

## PSDP Feedback from children, young people, parents and carers

### Introduction

As part of the PSDP Engage and Scope phase, we worked with leading organisations to elicit the perspectives of children, families and carers regarding the learning needs of Practice Supervisors. We sought to hear the voices of people who have, or used to have, a social worker in their lives. They provided feedback in different formats with some using surveys (TACT and Catch 22/NLCBF<sup>1</sup>) and some had focus groups using the survey as a basis for discussion (Barnardo's, Grandparents Plus and Become) and others like the Family Rights Group (FRG) did a review of their existing consultation work and pulled out key messages.

The charities who helped us gain feedback from **children and young people** were:

- **Catch22/NLCBF:** A not-for-profit social business which delivers alternative education, apprenticeships and employability programmes, justice and rehabilitation services, gangs intervention work, support regarding emotional wellbeing and substance misuse, and children's social care programmes.
- **Barnardo's:** The UK's largest children's charity with services including children's advocacy, supporting children in poverty and supporting young carers.
- **Become:** A leading advocacy charity for children in care and care leavers

Participants were **16** young people receiving support from Barnardo's, **41** young people receiving support from Catch 22, **1** survey respondent receiving support from Become and they also held a focus group of XX young people. (*note awaiting confirmation of final numbers*)

The charities who helped us gain feedback from **parents and carers** were:

- **TACT:** The UK's largest Fostering and Adoption charity
- **Grandparents Plus:** A national charity (England and Wales) dedicated to kinship carers, with a particular focus on grandparents and their role in the care of their grandchildren.
- **Family Rights Group:** A charity that works with parents whose children are in need, at risk or are in the care system and with wider family members who are caring for children unable to remain at home.

Participants/ respondents comprised **39** TACT foster carers, **22** kinship carers receiving support from Grandparents Plus, while the Family Rights group (FRG) extracted and provided relevant insights using feedback already gathered from family members including birth parents. The FRG insights from families were gathered from a survey of families that formed part of the [Care Crisis Review](#) and the 'engagement of parents/kinship carers that fed into the original KSS for practice supervisors, the development of NAAS and the Mott McDonald development of training for social workers on achieving permanence'.

### Caveat

It is important to note that this feedback is illustrative; it has not been systematically gathered nor are respondents / participants assumed to be representative of children young people, parents and carers more generally. The nature of the organisations supporting this exercise may also affect responses: differences of perspective between young people may reflect in part the different service offers of the advocacy organisations undertaking the consultation, for example.

### Children and Young People

#### Number of social workers

<sup>1</sup> National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum

Table 1 shows the number of social workers that young people and kinship carers said they had worked with. Barnardo’s feedback showed that young people most frequently had worked with 2 to 3 social workers (50%), while 75% of respondents had worked with more than one social worker. The survey respondent from Become had worked with 3-5 social workers. While Catch 22 found that the majority of young people (65%) said they had worked with more than 5 social workers with 97% of young people having worked with more than one social worker. This highlights that multiple changes in social worker are a common feature in a young person’s experience of children’s social care.

The impact of these changes included that, not forming a relationship became a self-preservation strategy:

*“Too many changes all the time makes you want to not bother with the next one”*

Young people working with Become reflected that the question was “optimistic” and they “expected that most respondents would have had over 5 social workers”. Young people felt that changes in social worker were detrimental and that staff turnover needs to be addressed:

*“They need to stay in their job longer, that should be one of their standards and needs to be told, clearly, when they apply for the job”*

**Table 1. Number of social workers**

Organisation	Respondent	How many social workers have you worked with?	Percentage	n
Barnardo’s	Young people	1	25%	4
		2-3	50%	8
		3-5	19%	3
		5+	6%	1
		<b>Answered:</b>		16
Catch 22 and NLCBF	Young people	1	3%	1
		2-3	18%	7
		3-5	15%	6
		5+	65%	26
		<b>Answered:</b>		40
		<b>Skipped:</b>	1	
Become	Young Person	3-5	100%	1
		<b>Answered:</b>		1
Grandparents Plus	Carers	1	0%	0
		2-3	55%	12
		3-5	9%	2
		5+	36%	8
		<b>Answered</b>		22

