

What happens to siblings in the care system?

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This report investigates the current experience of siblings in the care system and whether some placement types are more likely than others to enable siblings to be raised together. It also explores how many foster carers are siblings of the children they are raising. A set of questions were sent to all English local authorities under the Freedom of Information Act. Their responses are summarised in this paper. We are grateful to The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation for funding this work.

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Summary of findings

- Half (49.5%) of sibling groups in local authority care are split up.
- 37% of children in care who have at least one other sibling in care - are living with none of their siblings. There is also considerable regional variation, with almost a half split up from any sibling in the East Midlands.
- Of sibling groups all placed together - 23% were living in family and friends foster care. This is more than double the proportion of all looked after children in kinship foster care placements (11%). In other words although relatively few looked after children live in kinship foster care, it appears to particularly be conducive to supporting siblings to be able to live together. It is also worth noting Farmer & Moyers' ¹finding, that when children are placed with siblings their placement is less likely to be disrupted.
- Only 1% of sibling groups who were all placed together were living in residential care. Government figures show 10% of all children looked after are placed in residential care.²
- On average local authorities reported that there were 50 children being raised by connected persons i.e. family and friends foster carers. However, the average number of sibling foster carers was just 1 per authority. Indeed less than 3% of the connected foster carers were sibling carers. In fact most local authorities that provided data reported having no sibling foster carers although Northamptonshire had 14. This finding is particularly interesting because it is in such sharp contrast to picture drawn from the analysis of the 2001 census³ which found that 38% of *all children in kinship care* (i.e. all children being raised by a relative other than a parent) were being raised by sibling carers. Research⁴ has found that access to support for children in kinship care is largely determined by whether or not they are in or outside the care system. This is likely to partly explain why sibling carers and the children they are raising often struggle to get basic help from their local authority and other agencies⁵.

¹ Farmer E and Moyers S (2008) Kinship Care: Fostering Effective Family and Friends Placements

² DfE (2014) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption>

³ Nandy S, Selwyn J, Farmer E, Vaisey P (2011) Spotlight on Kinship Care (University of Bristol)

⁴ Hunt J and Waterhouse S (2012) Understanding family and friends care: the relationship between need, support and legal status (University of Oxford & FRG)

⁵ Ashley C, Roth D, Lindley B (2011) Big Bruv, Little Sis (Family Rights Group)

Recommendations

1. ***The presumption should be that it is in the interests of siblings to be placed together unless it is contrary to an individual child's welfare needs.*** Each child's welfare needs throughout their life, will include identity needs. Where support is needed with their relationship, the plan should clearly set out the support that will be provided;
2. ***Where children are not living with their siblings, their relationship should be supported and nurtured,*** potentially drawing upon specialist resources such as Siblings Together and Shaftesbury Young People's Siblings United project, which arrange contact between separated siblings. Where the placement needs of siblings who are looked after appear to be in conflict, a thorough assessment should be undertaken of any potential risks that would arise if the children were to be placed together and what support could be put in place to address these risks. If following assessment, it is contrary to an individual child's needs to be placed with their sibling(s), the care plan should set out what the contact arrangements should be in place including potential overnight stays: how often should contact take place, its whereabouts, and whether it needs to be supervised.
3. All local authorities should undertake an audit of the needs of their looked after population⁶ and regularly publish data on sibling placements, to ensure that they ***make suitable provision to meet the needs of sibling groups.***
4. There should be a new legal duty on local authorities to ensure that ***potential placements with family and friends carers are always explored and assessed for suitability*** including offering all families the opportunity to have a ***family group conference*** before a child enters the care system (unless there is an emergency). This would maximise the prospects of children, who are unable to live with their parents, being able to be raised safely with their siblings within the family network. This is consistent with optimising the children's outcomes including supporting them to feel more emotionally secure, have fewer behavioural problems and help them to do better in all areas including academically. Research confirms that most children in kinship care thrive and do significantly better than those in unrelated care.⁷
5. Currently legal status, in particular whether a child is in the care system or not is all too often the key determinant as to whether a child in kinship care gets support. Research shows that children raised by their sibling carers are particularly disadvantaged. The Government should ***regulate to require local authorities to publish a family and friends care policy to maximise the identification of and support for family and friends carers*** and place a ***new duty on local authorities to establish and commission family and friends care support services***, including bereavement counselling, life story work and help managing contact. The Government should also introduce the right to a period of ***paid employment leave and protection, akin to paid adoption leave,***

