

NSW children and young people in out-of-home care in 2018: a summary of their views and experiences

Snapshot

- The 2018 NSW Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) and NSW Residential Care Surveys asked children and young people about their views and experiences of care.
- Overall, the results from the NSW OOHC Survey are encouraging with the majority of children and young people reporting positively against indicators.
- Most children and young people in the NSW OOHC Survey reported feeling safe and settled (94.7%), feeling close to the people they were currently living with and/or to family they didn't live with (93.7%), having at least some knowledge of their family background (96.6%), and having a significant adult that cares about what happens to them (97.8%).
- Results reported by children and young people in the NSW Residential Care survey were poorer than those from the NSW OOHC Survey for all indicators.
- There have been improvements for some groups of children on some indicators since 2015, the last time these surveys were conducted. Notably, young people aged 15-17 in OOHC reported significant improvement in their satisfaction with contact with family, and females in residential care were more likely to report feeling safe and settled.
- Results from both surveys highlight policy and practice areas for further investigation and improvement, such as leaving care planning, participation in decision making and feeling listened to. Responses from the NSW Residential Care Survey reveal additional concerns about safety and contact with birth family members and friends.

Introduction

This FACSIAR Evidence to Action Note presents summary results from two state-wide surveys conducted in 2018 by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) (formerly Family and Community Services or FACS).



The NSW OOHC Survey and the NSW Residential Care Survey (Box 1) look at the experiences of children and young people in OOHC. The surveys are designed to report against key factors that influence better outcomes for children and young people. They aim to inform planning and drive improvement in the consistency and quality of care provided to children and young people.

The results from these surveys should be shared and discussed to inform practice improvements and broader work with our partners to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families.

Where possible, comparisons are made with national survey results, and with the results from the last time these surveys were conducted, in 2015. The survey results and analyses reported in this note are descriptive only. They do not indicate causal relationships or take into account other underlying factors that could contribute to the results.

Why did we conduct the surveys?

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 provides the context for these surveys with the overarching agenda to improve the safety and wellbeing of Australia's Children. The National Framework defines 13 standards 'to ensure children in need of out-of-home care are given consistent, best practice care, no matter where they live'.¹

The survey results are reported against eight indicators which map to a sub-set of the OOHC national standards:

- sense of security
- participation
- community activity
- family connection
- family contact
- sense of community
- significant person
- leaving care.

The surveys enable results for each indicator to be reported for a range of characteristics including age, sex, Aboriginality, placement type, and provider type (i.e. DCJ or Funded Service Provider). To enable national reporting, similar surveys were conducted during 2018 across all states and territories, although there were some differences in the sampling and methodologies used.² As this is the second time these surveys have been conducted, results can also be compared with those released in 2015 where the questions asked were the same. These results help to identify strengths and areas for improvement and can inform policy and practice.

Box 1 – About the Surveys

The NSW OOHC Survey and NSW Residential Care Survey were conducted in 2015 and 2018.

In 2018, the NSW OOHC Survey was completed by 322 children and young people:

- aged 8-17 years residing in OOHC under the NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1988
- whose care arrangements were ordered by the Children's Court and for whom parental responsibility was transferred to the Minister/Secretary
- on a relevant court order for three months or more.

In 2018, the NSW Residential Care Survey was completed by 143 children and young people who were:

- aged 8-17 years residing in residential OOHC under the NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1988.