**Experience of social workers**

Qualitative answers showed that a number of young people felt their social worker/s **had a positive impact** on their life:

*“Just wanted to say thank you and keep doing what you guys are doing”*

However, a number felt that social workers had a negative impact on them, their life and on

their family, including one young person describing their experience as “disgusting”. Some young people said that their experience of the leaving care team was better and felt Personal Advisers were ‘better to work with’.

One of the survey questions asked for young people to select the top 3 most important things a social worker needs to do, with the list adapted from the Knowledge and Skills Statement for practitioners. All survey statements were identified as important (even if expressed qualitatively). This supports what was also stated explicitly, which was that to be “there for” them (i.e. “doing the best for children and showing they care”), social workers needed to “do everything [on the list]”.

Across survey responses from Catch 22 and Barnardo’s, the most important things that young people said social workers needs to do were

- ‘Understanding how children feel and what they need to grow up happy and safe’,
- ‘Being able to communicate with people clearly and respectfully’ and
- ‘Building good relationships and being able to make people want to talk to them’.

While the majority of young people either agreed or strongly agreed that social workers **had built good relationships with them and family/carers**, a substantial number disagreed or strongly disagreed, with a lower number expressing neutral / ambivalent perspectives, saying they ‘neither had nor hadn’t’. While ‘Understanding the problems that adults face and what they need to be good parents’ was least often selected as one of the most important social work tasks, qualitative responses touched on it as young people wanted to problems to be noticed, to be safeguarded and to understand that their “mother did her best”.

A recurrent theme of the need for honesty and transparency came up and many young people had felt misled by social workers who either gave them incorrect information, or did not follow through on finding information out or made promises which they either couldn’t deliver or didn’t keep.

*“Being 100% honest with young people, instead of making empty promises or ball park answers if they were honest about the issues then the young person would respect them more”*

They would prefer a social worker answered by saying “I don’t know” than providing no answer or appearing to guess.

Needing to empathise with how children feel was emphasised:

*“Just try to wear the young person’s shoes for a bit, we bottle up a lot more than you all anticipate”*

Just as one example, one young person said that the way Personal Education Plan meetings are structured, do not recognise how “awkward” being removed from class and the ensuing questions from classmates can be.

The majority of young people who responded to the survey questions directly agreed that **social workers made them feel respected and valued**. However, there was divergence from this. When treated disrespectfully, trust is undermined. Examples included, communicating in a “patronising or confusing way”, intrusive questioning, feeling like a tick box exercise and lacking confidence in explaining their decisions:

*“Explaining why they say no (I understand now it might be because of a manager) instead of just saying it with no reasoning”*

Young people said that written records had misrepresented them and upset them:

*“It didn’t feel like she knew me or had respect”*

In order to understand a young person, social workers need to value young people's opinion and self-knowledge and hold the "voice of the child" in high esteem. Listening to children and observation of them, were highlighted as key skills for being able to "adapt" to that child's individual needs. One young person suggested that young people should be involved in formal training:

*"Young people should help provide more real life training - I have found it works better"*

Young people said that by not listening, power was being used inappropriately. For instance, being mechanistic by focussing on legal requirements in visits did not meet children's needs and was a barrier to forming a relationship; "They need to involve the young person better, not do their 'check list' and go" (Catch22).

Being outspoken in decision-making yet not taking ownership of mistakes was identified as a problem. Keeping the child central involved understanding their individual needs and one young person implied that to keep children central, social workers need to understand that what is important to young people changes and that technology/the internet is integral to living as a young person.