⁶ This is in accordance with the sufficiency duty (s.22G CA 1989) as amended

⁷ Selwyn et al, (2013) The Poor Relations? Children and informal kinship carers speak out (University of Bristol)

to kinship carers, including sibling carers, who are permanently raising children who cannot live with their parents, so they are not forced to give up work or college to raise their younger siblings.

6. The Government should adequately fund **free specialist independent legal advice and information services to family and friends** who are considering, or have taken on a child, including sibling carers, not least so they can navigate a field of complex child welfare law and variable local policy and practice, in order to make an informed decision.
7. **Local authorities should review their approach to sibling carers.** This should include ensuring that they are complying with the law as to who is a looked after child/foster carer and that the procedures used to assess the suitability of older siblings as potential carers for their younger brothers and sisters are such as to allow the potential sibling carer the full opportunity to explain the strengths that they will bring to the task of raising their young siblings. Policy makers, practitioners and services should be aware of and respectful of sibling carers and the children they are raising and be responsive to their particular needs, for example, for counselling or accommodation difficulties, regardless of the child's legal status.

1. Context

1.1 Placement of siblings when in care – research and practice

When siblings enter the care system, the decision whether to place them together or separately is of vital importance. This decision can have lifelong consequences in terms of whether these children will grow up knowing each other or not.

Children entering the care system are likely to have to go to live in circumstances that are very unfamiliar to them. Most will be placed with a foster family who is previously unknown to them and whose household rules and routines are unfamiliar to them. The carer may have no previous knowledge of what food they like, what are the things that scare them, and whether they have a particular soft toy that they like to have with them at bedtime.

Children entering residential care can face additional difficulties, as they have to come to terms with the changes of key worker availability that is the result of residential workers' shift systems, while some children's homes can seem scary and overwhelming.

In this situation, the presence of a sibling can provide a great deal of reassurance. While not all siblings have close relationships, the presence of a sibling in the same placement can provide a trusted presence to share anxieties with, and a point of familiarity amid so much else that is strange and unfamiliar.

There is evidence that being placed with siblings can often be a protective factor for looked after children e.g. Farmer and Moyers found that the placements of children living with their siblings were less likely to disrupt, whether they were placed with

family and friends carers or unrelated foster carers.⁸ In their study of children placed with adopters or long-term foster carers when they were aged between 5 and 11, Rushton et al⁹ found that *“Among singly placed children, scapegoating and rejection by birth parents were associated with poorer placement outcomes, especially for boys. However, when placed together with siblings, the relationship between rejection and poor outcome did not hold.”*

Moreover, keeping siblings together is what young people themselves say they want. 86% of all children in care thought it important to keep siblings together in care. Over three quarters thought that councils should help children and young people to keep in touch with their brothers and sisters¹⁰.

‘If you have a sibling with you it is better because you can have a bit of your birth family all the time’¹¹ – young person in care

Research has shown the benefits that siblings can gain from being raised together: for many, it is the closest relationship they ever experience, and they are able to share information and feelings, and develop a shared sense of identity. Even difficulties such as rivalries and jealousy can assist siblings with important life-skills such as learning to share and co-operate.¹²

“Sibling relationships can provide a thread of continuity and support for looked after young people even when they end up moving frequently. For many looked after children, sibling relationships are in practice their best hope of maintaining long term supportive relationships that will continue through placement changes and after they become adults and leave care.” – Siblings Together

“One of our greatest concerns is that the bonds between siblings in care, which can lead to greatly valued lifelong relationships, are being broken.” – Centre for Social Justice, Finding their Feet, Equipping care leavers to reach their potential (January 2015)

“It’s the one relationship that can last a lifetime” – Linda Jones, Shaftesbury Young People’s Siblings United project

