

Public attitudes to children in care Results from a national survey

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Key Messages

- The public has little idea of the size of the care population, or the number of children who come into the care system,
- The public recognises that children are most likely to come into care because of abuse or neglect. Indeed the most common words that come to mind in relation to children in care are: abused/abuse, lonely/loneliness, neglect/neglected.
- The public understands that, when first taken into care, children are most likely to live in a foster carer's home in the local community.
- The public correctly recognises that fewer than half of the children in care attain five or more GCSEs at 16, but think that rather more attain this than is in fact the case.
- When asked what more they thought could be done to help children who have experienced abuse or neglect, the public's two main responses were 'increasing provision of local authorities' (40%) and 'people becoming foster carers' (23%).
- When asked about whether they would ever consider being a foster carer themselves in the future, over one in five respondents (22%) said that they would consider it and 17% said they did not know.
- When those who would consider being a foster carer were asked why would do so stressed the value to and rights of the child, and their own ability to provide a home, as key reasons. (Specifics included to help deprived children; to give children a safe home; to change lives/give them a better start; I would make a good parent; every child deserves to be cared for.)
- Those who would not consider being a foster carer (59%) said it was because they felt too old felt it was too great a challenge or already had children and did not want any more.

1. Introduction

This report sets out results of survey work undertaken for Coram in summer 2017 to assess the general public's views on children in care. Coram, the first children's charity, has an ongoing commitment to raise and develop the public's understanding of children in care, and these survey results contribute to that commitment.

2. Methodology

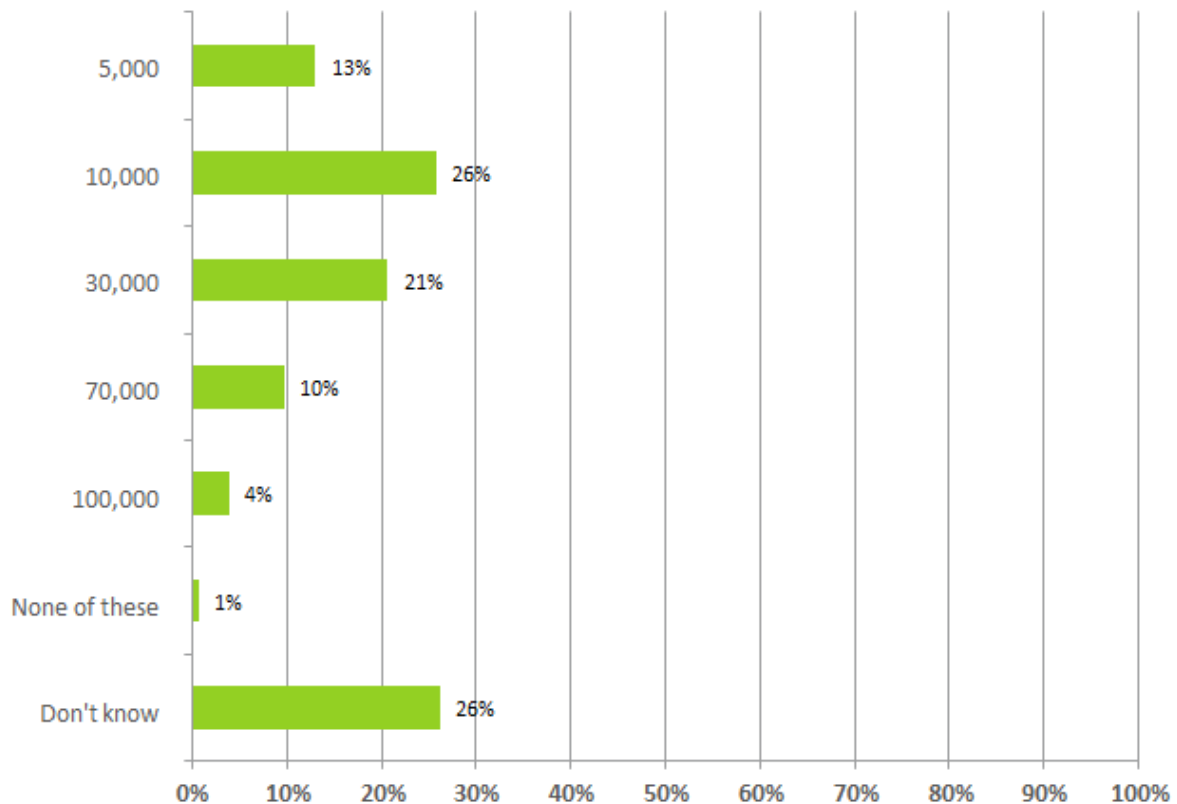
This survey has been conducted using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc UK panel of 800,000+ individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys.