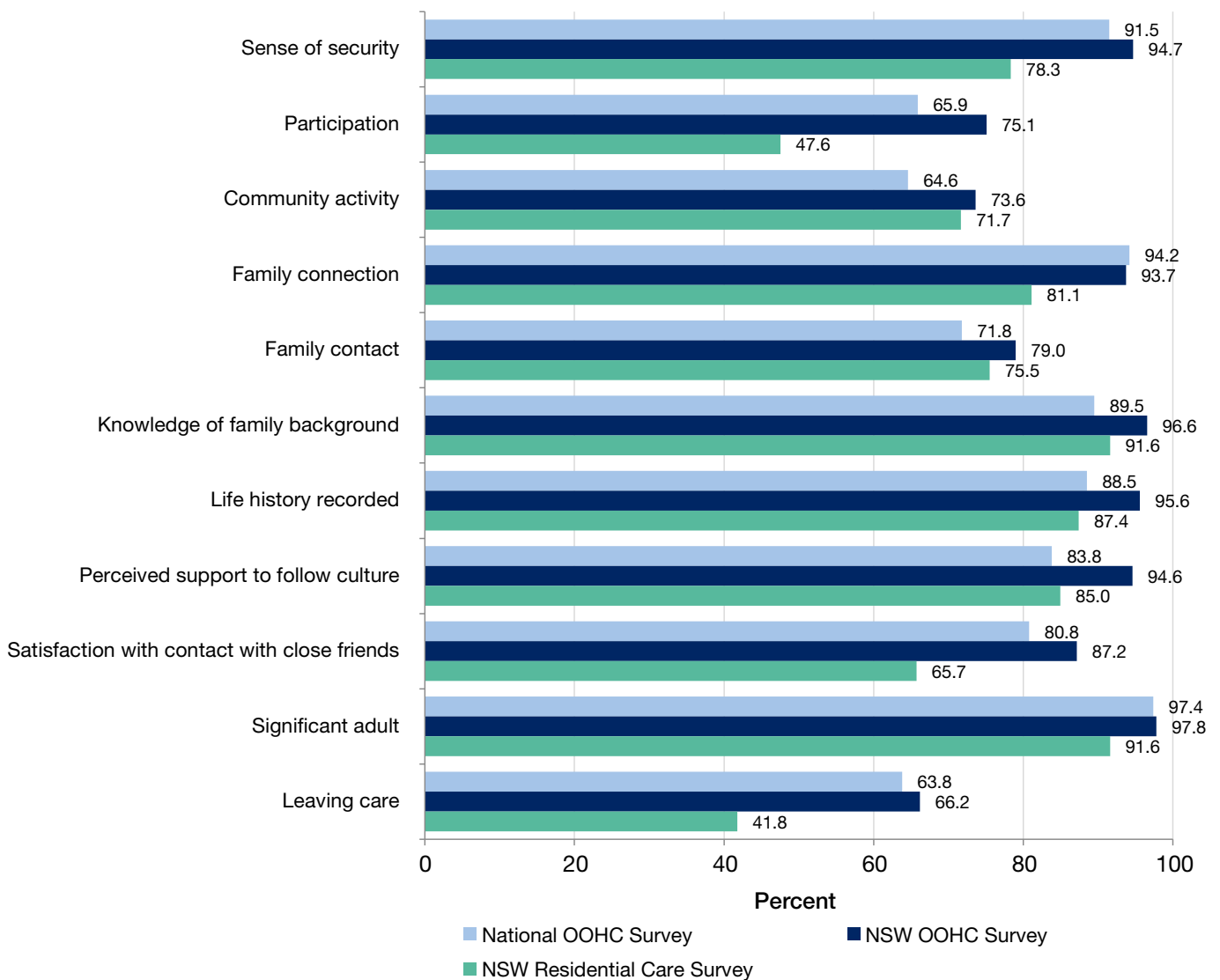
Rather than highlighting all differences in results between surveys, over time and by characteristics, the analysis focuses on key differences to emphasise policy and practice areas for improvement. In general, differences of 10 percentage points or more are drawn attention to as key findings for this purpose. Unless otherwise stated, the differences described are statistically significant at the 90 per cent level and based on counts of 30 or more respondents.

What did the surveys find?

Overall, the majority of children and young people reported positively against all indicators in the 2018 NSW OOHC Survey and National OOHC Survey. Results from the 2018 NSW Residential Care Survey were below those from the NSW OOHC Survey for all indicators, and below the national results for most indicators (Figure 1).

In comparing these results, it should be noted that these differences may be due to differences in the characteristics of the populations of children and young people that were included in each survey, as well as the different collection approaches used across jurisdictions.

Figure 1: NSW and National OOHC and NSW Residential Care Survey results by indicator, 2018

