parent(s)
- 153 were living with relatives
- 212 had been adopted
- 29 no longer looked after (no data on destination)

The remaining 605 children were still looked after. Of these children:

- 72 were looked after at home
- 220 were living with kinship foster carers
- 241 were living with unrelated foster carers
- 67 were living with prospective adopters
- 5 were in other placements (e.g. crisis care)



Where were the 1,355 children after 3-4 years? (%)



Permanence status 3-4 years after becoming looked after away from home

- A third of children had been reunified to parents
 - Average time away from home was 9 months
- 11% of children were in permanent placement with kin (s11)
- Just over a fifth adopted or on adoption pathway
 - Average time from becoming looked after away from home to being adopted was 28 months
- Nearly a third still placed away from home



About the children (Outcomes Study)

- 53% boys, 47% girls
- 8% have a recorded disability
- One-third under 6 weeks old when first looked after away from home
- 29% had just one placement, 30% had one placement change, 20% two placement changes, and 20% three or more placement changes
- 30% entered the current placement when they were under 12 months old, 32% when they were 1-2 years, and 38% when they were aged over 3 years



Emotional and behavioural problems (SDQ)

- Overall, our children have scores indicating likely ‘mental disorder’ 2-3 times that in general population
 - Total difficulties
 - Hyperactivity
 - Emotional symptoms
 - Conduct disorder
 - Peer problems
 - Pro-social behaviour
- No major differences between our permanence groups



Emotional and behavioural problems (SDQ)

- Higher prevalence of 'mental disorder' was seen
 - For children with a disability
 - Where children had first been looked after away from home when they were older (aged 4-5 years compared to under 6 weeks)
 - Where children had had 3 or more placement changes
 - Where children were older when they had entered the current placement



Attachment and relationships (Minnis)

- 10-item scale and scores of 7+ identified as child being likely to have attachment problem
- Overall, a quarter of our children had such concerns
- Higher level of concerns for children who were still looked after away from home (including those on PO), than for those with kin (s11) or on an adoption pathway



Attachment and relationships (Minnis)

- Higher level of attachment concerns
 - Where children had first been looked after away from home when they were older (aged 4-5 years compared to under 6 weeks)
 - Where children had become looked after away from home more than once (ie. Failed reunification attempt)
 - Where children were older when they had entered the current placement



Where are the children now and how are they doing



- Relationships:
 - between child and carer/adoptive parent
 - with peers - *"I can't really cope with football"*
- On-going impact of:
 - loss and transitions in daily life (e.g. drop-offs, pick-ups)
 - what *did* and *did not* happen before moving to permanence - dental health, getting glasses
 - contact with birth family and carers





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Being and Feeling
Secure:
What helps

BE THE DIFFERENCE

Being and feeling secure: Children identified differences

- Differences in care as experienced both through day-to-day routines and special occasions
- Not moving between carers
- Being at school
- Different limits (bedtime, toys, food)
- Physical markers of stability - wallpaper



Being and feeling secure: Adult's perspectives

Kinship carers/foster carers/adoptive parents talked about importance of reparative care including:

- Understanding what might explain behaviours
- Reliable routines - including around food/bedtime
- Time with caring adult
- Being dependable (bus ticket)
- Health and educational needs met (including dentist, optician)
- Accompanying children to activities where they might struggle
- Supportive, sensitive staff at nursery/school
- Older foster carers/kin carers had made 'fall back' plans to ensure child would be cared for by family members



What would children want to remind us?



- Most children did not talk about legal processes – with one exception, Arran*, who had this advice about the timescales involved in adoption:

Arran: Something that they could improve...even though the legal time is a longer time they should try and make it as quick as they can.

Interviewer: Right, because for you it was over a year wasn't it? So would you have liked that to have been less time?

Arran: So you wouldn't have uncertainty that you wouldn't...

Interviewer: During that year did you think this might not happen?

Arran: No, I just thought that I'm not too sure how long it will take.

*All names changed



Interviewer: *Why do you think it took so long? Do you know?*

Arran : *Probably because they had to...I know why it took so long because my mum kept wanting to...she kept trying to keep me because she didn't want me to leave but my dad was fine with it. So she kept doing it and doing it but she wasn't...she couldn't look after us so...*

[Later in interview]

Interviewer: *So you were saying that if you were going to tell people about things that you wanted to change, it would be about the time it took to be adopted?*

Arran: *Yeah, and if you are going to get it happened to you, you don't want it to take as long as it did and you would not want it to take so long and then you're so unsure and stuff.*

**All names changed*