There was a mixed response as to whether social workers had been **able to deal with any disagreements between them and the child/young person in a respectful and fair way**. The majority of Barnardo's young people and the survey respondent from Become said they disagreed or strongly disagreed. However, the majority of Catch 22 young people said that their social worker had dealt with disagreements fairly and respectfully. Similarly there was a mixed response to whether social workers had **been thoughtful and changed the way they do things when young people asked them to**. The majority of respondents said that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement and this was their experience, however a number of young people disagreed or strongly disagreed and had experience of inflexible social work teams. Mirroring this, the majority of young people who responded to surveys said that social workers did want **feedback from them / their family and carers**, however a number had found that their social worker had not wanted feedback. This indicates that there is considerable variability in how collaboratively social workers practice. The young people in the Become focus group said that young people need to be "listened to and taken seriously when making a complaint about a social worker and that managers and supervisors needed to demonstrate that they would not automatically side with their colleague". It was felt that social care teams, including supervisors, "should respond to criticism" constructively instead of appearing "defensive". They saw a direct work role for supervisors, whereby young people should be able to tell them (the supervisors) "what's going well and what's not going well".

There were differences in opinion as to whether their social worker/s seemed to **know the right facts to do their job**. The vast majority of Barnardo's young people disagreed with this statement. Many participants neither agreed nor disagreed and perhaps this illustrates how much they have to rely on their social worker to give them the correct information. Catch 22 young people had more frequent experience of staff who appeared knowledgeable, yet there was still divergence and a variety of experience. Young people said to understand and not judge situations and young people, knowledge is needed:

*"Understand about people's feelings and don't judge us"*

Social workers needed to understand the reasons for behaviours and not get frustrated. Thus knowledge of mental health, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and the needs of LGBT young people were essential.

The majority of Catch 22 young people found that their social worker had been **clear what their role is, and what other professionals' roles are**. However, of Barnardo's respondents, half (n=8) agreed that their social worker explained roles and remits while half (n=8) disagreed. Other respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

The majority of Barnardo's young people neither agreed nor disagreed that their social worker/s were **able to understand their power over them** and their family/carers and that this could be uncomfortable, while more young people disagreed than agreed. However, although there was a mixture of responses from Catch 22 young people, the majority agreed that social workers were knowledgeable of the power they held and how this could cause discomfort. One respondent strongly agreed with the statement. Using their power fairly and for good was beneficial, with children supported by Barnardo's and a young person from Become highlighting, 'Being able to make decisions and plans that help people's lives improve' is of high importance.

Using their power responsibly, involved promoting children's autonomy and independence while also identifying issues and acting helpfully:

*"Learn when to step back and step up in helping... not doing so makes life difficult"*

Boundaries were important and a young person said that they didn't want their social worker to be a "friend", but instead a "guide". Good social workers needed to be calm, understanding, patient and proactive in advocating for the child. One young person said their social worker was "not strong enough to take on the needs of family and take the right action".

When asked about the statement 'My social worker/s have **been confident and assertive without being too bossy**', a similar number of Catch 22 young people said that they either 'agreed' or 'neither agreed nor disagreed' (as did the Become survey respondent). Overall there was more agreement with this statement than disagreement. In contrast to this, more Barnardo's young people disagreed that their social worker/s were assertive without being bossy.

The vast majority of young people from Catch 22 said that their social worker was **able to manage any stress they feel so that it doesn't affect their work together**. This picture wasn't mirrored by other respondents many of whom disagreed, with social worker's experience of stress described as having an impact on the work they do together. Young people wanted their social workers to be supported with personal stress and caseload pressures:

*"Making sure they do actually have supervisions with their manager so I don't get the backlash of them feeling under pressure or stressed when they visit me"*

Overall, young people did **not** think that their social workers had made them and their family/carers feel important. However, young people from Catch 22 had a variety of experiences with almost equal levels of agreement, disagreement and neither agree nor disagree responses.