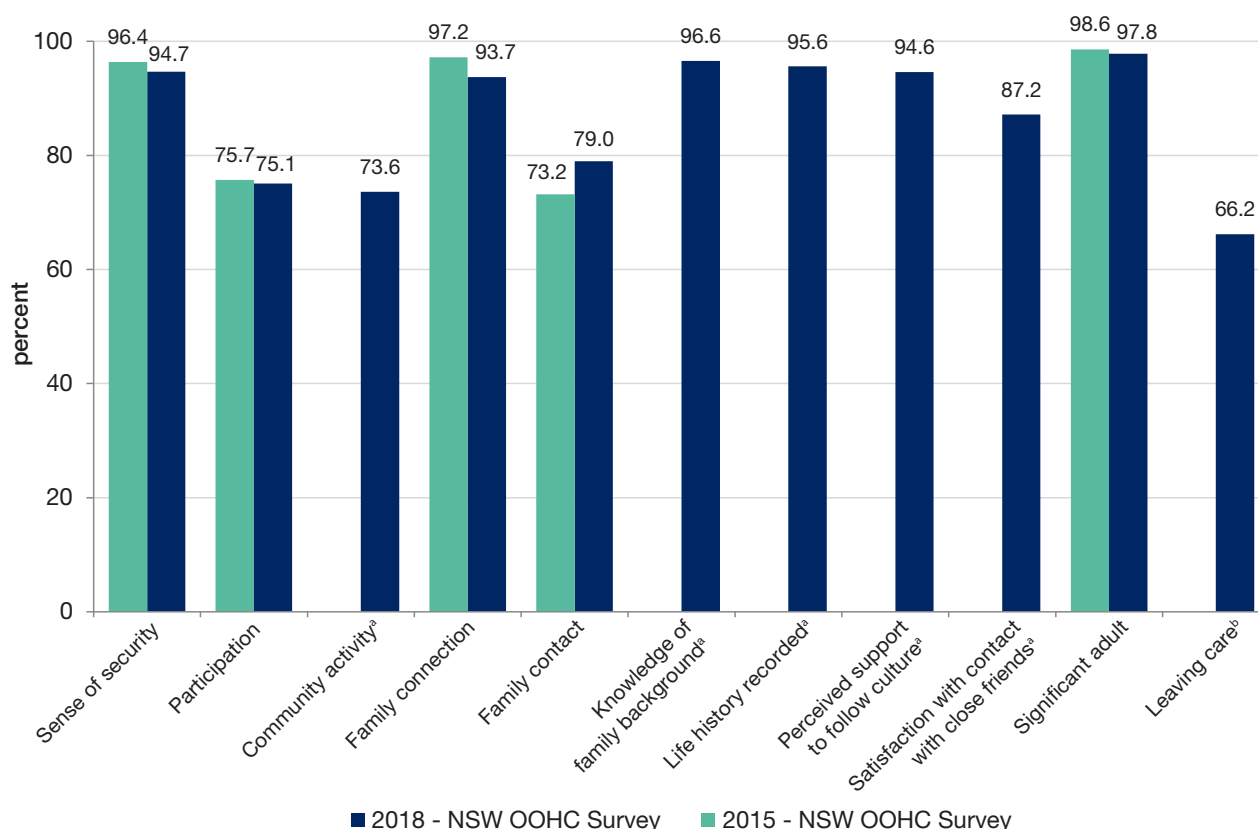


Source: 2018 NSW OOHC Survey dataset and 2018 NSW Residential Care Survey dataset, NSW FACS. National data based on AIHW material.

Key findings for NSW children and young people in OOHC

Overall, the results from the 2018 NSW OOHC Survey are encouraging with the majority of children and young people reporting positively against all indicators. Comparable results for 2015 were generally consistent with those for 2018. Results for ‘family contact’ and ‘family connection’ changed significantly between 2015 and 2018. Satisfaction with family contact improved by more than five percentage points, while family connection saw a drop in positive responses from 97.2% to 93.7% (Figure 2).

Figure 2: NSW OOHC survey results by indicator, 2015 and 2018



Note:

- Due to the substantial changes to the survey questions and response categories for ‘Community activity’ and ‘Sense of community’, the results are not comparable across the 2015 and 2018 surveys. ‘Sense of community’ includes ‘Knowledge of family background’, ‘Life history recorded’, ‘Perceived support to follow culture’ and ‘Satisfaction with contact with close friends’.
- For ‘Leaving care’, it is not appropriate to compare the 2018 and 2015 survey results as the 2018 results are based on a question that was not included in the NSW implementation of the survey in 2015.

Source: 2018 NSW OOHC Survey dataset and 2015 NSW OOHC Survey Report, NSW FACS.

The vast majority of children and young people reported:

- feeling safe and settled (94.7%)
- feeling close to the people they were currently living with and/or to family they didn’t live with (93.7%)
- having at least some knowledge of their family background (96.6%)
- that they had a significant adult that cares about what happens to them (97.8%).