Clearly, there are some children whose own welfare needs are such that they are assessed as requiring their own separate placement. According to recent Ofsted data¹³ of children in foster care in England during 2013-14, 69% of siblings in foster care were placed together (8175 children) and 31% (3515) of brothers and sisters

⁸ Farmer E and Myers S (2008) *ibid*

⁹ Rushton, A, Dance, C, Quinton, D and Mayes, D (2001) *Siblings in Late Permanent Placements* London: BAAF

¹⁰ Morgan, R (2009) *Keeping in touch: A report of children’s experience by the Children’s Rights Director for England* Ofsted

¹¹ Quote from Children’s Rights Director for England (2009), *ibid*

¹² Lord J and Borthwick S (2009) *Planning and placement for sibling groups*; from Schofield G and Simmonds J eds *The Child Placement Handbook: Research policy and practice* (BAAF); Prynne B (1999) *Looking back: Childhood separations revisited*, from Mullender A ed (1999) *We are family: Sibling relationships in placement and beyond* (London: BAAF)

¹³ Source: Ofsted (January 2015) *Fostering 2013-14*

were placed separately. 18% of siblings in foster care (2095) were assessed to be placed separately and were placed apart. However, 13% (1520) were assessed to be placed together but were placed apart. In some, although not by any means all such cases, that may be because there are some practical challenges that local authorities face in placing larger sibling groups together. However, it is important when siblings are split up to ensure that full and continuing consideration is given to arranging contact between separated siblings: one study of siblings in late permanent placements found that half of the placements had been made without any plans for sibling contact.¹⁴

“When your sibling is taken away from you, it takes away your heart” – 15 year old, young person in care, Shaftesbury Young People’s Siblings United project

1.2 Placement of siblings when in care – legal framework

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 places a duty on local authorities, so far as reasonably practicable, to place siblings together. This is based on a clear presumption that, subject to welfare considerations, this would generally be the best option for children going into public care.

“The local authority must ensure that the placement is such that ... if C has a sibling for whom the local authority are also providing accommodation, it enables C and the sibling to live together”

S22C Children Act 1989, as amended by Children and Young Persons Act 2008

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Guidance & Regulations 2010 outline some of the reasons why placing siblings together is considered to be appropriate.

“Being able to live with brothers and sisters where they are also looked after is an important protective factor for many looked after children. Positive sibling relationships provide support both in childhood and adulthood and can be particularly valuable during changes in a young person’s life, such as leaving care.”

Para 3.21 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Guidance & Regulations 2010

Updated 2015 Guidance on ‘Looked after children: contact with siblings’ maintains this guidance, and further states:

“Wherever it is in the best interests of each individual child, siblings should be placed together.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Rushton A, Dance C, Quinton, D and Mayes D (2001) Siblings in Late Permanent Placements (London: BAAF), cited in Lord and Borthwick (2009) *ibid*

¹⁵ DfE (2014) Looked After Children: Contact with Siblings, Update to The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volume 2: care planning, placement and case review

The Guidance goes on to emphasise the importance of sibling contact where siblings cannot be placed together.

1.3 Children being placed for adoption

In 2012 Martin Narey, Ministerial Advisor for Adoption, was asked by the Department for Education to conduct a review of adoption. He concluded that attempts to find adoption placements for siblings together could delay or prevent their being adopted, and that it was in the interests of some siblings to be placed for adoption separately. He issued a consultation, based on the proposition that there should no longer be a presumption of siblings being placed for adoption together. The government has followed this line, stating in its Adoption consultation response (2014) that

“The Government considers there should be no presumption about whether to separate or place siblings together; decisions should depend on the individual needs of each child and local authorities should have in place a robust decision making process.”

Department for Education (May 2014) Adoption: Getting it right, making it work consultation response.

Draft statutory guidance on adoption provides some guidelines on how this might work in practice.

“There should be a clear decision making process which enables social workers to decide early whether it is in the best interests of each child to be placed together or separately, and the impact on each child of that decision ... The decision should be based on a balanced assessment of the individual needs of each child in the group, and the likely or possible consequences of each option on each child.”