Emails are sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample. The e-mail invites them to take part in a survey and provides a generic survey link. Once a panel member clicks on the link they are sent to the survey that they are most required for, according to the sample definition and quotas. (The sample definition could be "UK adult population" or a subset such as "English adults"). Invitations to surveys don't expire and respondents can be sent to any available survey. The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample. The profile is normally derived from census data or, if not available from the census, from industry accepted data.

For this survey the questions were asked in two phases, in June and August 2017. This enabled some refinement of questions and the inclusion of some additional questions in the second phase, but the same methods were used for both phases.

Over 2,100 adults in the UK completed the survey with smaller sub-sets for different parts of the UK. Numbers of respondents are provided for relevant questions. For some of the survey questions were asked about rates and numbers in England. Where this is the case the set of responses from England only (1,774) is used

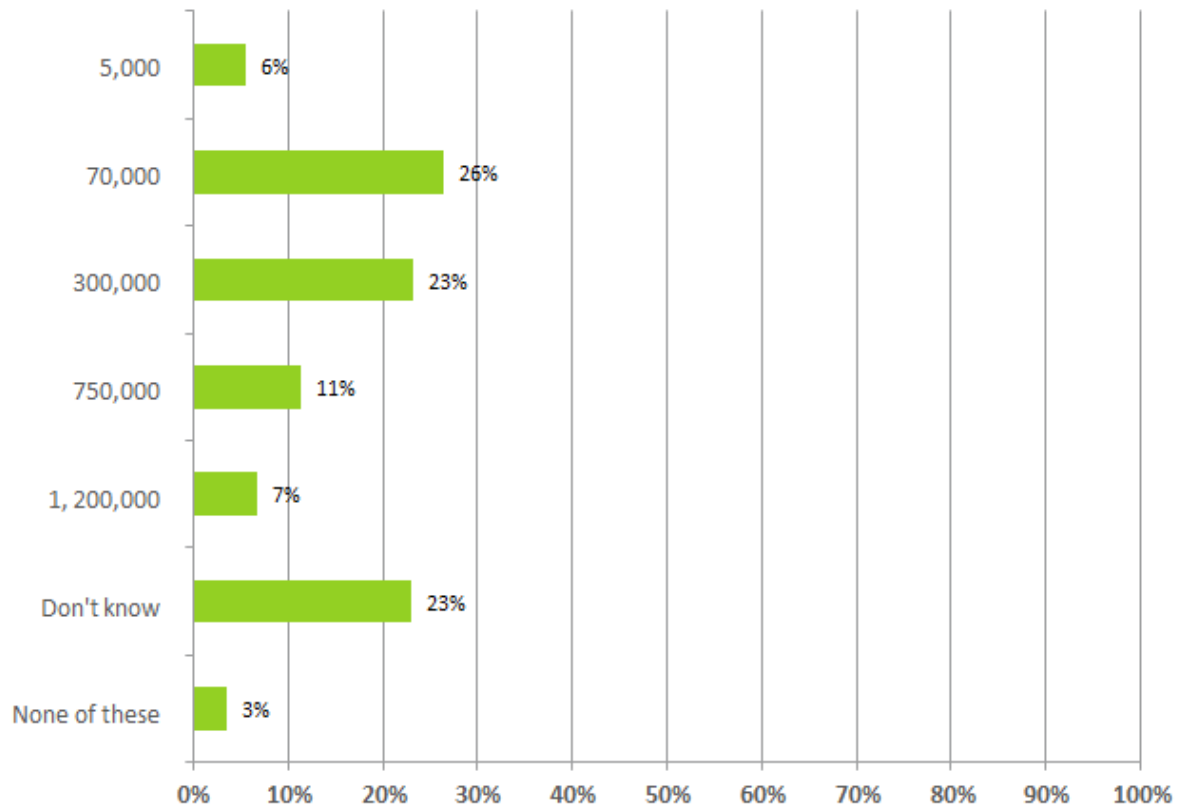
Figure 2: Approximately, which one of the following comes closest to the number of children you think were taken into care by local authorities in England in the period April 2016 to March 2017? (Please select the option that best applies. If you are unsure, please give your best estimate)