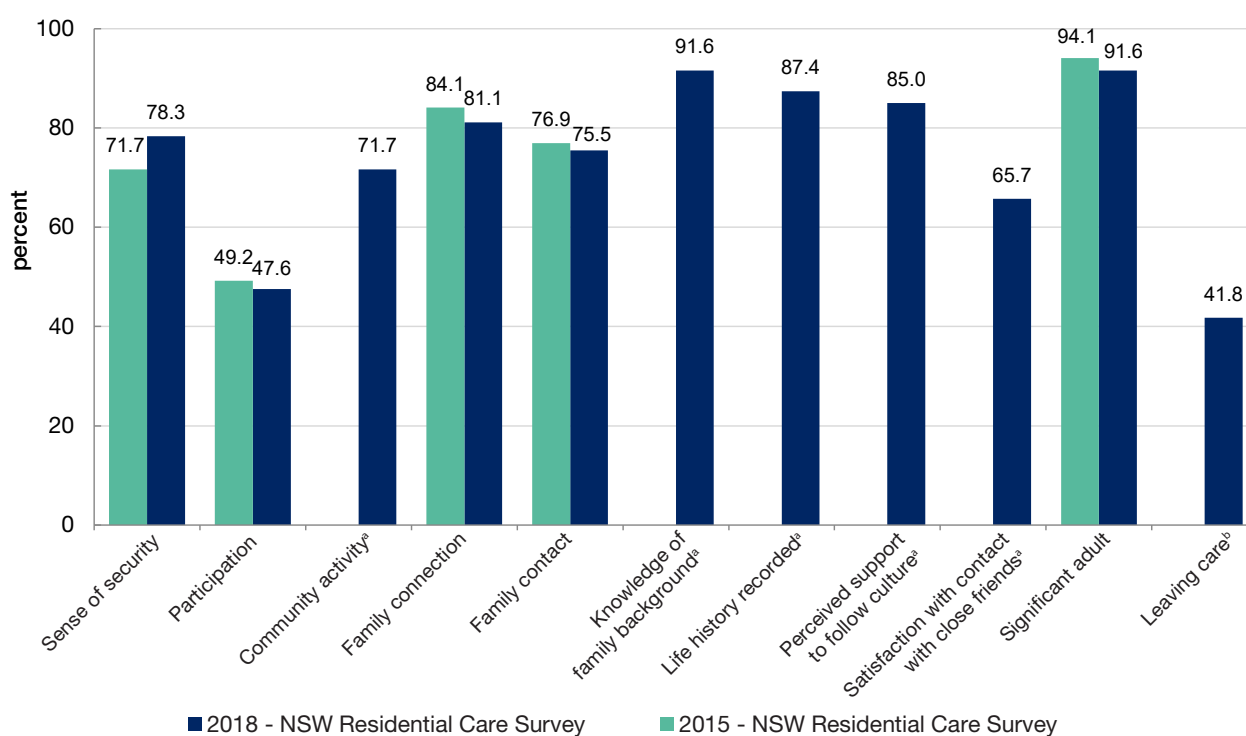
The results also highlight policy and practice areas that require further investigation and improvement. These include leaving care planning, participation in decision making and feeling listened to:

- one-third of children and young people reported they were not getting as much help as they needed to make a decision about their future (33.8%)
- a quarter reported that they don't usually get to have a say in what happens to them and/or don't usually feel listened to (24.9%)
- just over a quarter felt that they did not receive adequate support to participate in all activities (26.4%).

Key findings for NSW children and young people in Residential Care

While the results from the NSW Residential Care Survey were generally lower than the NSW OOHC Survey and national results, they are also encouraging. The majority of children and young people responded positively to most indicators except for leaving care, participation and contact with close friends. Where comparisons could be made, results for 2018 were generally consistent with those for 2015 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: NSW Residential Care Survey results by indicator, 2015 and 2018



Note:

a. Due to the substantial changes to the survey questions and response categories for 'Community activity' and 'Sense of community', the results are not comparable across the 2015 and 2018 surveys. 'Sense of community' includes 'Knowledge of family background', 'Life history recorded', 'Perceived support to follow culture' and 'Satisfaction with contact with close friends'.

b. For 'Leaving care', it is not appropriate to compare the 2018 and 2015 survey results as the 2018 results are based on a question that was not included in the NSW implementation of the survey in 2015.

Source: 2018 NSW Residential Care Survey dataset and 2015 NSW OOHC Survey Report, NSW FACS.

