

Communities and Justice

2024 Carer Survey: Findings Report

June 2025

Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Communities and Justice acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that contributed to the development of this Report.

We advise this resource may contain images, or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

2024 Carer Survey

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Introduction

Why conduct a Carer Survey?

The 2024 Carer Survey was developed in response to a request from the NSW Minister for Families and Communities to engage with authorised carers and gather important insights into the experiences, challenges, and recommendations of carers in New South Wales (NSW). The survey's primary objective is to inform the development of strategies to create a more supportive and sustainable out-of-home care (OOHC) system for both carers and children in care by improving carer experiences, addressing systemic issues, and enhancing carer recruitment and retention. The insights gained will contribute to the ongoing dialogue between the Minister and NSW carers, fostering a collaborative approach to the OOHC system reform.

This report provides an overview of the results of the 2024 Carer Survey. It highlights the experiences and needs of carers. Their feedback provides input to potential governmental reforms to enhance the OOHC system in NSW. The survey points to some key areas to shape policies that better support carers and improve the overall care framework. The survey is intended as a snapshot of current issues of importance for carers for the purpose of quality improvements to the carer system. It should be read in conjunction with other recent, more rigorous NSW carer surveys, such as those conducted by My Forever Family NSW¹ and the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS)².

How was the survey conducted?

The 24 survey questions were developed through an analysis of the previous My Forever Family Carer Surveys (2022) and enriched by feedback from carers gathered through carer reference groups, consultations with My Forever Family and input from the NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec). This collaborative approach ensured that the survey targeted the key concerns of carers, capturing their views on both the strengths and challenges of the current OOHC system. The survey was distributed via email to approximately 5,600 carer households with the June 2024 edition of the Foster and Kin Connect newsletter. Additionally, it was shared with non-Government Organisations (NGO) providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to further disseminate it to the carers they support. This multi-channel approach aimed to ensure a wide reach across the state. Participation was voluntary, leading to a relatively small (n=418) self-selected group of respondents.

Scope of this report

This report presents the results from the 2024 Carer Survey. The responses to the questionnaire and a more in-depth analysis are grouped into four different sections. Section one and two provide an

¹ My Forever Family NSW n.d., Carer Survey, viewed 2 September 2024, <https://www.myforeverfamily.org.au/about-us/carers-survey/>

² See for example Delfabbro, P. 2017, Relative/kinship and foster care: A comparison of carer and child characteristics, Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study: Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care. Research Report Number 7. Sydney. NSW Department of Family and Community Services; viewed 2 September 2024; <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/documents/about-us/facsiar/pocls/pocls-publications/relative-kinship-and-foster-care.pdf>; Eastman, C., Katz, I. and McHugh, M. 2018, Service needs and uptake amongst children in out-of-home care and their carers, Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study: Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care. Research Report Number 10. Sydney. NSW Department of Family and Community Services, viewed 2 September 2024, <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/documents/about-us/facsiar/pocls/pocls-publications/service-needs-and-uptake-amongst-children.pdf>;

overview of carer demographics and characteristics along with their feedback and suggestions. The responses to two open-ended questions (Questions 23 and 24) were manually coded, grouped into themes, and quantified. To ensure carers' voices are authentically represented, a large number of testimonials from the free-text fields in Questions 13, 23, and 24 are included, offering a direct glimpse into the sentiments and challenges that some carers are experiencing. Section three of the report presents a more detailed analysis of issues identified in the survey, and section four provides a comparison of the survey findings with those of the My Forever Family Carer Survey. The original questionnaire can be found at Appendix B.

Limitations

Survey design: The questions have been developed from the previous My Forever Family Carer Survey and stakeholder feedback. No additional pilot testing or question validation occurred due to the short timeframes to undertake the carer engagement. This survey and the methods have not been approved by a Human Research Ethics Committee as the results are for quality improvement only. For these reasons, the findings should be understood as indicators only and not equivalent to other more rigorous carer surveys such as the My Forever Family Carer Survey and Pathways of Care longitudinal Survey (POCLS) carer findings. Due to a technical error in the design of the survey, the Hunter and New England, Central Coast, Northern NSW and Mid North Coast districts had to be combined into one region (Hunter and Northern) for the regional analysis of the survey responses on pages 27-29.

Sample: The carers who responded to this survey are not representative of all foster and relative/kinship carers in NSW. Participation was voluntary, leading to a relatively small (n=418) self-selected group of respondents. This potentially limited participation of some carers, such as those from non-English speaking backgrounds or carers with limited access to technology. It is likely that there is sampling bias with those with stronger views more likely to respond. Please see below for more details on the sample and comparison to the Office of the Children's Guardian's NSW Carers Register. Details on the make-up of the sample can be found in Appendix A at the end of the report.

Analysis: This report provides simple descriptive statistics and analysis of free text responses only. As the survey design has limitations and the carers who responded (i.e., the sample) are not representative, there have been no attempts to undertake more complex statistical analysis. The results shown reflect only the views of the carers that responded to the survey and cannot be generalised to all foster and relative/kinship carers in NSW. Any differences observed for those carers who responded should be understood as indicative only and may not be true differences between groups, as no significance testing has been undertaken.

What did the Carer Survey respondents say?

Key findings

- The carer testimonials from the survey respondents show how committed many of them are to providing a loving home for children who cannot be with their birth families (at least for the time being), and how much joy and satisfaction they derive from their caring role.
- Carers said that they want to feel valued and listened to and they want to be adequately supported, financially and in their relationship with their caseworker.
- Almost two thirds of survey respondents indicated they were satisfied with their caring role (62%). However, less than half of the survey respondents felt valued as a carer by the agency they provide care for (37%), and felt their views were listened to by their agency regarding the decisions made about the children they care for (38%).
- Two thirds of respondents (59%) reported not receiving regular, helpful information about changes to the OOHC system, and half of all respondents said that their agency did not appropriately consider the costs associated with the child(ren) they provide care for (50%) and that reimbursements of costs incurred were not provided in a timely manner (59%).
- Half (49%) of the survey respondents indicated that over the last year their experience as foster, relative or kinship carer got harder, 39% said their situation got easier, and 12% said their experience was about the same as last year.
- The most commonly mentioned improvements to the OOHC sector across all the survey questions were to have fewer changes in caseworkers, more financial support for the children and for the carer, more value placed on carers by agencies, and the carers' views being listened to and considered.
- The most common changes mentioned to make caring easier were to have improved access to financial support for carers, partnerships between casework teams and carers and improved access to support services such as health and education services.
- It is our responsibility to make sure that all foster carers, and relative and kinship carers have the support and recognition they deserve and need to sustain them in their caring role. This will not only increase carer satisfaction and retention, but also the likelihood of positive word of mouth and the flow on effect to welcoming new carers to the role.

The carer experience

Question 13: Please describe the best things about the child or children you are caring for?

"Being able to provide my grandson with a safe, loving environment for him to grow up in without him worrying who will hurt him next or when he will be fed next." *Aboriginal relative/kinship carer*

"The young people in my care are amazing. Caring and brave, not scared to meet a challenge head on. I can't brag enough about them." *Aboriginal foster carer*

"They love you back for all that you do for them and by caring for them you watch them grow up into beautiful people. Experience is the best teacher. I have learned to do things differently from when I brought up my own kids." *Relative/kinship carer*

"My kids are all amazing, 'normal' kids. We have lots of positive birth family contact and we all want a stable loving upbringing for the kids." *General foster carer*

"They're my grandchildren. Getting to know them more intimately" *Relative/kinship carer*

"Making a difference in their lives, being able to provide a safe and stable home" *General foster carer*

"The child in our care currently [...] years with us is a ray of sunshine, with the biggest, beautiful heart. Watching him move mountains and thrive as a young teen." *General foster carer*

"She is happy, cheeky and bright. She is growing into a smart, confident and active person. She is opinionated and loves crocodiles and sharks." *General foster carer & relative/kinship carer*

"Seeing them change and develop over time. Watching and helping them overcome challenges associated with trauma and foster care is very rewarding." *General foster carer*

"They are incredible young ladies; they have been through so much and let down by their parents and the system more times than anyone can comprehend but they are so hungry to make positive change in their lives. It is inspiring." *Relative/kinship carer*

"He gives us lots of hugs and shows his love by doing gorgeous things for us (e.g. he makes me a coffee in a KeepCup to take to work!!)." *General foster carer*

"Every day is a delight having my granddaughter and grandson live with my husband and myself. Some days are tougher as we are grandparents in our late 50s, but so so worth every minute." *Relative/kinship carer*

"Watching them grow and develop into who they are, confident to use their voice and an understanding where they fit in. Knowing they are not with their birth family but confident knowing they are loved by two families." *Aboriginal foster carer*

"My kinship daughter [...] is a bright, active, loving, friendly, caring and strong-willed, [...] year old. Although she has diagnosed additional needs and challenging behaviours, she is thriving with supports through NDIS." *CALD relative/kinship carer*

"They have stability in their lives, and this is reflecting positively in their academic, social, emotional, and physical health. They have such resilience despite being reminded way too often they are in care and life is not normal for them." *General foster carer*

"They are amazing, awesome humans" *General foster carer & Relative/kinship carer.*

"Seeing them grow up, getting awards and feeling proud of themselves, smiling faces instead of sad ones. Seeing all their talents appear. One is an amazingly talented artist another loves fashion design and the youngest wants to be a doctor." *General foster carer & Relative/kinship carer*

"The love they bring to our family." *Aboriginal relative/kinship carer*

"Their bravery, their compassion for others, their insight, the cuddles, the beautiful words of encouragement to me when they are the ones going through the hardest of times, their humour, so much. But mostly seeing them snuggle up to the flannel sheets this winter and teddy warmer in their bed on their toes, knowing they are safe and loved." *General foster carer*

"Every morning being told that he loves me" *CALD relative/kinship carer.*

"She's incredibly strong! She will try anything new, she's not afraid to say how she feels but she is also incredibly caring. She is so smart and kind. I could go on forever." *General foster carer*

"I care for one First Nations child, he has been with me for many years and last year made school captain and can play the didgeridoo, he is well-adjusted." *Aboriginal foster carer*

"She is the little sister (same birth mum) as my [...] -year-old adopted child. It's fabulous having the girls able to live together and 'tummy mummy' feels better knowing her girls are together." *Aboriginal foster carer*

"Best thing is that they are seen and heard. They are loved and they can see it." *Aboriginal relative/kinship carer*

"I know that he is safe" *Relative/kinship carer.*

"My little [...] -year-old he is a delight. He is so happy. He eats really well. He wants to call me mum. He said he wants me as his mum. He is giving me big group hugs with my dog. Goes off happily to school and comes home happy. He melts my heart, seeing him happy living with us. It is only myself and husband and the dog. If I can show him that we care for him and that he is safe. Makes my day and want to get up to get him ready for the day." *Foster carer*

"They are with mob and loved." *Aboriginal foster & relative/kinship carer*

"We have a brother and sister we just fell in love with both of them ♡." *Foster carer*

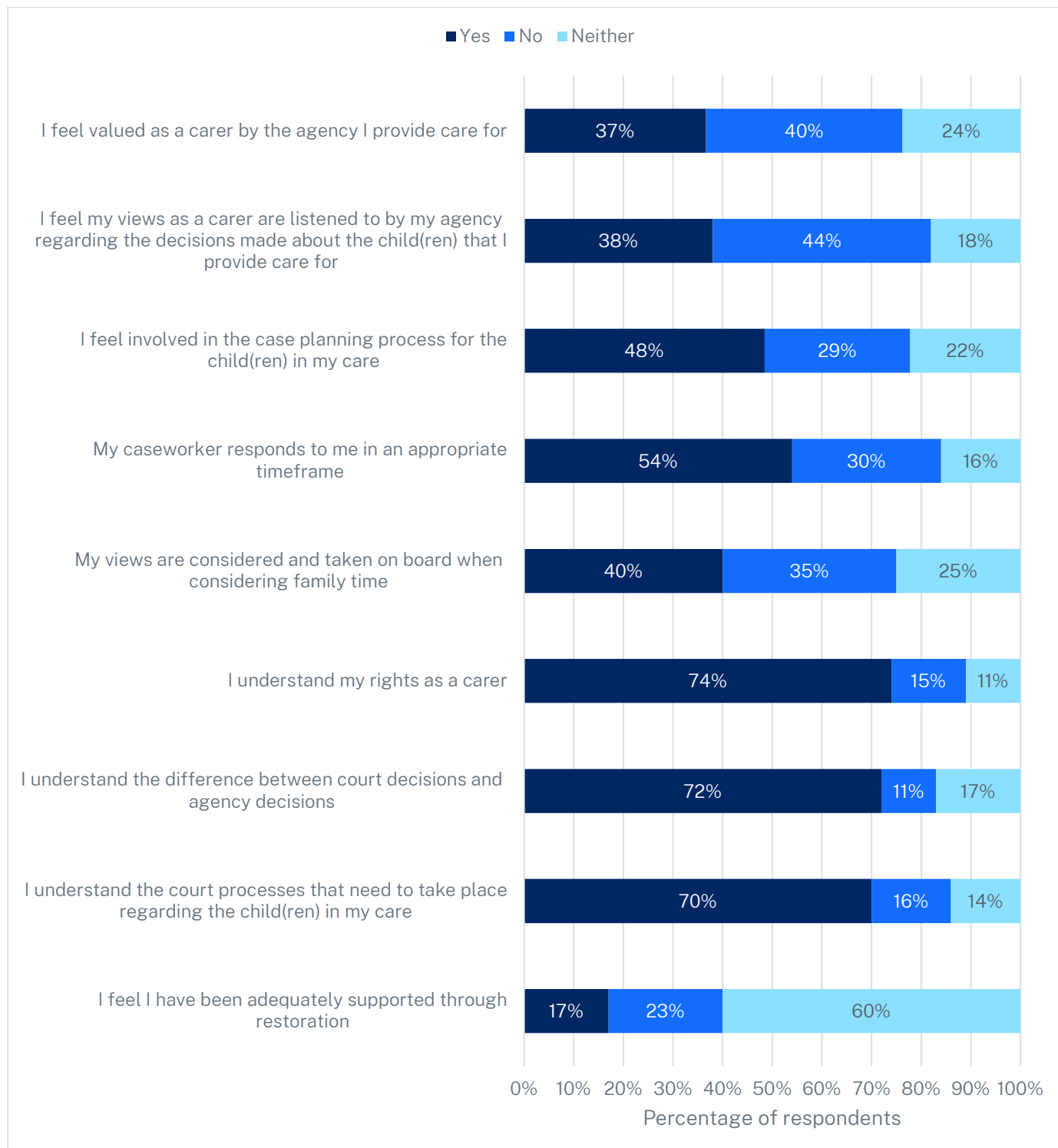
"Bringing up my grandkids has been like never having an empty nest. I am now at sports with my kids and friends' kids. I feel like I have never left my 20s as I am lucky enough to be fit and healthy to enjoy them. I also have made new friends." *Relative/kinship carer*

"They're family." *Relative/kinship carer*

Question 14: Please rate your experience as a foster, relative or kinship carer?

Figure 1 shows that less than half of the survey respondents felt valued as a carer by the agency they provide care for (37%) and felt their views as a carer were listened to by their agency regarding the decisions made about the children they care for (38%).

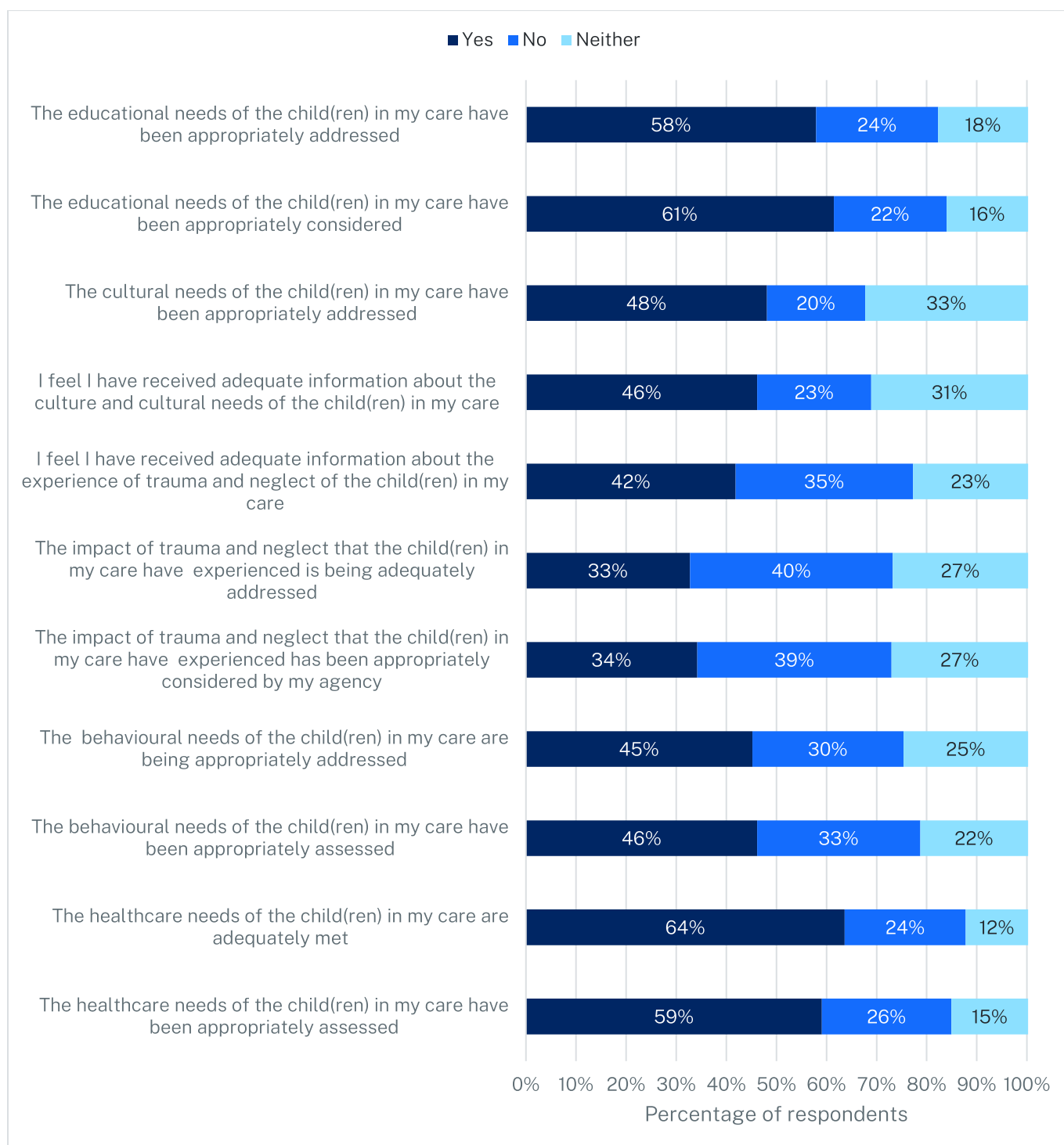
Figure 1 Proportion of respondents by their experiences as foster, relative, or kinship carers (n=418)



Question 15: Please rate your experience in assessing and addressing the needs of the child(ren) in your care?