Source: YouGov survey on children in care for Coram, June 2017. Unweighted base: All English adults (1774).

With regard to the numbers of children being taken into care, almost 80% either gave the wrong answer or didn't know. Only 21% were able to estimate correctly the most recent figure of 30,000 children, with the majority of respondents, 26% stating that they did not know. 53% estimated that this figure was either 5,000, 10,000, 70,000 or 100,000.

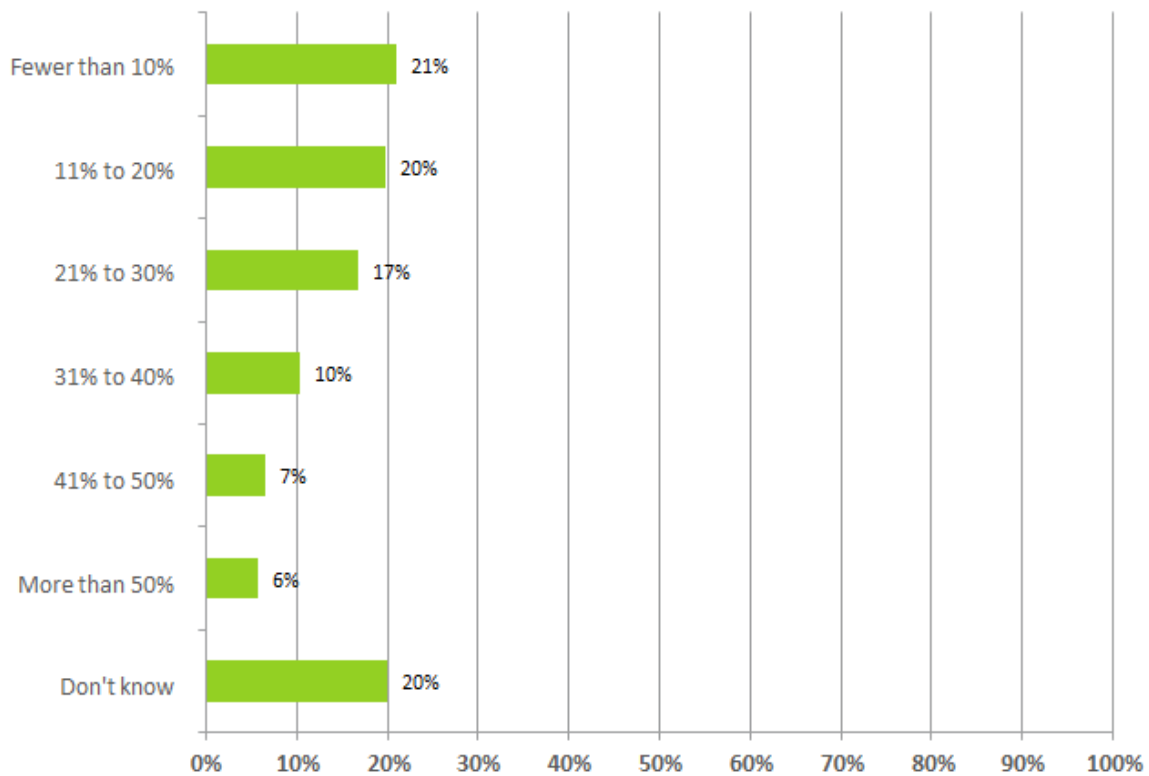
Figure 3: which one of the following comes closest to the total number of children you think are currently in care?



