

Permanently Progressing?

Building Secure Futures for Children in Scotland

Phase 2

Annual Update Spring 2024

Permanently Progressing? is a longitudinal study seeking to better understand the experiences of care experienced children in Scotland by exploring:

- children's routes to different forms of permanence (with parents, kinship carers, foster carers, or adoptive parents),
- children's experiences, wellbeing, and outcomes, and how they keep in touch with people who they do not live with, but are important to them,
- what sources of support are needed by and available to children, their caregivers, and families.

We are examining experiences and pathways to permanence for all 1,836 children who became looked after in 2012-13 when they were aged five or under, tracking children's progress at key life stages. Phase 1 focused on early childhood, Phase 2 (the current phase) is middle childhood, while Phase 3 will explore adolescence/early adulthood. Phase 1 reports are available at: [Permanently Progressing? reports and summaries](#).

Phase 2 of the study is funded by a donor who wishes to remain anonymous and the Nuffield Foundation. The research team is analysing and linking administrative data, surveys of caregivers and social workers, and interviews with caregivers/adoptive parents, children, and parents whose child/ren no longer live with them. This annual summary gives an update on progress since Spring 2023. It is an opportunity to say thank you to the children and adults who have been involved and have been so generous with their time.

Access to administrative data

In September 2023, after a long process, we gained access to pseudonymised administrative data, including the Children Looked After Statistics (CLAS) collected by the Scottish Government. There are different aspects to permanence, including physical and legal stability and subjective perceptions or 'felt security'. Using the CLAS data we have been analysing children's routes to legal permanence (and impermanence) for all the 1,836 children. For some children, we have been able to link CLAS data to education data and information from the surveys.

Survey of social workers and children's caregivers

Each of the 27 participating Local Authorities had a nominated 'link person' to assist with the various elements of the study and we are grateful to them for all their help.

Social worker survey

In total, 677 questionnaires were sent out to social workers and 480 were returned and have been analysed. The survey provides important data about children's experiences, and the processes involved.

Caregiver survey

Where we had caregivers' contact details from Phase 1, we sent them a questionnaire directly, but in other instances we relied on local authorities to send questionnaires. We had 98 completed questionnaires returned, and caregivers (68 adoptive parents, 17 kinship carers and 15 foster carers) answered questions on children's health and wellbeing; education and support needs; behaviour and relationships; and contact, connections, and sources of support.

Interviews

We have completed 34 interviews with caregivers from 25 families (10 adoptive, 8 kin and 7 foster families). Of these, 14 families took part in Phase 1, and it was incredible to be able to revisit children and their families. All caregivers have expressed a willingness to be contacted in Phase 3. 18 children participated in the study, from 14 families, plus two siblings (caregivers' birth children). We have also interviewed ten parents whose child(ren) no longer live with them.

Children told us what helps them to feel safe, loved, understood, and accepted, and who they would usually go to for support. Caregivers and birth parents have also told us about what formal and informal supports they have found helpful and not so helpful, and what helps children to maintain connections with people who are important to them, but they do not live with.

Conference

We report on findings later this year, including at our conference on Tuesday 10th September at the University of Stirling. Please save the date.

Thank you to all those who have been involved from the research team: Alison, Ariane, Ben, Helen, Jade, Linda, Maggie, and Paula. For more information, please contact helen.whincup@stir.ac.uk or go to our website <https://permanentlyprogressing.stir.ac.uk/>