Figure 2 shows that two thirds of respondents agreed that the educational needs (61%) and health needs (64%) of the children were being met. Conversely, only a third of survey respondents indicated that the impact of trauma and neglect that the children in their care had experienced was appropriately considered (34%) and addressed (33%) by their agency. Less than half of survey respondents felt that the cultural needs of the children in their care were appropriately addressed (48%) and that the behavioural needs of the children in their care were appropriately assessed (46%) and addressed (45%).

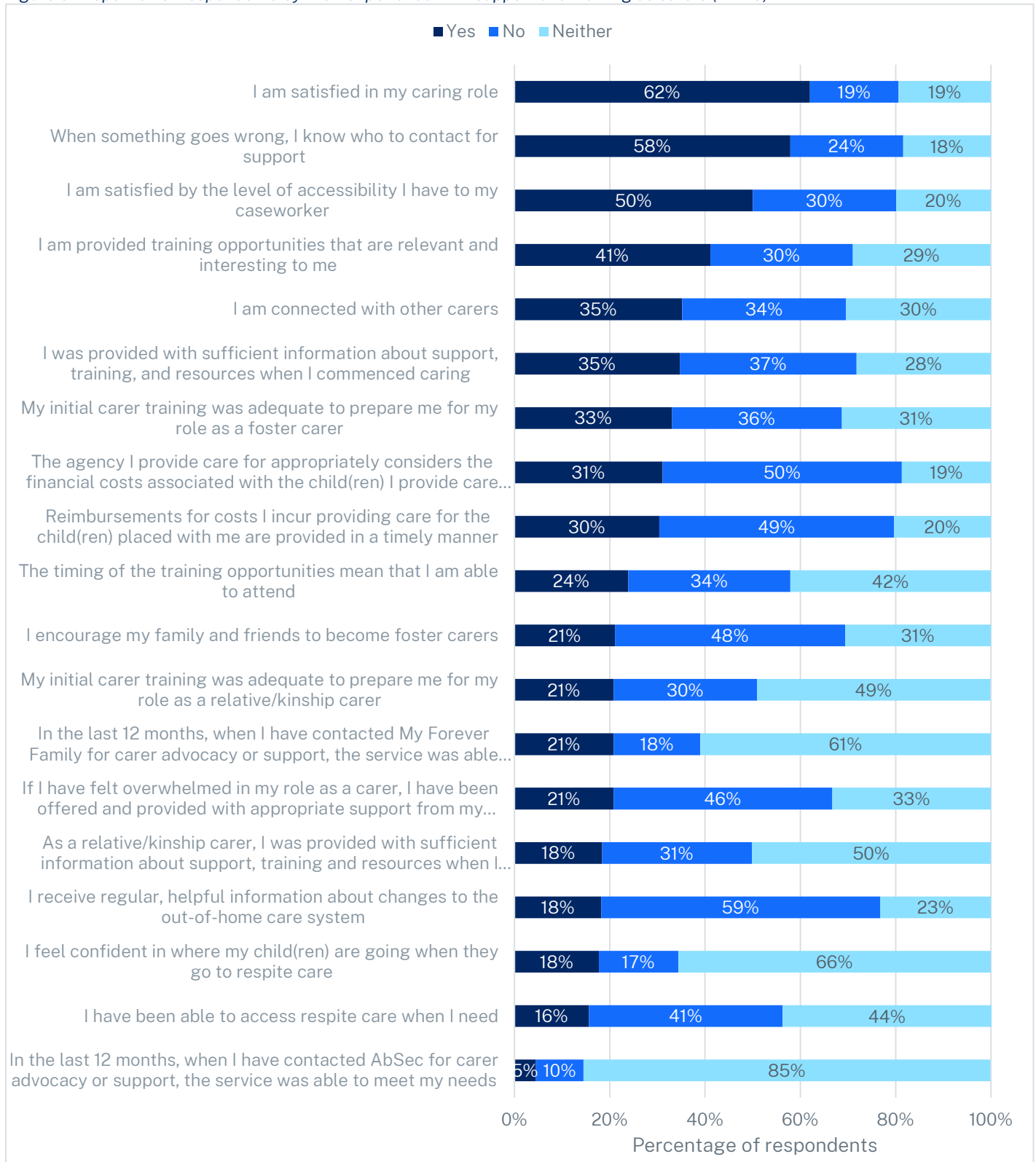
Figure 2 Proportion of respondents by their experience of how the needs of the child(ren) in their care are assessed and addressed (n=418)



Question 16: Rate your experience with the following aspects of your support and training.

Figure 3 shows that two thirds of survey respondents were satisfied in their caring role (62%) but only 16% could access respite care when needed. Two thirds of respondents (59%) reported not receiving regular, helpful information about changes to the OOH system, and half of all respondents said that their agency did not appropriately consider the costs associated with the child(ren) they provide care for (50%) and that reimbursements of costs incurred were not provided in a timely manner (59%)

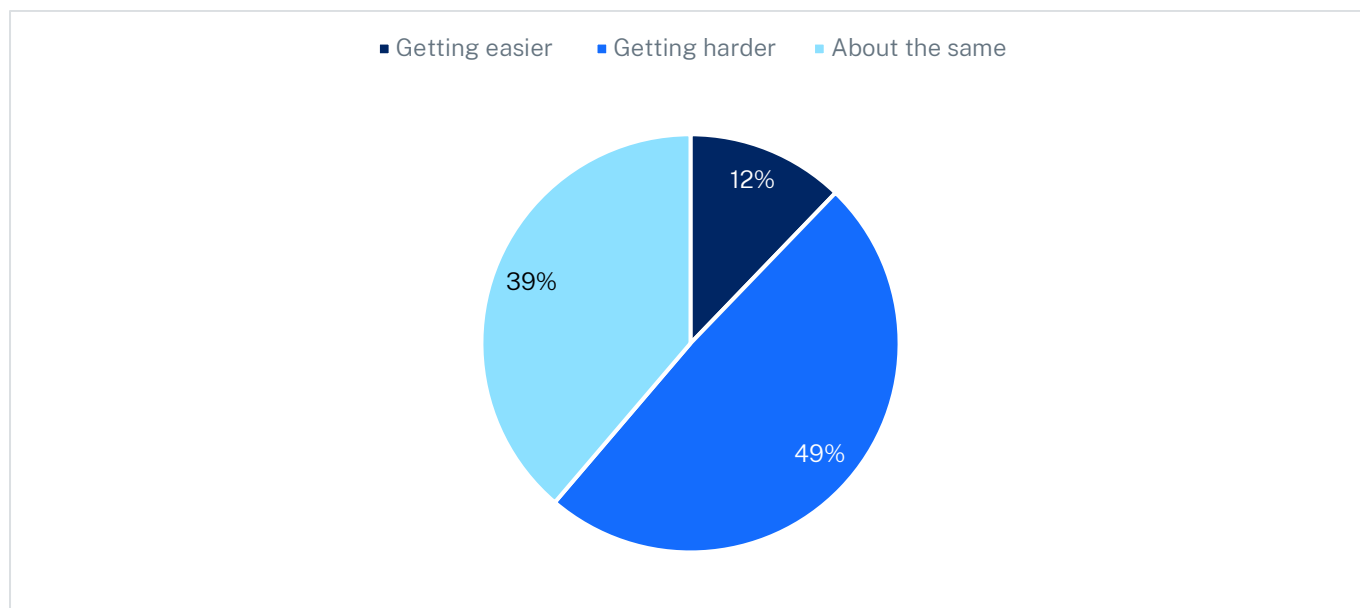
Figure 3 Proportion of respondents by their experience with support and training as carers (n=418)



Question 18: Thinking of your experience as a foster, relative or kinship carer over the last year, overall are things about the same, getting easier or getting harder?

Figure 4 shows that half of the survey respondents indicated that over the last year, their experience as a foster, relative or kinship carer got harder (49%) while 39% said it got easier and 12% said their experience remained about the same.

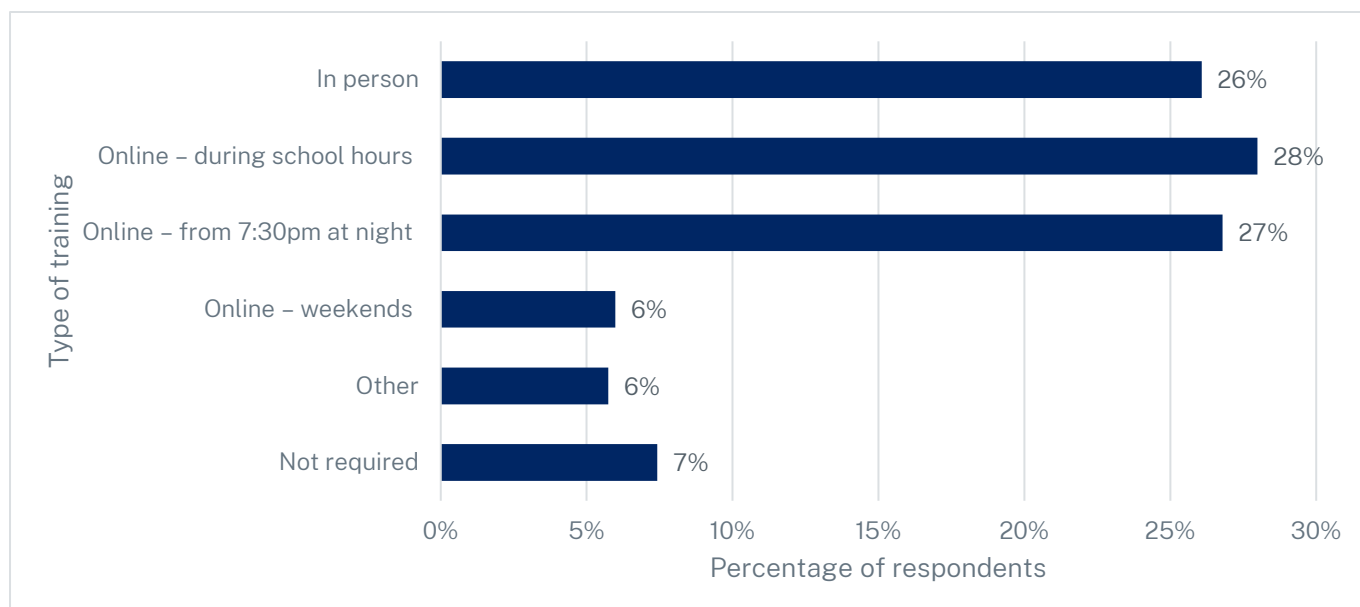
Figure 4 Proportion of respondents by their experience as a carer over the last year (n=418)



Question 19: What training, learning and development activities would you most likely attend?

Figure 5 shows that similar proportions of survey respondents indicated they would most likely attend in person training (26%), online training during school hours (28%), and online training from 7.30pm at night (27%).

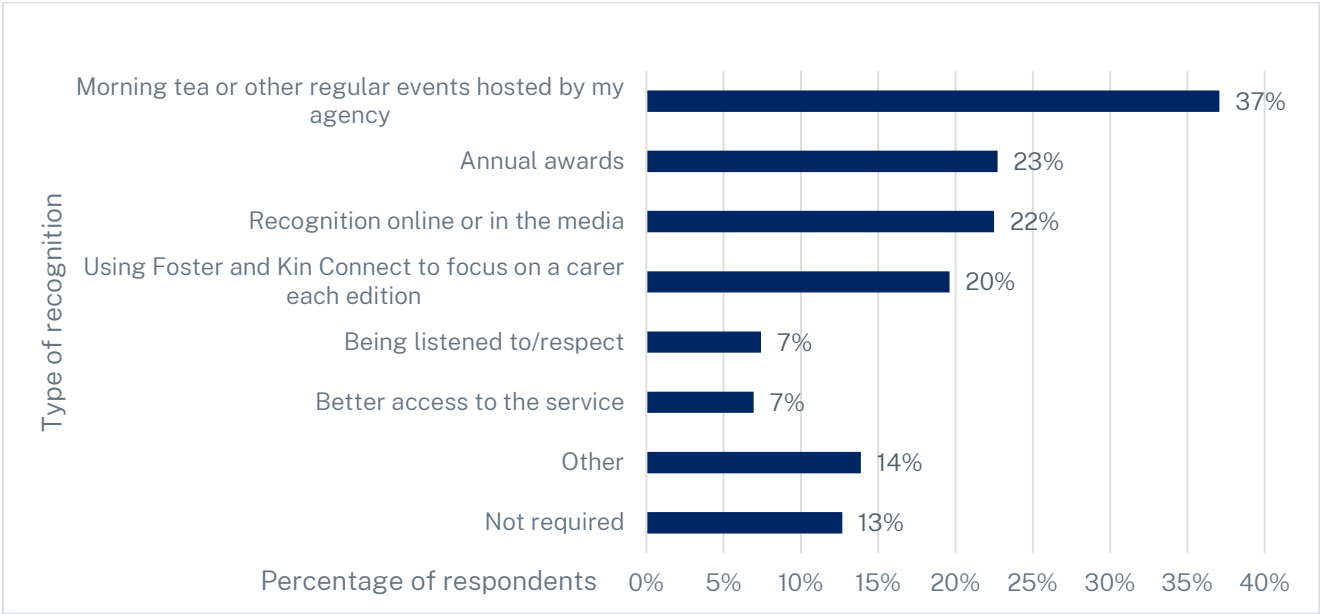
Figure 5 Proportion of respondents by the type of training, learning and development activities they are most likely to attend (n=418)



Question 21: What would you suggest to promote recognition for the role of foster, relative/kinship carer? (Multiple responses possible)

Figure 6 shows that the most common types of activities to promote carer recognition indicated by the survey respondents were morning teas or other regular events hosted by their agency (n=155, 37% of sample), annual awards (n=95, 23% of sample), and recognition online or in the media (n=94, 22% of sample).

Figure 6 Percentage of respondents mentioning each type of recognition for the role of carer (n=418)

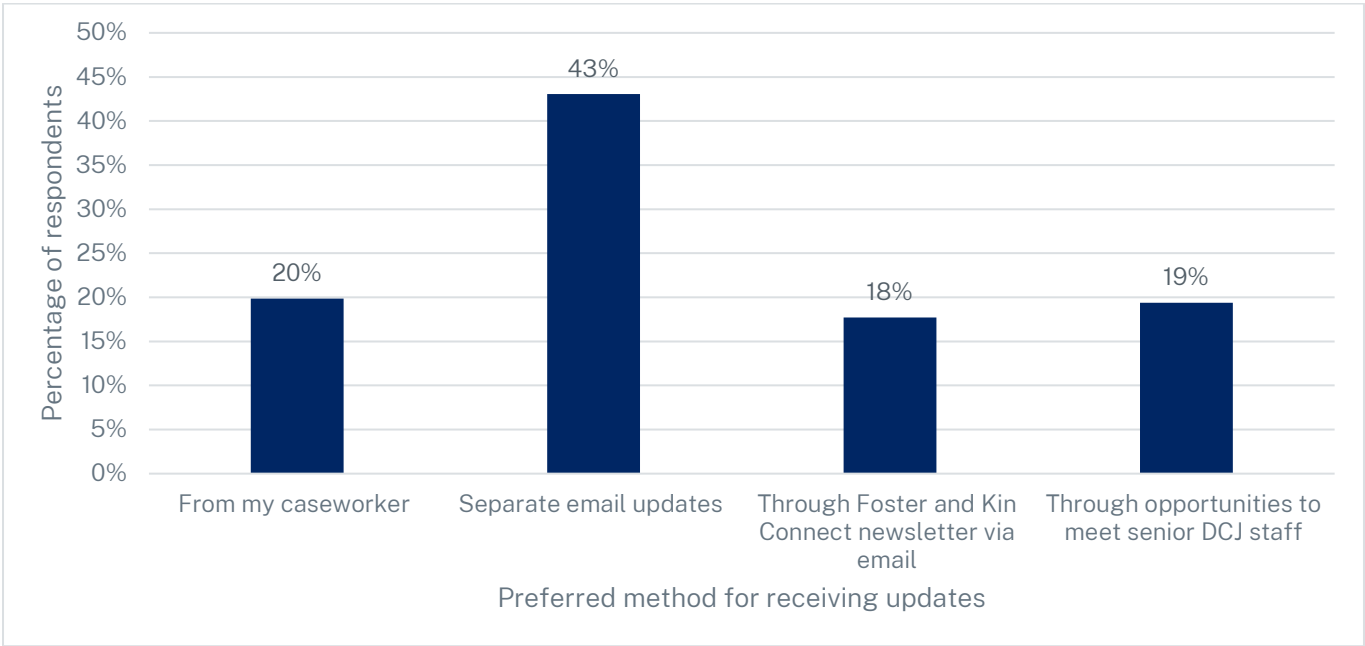


* Respondents could select multiple responses and the percentages shown represent the proportion of total respondents (n=418) who chose that option.

Question 22: How would you like to receive future information about changes to the out-of-home care system?

Figure 7 shows that survey respondents were most likely to indicate that they wanted to receive separate email updates about changes to the out-of-home care system (43%).