Draft statutory guidance on adoption, 2014

Whilst the draft guidance specifically relates to adoption, the impact may have more far-reaching consequences, not least when one sibling remains in care when their other sibling is adopted or when siblings are split up because the plan for at least one is adoption, but the adoption plan does not come to fruition.

1.4 Siblings as carers

Analysis of the 2001 census¹⁶ found 38% of all children being raised in kinship care were being brought up by their older siblings. The only study¹⁷ in the UK conducted into the circumstances of siblings carers raising children who couldn't safely live with their parents, found that sibling carers faced many disadvantages and struggled to access support for the children they are were raising or for themselves. Sibling

¹⁶ Nandy et (2011) Spotlight on Kinship Care (University of Bristol)

¹⁷ Ashley et (2011) Big Bruv Little Sis (Family Rights Group)0

carers appear to be particularly hidden from public policy discussion at local and national level.

Research has found that the most significant factor determining whether a child being raised by family and friends carers (also known as kinship care) can access financial and practical help, is not their level of need but their legal status, in particular whether they are in the care system or not. Currently around 5% of children raised by family and friends carers are in the care system i.e. looked after children, the rest are subject to a Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangements Order (residence) which has replaced Residence Orders, or no legal order where it is a private arrangement. Local authorities are under a duty, when providing accommodation for a looked after child who cannot live with a parent, to find the most appropriate placement available, giving preference to placement with a 'relative, friend or other connected person'.

We wanted to explore how many children were being raised in the care system by family or friends foster carers – also known as 'connected persons'¹⁸, and of these how many are siblings.

2. Methodology

Family Rights Group wrote to all 152 English local authorities in August 2014, asking six questions. A copy of the letter is attached as an appendix to this report, but the information requested was as of 1 July 2014:

- How many looked after children were in the care of the local authority.
- How many sibling groups were in the care of each authority, and the size of the sibling groups.
- How many of the sibling groups were placed together, and what were their placements.
- How many looked after children, who were part of a sibling group in care, were not living with at least one of those siblings, and the nature of their placement.
- How many of the local authority's looked after children were being raised by a connected foster carer¹⁹, and how many of these connected foster carers were an older sibling.
- The local authority was asked to provide any current policies and guidance on the placement of siblings within the care system.

We clarified, when requested by a local authority, that sibling included full siblings, half siblings, step siblings and adoptive siblings who were in the care system.

¹⁸

Connected persons are defined in the Children Act 1989, as 'an individual who is a relative, friend, or other person connected with the child'. A 'relative' includes a sibling or half sibling.

¹⁹ See explanation above.

We recognised that the response provided would be no more than a snapshot. We were very aware of not wanting to ask questions that were too detailed, and would require more time to answer than the local authority could reasonably allow.

We followed up non-responding local authorities with a chaser email. We transposed the responses on to excel worksheets in order to analyse the results.

3. Findings

122 English local authorities responded.

We received no reply or acknowledgement from 30 local authorities i.e. 19.7% of English local authorities. The worst region for responding was London, where 8 (24%) authorities didn't respond, and the best was the North East where only 1 (8%) didn't reply.

25 refused to provide a significant amount of the data requested. Where local authorities refused to provide information, in the main this was on the grounds that it would cost too much for them to allocate the necessary time to provide the answers. In some instances, local authority data systems were not set up in such a way as to make the requested data easily accessible, and so it would have taken many hours of an individual worker's time to go through individual case files and records to collect the data. Birmingham City Council, for example, estimated it would cost more than £23000 for such a task to be completed! Poor data systems meant some authorities only provided partial data. It is very concerning that some local authorities were not able to extract the data we requested, since it would indicate that whether siblings were being placed together or separated was not being monitored strategically by those authorities. The same is true in relation to local authorities not being able to provide information on numbers of looked after children being raised by older siblings.

In a few cases, where a local authority was concerned that supplying us with an exact small number could aid identification of a child e.g. numbers of children not with their sibling and who were placed for adoption, they have understandably stated that fewer than five or fewer than ten children were in this situation. On occasion we have therefore made an educated estimate to assist with arriving at a total average number of children who fall into that category at regional or national level.