Source: YouGov survey on children in care for Coram, June 2017. Unweighted base: All English adults (1774).

Seventy four per cent of the population could not give a correct estimation of the number of children in care in England. 26% estimated correctly that around 70,000 children are currently in care in England. According to the DfE's statistics there were 70,440 looked after children in England at 31 March 2016, (Source: Department for Education. Children looked after in England, SFR 41/2016, 29 September 2016.)

Figure 4: Approximately, what percentage of children in care in England do you think achieved 5 A*- C grades when taking GCSE exams in 2016?

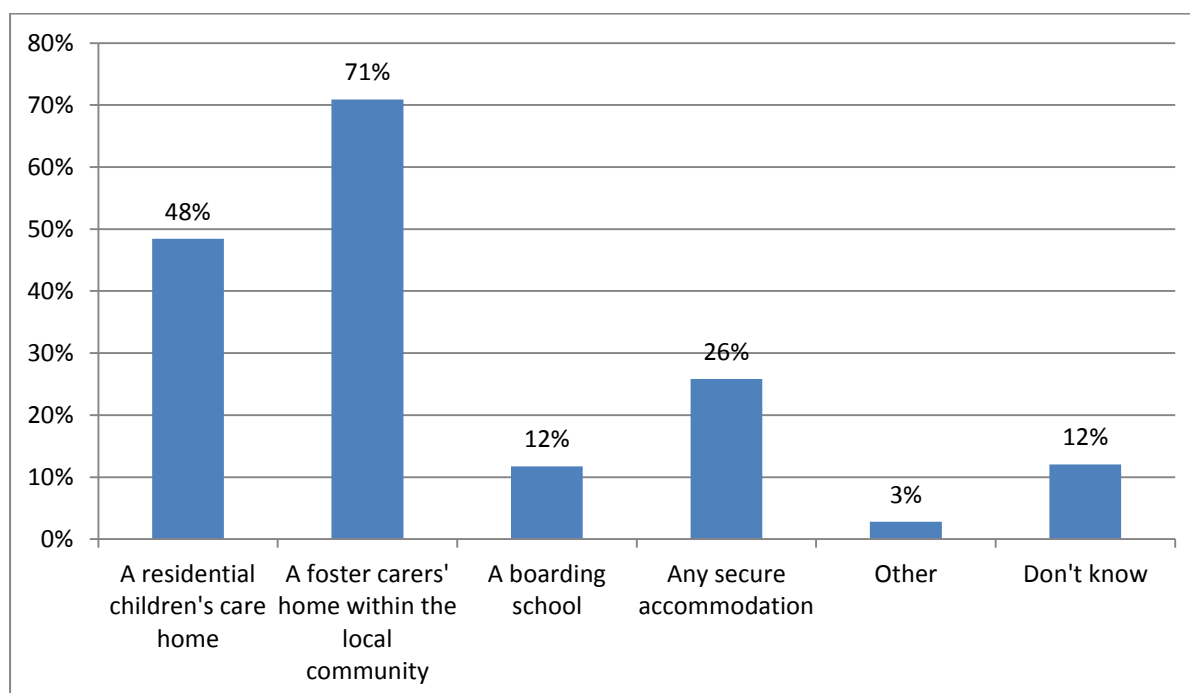


Source: YouGov survey on children in care for Coram, June 2017. Unweighted base: All English adults (1774).

On the educational achievements of children in care, 20% of respondents identified that among Year 11 students between 11% and 20% of looked after children achieved five GCSEs A* to C including Mathematics and English. 40% of respondents gave an estimate of 20% or more achieving 5 A*- C grades.

(The actual figure for 2014 was 14%), compared with 55% nationally of all children taking GCSEs. (Source: HoC Library Briefing Paper: Children in Care in England Statistics for 2014, October 2015).