Figure 7 Percentage of respondents by their preferred method for receiving updates on out-of-home care system changes (n=418)

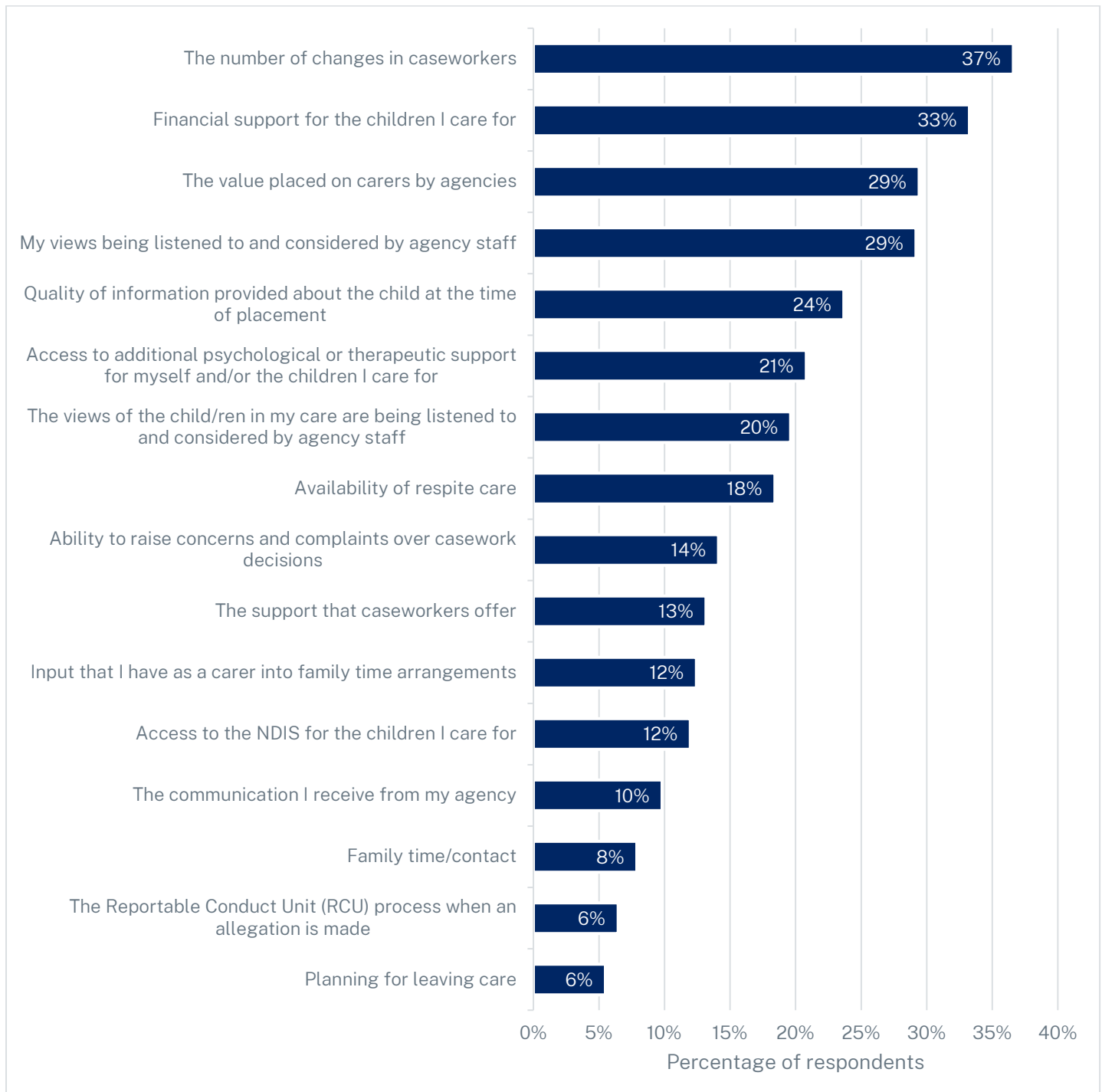


How could the out-of-home care system be improved?

Question 17: What are the top three areas you see as the areas how we could improve out-of-home care (Multiple responses possible)?

Figure 8 shows that the survey respondents' three most commonly mentioned improvements to the out-of-home care sector were: the number of changes in caseworkers (153 mentions or 37% of sample), financial support for the children I care for (139 mentions or 33% of sample) and value placed on carers by agencies (123 mentions or 29% of sample).

Figure 8 Percentage of respondents mentioning an issue as one of the top three areas to improve out-of-home care (n=418)



*Respondents could select three responses and the percentages shown represent the proportion of total respondents (n=418) who chose that option.

Question 20: What changes do you think need to happen to make it easier for foster, relative/kinship carers to care for children (pick three)?

Table 1 shows that the survey asked carers to select up to three changes needed to make it easier to care for children in OOHC. The most common changes indicated by the survey respondents were improved access to financial support for carers (55%), improved partnerships between casework teams and carers (45%), improved access to support services such as health and education services (34%), and easier access for carers to information about the child (33%).

Table 1 Number and proportion of respondents by the changes needed to make caring easier (n=418)

Changes required to make caring easier	n	%
Improved access to financial support for carers	230	55%
Improved partnerships between casework teams and carers	186	45%
Improved access to support services e.g., health services, education services	141	34%
Easier access for carers to information about the child that I care for	138	33%
Easier access to information about Guardianship and Adoption for foster carers	116	28%
Easier access to respite care	91	22%
Easier access for my family to be authorised to provide paid respite for the child(ren) in my care	82	20%
Greater access to carer support networks for carers	75	18%
Improved family time access and support for children, carers, and parents	63	15%
Easier access for carers to join support networks of other carers	47	11%
Improved training opportunities for carers	35	8%
Other	50	12%
Total number of respondents	418	

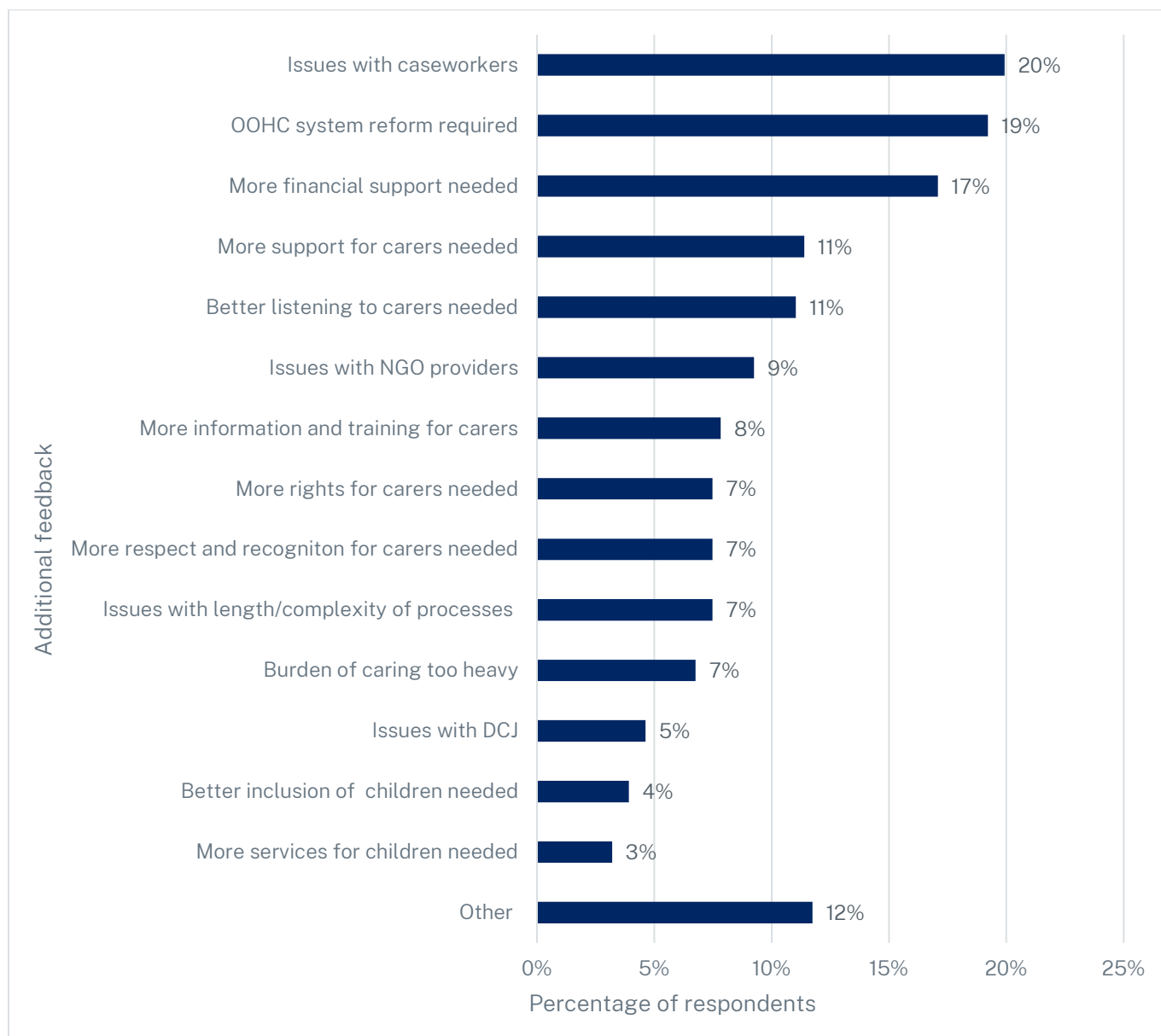
*As respondents could select up to three responses, the percentages do not add up to 100%. The percentages indicate the proportion of survey respondents that selected that response.

Question 23: Is there any other feedback that you would like to provide about the out-of-home care system?

Of the survey participants, 281 carers answered this question, which was a free text field. The remaining 137 carers did not answer the question. The responses were coded into themes and each response could cover multiple themes. Selected carer responses are also included in full for each theme. The responses were edited for spelling and grammar mistakes, and any identifying information was taken out.

Figure 9 shows that one in five of the 281 survey respondents that answered this question indicated that issues with caseworkers needed to be improved. This includes less frequent caseworker changes, better relationships with and support from caseworkers and better caseworker training and first-hand experience as foster carers. One in five also indicated that the out-of-home care system needs to be reformed and 17% indicated that more financial support is needed.

Figure 9 Percentage of respondents providing additional feedback about the out-of-home care system (n=281)



* Respondents could have more than one theme in their answers and the percentages shown represent the proportion of total respondents (n=281) whose answer included the theme.

Selected carer responses:

Issues with caseworkers

"The caseworker I have now is just the best. I couldn't ask for any better. However, in the past our caseworkers have been disrespectful and uncaring. I never want to go through that again."

Relative/kinship carer

"Better caseworker training, so they don't burn out. We had 40+ caseworkers, and my girl hates to keep telling her story, not enough info re child is passed to the next worker so they have no idea about the child." *Relative/kinship carer*

"There really needs to be less caseworker changes for these kids it can be very traumatic for some when they are changed." *Foster carer*

"Just want to thank you. I know that there is always help if I should get stuck. I know where or who to contact. I appreciate the service and programs available that I can take." *Relative/kinship carer*

OOHC system reform required

"The OOHC system requires a complete restructure with the needs of the children and their carers placed at the top of the priority list. The government needs to appropriately fund the OOHC sector and take control of the NGOs so that the sector functions as one unit with consistent policies and practice."

Foster carer

"That it is broken and needs to be fixed. It is becoming harder as a foster carer, we are being scrutinised over, having monthly visits, DCJ is always in the children's faces reminding them they are in care. Especially with their Charter of Rights that they read to the child every year, this raises issues every year. I know there are good and bad carers, and the bad ones should be de-registered, but the caseworkers know who these are, don't treat us all the same! Consider the needs of the children!!! Not the parents!" *General foster carer*

More financial support needed

"The financial payments for the carers are well below what is required. With the financial strain on everyone, Government should be paying either more to the carers or cover electricity, land rates or put high quality solar panels on their homes and pay car registration. After 25 years of caring, we have never done it so tough. Build extensions on family homes so the good carers are able to support more children." *Foster carer*

"I believe carers should be paid a weekly allowance for what they do as carers. We are always told the allowance we receive is for the children in care. So, what about a payment for acknowledging the carers. Even an annual payment would be acknowledgment." *Aboriginal relative/kinship carer*

"Foster caring should be treated as a job where the carer gets a living wage for care yet is also held to account just like any employment where job standards need to be met. This would raise caring standards and also allow the carer to devote themselves to concentrated care for children who require extra attention, multiple medical and allied care appointments and administration resulting in best outcomes for all." *Foster carer*

More support for carers needed

"We have been carers for nearly 25 years, both in Australia and overseas. DCJ and agencies need more staff, and staff that will listen to carers, to be wise in who they accept as carers, to provide more training and give more support around trauma and its impacts. To not overload carers, to provide reimbursement that is in line with the amount of work they do. To provide as much information as possible to carers about the children coming into care, and when children are high needs to provide the support. The carers need to continue caring rather than ripping children out of placements and placing them in supported accommodation or hotels or other inappropriate placements." *Foster carer*

"The inconsistency of support between foster carers and kinship carers. Often kinship will not be given the same level of support. I think that the agencies think that family feel more obligated to continue in their caring role no matter how hard life gets and so often our requests are pushed aside or denied."

After 10 years it's getting harder and harder to maintain because of behaviours even though I'm family." *Foster and Relative/kinship carer*

"Respite care is crucial for aged carers, possibly DCJ workers contacting other relatives, on an official basis to enlist such care, e.g., a weekend per month or 2-3 weeks per year to satisfy much needed couples (carers) time." *Relative/kinship carer*

Better listening to carers needed

"Carers should be valued and listened too much more. More should be done financially (directly and indirectly) to support placements to not just survive, but to thrive. Also, more relevant training available, in person and close by. NGOs and DCJ should be able to share respite care where needed." *Foster carer*

"More input for the carers into decisions for the child/ren. Recognise that carers are with the child for majority of the time and that their input regarding the child/ren is just as important as the caseworker, agency, etc." *Relative/kinship carer*

"Listen to carers with intent, ensure accountability regarding policy and procedures, include the child/ren in all decision making and support for carers, including financial. (Carers get no superannuation and usually withdraw from superannuation accounts to provide financial security for family including child/ren in care)." *Foster carer*

Issues with NGO providers

"I have felt extremely let down by the system since we were all made to go to agencies. The wall put up to keep carers at bay from asking questions and being given real answers has grown so tall. Foster care used to be about the kids but after being a carer for 20 plus years it is rather sad to see the difference in the quality of care given to them" *Aboriginal relative/kinship carer*

"Our kiddo has received more trauma in care and there is no recognition of this from the agency. He has significant behaviours of concern, and we are constantly advocating and asking for intervention and support as he's so young. I'm requesting early intervention to support him to develop and prevent long term need for services, however we are constantly battling the agency around this and basic day-to-day communication. If we would've stopped caring, it wouldn't be because of the kiddo, it would be because of the agency." *Foster carer*

"The system is a broken system. Foster agencies only look at money. It is a money-making business, and they never help foster children to connect with their families. They try hard to keep them foster children away from biological families, so they don't connect and want to go back. This is due to the fact that they will lose their money. They don't care for children, and they disrespect foster carers. [...] foster agency is a mess, and they should be investigated." *Foster carer*

More information and training for carers

"Over the years I have had to seek out and pay for my own training opportunities that are specific to better understanding and meeting the needs of my foster child. These children are so complex, and I don't think caseworkers really understand how demanding and exhausting it is to be a foster carer. If I had only relied on agency training, I really believe that our placement would have failed." *Relative/kinship carer and foster carer*

"More training on the difficulties/grief that carers might experience when children leave your care." *Foster carer*

Issues with length and/or complexity of processes

"I have been caring for two children for the past [...] years. They are [...] and [...] years. Old enough to voice their opinion. We have been trying to become their guardians for the past 6 years and [...] keep brushing us off and giving us excuses to stall. The children want us to be their guardians. The agency has had no concerns about the children's placement or welfare for the past [...] years, we have birth family contact which we do ourselves. We have a good relationship with the birth family. Yet still nothing being done about Guardianship. The legislation states that all child in care after a 2-year period needs to have a permanency plan. These agencies exploit the children for the money. All the

money that is spent on the children is a paediatrician bill per year. The rest lines their pockets.” *Foster carer*

“I would love to speak to you about our journey. Both girls who are now [...] years had to write several letters to the secretary to help support the adoption. I also had to spend \$10,000 on lawyers to keep them honest and to do the job that legislation supports. We had parents and family consent. It did not need to be this hard.” *Foster carer*

More respect and recognition for carers needed

“Treat the carers in the system better and they will recruit for you. So sick of seeing expensive carer recruitment advertising during foster care week - promising the world in happy glossy pics, when current carers are drowning financially, emotionally, mentally, and physically. Carers give up careers, go into debt for bigger cars/houses, for health needs. Financial reimbursement needs to reflect the true cost of meeting kids’ needs. There needs to be opportunities available for carers to re-enter the workforce or heal from the trauma during or after their caring life. Or to be compensated through superannuation. I liked being a DCJ carer way better than with an agency. Information was communicated accurately and timely. Caseworkers didn’t change as often. Carers were respected and valued. Financial, health and education support didn’t require mountains of paperwork and time. Awards and morning teas are tokenistic and do more harm than good for carer morale. A card for a carer’s birthday with a coffee voucher or a packet of biscuits at a home visit - VALUE CARERS before there are none left.” *Foster carer*

More rights for carers needed

“There is insufficient support for carers, carers are not given a say in decisions that affect them. Caseworkers constantly changing. Agencies do not give carers any respect and make placements unsustainable.” *Aboriginal foster carer*

“It is very scary having no control over what happens to children who have been in your care for over two years, who you want to provide permanence too, whose family is happy for that to happen and has no other viable options of placement. I used to recommend foster care to others but at the moment I could not honestly recommend the uncertainty, lack of respect and lack of placing the child’s need first and no consideration whatsoever to the foster families who love these children unconditionally, have supported restoration, have community connection and approval and whose role has now been completely invalidated by a need for political correctness and are literally listed as ‘the last resort’.” *Foster carer*

Burden of caring is too heavy

“We are exhausted. I wouldn’t wish this on anyone. I suggest we move to supervised homes and paid carers, as if they are a professional. The toll it’s taken on my family is enormous.” *Foster carer*

“Acknowledge the massive emotional toll caring for a child that is not yours places on you. You don’t just love them for a day, they become your family, like we’re expected and then you torture us by reminding us of every day they’re not our kids. You put all the guilt, financial costs and demands on us, but then turn around and let us know you don’t get to decide for them, make choices for them, know them better, have any rights, have any attachments to them etc. I have felt completely destroyed at times and in fear of losing children I have cared for since they were babies. They DO NOT respect or value the attachment you have to them.” *Foster carer, Northern NSW*

“It’s exhausting, expensive, demoralising, stressful on marriage. It is so so hard.” *Foster carer*