*"Give [young people] the time of day and not brush them away"*

Young people outlined a number of ways that social workers need to show their availability such as by spending more time doing 'direct work' with them (and being supported by their organisations to do this), by staying in contact in-between visits, attending appointments, by not going on sick leave for long periods, and being positive about the time spent together:

*"When I need her to go to Wales, she was happy and said 'road trip' instead of being grumpy"*

A young person who was positive about social workers said that "young people need to understand that they're not the only person the social worker is looking after and helping" and this illustrates that part of a social worker being available includes explaining why there are limits to their availability, without burdening the young person. One young person (Barnardo's) said that cancelling visits and saying that "he can't talk" because of being busy was upsetting, further illustrating the importance of demonstrating availability and limits of this to children and young people.



Linking to the need for social workers to have adequate knowledge, young people said that trust takes time to be earned when young people live lives characterised by instability. Where social workers didn't provide availability, stability / consistency, young people couldn't trust them or feel safe being supported by them:

*"The first things social workers should worry about is the stability of the relationship they have with their young person, and make that young person feel safe and feel like they can rely on [them]"*

Of survey responses, there was more agreement than disagreement that young people's **social worker/s had worked with other professionals in a way that gets the best for them / their family / carers**. Although notably, there was disagreement and strong disagreement from some young people. One young person struggled to answer questions which were about them *and* their family at the same time, as "we have been treated differently."

Young people more often agreed that their social worker was able to support children to **keep themselves calm when life feels difficult**. However, a substantial number had the opposite experience.

## Birth family and kinship carers

### Number of Social Workers

Kinship carers (Grandparents Plus) said that "none of the carers spoken to had worked with only one social worker throughout their journey as a kinship carer. The majority of participants, twelve kinship carers, had worked with 2 or 3 social workers, while 36% of kinship carers had worked with more than 5 social workers" (see Table 1.). The Family Rights Group provided an insight from a previous consultation, where a birth parent said:

*"Social workers change constantly. They leave without warning and then you wait months to be reallocated and start all over again."*

### Experience of social workers

Some kinship carers working with Grandparents Plus had positive experiences:

*"Everything was perfect with the social worker we have worked with"*

A large number of parents and kinship carers portrayed more negative experiences. Birth family members (FRG) said that funding and resource pressures on children's social care mean that social care staff are "understaffed and over worked". They attributed many of the negative experiences they had to this difficult context. Wider family (FRG) experiences were characterised by "despair" and "frustration" and relationships were undermined by the issues below.

Kinship Carers being supported by Grandparents Plus said that one of the most important skills for social workers was to **build good relationships and being able to make people want to talk to them**. Nine kinship carers agreed or strongly agreed that 'my social worker/s have been good at building relationships with me and my family' and yet "15 participants strongly disagreed or disagreed that their 'social worker made them feel respected and valued' with only 3 carers agreeing that they felt respected or valued by their social worker/s. Wider family members said that they were not always treated respectfully and this resulted in an unequal relationship where power was being misused. For example, communication issues prevented good relationships. Kinship carers and birth family members felt misled and outlined the need for social workers to:

*"Tell the truth about the situation and options that exist."*

Family members (FRG) said that information about them was withheld which led to inaccuracies in reports not being addressed. When corrections were requested by birth parents they did not happen. Family members found that some social workers were unclear about the child protection process. However, kinship carers may have received more clarity about roles and remits as the survey statement with the highest amount of kinship carer agreement (n = 11) was that their **social worker/s have been clear about their role**, and what other professionals' role are. Despite this, eleven kinship carers also agreed or strongly agreed that social workers have used their power over them and their family which has been uncomfortable, "suggesting an uneven power dynamic between the two parties". Family members (FRG) gave a sense that social workers' power was going unchecked. Families' experience of being treated disrespectfully was exacerbated by social care services not providing apologies, nor acknowledging mistakes and crucially examples of no attempt to rectify mistakes.

Poor organisation often lead to parents having adapt to the social worker's diary with little notice. For example, meetings were arranged at short notice. Reports were often not shared in a timely manner meaning that the family didn't see them prior to meetings/court.