Keeping the questions simple meant that we are able to analyse the number of sibling groups who had been separated, but not the number of those groups where separation had been judged to be the best option, or why that had been the case. The returned data did not reveal efforts that local authorities may have made to ensure that siblings who were placed separately maintained contact, for example by placing them in foster homes that were close to each other or arranging regular contact with each other and visits to each other's homes. Nor do the questions explore the numbers of a looked after children who are separated from their brother or sister who is not looked after, possibly because they remained at home, were adopted or are in kinship care under a different legal arrangement.

Our letters containing the questions were all sent to the person currently in post as the Director of Children’s Services, at the email address provided for them at the ADCS website.

We are grateful to the 64% of local authorities who did provide a full or almost complete response.

Table 1 Responses to the Freedom of Information Request by region

Region	Total number LAs in England (% in each region)	Number of LA which did not reply (% of LAs in the region)	Number of LAs that provided very incomplete response (% of LAs in the region)	Number of LAs that provided complete/near complete response (% of LAs in the region)
North East	12 (7.9%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (16.7%)	9 (75.0%)
North West	23 (15.1%)	5 (21.7%)	3 (21.7%)	15 (65.2%)
Yorkshire & Humberside	15 (9.9%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	12 (80%)
East Midlands	9 (5.9%)	1 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)	7 (77.8%)
West Midlands	14 (9.2%)	3 (21.4%)	4 (28.6%)	7 (50.0%)
East of England	11 (7.2%)	1 (9.1%)	4 (36.4%)	6 (54.5%)
London	33 (21.7%)	8 (24.2%)	6 (18.1%)	19 (57.6%)
South East	19 (12.5%)	6 (31.6%)	3 (15.8%)	10 (52.6%)
South West	16 (10.5%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.25%)	12 (75.0%)
TOTAL	152	30 (19.7%)	25 (16.4%)	97 (63.8%)

Q1. How many looked after children are in the care of your local authority as of 1 July 2014?

115 local authorities provided us with a figure for the number of looked after children on this date.

The 115 local authorities which answered were caring for a total of 55,068 looked after children as of 1 July 2014, an average of 479 per local authority. This is above the national average published by the Department for Education which on 31 March 2014 stood at 453 per local authority²⁰. This might be explained by the fact that several of the local authorities that did not reply were smaller authorities, where the numbers of looked after children could be expected to be low. However, it also highlights the fact that while some local authorities with large care populations were able to provide the information, e.g. Leeds informed us that their care population

²⁰ Department for Education Children looked after in England, 2013-14
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption--2>

stands at 1269, a number of smaller authorities did not reply or refused on the grounds of cost.

Q2 a) How many sibling groups are in the care of your local authority as at 1 July 2014?

97 local authorities provided data that enabled us to calculate that the total number of sibling groups in those 97 authorities is 8,446, or an average of 87 per authority.

Q2 b) Of these, how many are sibling groups comprising

- i. 2 children
- ii. 3 children
- iii. 4 children
- iv. More than 4 children

In order to make the request as simple as possible, we did not ask the number of sibling groups of five, six, seven, etc children in the local authority’s care, instead they were categorised as sibling groups of ‘more than 4 children’. We have assumed in our calculations that all the sibling groups of more than four children were groups of five children. However, this does mean that our figure for the numbers of looked after children who are part of a sibling group is likely to be a slight under-estimate.

95 local authorities provided data of sibling groups by size. In a few cases local authorities, fearful that small data could identify a specific child or sibling group provided a data range in their response (e.g. less than 5 children in a sibling group of 3) rather than a precise number. In such cases, in order to assist with the overall analysis, we have made an educated estimate so we can come up with an aggregate total at regional or national level.

Table 2: Number of sibling groups by size of sibling group in 95 local authorities

Number of siblings in group	Number of sibling groups	Average sibling group per LA	Total children in sibling group
Sibling groups of 2	5159	54	10318
Sibling groups of 3	1796	20	5388
Sibling groups of 4	796	8	3184
Sibling groups of more than 4	452	5	2260
Total sibling groups	8203	86	21150

In total we conclude that 21150 children in care were part of a sibling group in the 95 authorities, an average of 86 per authority. Of those children in care who were part of a sibling group, 49% were in a sibling group of two, 25% in a group of three, 15% in a group of four and 11% in a group of more than four.