Issues with DCJ

“The system is terribly broken! It is such a shame as it’s supposed to care for our most vulnerable children. I want to encourage friends and family to be carers, but we’re treated so poorly that I don’t want others to have to experience that. Caring for three children with additional needs does not take anywhere near the emotional energy that liaising with DCJ takes.” *Foster carer*

“I think there needs to be reviews on safety plans. There are many kids and babies going back home in very dangerous conditions because the safety plan threshold is low. As an Aboriginal person I think DCJ favour the political side and their statistics then removing children based on race. I understand it is

awful having so many Aboriginal children in care however regardless of race they deserve to be safe. I also feel that once a carer complains to the Minister / Director it sticks with them forever and they are seen as troublemakers, they stop getting placements and support they once had. Caseworkers and managers need to realise the children work the system very quick, what behaviour they show at the carers home isn't necessarily what they are like, so when carers have concerns of violent or sexualised behaviour, DCJ need to stand up and listen to the carer." *Aboriginal Foster carer*

"DCJ has no balance or checks for their decisions. They hold all the power and do not always treat foster carers with respect, they do not always report on time or accurately. They do not provide enough help for the children in care to succeed. I fear complaining as I need to deal with these people on an ongoing basis and they have in the past lied and been unkind when I have reported concerns of abuse to the children from their biological parent." *Relative/kinship carer*

Better inclusion of children needed

"They need to start listening to more of the carers and the children about their needs." *Aboriginal relative/kinship carer*

"Losing access to their records until they are 18 is unfair to children under guardianship/adoption. How can we provide effective, therapeutic life story work without access to the records?" *Foster carer*

"The one size fits all model currently being used continues to traumatise children. Lack of thought of the children's rights in comparison to birth parents' rights is adding additional trauma to children. Being told as a carer that DCJ need to tick a box and that the child's needs and rights are not valid is infuriating!" *Foster and relative/kinship carer*

More services for children needed

"The availability of psychological support for children (and carers) needs to be radically improved. It is so difficult to get access to the right services that these kids desperately need." *Foster carer*

"Better support for children with disabilities and health conditions, when in hospital and doing appointments in Sydney" *Foster carer*

Other

"Support for kids in foster/kinship systems need to be supported beyond the age of consent. These kids need post school and age of consent support to fulltime study or employment and training. The impact of being independent and finding accommodation needs to be supported until they reach or achieve fulltime work or completion of approved post school study. The trauma impact also needs support and services well beyond age of consent." *Aboriginal relative/kinship carer*

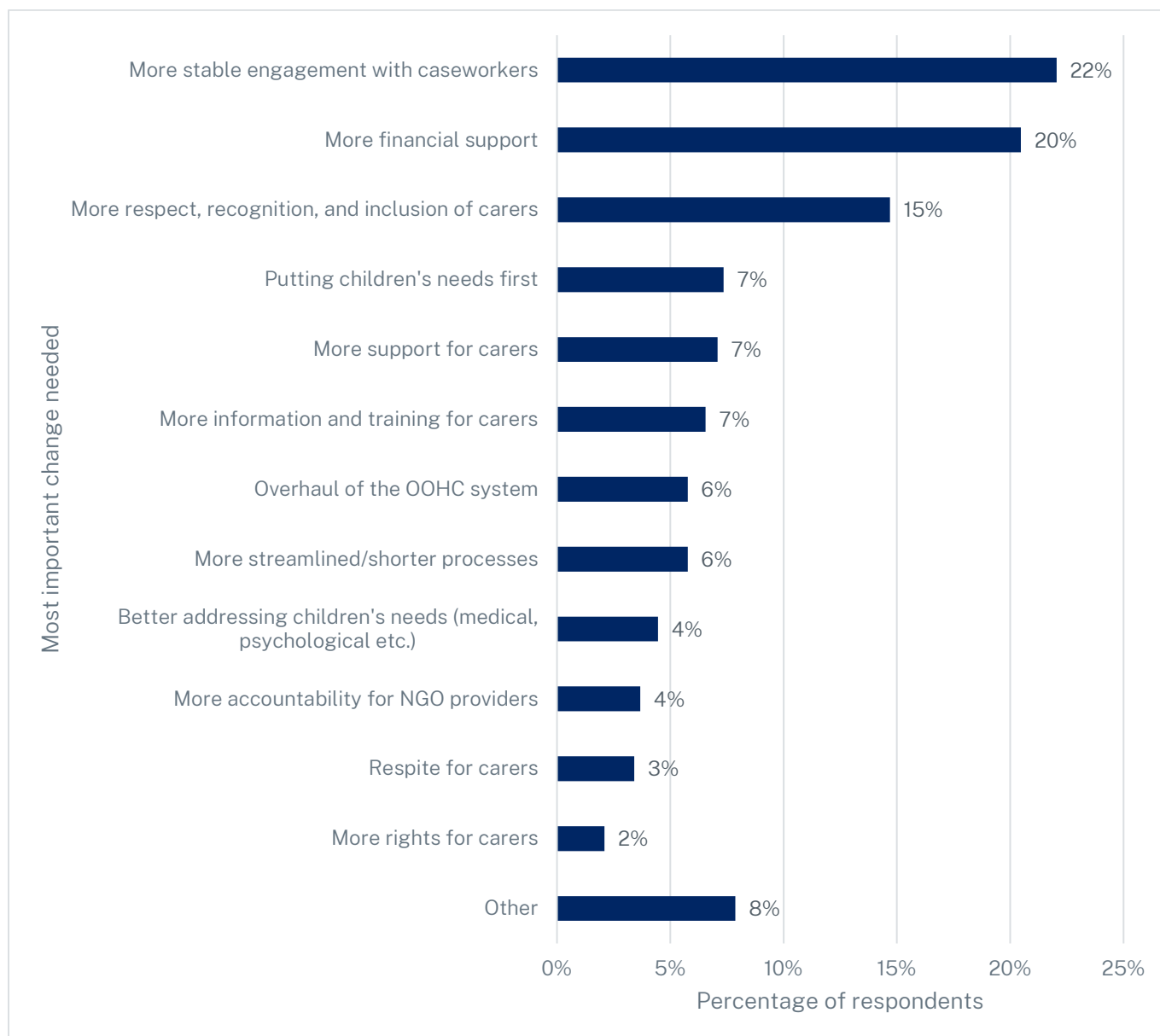
"Grandparents raising grandchildren is a great resource." *Relative/kinship carer*

Question 24: If you could change just one thing about the out-of-home care system, what would it be?

Of those who responded to the survey, 381 carers answered this question, which was a free text field. The remaining 37 carers did not answer the question. The responses were coded into themes, and each response could cover multiple themes. Selected carer responses are included in full for each theme below. The responses were edited for spelling and grammar mistakes, and any identifying information was taken out.

Figure 10 shows that just over one in five of the 381 survey respondents that answered this question indicated that the one thing they would like to change about the OOHC care system was having more stable engagement with caseworkers. One in five indicated that more financial support and 15% indicated more respect, recognition and inclusion of carers.

Figure 10 Percentage of respondents identifying the most important change needed in the out-of-home care system (n=381)



* Respondents could have more than one theme in their answers and the percentages shown represent the proportion of total respondents (n=281) whose answer included the theme.

Selected carer responses:

Better and more stable relationships with caseworkers

"Aligning myself to an experienced Caseworker, with minimum experience for any DCJ worker to have had children, and to have had at least 6 months of doing Foster Care themselves. All professional academic training should have mandatory immersion into being a Carer themselves, so they demonstrate a genuine interest in child welfare from displacement, trauma, abuse, death, etc perspective." *Aboriginal foster carer*

"Lower the turnover of caseworkers." *Foster carer.*

"Better conditions for caseworkers, who then have enough time to spend with the carers and kids. More need to be employed and incentives given to retain them. All foster carers and the children in their care need consistency and genuine concern for well-being." *Foster carer*

More financial support

"Funding should be provided for carers because of what we do. I am now 56 and my 5 children are all moved out, and I have basically given my life up to care for my cousins. I love them but I do this on my own and I have to work full time because the money I receive for caring cannot be included as income. When I was working part time, I tried to apply to refinance my home, but they wouldn't give it to me because my income was too low, so I have had to go back to work full time. People don't realise how much you give up to be a carer!!" *Aboriginal relative/kinship carer*

"To have a wage and super for the carers who have given up their careers to care for these vulnerable kids." *Foster carer*

"Appropriate financial investment in children in OOHC. Trauma comes at a significant cost. And early intervention has been shown to be much more cost effective than investing in health needs for adults. I cannot understand why I need to constantly argue about the health needs of our children to be met and why this needs to be reviewed at every case plan meeting rather than being carried over without a fight. The constant advocating for the children in our care to the agency (DCJ) that is supposed to be responsible for them is the most exhausting part of being a carer." *Foster carer*

More respect, recognition, and inclusion of carers

"Carers to be treated with respect and given a say in decisions affecting them, and support/respite made available when needed." *Aboriginal foster carer*

"For people to understand how hard it is at times and follow through with thing that are needed to support these children in care and for the children and adults that deal with the children on a daily basis. DCJ to listen and actively do things on concerns." *Aboriginal relative/kinship carer*

"To be treated as an equal in a partnership with staff with an authentic focus on the best needs of the child." *Foster carer*

Putting children's needs first.

"It should be the child first then the carer then the parents! We as carers are treated like just the babysitter, and the child has no say whatsoever! Caseworkers with no trauma training are making these decisions for the child. Whatever the parents want they get." *Foster carer*

"Not all families having access visits are good for the children and should be done on a case-to-case basis." *Relative/kinship carer*

More support for carers

"I would enhance the level of support provided for carers. When you become a carer, regardless of what happens, including a death in the family, there is no support for carers. We are expected to "just keep going" even when our circumstances change, and we are grieving to give a specific example. There is no support for carers at all, even when you discuss the needs and requirements that would assist you to continue on the journey. I have been caring for a month shy of [...] years, I had never asked for support until a family member passed and I recognised, I needed to do some self-care as I wasn't coping. There were no options for me and no support, and I was told respite wasn't an option. It's really sad as we are

the ones who deal with things daily and all for the greater good of children, yet we are forgotten about.” *Relative/kinship carer*

“I have had great support, and your support is appreciated.” *Relative/kinship carer*

“When I received my grandson one rainy night he was literally dropped at my door, I had no idea as to what I could or couldn’t do, where to go to get information on his medical treatments or how to manage his behavioural issues. I was literally flying blind, and had to find my own way in finding what I could or couldn’t do either medically, schooling and support services, it was a nightmare to start. I was advised about a training workshop which I attended which helped me understand his problems and then his NDIS co-ordinator came to my rescue. I felt totally lost and exceedingly stressed.” *Relative/kinship carer*

Reform of the OOHHC system

“Everything” *Aboriginal Relative/kinship carer*

“Nothing! Our experience has been excellent. We are so happy with the agency we chose [...], the care and respect shown to our family when we started. The support given from start to end as we are just about to lodge with court for adoption! So much guidance and support from start to now. Amazing experience and we are so grateful. Our daughter is thriving. It truly takes a village. Thank you xx.” *Foster carer*

“The system needs total reform. Boiling it down to one thing is oversimplifying a very dysfunctional system, and I’m not in a position to do that. However, carer support, treatment and advocacy need to be much more robust in order to see any valuable systemic change!” *Foster carer*

More streamlined and shorter processes

“The process for adoption taking so long. Kids in care shouldn’t have to wait so long to feel permanent with their forever Mum and Dad.” *Foster carer*

“Real and meaningful efforts to have children placed permanently with families when they have been in long-term stable placements. We have had our little girl for [...] years, yet no one will have a genuine discussion about moving forward with guardianship, despite the fact we have been assessed favourably three times.” *Foster carer*

Better addressing the children’s needs (medical, psychological etc.)

“It is very hard to take on a young child without any access to “adoption leave”. You take in kids and have no time to settle them in, build routines and stability, and build relationships. Teenage years are very difficult for young people in foster care. More resources, programs, research is needed into how we can support these kids through this transition period when they struggle so much more than their peers. More accountability for NGO providers.” *Foster carer*

Respite for carers

“There is no respite care available in my area. We currently have no other family members able to assist with respite and therefore have no free time at all. This needs to be addressed.” *Relative/kinship carer*

“The number of people the children come in contact with and leave. These children are traumatised & it is critical to have stability and relationships that are consistent. Respite care - we are old, should be retired & have had approximately 15 weekends and two holidays away from the children causing a huge strain on our marriage and impacting the relationships with the children.” *Relative/kinship carer*

More rights for carers

“To keep in mind that children were removed for a reason and let carers do their job. They can’t do this when you keep putting obstacles in their way, fail to respect them, pay them barely enough, and make them sacrifice everything to do it. I’ve lost family, friends, superannuation, and career. I don’t regret it, but it would be nice if I still had some of it.” *Foster carer*

“To have less visits to my home by caseworkers. I think they should be able to establish whether or not they need to visit so regularly, once a month after 5 years is not necessary. Even my granddaughter asks, ‘why are you here again, my nanna knows how to take care of me’”. *Relative/kinship carer*

More culturally appropriate placements and supports.

“Program planning, our kids need to do life skills programs, to prepare for independent living, more age-appropriate cultural programs during school holidays for our Young Indigenous Teenagers.” *Aboriginal relative/kinship carer*

“Better cultural safety and awareness training for carers caring for our Indigenous children and accountability for not following carer code of conduct!!!!!!” *Aboriginal kinship carer*

Additional analysis of survey responses

Interpretation of this section: This section presents crosstabulations which disaggregate questions by care characteristics (such as agency type) and look at the relationship between questions. Noting the small sample size and low response rate, it is worth reiterating that these results are not representative of all foster and relative/kinship carers in NSW. Any differences observed are indicative only and may not be true differences between groups, as no significance testing has been undertaken.

What can we learn about the differences in experience for carers with either DCJ or NGOs/ACCOs case management (Questions 2 by Question 18, 14.1, 14.2, 16.1)

Of the 418 carers who responded to the survey, 268 (64%) are case managed by DCJ while 137 (33%) are managed by an NGO, and 13 (3%) are managed by an ACCO. For the following analyses, carers managed by an NGO and ACCO have been combined.

Figure 11 shows the relationship between agency type and whether, over the last year, the caring experience had stayed the same, got easier or got harder. Of the carers who responded to the survey and are managed by DCJ, 40% indicated that their experience as a carer got harder over the last year, while 15% indicated it got easier. The proportions for carers who responded and were managed by an NGO or ACCO were 65% (got harder) and 7% (got easier) respectively.

Figure 11 Proportion of respondents by agency type and their experience as a carer in the previous year (n=418) (Question 18)

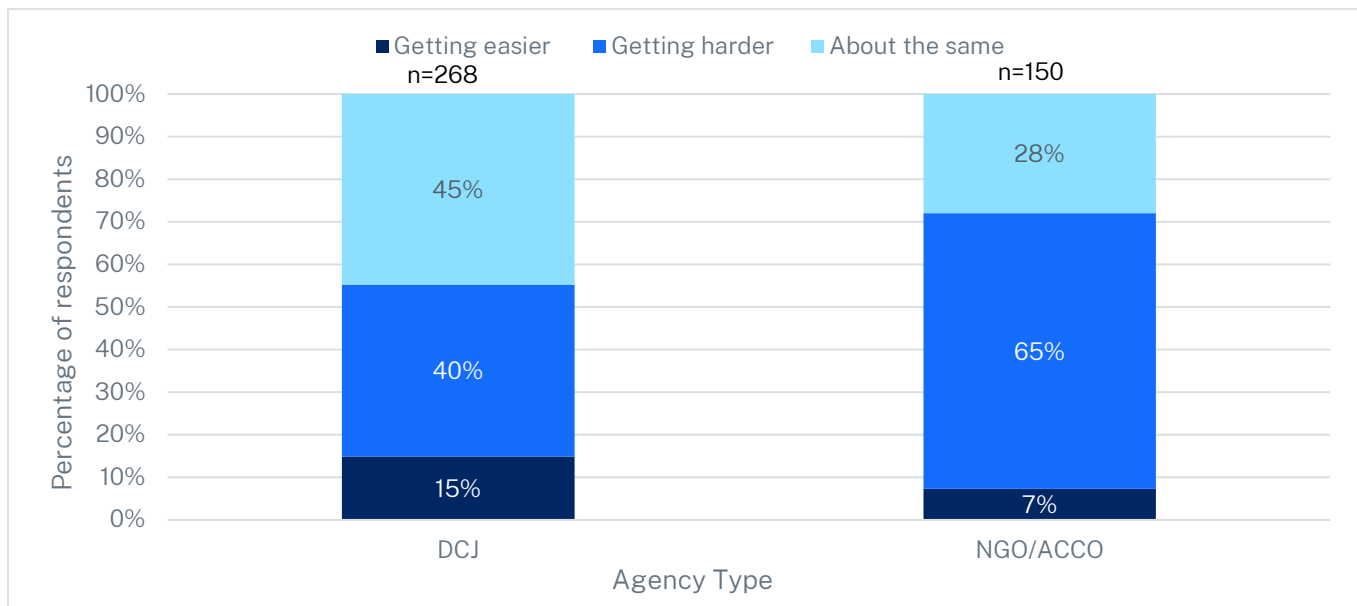


Figure 12 shows that, of the carers who responded to the survey and were managed by DCJ, 38% felt that they were being listened to while 42% felt they were not being listened to. The proportions for

respondents managed by an NGO or ACCO were 37% (felt listened to) and 48% (did not feel listened to) respectively.