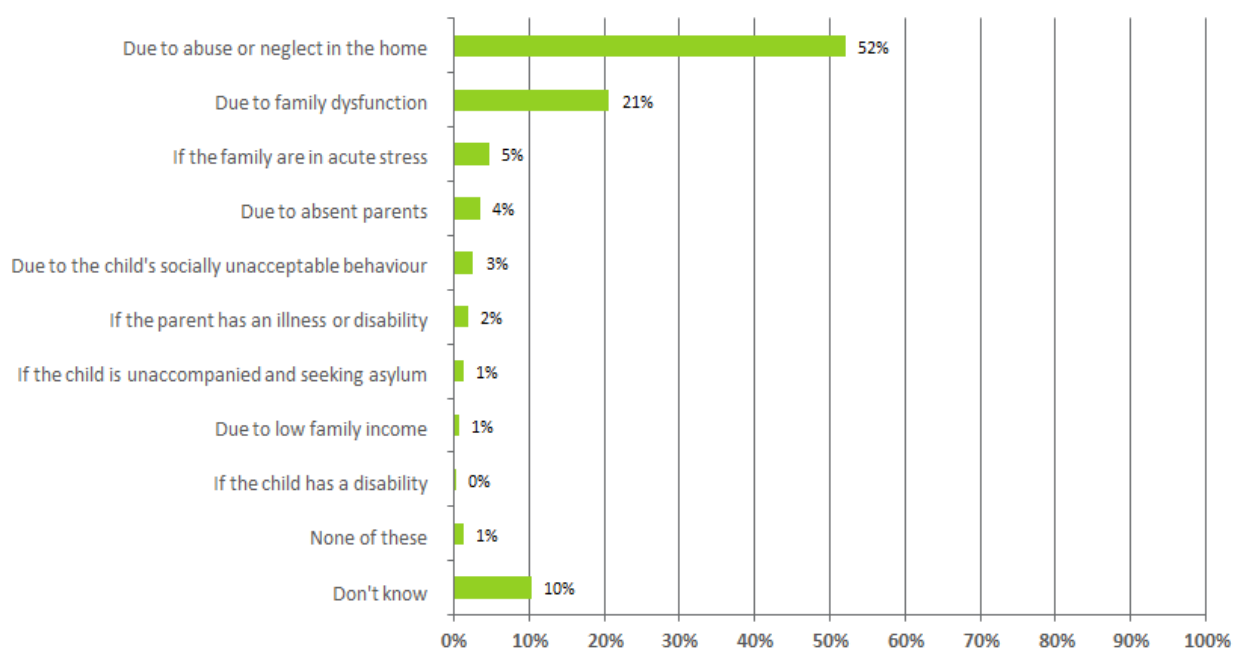
Figure 5: Thinking about when a child is first taken into care by a local authority, in which, if any, of the following places do you think they could be moved to live in?



Source: YouGov survey on children in care for Coram, June 2017. Unweighted base: All UK adults (2122). Note: respondents were asked to select all that they thought apply, which means totals do not sum to 100%.

With regard to where children live when they are first taken into care, 71% of respondents answered that this would be in a foster carer's home in the local community. This corresponds well with the places where children do actually live when taken into care, with the majority of looked after children (75%) in foster care placements. Given that this was a multi-option question, the responses elicited from respondents saw a wide spread of possible options for where children in care might live.

Figure 6: Which, if any, of the following do you think are reasons why children are taken into care by a local authority?



Source: YouGov survey on children in care for Coram, August 2017. Unweighted base: All UK adults (2122).