Family members identified social workers' lacked availability:

*"There is no time for them to work with us properly, every time I rang them for support I could not speak to my social worker"*

Families identified a lack of consistency. Grandparents Plus analysed that kinship carers' responses illustrated "differences in style and practice of social workers", which may create disparity but also "adversely affect the kinship carers" who had worked with multiple social workers and had to develop new relationships.

Social workers were reported to not always have the knowledge, including legal knowledge, or level of experience necessary to help children and families. Particularly the FRG stated that social workers were not following the law. Knowledge was highlighted as one of the most important parts of the role (Grandparents Plus). They said that social workers need to have better knowledge of legal advice in order that families can understand their rights and the process and highlighted how this otherwise leads to devastating impact on families. Family members said that Newly Qualified Social Workers can lack the **knowledge and experience** necessary to work with complexity. Kinship carers said that social workers appear to lack knowledge about kinship care more generally, including the "number of unique and complex issues, which they feel are often not understood by overworked social workers". They said that once kinship care is understood, there would be "increased empathy and compassion, and better relationships".

Families often didn't feel listened to and didn't feel that the local authority had worked in partnership with them. After such an experience, one family was allocated a new social worker who listened. Once they felt listened to, the family felt able form a "true dialogue" which led to a trusting relationship.

The majority of kinship carers, strongly disagreed or disagreed that their '**social workers/s have been able to make them and their family feel important**' and they wanted to be treated with compassion. They said that the most important thing that social workers need to do well was **to involve people in the decisions they make about them/their family**. Wider family members (FRG), often grandparents, repeatedly stated that children's social care were too slow to involve them which suggested that they weren't valued. The outcome of this was that they weren't involved early enough "to explore options... for wider family members to support parents to keep their children or to take on the care of the child if they couldn't remain at home". Wider family members didn't feel like they were seen as an "asset", which offered love to the child but who equally needed support, with their needs often not being met or

understood. Alternatively, they sometimes felt coerced into making uninformed decisions to care for children, without financial or emotional support for them or the children involved:

*"They should tell people about all the problems with child's behaviours and attachment disorders so that they know what to expect in the future."*

High numbers of kinship carers (Grandparents Plus) strongly disagreed or disagreed that their **'social worker has been able to show them how to keep calm when life has been difficult'** and felt judged when they showed their emotions. The Family Rights Group insights showed that families felt abandoned once court proceedings were over (depending on the order in place):

*"Family and friends carers spoke of feeling abandoned by children's services in the aftermath of proceedings, with no or little support and struggling"*

## Foster carers

### Information about their foster care experience

Three foster carers skipped this question but the majority, 52.8% (n = 19) said they have been foster carers for 5 years or more. The next most frequent duration of being a foster carer was 3-5 years (22.2%; n = 8), followed by less a year (16.7%; n = 6) and then 1-2 years (8.3%; n = 3).

The vast majority of agency foster carer respondents (94.7%; n = 36) said that they only had agency foster care experience. No foster carers had recent experience of being a local authority foster carer (i.e. within the past two years) and 5.3% of carers had experience of being a local authority foster carer more than 2 years ago.

Table 2 shows foster carers' tendency towards caring for children in a particular age range. The most frequent answer was that foster carers cared for children of all ages. Notably, no foster carer had a tendency towards caring for older teenagers aged between 17-21 years. Perhaps this reflects that foster care may be a less common permanence option for young people in care after their 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. The second least common response was the 0 - 5 years old age range.

Table 2. Which of the following best describes your experience of being a foster carer?