Figure 12 Proportion of respondents by agency type and their perception of being listened to (n=418) (Question 14.2)

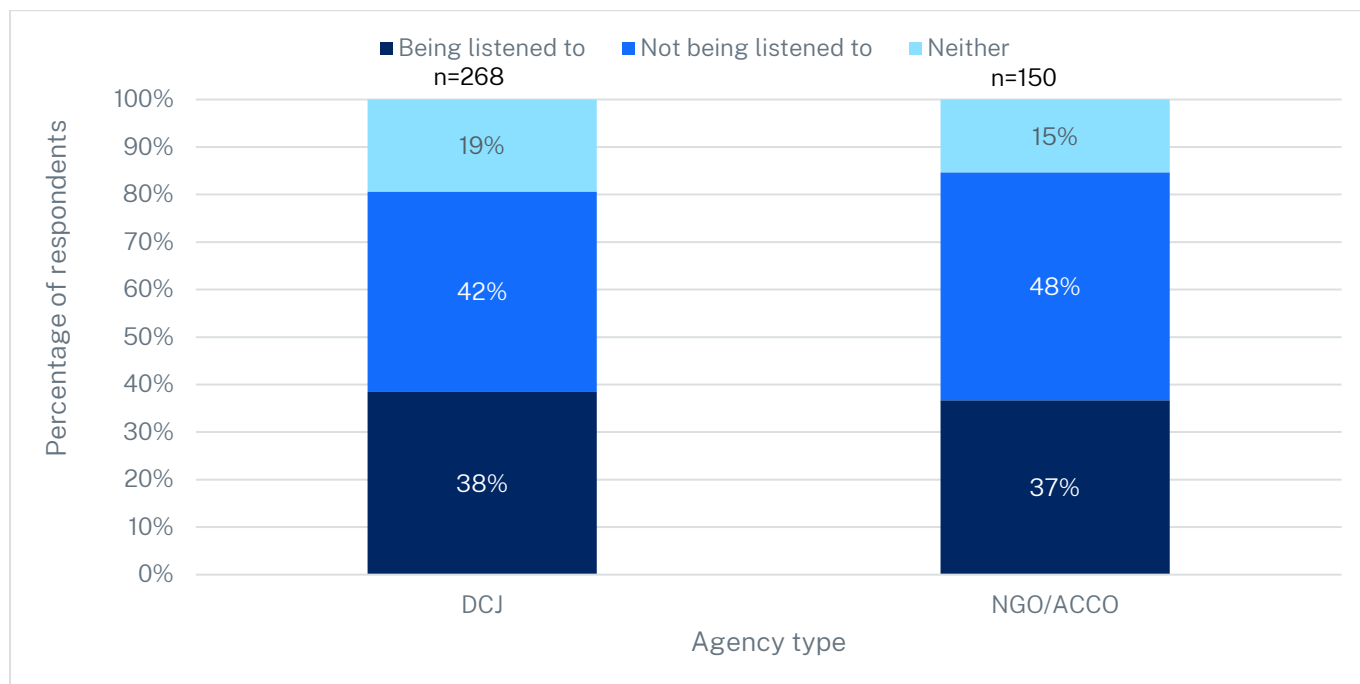


Figure 13 shows that, of the carers who responded to the survey and were managed by DCJ, 38% felt valued, and 38% did not feel valued. The proportions for respondents managed by an NGO or ACCO were 35% (felt valued) and 43% (did not feel valued) respectively.

Figure 13 Proportion of respondents by agency and their perception of feeling valued (n=418) (Question 14.1)

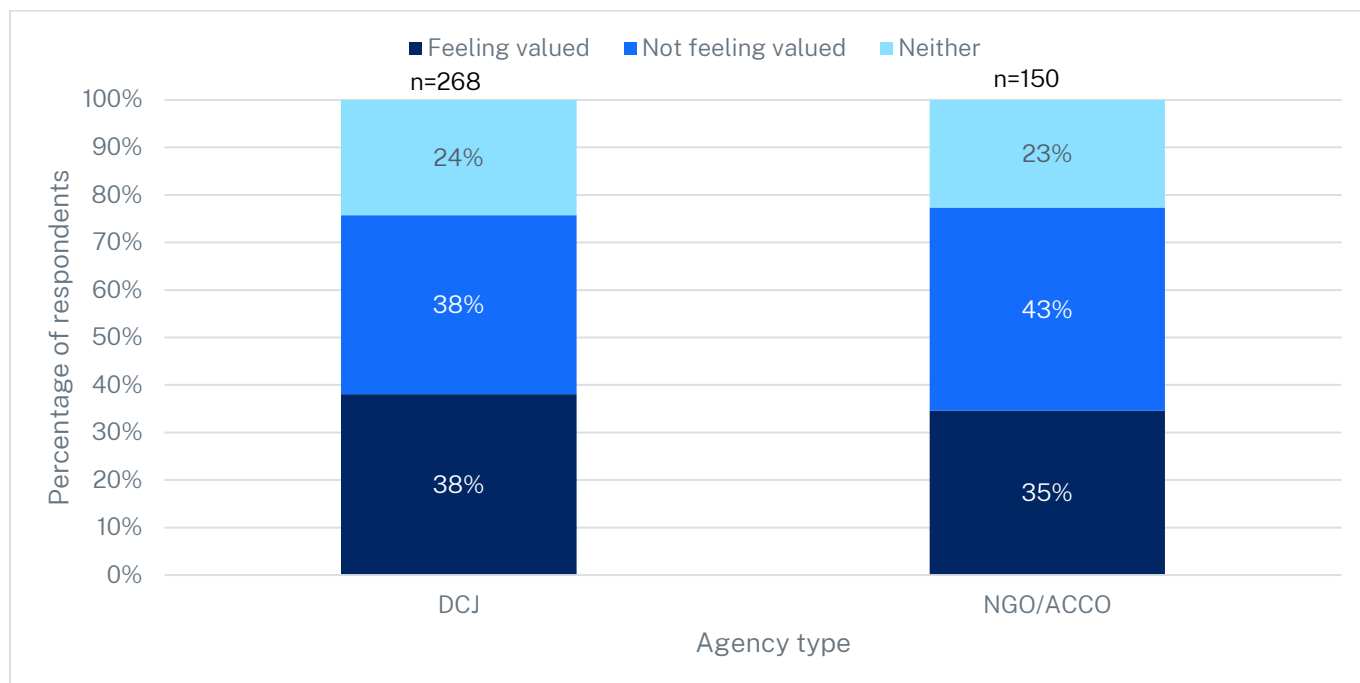
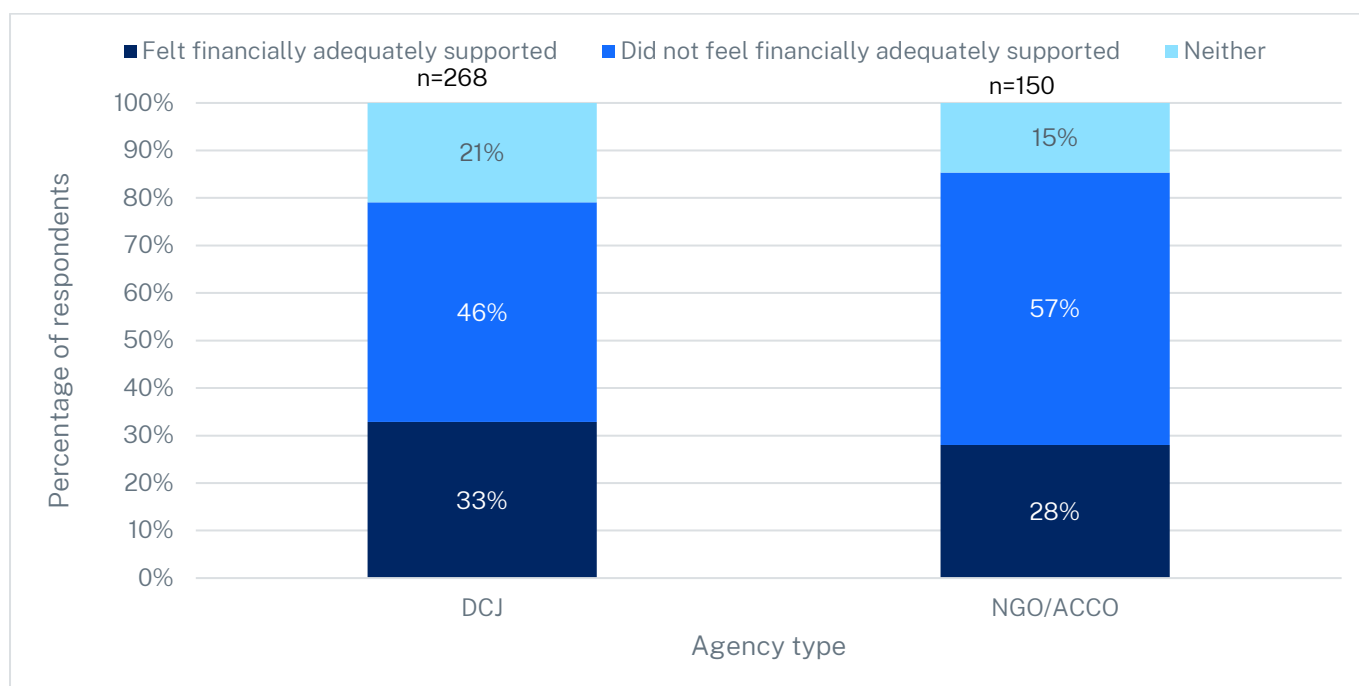


Figure 14 shows that, of the carers who responded to the survey and were managed by DCJ, 33% felt the financial support was adequate, while 46% felt that the financial support was not adequate. For respondents managed by an NGO or ACCO, the proportions were 28% (felt financial support was adequate) and 57% (felt financial support was inadequate) respectively.

Figure 14 Proportion of respondents by agency type and whether they felt adequately supported financially (n=418) (Question 16.1)



Of the 268 survey respondents who were managed by DCJ, 38% indicated that they would like to see the number of changes in caseworkers improved, 36% would like to see the financial support for the children they care for improved, and 28% would like their views to be listened to and considered by agency staff.

The results were somewhat similar for the 150 survey respondents who were managed by NGOs/ACCOs, with 34% indicating they would like to see the number of changes in caseworkers improved, and 31% saying they would like their views to be listened to and considered by agency staff. Survey respondents managed by NGOs/ACCOs also indicated that they would like the value placed on carers by agencies to be improved (31%).

What can we learn about the experience of carers in different regions? (Question 3 by Question 14.1, 14.2, 16.1, 17)

Please note Due to a technical error in the design of the survey, the Hunter and New England, Central Coast, Northern NSW and Mid North Coast districts had to be combined into one region ('Hunter and Northern') for the purpose of this analysis. Also, the sample sizes are low for the Sydney and South Western Sydney regions, and this is not a representative sample; these results should be read with some caution. The comparisons between districts when disaggregated by other survey characteristics should be read as indications only and not as accurate findings of regional differences.

Table 2 Number of respondents by regions

Regions	Districts	n
Hunter and Northern	Central Coast/Hunter and New England Mid North Coast/Northern	176
Southern	Southern NSW/Illawarra Shoalhaven	56
MFWW	Murrumbidgee/Far West/Western	58
Western Sydney	Western Sydney/Nepean Blue Mountains	58
Sydney	North Sydney/Sydney/Southeast Sydney	32
South Western Sydney	South Western Sydney	38
Total (N)		418

Figure 15 Respondents' perception of feeling valued by agency: breakdown by region (n=418) (Question 14.1)

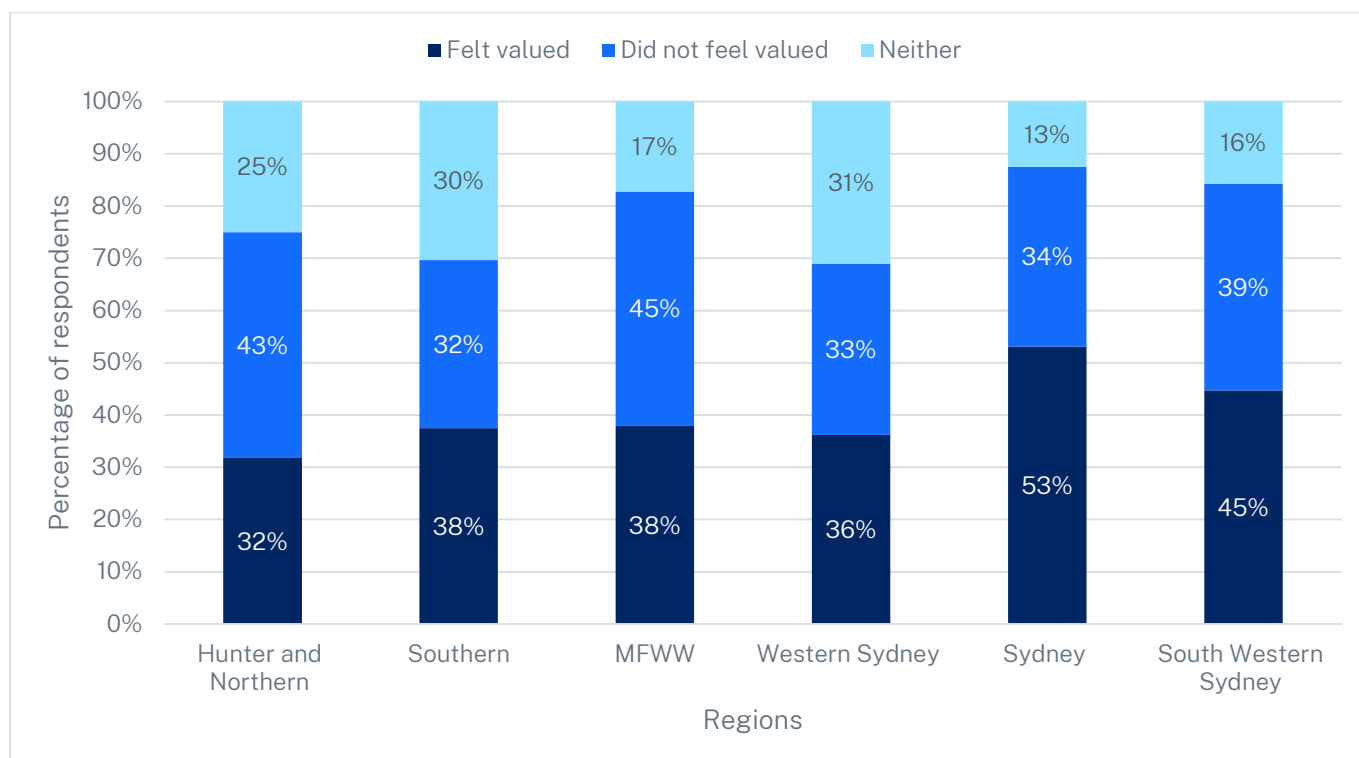


Figure 16 Respondents' perception of being adequately supported financially by agency, by region (n=418) (Question 16.1)

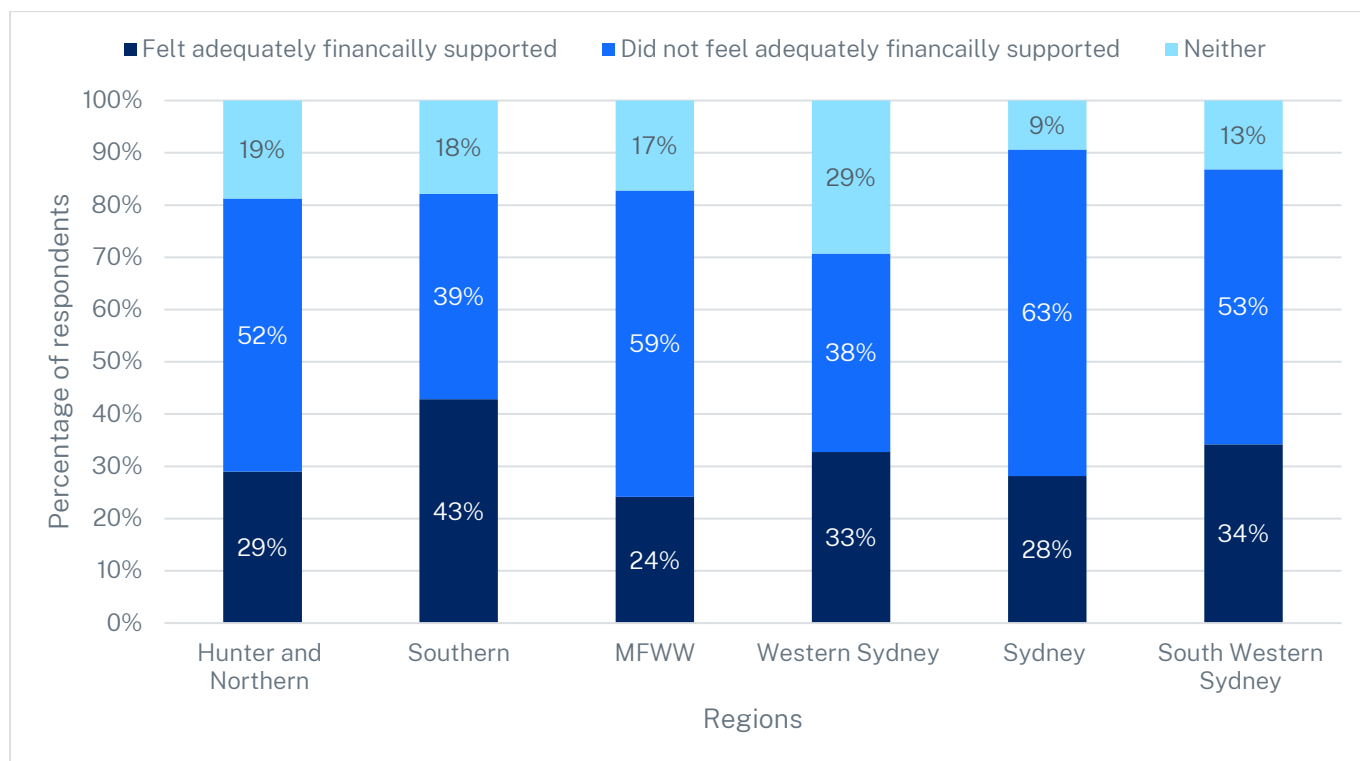


Figure 17 Respondents' perception of being listened to by agency, by region (n=418) (Question 14.2)

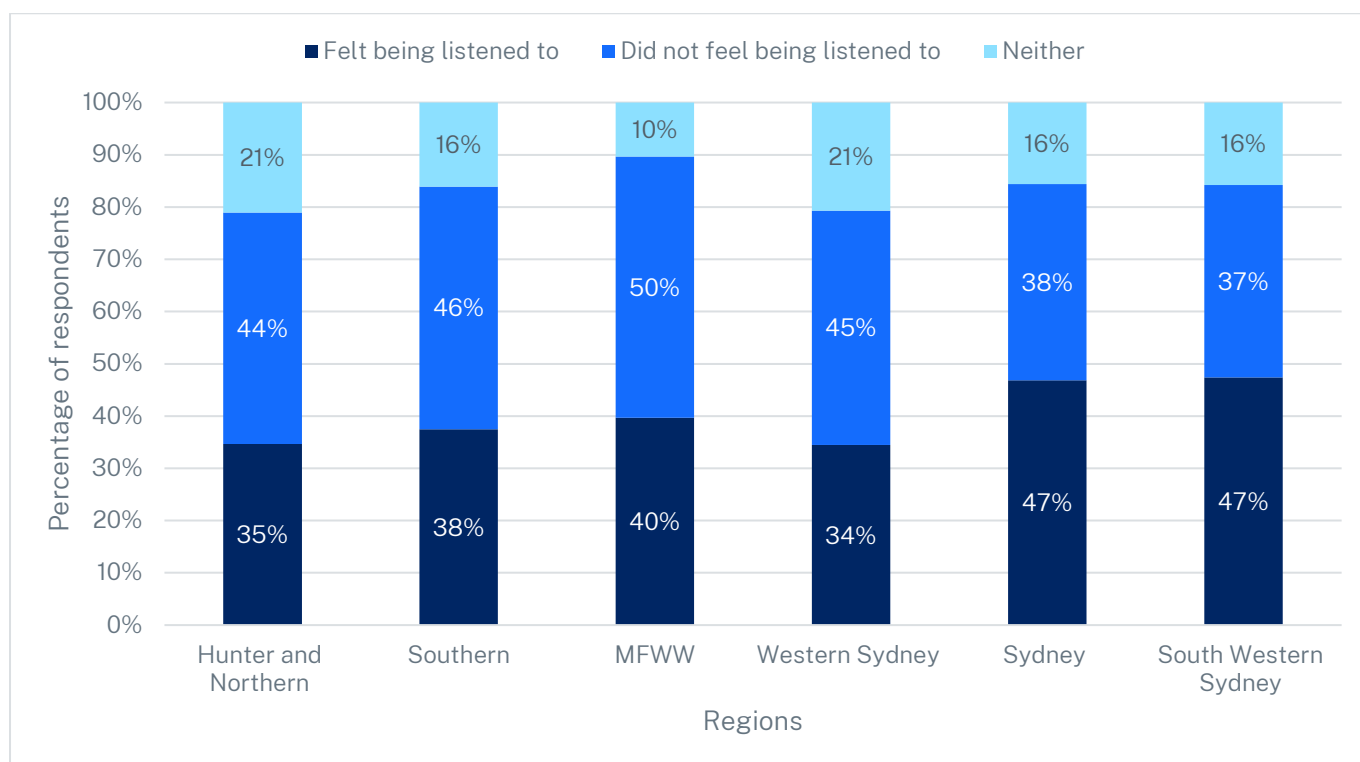


Table 3 shows that the top three suggestions from survey respondents to improve the OOHC system are consistent across DCJ regions.