Q3 a) How many sibling groups are all placed together?

91 local authorities provided data on the numbers of sibling groups who were all placed together. In these authorities 3,947 sibling groups were placed together, an

average of 43 per authority. In other words 50.5% of sibling groups were placed together and 49.5% were separated.

Table 3: Number and proportion of sibling groups kept together by region

Region	Total of sibling groups	Numbers of sibling groups placed together	% of sibling groups placed together
North East	826	368	44.6%
North West	1179	600	50.9%
Yorkshire & Humberside	1403	690	49.2%
East Midlands	792	381	48.1%
West Midlands	642	386	60.1%
East of England	602	308	51.5%
London	923	476	51.6%
South East	830	401	48.3%
South West	614	337	54.9%
TOTAL	7811	3947	50.5%

The West Midlands is the region with the largest proportion (60.1%) of sibling groups placed together, whilst the North East has the lowest proportion (44.6%).

Q3 b) How many sibling groups kept together are:

- i. in unrelated foster care
- ii. in kinship foster care
- iii. in residential care
- iv. placed for adoption?

89 local authorities provided data that could be analysed in answer to this question.

Table 4: Sibling groups where all siblings are placed together by placement type

Placement	Number of	Average number of	% of all sibling	% of looked
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	sibling groups placed together	siblings groups together in these placements per LA	groups together by placement type	after children in these placements (March 14, DfE data)
Unrelated foster care	2580	29.0	67.3%	64.0%
Kinship foster care	872	9.8	22.8%	10.6%
Residential care	43	0.5	1.1%	10.1%
Placed for adoption	241	2.7	6.3%	5.2%
Other	96	2.2	2.5%	10.1%
Total	3832		100%	100%

Table 4 shows the distribution of sibling groups living together by placement. Most sibling groups kept together are raised in unrelated foster care placements. However, what is striking is that the proportion of siblings groups placed together who are raised by kinship foster carers (22.8%) is more than twice as high as the proportion of all looked after children in kinship foster care placements (10.6%). In other words although relatively few looked after children live in kinship foster care, it appears to particularly be conducive to supporting siblings to be able to live together. In contrast only 1% of siblings groups placed together were in residential care.

Q4 a) How many children in your care, who are part of a sibling group, are not living with at least one of those siblings?

Information was provided by 93 local authorities that a total of 7787 children in their care who have at least one other sibling in care - are living with none of their siblings. There is an average of 84 children in this situation per local authority. It should be noted that the figures provided in response to this question refer to numbers of children rather than numbers of sibling groups. However, responses to question 1 from these same 93 authorities, allow us to calculate that there were 21011 looked after children in these localities with a sibling also in the care system. In other words there was an average of 225 children per local authority who responded who were part of a 'looked after' sibling group. We can therefore calculate that 37% of children who are part of a sibling group in care are not living with any of their siblings.

Table 5: Looked after children not living with any of their siblings in care by region

Region	Number of looked after children in a sibling group	Number of looked after children not living with any	% of looked after children not living with any of their siblings	% of looked after children living with at least one sibling

		of their siblings		
North East	2138	840	39.3%	60.7%
North West	3534	1093	30.9%	69.1%
Yorkshire & Humberside	3628	1576	43.4%	56.6%
East Midlands	2095	966	46.1%	53.9%
West Midlands	1708	427	25.0%	75.0%
East of England	1630	560	34.4%	65.6%
London	2262	785	34.7%	65.3%
South East	2116	776	36.7%	63.3%
South West	1900	764	40.2%	59.8%
TOTAL	21011	7787	37.1%	62.9%

The region with the lowest number of looked after children separated from their siblings in care is the West Midlands, where three quarters are living with at least one of their siblings and a quarter are not. In contrast, nearly a half (46%) of looked after children in the East Midlands who are part of a sibling group are not living with any of their siblings. In Yorkshire and Humberside the figure is also high at 43.4%.

Q4 b) Of children in your care, who are part of a sibling group, and are not living with at least one of those siblings, how many are:

- i. in unrelated foster care
- ii. in kinship foster care
- iii. in residential care
- iv. placed for adoption?