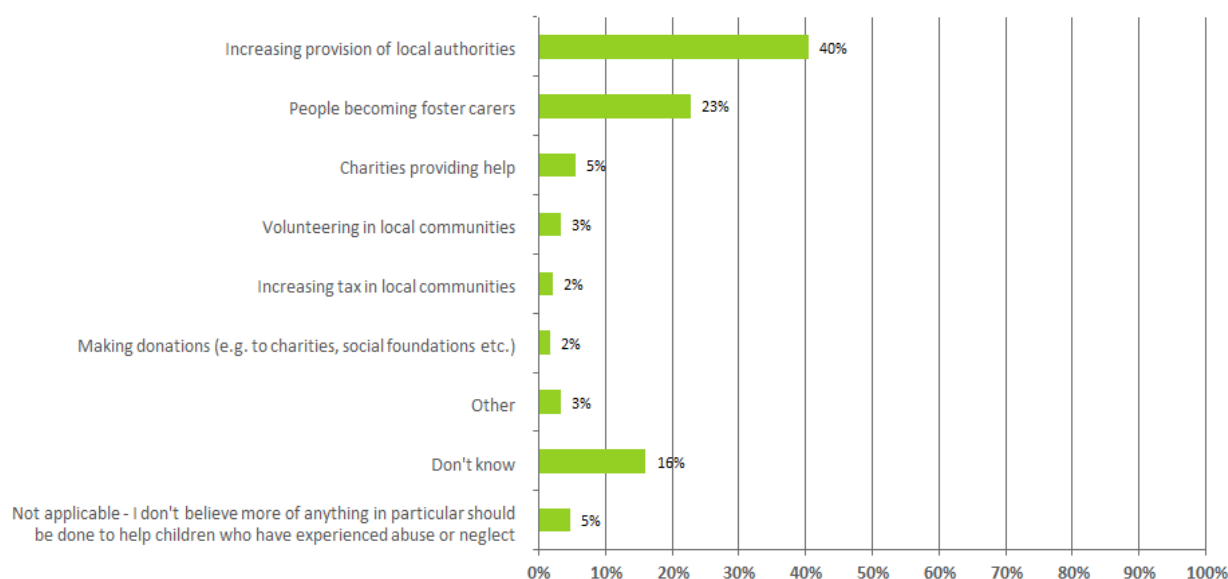
When a child is taken into care the main reason is collected. The proportion of children being looked after due to abuse or neglect in 2016 was 60%. Over the same time period the proportion of children in care due to absent parenting has risen from 5% in 2014, to 7% in 2016, reflecting the rise in unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

When asked about the reasons why children are taken into care by a local authority, most survey participants (52%) responded that the most common reason was because of abuse or neglect in the home. The public response to the survey did identify correctly the main reasons for children being taken into care. Other reasons identified by the public for children being taken into care included:

- Due to family dysfunction (21%)
- If the family are in acute stress (5%)
- Due to absent parents (4%)
- Due to the child's socially unacceptable behaviour (3%)

When asked if they know someone in their family or social circle that has ever been taken into care, only 20% said that they did. 77% said they didn't and 3% said they preferred not to say.

Figure 7: Which, if any, of the following do you think should be done more to help children who have experienced abuse or neglect?



Source: YouGov survey on children in care for Coram, August 2017. Unweighted base: All UK adults (2123).