Table 3 Top three suggestions to improve OOHC system, by respondents from different regions (n=418) (Question 17)

Region	Top three suggestions to improve out-of- home care by region
Hunter and Northern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial support for the children I care for The number of changes in caseworkers The value placed on carers by agencies.
Southern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of changes in caseworkers Financial support for the children I care for My views being listened to and considered by agency staff
MFWW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of changes in caseworkers The value placed on carers by agencies. Financial support for the children I care for
Western Sydney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of changes in caseworkers Financial support for the children I care for My views being listened to and considered by agency staff
Sydney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial support for the children I care for My views being listened to and considered by agency staff. The value placed on carers by agencies
Southwestern Sydney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My views being listened to and considered by agency staff. Quality of information provided about the child at the time of placement. The number of changes in caseworkers

What can we learn about the difference in experience between short term/emergency carers and long-term carers? (Question 9 by Question 14.1, 14.2, 16.1)

Most respondents indicated that they provide long-term care only (n=294), while a small number (n=17) provide only either emergency or short term care; the remainder (n=107) provide both. Results for those providing emergency/short term care should be read with caution given the small number of respondents in this category.

Figure 18 provides the proportions of respondents' perceptions of being adequately financially supported and compares those who provide short term with those who provide long-term care.

Figure 18 Respondents' perceptions of being adequately supported financially, by type of care they provide (n=418) (Question 16.1)

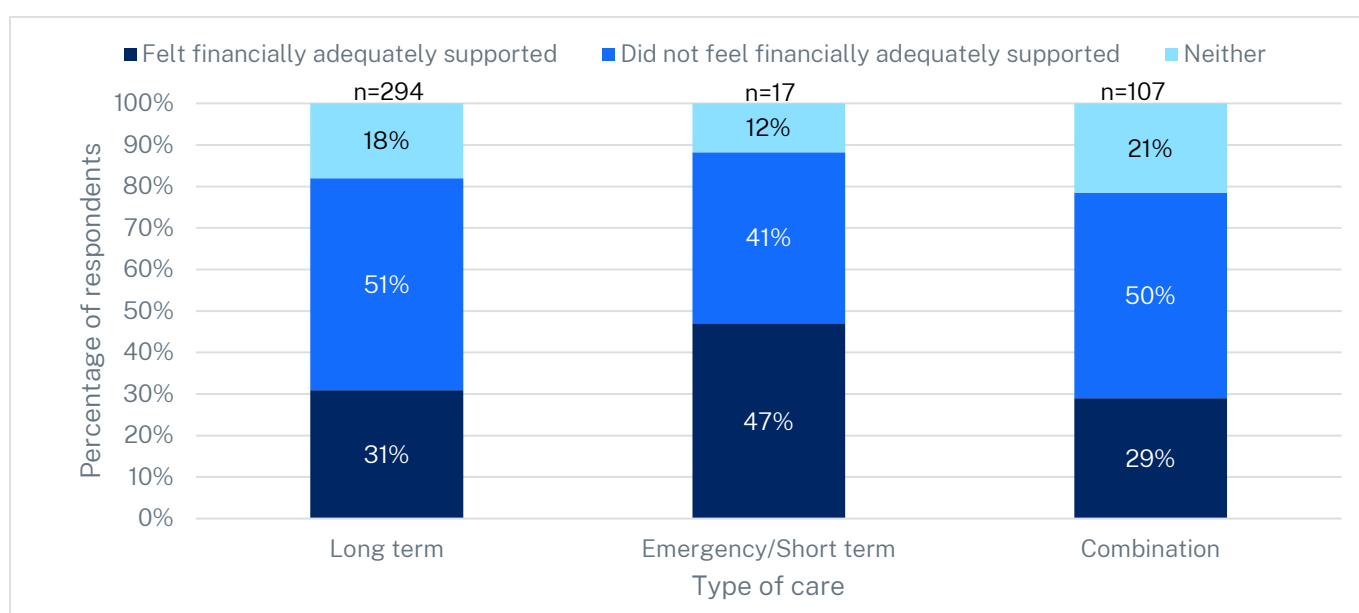


Figure 19 provides the proportions of respondents' perceptions of being valued and compares those who provide short and long term care. Long term carers were the least likely to say that they felt valued (33%).

Figure 19 Respondents' perception of feeling valued, by type of care they provide (n=418) (Question 14.1)

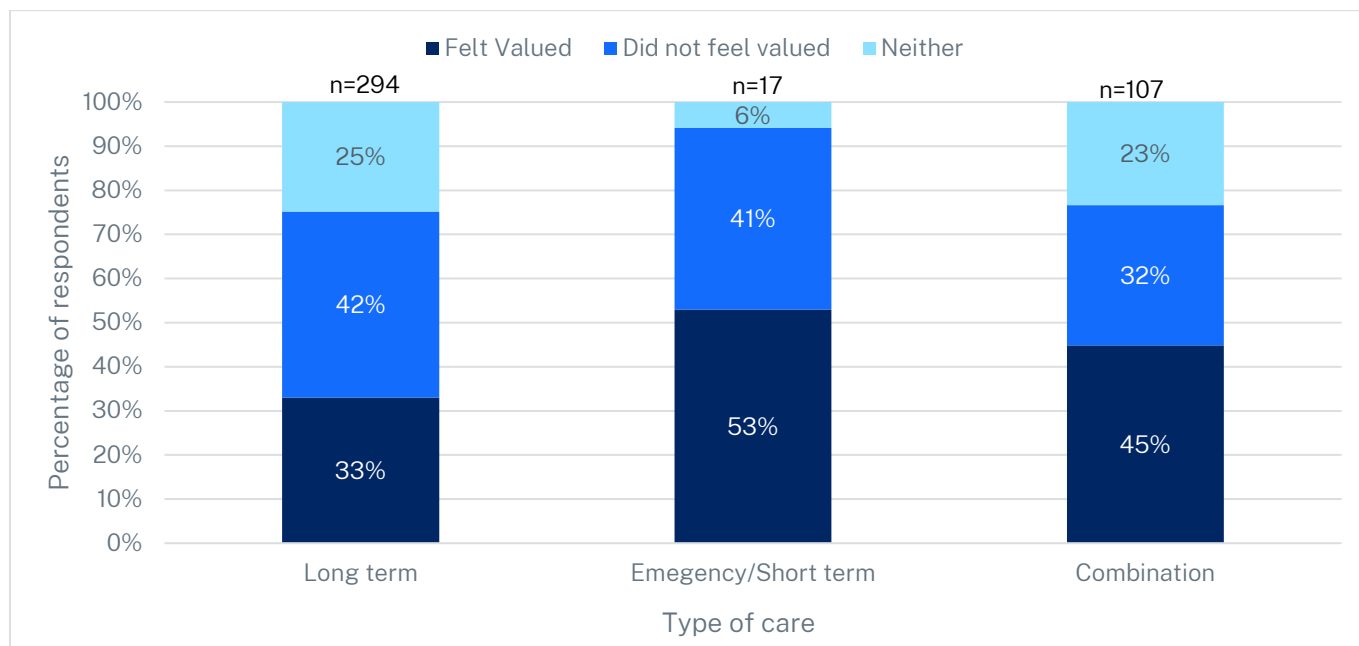
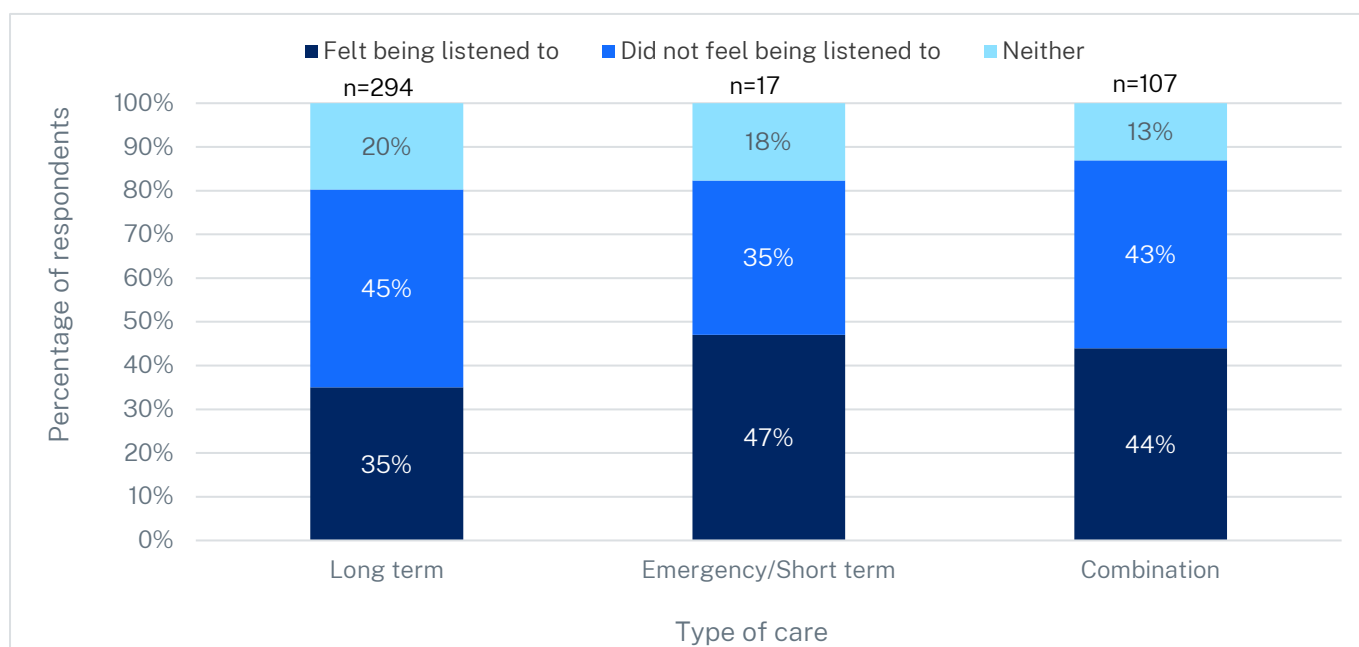


Figure 20 provides the proportions of respondents' perceptions of being listened to and compares those who provide short and long term care. Those survey respondents that provide long term care were less likely to say that they are listened to (35%).

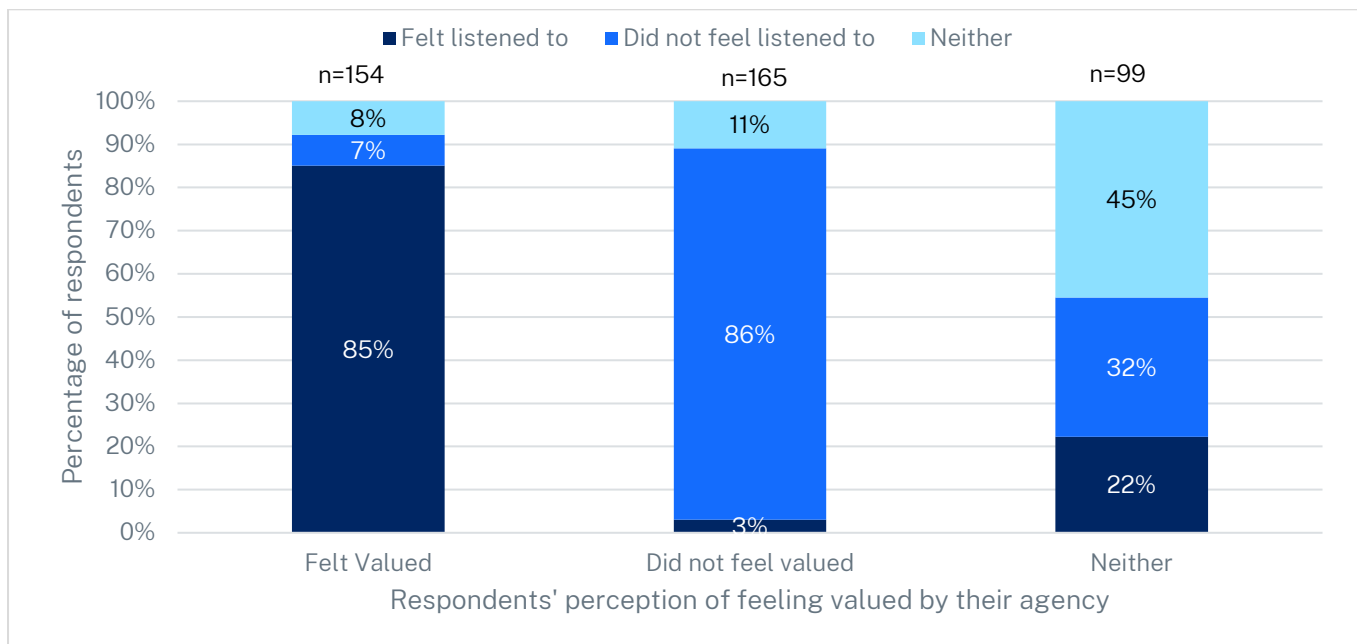
Figure 20 Respondents' perception of being listened to, by type of care they provide (n=418) (Question 14.2)



Did carers who felt valued by their agency feel they were listened to? (Question 14.1 and 14.2)

Figure 21 highlights the relationship between respondents feeling valued and being listened to, showing that 85% of carers who responded to the survey who felt valued also felt that they were listened to, while 86% who did not feel valued also felt they were not listened to.

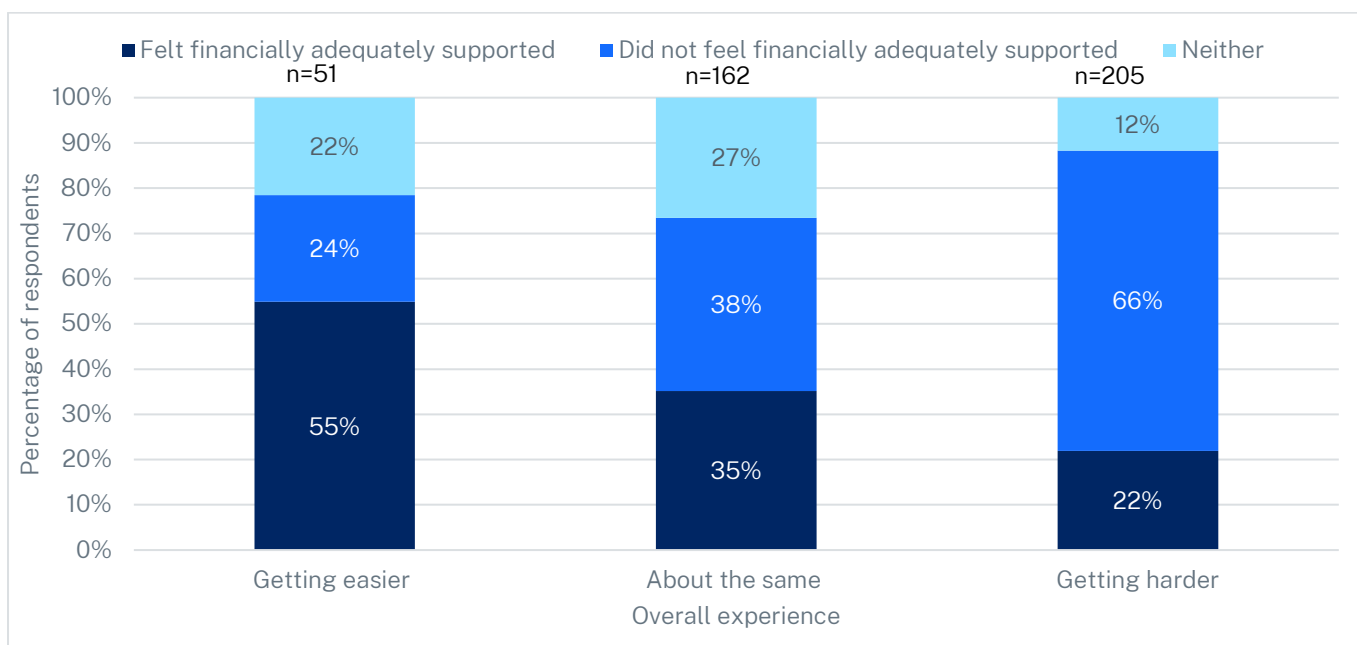
Figure 21 Respondents' perceptions of being valued, by their perceptions of being listened to (n=418)



Relationship between overall experience of being a carer (Question 18) how many felt adequately supported financially (Question 16.1)

Figure 22 highlights the relationship between the overall experience of being a carer and the proportion of carers who felt financially supported. Those carers that indicated that the caring experience was getting easier were more likely to feel adequately supported financially (55%), whereas those carers that indicated that it was getting harder to be a carer were more likely to indicate that they didn't feel financially supported (66%).