91 local authorities provided data that enabled us to calculate the number of looked after children in a sibling group who were not living with any of their brothers or sisters.

Table 6: Numbers of looked after children in a sibling group not living with any sibling by type of placement

Placement	Number not living with any sibling, by placement	Average number per local authority	% not living with any sibling by placement type	% of looked after children in these placements (March 14, DfE data)

Unrelated foster care	5397	59	70.7%	64.0%
Kinship foster care	603	6.6	7.9%	10.6%
Residential care	844	9.3	11%	10.1%
Placed for adoption	391	4.3	5.1%	5.2%
Other	395	4.3	5.2%	10.1%
Total	7633	83.9	100%	100%

Table 6 demonstrates that children in unrelated foster care and residential care are overrepresented amongst those separated from their siblings compared to their overall numbers in the care population. In contrast children in kinship foster care are less likely to be separated from their siblings.

Q5.

Q5 a) Please state the number of looked after children in your care being raised by a connected foster carer²¹.

97 local authorities provided us with the figure in response to *Part a* of Question 5, the number of looked after children being raised by a connected person. A total of 4908 children were being raised by connected person carers, which is to say family and friends foster carers i.e. an average of 50 per local authority which provided data. Most recent government figures indicate that there were 7300 children nationally in England being raised by family and friends foster carers,²² an average of 48 per local authority, so the figures provided to us are closely aligned with national data.

Q5 b) Of these how many are fostered by an older sibling?

78 local authorities provided a figure for the number of looked after children who were being raised by an older sibling. In total 84 children in those authorities were being raised by sibling foster carer, an average of just over one in each local authority. However, the pattern of such placements was more varied than this figure might at first indicate. 47 authorities provided a figure of zero looked after children who were being raised by an older sibling, meaning that the figure of 78 children came from only 31 local authorities. Indeed, one local authority (Northamptonshire) returned a figure of 14 children being raised in sibling care.

The 78 authorities reported that 3347 children were being raised by a connected foster carer, that is to say a kinship foster carer. Thus only 2.5% of their connected foster carers were sibling carers. This is in sharp contrast to the findings from analysis of the 2001 census analysis²³ that found that 38% of kinship carers in England were siblings. Given that research has shown that access to services for

²¹

Connected persons are defined in the Children Act 1989, as 'an individual who is a relative, friend, or other person connected with the child'. A 'relative' includes a sibling or half sibling.

²² DfE (2014) *ibid*

²³ Nandy S, Selwyn J, Farmer E, Vaisey P (2011) *ibid*

children in kinship care is largely dependent upon the child's legal status, in particular whether or not they are in the care system rather than the level of need²⁴, this would partly explain why sibling carers seem to struggle so badly to get help for the children they are raising and themselves.

APPENDIX ONE

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Freedom of Information request: looked after siblings

This is a request, made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, for information held by your local authority. The department holding the information that which has lead responsibility for dealing with 'looked after' children.

Please provide the following information that your local authority holds as at 1 July 2014:

1. How many looked after children are in the care of your local authority as of 1 July 2014?

2.

a) How many sibling groups are in the care of your local authority as at 1 July 2014?

b) Of these, how many are sibling groups comprising

- i. 2 children
- ii. 3 children
- iii. 4 children
- iv. More than 4 children

3.

a) How many sibling groups are all placed together?

b) Of these, how many are:

- i. in unrelated foster care
- ii. in kinship foster care
- iii. in residential care
- iv placed for adoption?

4.

a) How many children in your care, who are part of a sibling group, are not living with at least one of those siblings?

b) Of these how many are:

²⁴ Hunt and Waterhouse(2012) ibid

- i. in unrelated foster care
- ii. in kinship foster care
- iii. in residential care
- iv placed for adoption?

5.

a) Please state the number of looked after children in your care being raised by a connected person.

b) Of these how many are fostered by an older sibling?

6. Please provide any current local policies and guidance on the placement of siblings within the looked after system.

Thank you for your assistance, and we look forward to hearing from you within 20 working days.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Ashley
Chief Executive, Family Rights Group