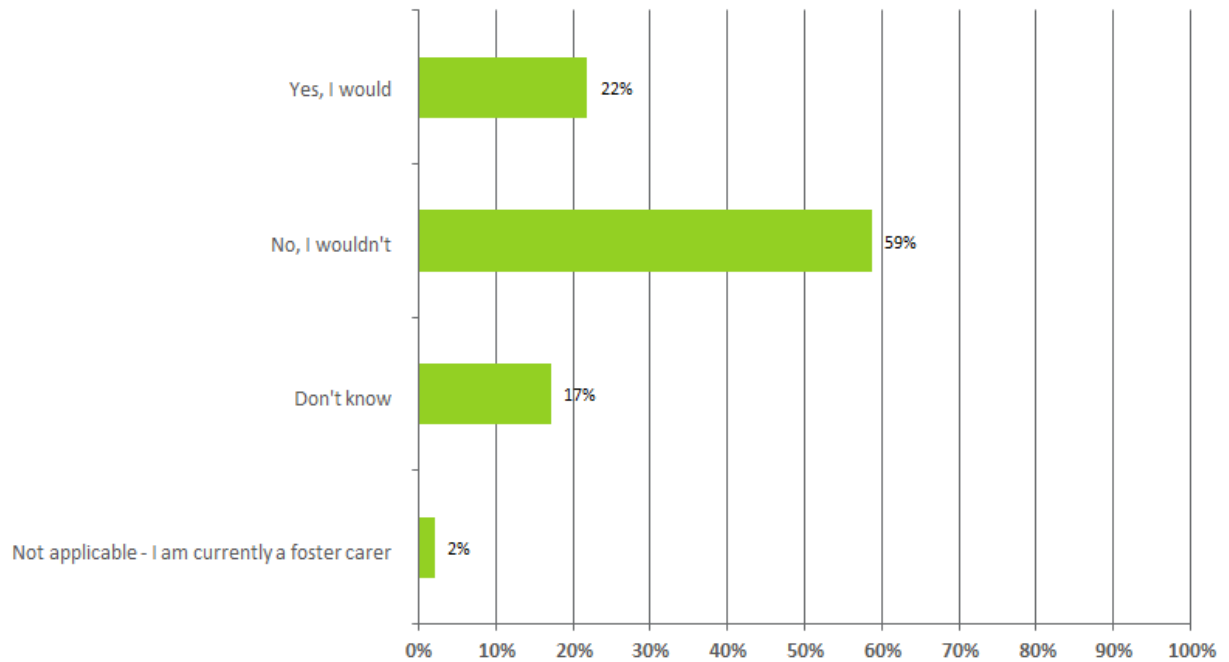
Respondents were also asked about what more they thought could be done to help children who have experienced abuse or neglect. The two main responses included 'increasing provision of local authorities' (40%) and 'people becoming foster carers' (23%). Other responses included:

- Charities providing help (5%)
- Volunteering in local communities (3%)
- Making donations (e.g. to charities, social foundations etc.) (2%) and
- Increasing tax in local communities (2%)

Five per cent of respondents said they thought nothing more of anything in particular should be done to help children who have experienced abuse or neglect.

When asked about whether they would ever consider being a foster carer themselves in the future, over 1 in 5 respondents (22%) said that they would consider it. Most respondents (59%) said they would not consider it and 17% said they did not know. Just 2% of respondents answered not applicable because they are already foster carers.

Figure 8: Would you ever consider being a foster carer yourself in the future?



Source: YouGov survey on children in care for Coram, August 2017. Unweighted base: All UK adults (2123).

When asked about the reasons for their answers relating to whether they would consider being a foster carer, respondents provided a wide variety of reasons why they would and why they would not consider it.

Figure 9: You previously said that you would consider being a foster carer in the future...What are your reasons for this?



Source: YouGov survey on children in care for Coram, August 2017. Unweighted base: All UK adults who would consider being a foster carer in the future (n=469).

The main answers given by respondents as to why they would consider being a foster carer included:

- To help children in need/deprived children (15%)
- Give children a safe home/provide a home (13%)
- To change lives/give them a chance/give them a better start (11%)
- I would make a good parent/I could do it/have a lot to offer (11%)
- Every child deserves to have a family/be loved/be cared for (11%)
- It's the right thing to do/human decency/socially responsible/to help the community/it's important (10%)
- To help/want to help (9%)

- Don't have my own children/unable to have children (9%)
- Too many children in care that need help/not enough foster carers (8%)

When asked about the reasons for their answers relating to whether they would consider being a foster carer, respondents provided a wide variety of reasons why they would and why they would not consider it.

Figure 10: You previously said that you would not consider/ were unsure of being a foster carer in the future... ..What are your reasons for this?



Source: YouGov survey on children in care for Coram, August 2017. Unweighted base: All UK adults who wouldn't consider/ unsure being a foster carer in the future (n=1613).

The main answers given by respondents as to why they would not consider being a foster carer included:

- Age is a barrier/ feel too old (35%)
- Too much responsibility/ stressful/ hard work/ not qualified/ emotional impact (11%)
- Already have children/ enough children/ children grown up/ don't want any more (8%)
- No time (7%)
- Ill health/ disability (6%)
- No room at home (5%)
- Not interested/ don't want to (5%)
- Work commitments (4%)
- Don't like children/ kids (4%)