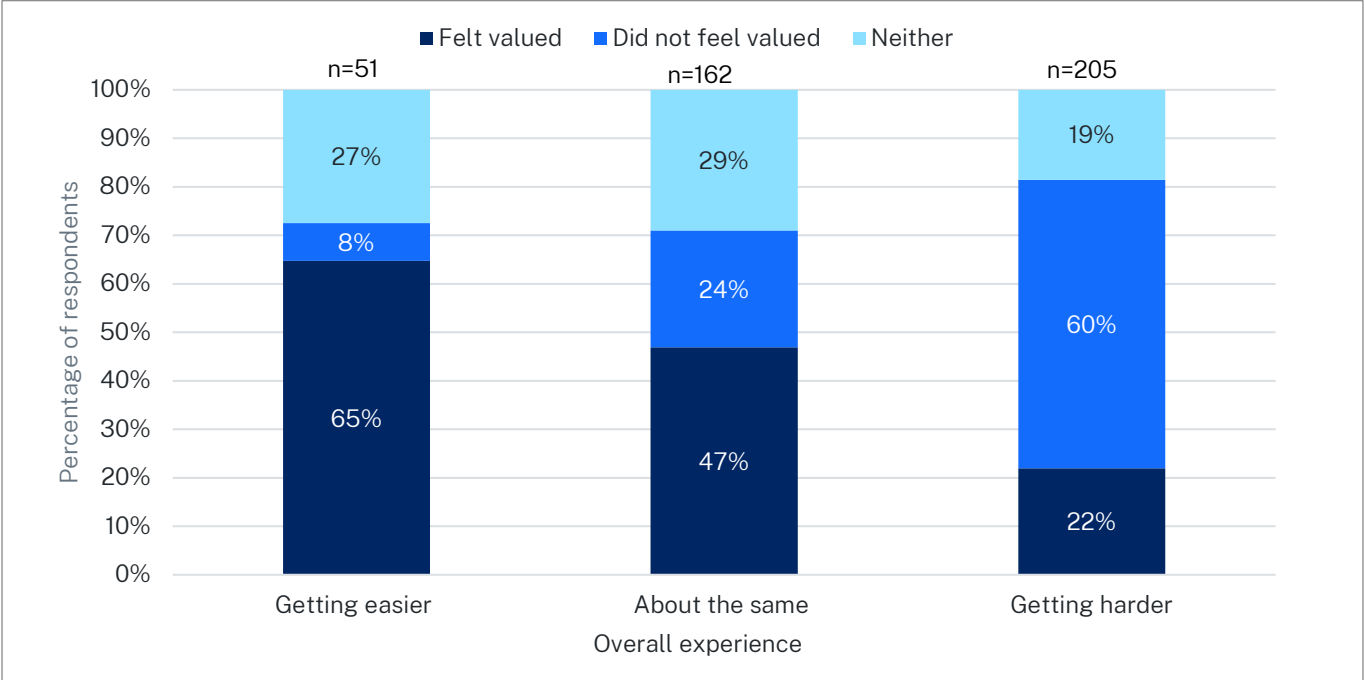
Figure 22 Respondents' overall experience of being a carer, by respondents' perceptions of feeling adequately supported financially



Relationship between overall experience of being a carer (Question 18) how many felt adequately felt valued (Question 14.1)

Figure 23 highlights the relationship between the overall experience of being a carer in the past year and the proportion of carers who felt valued. Those carers who indicated that the experience was getting easier were more likely to feel valued (65%), whereas carers who indicated that it was getting harder were more likely to indicate that they didn't feel valued (60%).

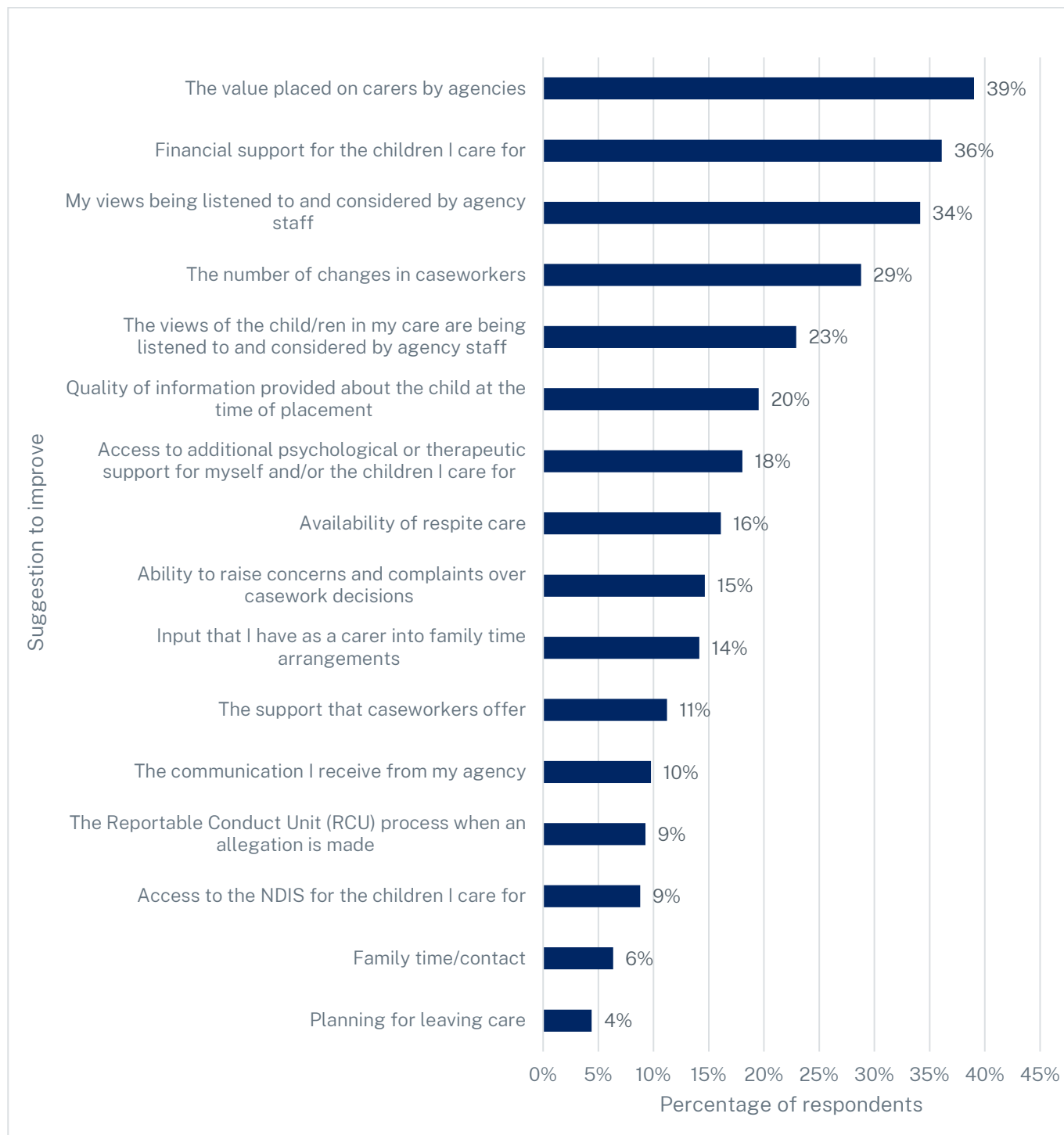
Figure 23 Respondents' perception of feeling valued, by respondents' overall experience of being a carer compared to last year (n=418)



For the 50% of carers that have said their experience of caring got harder (Question 18) what were their top 3 improvements that they were suggesting? (Question 17).

The top three improvements suggested by the 50% of carers who found their overall experience had got harder (n=205) in the past year were: the value placed on carers by agencies (n=80, 39%); financial support for the children they care for (n=74, 36%); and their views being listened to and considered by agency staff (n=74, 34%).

Figure 24 Percentage of respondents who found that the overall experience of caring got harder by the top three improvements they suggested (n=205)



*Respondents could select three responses and the percentages shown represent the proportion of respondents who found their overall experience got harder (n=205).

Comparing findings to the My Forever Family Carer Survey

The responses to the 2024 Carer Survey highlight the most pressing issues that need to be improved to make the caring role easier and more sustainable. However, it needs to be reiterated that this is based on the views of a non-representative and relatively small sample of carers. The carers who responded to the survey said they wanted to feel valued and listened to, and to be adequately supported, financially and in their relationships with caseworkers. Survey respondents' three most commonly mentioned suggested improvements to OOHC system were:

- the number of changes in caseworkers
- financial support for the children
- value placed on carers by agencies.

Many of the findings of the 2024 Carer Survey reaffirm the responses to the 2022 Carer Survey conducted by My Forever Family (although the questions were not the same),³ for example:

- 66% of respondents to the My Forever Family Carer Survey reported that they are satisfied or very satisfied with their role as a carer.
- Foster carers rated all three wellbeing measures (personal health and wellbeing, sense of connection with others, sense of achievement and fulfillment) slightly higher than relative and kinship carers. Relative and kinship carers also reported higher levels of stress.
- Just 50% of carers reported that they always or mostly received the support they needed from their caseworker or case manager.
- The most common support needs carers reported being unable to access for children in their care in the previous 12 months were:
 - specialist carer support services (54%)
 - additional financial support (45%)
 - support with restoration of children (41%).
- Other supports carers reported not being able to access include informal and formal respite care and specialist education support.
- 41% of carers surveyed reported that they were very likely or likely to recommend becoming a carer; 27% were neutral; and 32% were unlikely or very unlikely to recommend caring.
- The top three ranked factors carers indicated would increase their likelihood of recommending caring to others were:
 - more agency accountability (31%)
 - caseworkers following up on what they say they will do (19%)
 - improved financial support for medical and educational expenses (16%).

The responses to the 2022 My Forever Family survey and the 2024 survey both provide directions for improvements to the sector moving forward, particularly increased agency accountability and caseworker follow up, along with greater financial support for medical and educational expenses. These will see both increased carer satisfaction and retention, but also likelihood of positive word of mouth and the flow on effect to welcoming new carers to the role.

³ My Forever Family 2022, NSW Carer Survey 2022 – Report of findings, viewed 7 October 2024, https://www.myforeverfamily.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/MFF-2022-Carer-Survey-Report_FINAL.pdf

Where to from here?

The testimonials from carers in the 2024 Carer Survey highlight the dedication of many foster and relative/kinship carers in providing a loving home for children who cannot be with their birth families. These carers take great joy in their roles. It is our responsibility to ensure that all carers – foster, relative, and kinship – receive the support and recognition they need to thrive in their caregiving role.

The findings from the 2024 Carer Survey underscore the necessity for systemic reforms to address the challenges faced by caregivers and improve the overall care framework. They also suggest less costly interventions and changes that can be implemented relatively quickly within the existing service system. The survey offers valuable insights into what factors contribute to creating a stable, safe and nurturing care environment from the perspective of authorised foster, relative and kinship carers. Understanding the experiences of carers is crucial for tackling issues related to placement instability and negative well-being outcomes for children and young people in OOHC.

The responses to the 2024 Carer Survey complement reform work already in progress and will provide additional insights and suggestions drawn from the lived experiences of carers. An important next step in the reform process is to identify the essential features of an improved foster care model, which will include a range of enhanced features to offer flexible options to carers based on their needs. By sharing the findings report with casework teams and NGO and ACCO partners across the sector, DCJ aims to raise awareness and understanding of the current issues faced by carers.

One of the strongest overarching themes in the feedback was carers' desire for a positive relationship with their casework team, which includes feeling valued and recognised for their caring contributions. The findings report will guide immediate and future training objectives for DCJ caseworkers to build a greater understanding of the overall carer experience and the foundations of collaborative relationships between caseworkers and carers.

The Minister has committed to conducting future carer surveys to track improvements in service delivery and the overall carer experience.

Appendix A: What are the characteristics of carers who responded to the 2024 Carer Survey?

The survey was distributed via email to approximately 5,600 carer households with the June 2024 edition of the Foster and Kin Connect newsletter. Additionally, it was shared with NGO and ACCOs providers for dissemination to the carers they support. A total of 418 carers answered the survey. The following figures provide a breakdown of the sample characteristics of respondents.

Key statistics on all authorised carers in NSW are held by the Office of the Children's Guardian in the NSW Carers Register.⁴ There are observable differences in the characteristics of the carers whose details are recorded in the NSW Carers Register and the carers who responded to the 2024 Carer Survey. For example, in 2024, the Carers Register shows that 57% of authorised carers were managed by NGOs/ACCOs, and 43% by DCJ; however, 64% of survey respondents were managed by DCJ and 36% by NGOs/ACCOs. Further, 21.5% of survey respondents identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, compared to 15.5% of carers in the Carers Register. These comparisons show that the carers who responded to this survey are not representative of all foster and relative/kinship carers in NSW, and indicate that survey results need to be read and used with caution.

Figures 1 to 4 and Table 1 provide background information on carers who responded to the survey. Figures 5 to 9 provide more details about carers' experiences, including the length of time as a carer, the number of children cared for, and whether the caring responsibilities are shared with a partner.

Figure 3 Proportion of respondents by agency (n=418)

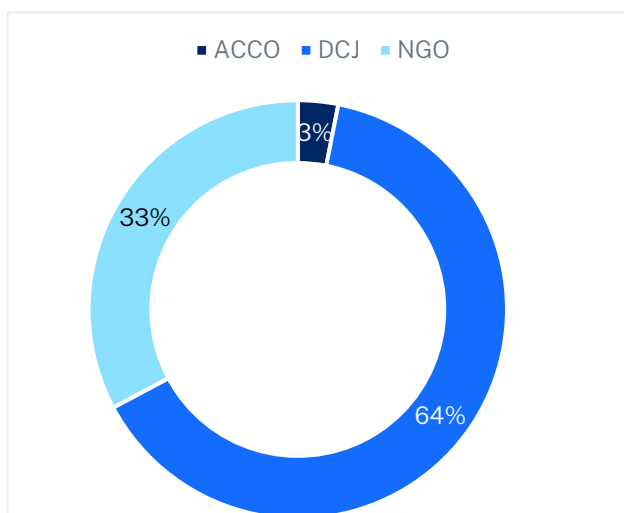
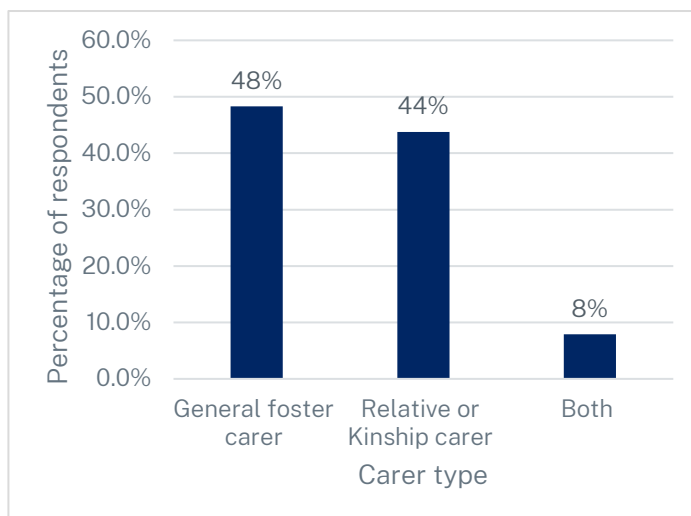


Figure 4 Proportion of respondents by carer type (n=418)



⁴ Office of the Children's Guardian 2023, Carers Register, viewed 16 September 2024, <https://ocg.nsw.gov.au/organisations/statutory-out-home-care-and-adoption/carers-register>

Figure 5 Proportion of relative or kinship carer respondents by relationship with child in care (n=216)

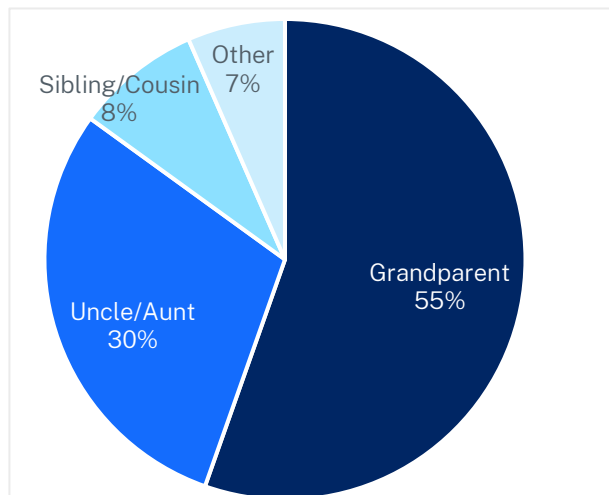


Figure 6 Number of respondents by Aboriginal/CALD status (n=418)

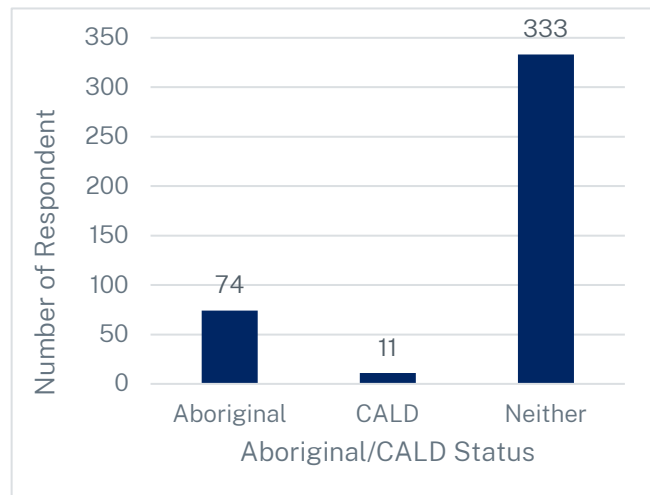


Table 1 Number and proportion of respondents by district and by region (n=418)