Answer Choice	Response Percent	Response Total
<b>I tend to care for younger children (0-5 year olds)</b>	7.9%	3
<b>I tend to care for primary school aged children (5-11 year olds)</b>	13.2%	5
<b>I tend to care for secondary school aged children (11-17 year olds)</b>	36.8%	14
<b>I tend to care for older teenagers (17 - 21 year olds)</b>	0.0%	0
<b>I care for children of all ages</b>	42.1%	16

Most frequently, foster carers had experience of short term (78.9%; n=30) and long term (78.9%; n=30) fostering. Scoring next was experience of providing emergency fostering placements/care (44.7%; n=17). While providing foster-to-adopt placements/care, parent and child placements, staying put or respite care were much less frequently selected or specified.



## Experience of social workers

Foster carers' survey responses painted a more positive than negative experience of social workers. Some foster carers highlighted positive relationships with social workers:

*"Our children's social worker is very good"*

The majority of foster carers felt social workers had:

- Been good at building a relationship with me and my family
- Been clear about their role and other people's roles
- Been able to manage their own stress
- Made them and their family feel important
- Worked well with other professionals in a way that gets the best for their whole family
- Been able to understand the emotional impact of being a foster carer and supportive
- Been confident and assertive without being overbearing
- Been able to recognise their power and use it appropriately
- Been keen to hear feedback (including critical feedback) from the carer, the carer's family, the child/ren they care for
- Made them feel respected and valued
- Been able to act on foster carer feedback
- Seemed to know and understand the right research evidence
- Been thoughtful, reflective and able to change their approach when needed
- Been able to deal with any disagreements in a respectful and constructive way

Some respondents felt the survey could have clarified whether they should feedback about their supervising social worker or the child's social worker as they had different experiences. Areas for improvement were identified and a wide range of positive and negative experience between social workers was highlighted.

*"The range of skill base is huge from exceptional to entirely inadequate"*

Although there were more positive than negative experiences, the statement most disagreed with was **'My social worker/s have been keen to hear feedback from me, my family, the child/ren we care for – even when it is critical feedback'**. Foster carers most frequently selected **'involving the foster carers and the child in decision making'** as the most important thing that social workers need more support to do well.

*"Need to join up all the dots and work collectively for positive outcomes"*

Foster carers highlighted that they and the child weren't always listened to or valued. When foster carers weren't listened to, their knowledge of the child and role wasn't respected.

*"To be open and transparent with foster carers and treat them as an equal and with the respect that they deserve"*

Foster carers said that it was really important that social workers receive more support to be **'able to communicate with different audiences clearly, respectfully and helpfully'**. Social workers didn't always empathise with what the foster carer's role entailed and how it can be very stressful. Decision-making needed to be explained to the child with honesty and transparency. They echoed young people's responses and noted that 'false promises' undermined the relationship.

They experienced a lack of availability, and yet foster carers need to be responded to quickly.

*"We need to get hold of them when we need them. Not days or weeks later"*

Sometimes social workers missed key meetings and appointments. However, most often, foster carers felt strongly that social workers would be more available to them and the child if they had smaller caseloads, if there were more practitioners and better access to resources. They felt strongly that social workers need more support to build good relationships and be able to do 'direct work'.

The least frequently selected statement for social workers to receive more support to achieve was, 'understanding the law and the family and youth justice systems'.

### Themes and relevance

An overarching theme emerges of the need for social workers to be able to **build a trusting relationship**. Therefore a key need for practice supervision is that it is built around promoting good relationships with everyone involved in the child's life. Without a meaningful and trusting relationship, the other social work tasks including safeguarding, supporting change / development and building self-efficacy will be much harder to achieve. Respondents wanted good practice to be praised by supervisors and shared with other social workers. There was a sense that the balance of care and control were tipped towards control. Coming in and making decisions without a positive relationship was experienced as negative and disempowering.

There were a number of antecedents for building a trusting relationship which included:

- demonstrating consistency and availability,
- being highly motivated to be child-centred which includes supporting families and carers,
- being respectful including involving young people and others to build self-efficacy and inform better decisions,
- being responsive,
- having empathy and compassion, and
- having an accurate knowledge base.