A considerable proportion of children and young people responded negatively to a number of indicators, in particular:

- less than half of children and young people felt that they usually get to have a say in what happens to them and usually felt listened to (47.6%)
- less than half reported they were getting as much help as they needed to make a decision about their future (41.8%)
- less than a third were not receiving adequate support to participate in all activities (28.3%)
- more than one in five did not feel safe and settled (21.7%)
- almost a quarter were not satisfied with one or more contact types (24.5%)
- around a third were dissatisfied with the amount of contact with their close friends (34.3%).

Key findings by characteristics

Looking at the survey results by key characteristics of children and young people and their placements shows:

- The proportion of children and young people managed by DCJ who reported in the NSW OOHC Survey they usually get to have a say and usually feel listened to increased by 10.8 percentage points from 71.3% in 2015 to 82.1% in 2018.
- In the NSW OOHC Survey, there was a significant increase from 2015 to 2018 in the proportion of young people aged 15-17 years reporting satisfaction with 'their contact with family'. The proportion of young people aged 15-17 years reporting satisfaction with one or more contact types increased from 79.0% in 2015 to 90.3% in 2018.
- Although the majority of young people aged 15-17 years in both the NSW OOHC and NSW Residential Care surveys reported feeling close to at least one family group (85.5% and 72.0% respectively), the findings were lower than those in the 2015 survey (98.8% and 82.8% respectively).
- In the NSW Residential Care Survey, there was a 20.6 percentage point increase in the proportion of female respondents who reported 'feeling safe and settled', up from 60.8% in 2015 to 81.4% in 2018.
- The proportion of female children and young people in residential care who reported feeling close to at least one family group decreased by 12.5 percentage points, from 84.6% in 2015 to 72.1% in 2018.

Where to from here?

Results from both surveys point to the need for more collaborative casework with children and young people to maintain stability in a placement, and make children and young people feel respected and valued.

A large proportion of children and young people in residential care reported being dissatisfied with one or more contact types and with the amount of contact with their close friends. This highlights a need for greater promotion of contact with birth family members and friends. Birth family involvement in children and young people's lives can help children and young people adjust to their OOHC placement and help birth parents strengthen their own parenting skills.³ Maintaining connections with birth family, friends and community can also help make leaving care and transitioning to independent living easier.

Results from both surveys reveal a need for more thorough leaving care planning and support during this critical transition period for young people. This indicator had the lowest results in both surveys. Less than half of young people (aged 15-17 years) who completed the NSW Residential Care Survey and two-thirds of young people who completed the NSW OOHC Survey said they received as much help as they needed to make decisions about their future. Whilst there is limited research on the outcomes for young people who have exited the OOHC system, the available evidence shows that young people leaving care are one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged social groups in Australia.^{4 5} More thorough leaving care planning could help young people to feel more satisfied with the leaving care planning process and their involvement in decision making, making the transition from OOHC a smoother one.

More information

More detailed analysis of the NSW survey results is available in the FACSIAR Report [hyperlink or URL], The views and experiences of children and young people in out-of-home care in NSW: NSW results from the National Out-of-Home Care and NSW Residential Care Surveys FACSIAR Report.

The NSW Department of Communities and Justice (formerly Family and Community Services or FACS) has recently developed a number of tools and resources to support workers engaging in leaving care planning with young people. These tools and resources are available at:

www.facs.nsw.gov.au/providers/children-families/leaving-care-planning.

Acknowledgement

The surveys are achieved through the valuable support of caseworkers and carers across NSW supporting children and young people to engage with the survey and complete the questions.

Endnotes

¹ Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) 2012, *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children – Second three year action plan 2012-2015*, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019, *The views of children and young people in out-of-home care: Overview of indicator results from second national survey, 2018*, Cat no. CWS 68, AIHW, Canberra, viewed 30 October 2019, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/ab21f8c3-3d5b-423e-9d36-2050ebe17ea6/aihw-cws-68.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

³ Fernandez, E 2013, *Accomplishing permanency: Reunification pathways and outcomes for foster care children*, Springer, New York.

⁴ Johnson, G, Natalier, K, Mendes, P, Liddiard, M, Thoresen, S, Hollows, A & Bailey, N 2010, *Pathways from out-of-home care: AHURI Final Report No. 14*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne.

⁵ Bromfield, L & Osborn, A 2007, 'Getting the big picture: A synopsis and critique of Australian out-of-home care research', *Child Abuse Prevention Issues*, no. 26, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

Produced by

FACS Insights, Analysis and Research (FACSIAR)

NSW Department of Communities and Justice

320 Liverpool Rd, Ashfield NSW 2131

www.facs.nsw.gov.au

Email: facsiar@facs.nsw.gov.au