District	N	%
Hunter and New England	92	22%
South Western Sydney	38	9%
Western Sydney	33	8%
Central Coast	31	7%
Northern NSW	31	7%
Illawarra Shoalhaven	31	7%
Nepean Blue Mountains	25	6%
Western NSW	25	6%
Southern NSW	25	6%
Mid North Coast	22	5%
Murrumbidgee	20	5%
Northern Sydney	15	4%
Far West NSW	13	3%
South Eastern Sydney	10	2%
Central Sydney	7	2%
Total	418	100%

Figure 7 Percentage of respondents by caring responsibility and type of carer (n=418)

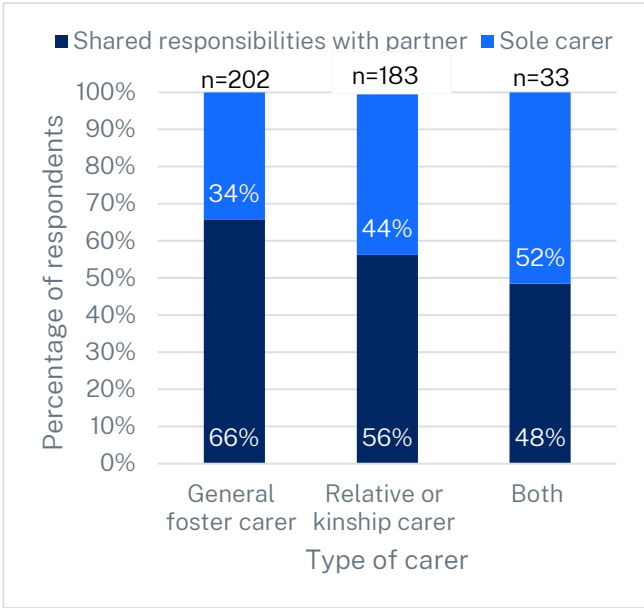


Figure 8 Number of respondents by the number of children they care for (n=418)

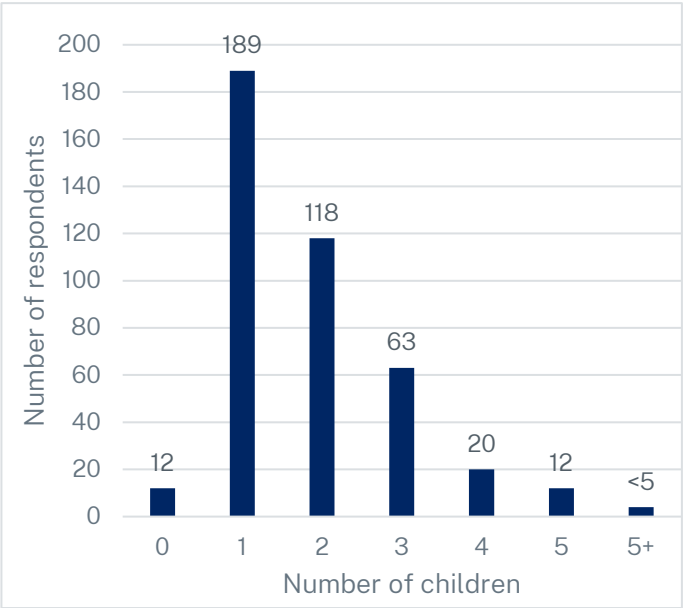
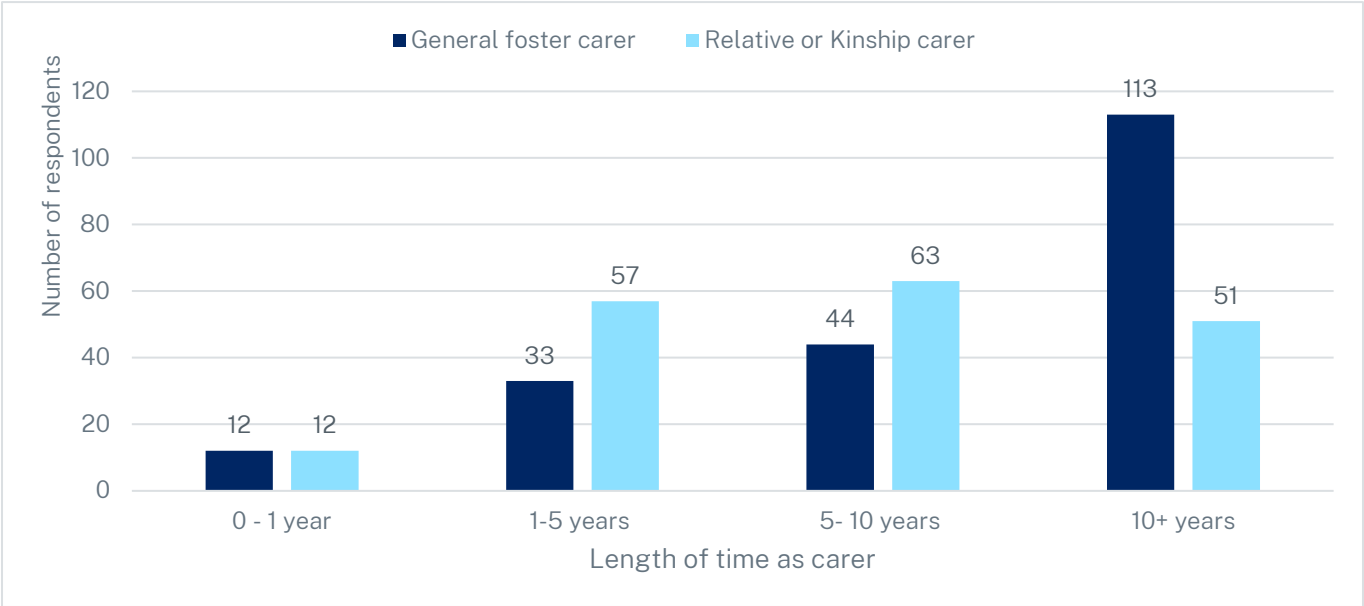


Figure 9 Number of respondents by length of time as a carer (n=418)



*Respondents who indicated that they are both foster carers and relative/kinship carers are excluded due to small numbers (<5) in some categories.

Figure 10 Proportion of respondents interested in caring for more children (n=418)

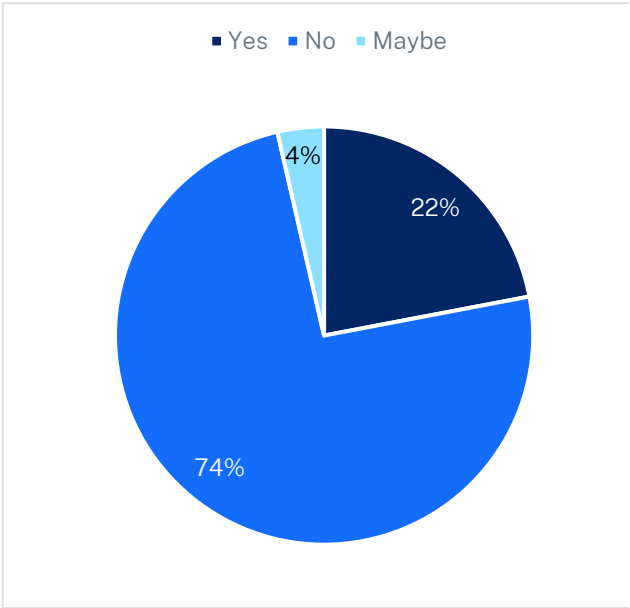
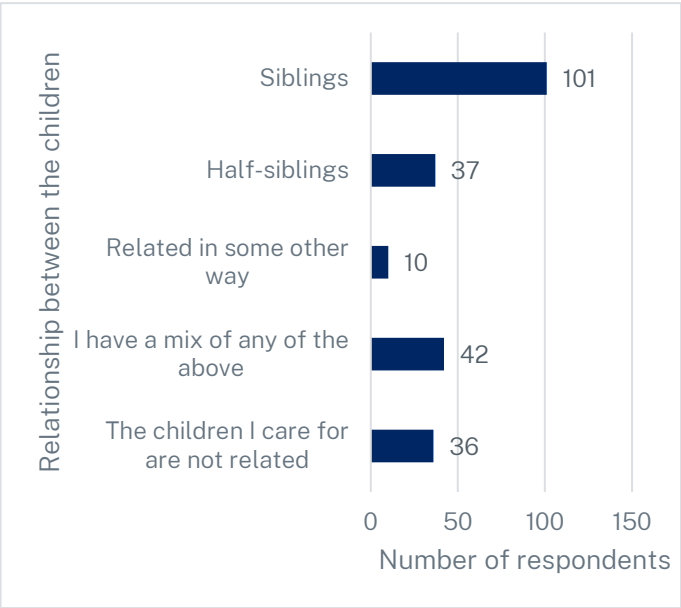


Figure 11 Number of respondents by the relationship between the children they care for (n=226)⁵



*This table only applies only to carers with multiple children

As shown in Figure 6, only a very small number of respondents (n=12) did not currently have children in their care. The main reasons respondents gave for not currently having children placed in their care were:

- I am interested in caring, but I am waiting for someone to contact me about placing a child in my care.
- I had a child in my care who recently self-placed with their parents or somebody else known to them.
- I used to be a carer but am no longer able to provide care for children.

Appendix B: 2024 Carer Survey (full list of questions)

Thank you for taking the time to complete these responses. Your lived experience is important to help shape Government priorities for reforms and improvements to the out-of-home care system in New South Wales.

DCJ understands that there are different types of foster carers receiving this survey and appreciates that some children are now under guardianship orders or open adoption. For the purpose of this survey, children and young people will be referred to as foster children.

1. Please describe the best things about the child/ren you are currently caring for:

- Free text

2. Are you currently a foster carer or relative/kinship carer for a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) or the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)? Or an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO)? Multiple choice

- NGO
- DCJ
- ACCO

Throughout this survey DCJ or the NGO or the ACCO you provide care for will be referred to as “the agency”

3. What district do you live in?

- Central Coast
- Far West NSW
- Hunter and New England
- Illawarra Shoalhaven
- Mid North Coast
- Murrumbidgee
- Nepean Blue Mountains
- Northern NSW
- Southern NSW
- Western NSW
- Northern Sydney
- South Eastern Sydney
- South Western Sydney
- Central Sydney
- Western Sydney

4. Are you currently a relative/kinship, or general authorised - foster, carer?

- Relative or Kinship carer
- General foster carer
- both

5. If you are a relative/kinship carer, what is your relationship to the child?

- Maternal Grandparent
- Paternal Grandparent
- Sibling

- Paternal uncle or aunt
 - Maternal uncle or aunt
 - Other
- 6. How long have you been a foster carer or relative/kinship carer for? (count from the first time you were authorised as a carer)**
- 0-1 year
 - 1-5 years
 - 5-10 years
 - 10+ years
- 7. Do you identify as an Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander Carer or Culturally and Linguistically diverse (CALD) Carer?**
- Yes – Aboriginal Foster Carer
 - Yes – Torres Strait Islander Foster Carer
 - Yes – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foster Carer
 - Yes – CALD Foster Carer
 - Yes – Aboriginal Relative/kinship Carer
 - Yes – Torres Strait Islander Relative/kinship Carer
 - Yes – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Relative/kinship Carer
 - Yes – CALD Relative/kinship Carer
 - Other (specify)
 - No
- 8. Are you a sole carer or have a partner who shares caring responsibilities?**
- Sole carer
 - Partner who shares the caring responsibilities
 - Partner who does not share the caring responsibilities
- 9. What kind of care do you provide (select all that apply)**
- Emergency (respite/crisis)
 - Short-term
 - Long-term
- 10. BRANCHING QUESTION: How many foster, relative or kin children are currently in your care?**
- 0 – Branching 1
 - 1 – Branching 2
 - 2 – Branching 2
 - 3 – Branching 2
 - 4 – Branching 2
 - 5 – Branching 2
 - 6+ –Branching 2
- 11. BRANCH 1: Please tell us why you do not currently have children placed in your care: multiple response.**
- I am interested in caring, but I am waiting for someone to contact me about placing a child in my care
 - I think being a foster carer is important, but I am not currently caring for any children because I require additional support from my agency
 - I cannot afford it at the moment
 - Other caring commitments (ageing parents, own children)
 - Work commitments

- My family is currently taking a break from caring
- I currently have health issues
- I currently have mental health issues
- I have a disability (specify)
- I do not currently have any children under 18 in my care, but have continued to provide care to the children placed in my home as they transition into adulthood
- I used to be a carer, but am no longer able to provide care for children (specify)
- I had a child in my care who recently self-placed with their parents or somebody else known to them
- Other (specify)

12. BRANCH 2: If you care for more than one foster, relative or kin child, are the children:

- Siblings
- Half-siblings
- Related in some other way (e.g. cousins, nieces and nephews)
- From the same Aboriginal nation (clan)
- From the same CALD background
- The children I care for are not related
- I have a mix of any of the above

13. Are you interested in caring for more children?

- Yes – I have asked my caseworker about this but haven't heard anything further
- Yes – My caseworker is working on this at the moment
- Yes – I will ask my caseworker about this
- No – My family is unable to at this stage
- No – I am interested, but I require more support from my agency to be able to foster
- Other – free text (limited to 100 characters)

14. Please rate your experience as a foster, relative/kinship carer

Below are a series of statements. Please rate on a scale of 1 to 7 how much you agree with the statement, with 1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree; 4 is a neutral response, neither agree or disagree. Please answer considering your experience as a foster carer in the last 12 months.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel valued as a foster carer by the agency I provide care for							
I feel my views as a foster carer are listened to by my agency regarding the decisions made about the child(ren) that I provide care for							
I feel involved in the case planning process for the foster child(ren) in my care							
My caseworker responds to me in an appropriate time frame							
My views are considered and taken on board when considering family time							
I understand my rights as a foster carer							
I understand the difference between court decisions and agency decisions							
I understand the court processes that need to take place regarding the child(ren) in my care							
I feel I have been adequately supported through restoration							

15. Please rate your experience in assessing and addressing the needs of the child(ren) in your care in the following areas

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The healthcare needs of the child(ren) in my care have been appropriately assessed							
The healthcare needs of the child(ren) in my care are adequately met							
The behavioural needs of the child(ren) in my care have been appropriately assessed							
The behavioural needs of the child(ren) in my care are being appropriately addressed							
The impact of trauma and neglect that the child(ren) in my care has experienced has been appropriately considered by my agency							
The impact of trauma and neglect that the child(ren) in my care has experienced is being adequately addressed							
I feel I have received adequate information about the experience of trauma and neglect of the child(ren) in my care							
I feel I have received adequate information about the culture and cultural needs of the child (ren) in my care							
The cultural needs of the child (ren) in my care have been appropriately addressed							
The educational needs of the child(ren) in my care have been appropriately considered							
The educational needs of the child(ren) in my care have been appropriately addressed							

16. Please rate your experience with the following aspects of your support and training as a carer

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The agency I provide care for appropriately considers the financial costs associated with the child(ren) I provide care for							
I have been able to access respite care when I need							
I feel confident in where my child(ren) are going when they go to respite care							
If I have felt overwhelmed in my role as a foster carer, I have been offered and provided with appropriate support from my care agency							
I am provided training opportunities that are relevant and interesting to me							
The timing of the training opportunities mean that I am able to attend							
In the last 12 months, when I have contacted My Forever Family for foster carer advocacy or support, the service was able to meet my needs							
In the last 12 months, when I have contacted AbSec for foster carer advocacy or support, the service was able to meet my needs							
When something goes wrong, I know who to contact for support							
I am connected with other carers							
I encourage my family and friends to become foster carers							
Reimbursements for costs I incur providing care for the child(ren) placed with me are provided in a timely manner							
I receive regular, helpful information about changes to the out-of-home care system							
My initial carer training was adequate to prepare me for my role as a foster carer							
As a foster carer, I was provided with sufficient information about support, training and resources when I commenced caring							
My initial carer training was adequate to prepare me for my role as a Relative/kinship carer							
As a Relative/kinship carer, I was provided with sufficient information about support, training and resources when I commenced caring							
I am satisfied by the level of accessibility I have to my caseworker							
I am satisfied in my caring role							
The agency I provide care for appropriately considers the financial costs associated with the child(ren) I provide care for							
I have been able to access respite care when I need							

17. What are the top three areas you see as the areas we could improve out-of-home care (select top three answers)

- Quality of information provided about the child at the time of placement
- My views being listened to and considered by agency staff
- The views of my child/ren in care being listened to and considered by agency staff
- The value placed on carers by agencies
- The number of changes in caseworkers
- The support that caseworkers offer
- The communication I receive from my agency
- Access to additional psychological or therapeutic support for myself or the children I care for
- Ability to raise concerns and complaints over casework decisions
- Access to the NDIS for the children I care for
- Financial support for the children I care for
- Family time/contact
- Planning for leaving care
- The Reportable Conduct Unit (RCU) process when an allegation is made
- Availability of respite care
- Input that I have as a carer into family time arrangements

18. Thinking of your experience of a foster, relative, kinship carer over the last year, overall are things:

- Getting harder
- Getting easier
- About the same

19. What training, learning and development activities would you be most likely to attend? (select all that apply)

- Online – during school hours
- Online – from 7:30pm at night
- Online – weekends
- In person – during school hours
- In person – from 7:30pm at night
- In person – weekends
- Other – free text

20. What changes do you think need to happen to make it easier for foster, relative, and kinship carers to care for children? (Select any three)

- Improved partnerships between casework teams and carers
- Improved family time access and support for children, carers and parents
- Easier access for foster carers to information about the child that they care for
- Easier access to information about Guardianship and Adoption for foster carers
- Greater access to carer support networks for foster carers
- Improved access to financial support for carers
- Improved access to support services e.g. health services, education services
- Improved training opportunities for foster carers
- Easier access to respite care
- Other – free text

21. What would you suggest to promote recognition for the role of foster, relative, kinship carers?

- Annual awards
- Morning tea or other regular events hosted by my agency

- Recognition online or in the media
- Using Foster and Kin Connect to focus on a carer each edition
- Other (free text)

22. How would you like to receive future information about changes to the out-of-home care system?

- Through Foster and Kin Connect newsletter via email
- Through opportunities to meet senior DCJ staff
- From my caseworker
- Separate email updates

23. If you could change just one thing about the out-of-home system currently what would it be?

- Free text

24. Is there any other feedback that you would like to provide about the out-of-home care system?

- Free text

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