#### *Availability (and consistency)*

There was a sense that social worker stability should be part of permanence planning for a child. Practice supervision and organisational contexts need to address staff turnover and sickness to avoid children being harmed. Young people, birth family, kinship/foster carers all described huge variety of experience which indicates a problematic lack of consistency and differential readiness to practice:

*"Social work is a really important job you get to change children's lives – you shouldn't pass your exam if you are not good at it"*

Young people clearly identified that supervisors should have regular supportive supervision with social workers in order to prevent their personal or work stress impacting on their direct work and subsequently, the people they work with.

Supervisors should ensure that children / carers / families do not experience gaps in support when staff change. Organisations and supervisors need to consider how changes in staff are managed. Family Rights Group recommends that supervisors "support social workers to provide good handover notes and records if staff leave; consider case allocation to avoid multiple social workers where possible and to provide more experienced social workers to families with very entrenched difficulties".

Supervisors need to promote non-mechanistic practice, for example, promoting the value of staying in contact in-between visits/meetings. Providing supervision on the quality of

visits/ meetings could help. They also need to challenge any negative opinions/frustrations held about children and families and unpick these.

### *Motivation and responsivity*

Practice supervisors could better engage with social workers' motivations and explore their focus to ensure practice is child and family centred. Young people, kinship / foster carers and family members described a sense that motivation appears to be misplaced and therefore practice supervisors should question where the social workers' energy is focused. Family members in particular said that children's social care is not responsive. Social workers need to act and respond in a timely way. Practice supervisors could ensure that mistakes are rectified and support the prioritisation of timely reports being sent out.

### *Listening and involving*

It was felt to be disrespectful of social workers not to listen to or involve young people / kinship and foster carers and birth family members. Yet it was a common experience and social workers often could improve on actively listening. Practice supervision should support and promote collaborative and partnership working. Practice supervisors should make time to listen and understand the family's perspective and the child's perspective and needs. Involving service users includes ensuring they are informed and up-to-date. Social workers should therefore be supported to be confident explaining processes as well as why they are making decisions. Justifying decisions in supervision could support this, perhaps even role-playing/modelling how to talk to families. Supervisors to support social workers to recognise non-verbal communication and the meanings behind behaviours. The FRG said that supervisors need to help social workers to consider and locate the wider family and friends network early, initiating Family Group Conferences.

### *Empathy*

Social workers need to be supported to be able to put themselves in children's and family's shoes and really understand how the implications of social work practice feels for them. a number of respondents said that social workers need good supervision to support them to reflect on their assumptions.

### *Being honest and knowledgeable*

Practice supervisors should support social workers to communicate better with families and carers by being transparent and giving regular updates. Practice Supervisors should encourage their staff to seek advice from other people when they have gaps in knowledge or are finding it hard to make a decision. Supervisors should support social workers to understand the reasons for behaviours by enabling them to access specific and up-to-date knowledge and research, for example mental health, LGBT, trauma and SEND. This could include encouraging social workers to engage with available evidence or supporting their CPD through ensuring they attend training. Grandparents Plus identified a specific training need and need for supervision to address a lack of knowledge about what kinship care is and the unique set of benefits, challenges and complexities that these carers face and well as meeting wider families' support needs.

Supervision should pinpoint a social worker's assumptions and judgements and challenge these where necessary. Young people wanted supervisors to observe their staff in order to witness practice issues, and all respondents highlighted that their feedback and criticism are useful sources of knowledge and learning which should be taken seriously. There was an anticipation that supervisors would side with staff and supervisors have a responsibility to seek, welcome and respond to feedback / criticism fairly. Social workers need to be able to explain the law, rights and refer to legal advice and advocacy. This includes open information about financial rights, particularly for carers. Supervisors should involve families in training and development of social workers. Social workers need to provide children, young people, families and carers with



transparent information in order to build trust. Providing information regarding rights can help people know that they are being treated fairly and receiving what they are entitled to, which in turn, builds a trusting open relationship.