



Children's experiences of using the CAFCASS service

Data collected by Viewpoint

Analysed by

Young Voice

The national charity making young people's views count.

www.young-voice.org

September 2006



Written by Adrienne Katz
With Peter Hesketh

Contents

Introduction: Judging Satisfaction – Some challenges	3
CAFCASS works at the complex end of the spectrum	3
Impacts on children are not limited to a one time event.....	3
Impacts on children are not limited to one cause.	3
Judging satisfaction in the context of their distress.....	4
Method.....	5
The sample.....	6
Part one: Communication	12
Understanding the role of CAFCASS workers.....	12
How well do practitioners explain their role to children under 12?.....	12
Those who have difficulties	14
Leaflets	15
Time to talk	15
Phone contact numbers	16
Location of meetings – ‘a good place to meet?’	16
SUMMARY: Communication	17
Part Two: The relationship with the worker and satisfaction with the experience.....	18
Knowing you and understanding your needs.....	18
Did your CAFCASS worker know enough about you?.....	18
High ratings for their worker, but few successful outcomes.....	18
Did your CAFCASS worker help you in the following ways?.....	19
Being able to express your views is not the same as being ‘listened to’	20
SUMMARY: The relationship with the worker and satisfaction with the experience....	22
Part three: The process	23
Reports	23
Right to read?	23
Explanations about what would happen in court.....	24
Making court more friendly.....	25
Understanding the decision made in court	25
Being told the decision.....	26
Did the court make a good decision for you?	26
Problems for teenaged girls?	26
Rating the CAFCASS service overall.....	27
Special Needs.....	27
Helping those with special needs understand the court’s decision	28
Additional needs and complaints.....	29
SUMMARY: Process.....	29

Introduction: Judging Satisfaction – Some challenges

CAFCASS works at the complex end of the spectrum

It is estimated that around 25% of all children aged 0-16 will experience parents' separation or divorce.¹ In the majority of cases, parents are able, with the help of mediators or other professionals, to come to an agreement about their children. If the separation is handled well and the parents approach the needs of their children sensitively, adverse impacts on children can be limited.²

Those that progress to the stage of a court struggle over residence, contact, specific issues or prohibited steps are the minority and their cases are likely to involve various intractable problems. There may be multiple impacts on the child, of which the divorce is only one. Adjusting to the new arrangements or being taken into a new care situation can demand a great deal from an already distressed young person. CAFCASS is therefore representing children in the more difficult or contested range of family separations and care proceedings.

CAFCASS have promoted the interests of 61,239 children involved in legal proceedings in the financial year to 2006, and if children involved in dispute resolution work are included, this figure is nearer 100,000.³

In the financial year 2005/6 CAFCASS received requests in the following range of cases:

Public Law requests: 12,775

Dispute Resolution meetings: 32,537

Sec. 7 requests: 26,144

Impacts on children are not limited to a one time event

Divorce and separation represent not simply a single moment or event, but a process over time⁴ involving periods of change and adjustment. Therefore it is difficult to disentangle the many reasons why a child may not be satisfied with the decisions made in a one time snapshot. There is nevertheless a need to evaluate a service and to have a consumer view. These respondents reveal some interesting pointers for training and development of the CAFCASS service for children. Some of these messages would apply to other services and some point to ways in which support from other agencies might be enlisted for young clients. Importantly in the light of their right to have their wishes and feelings heard, these data can show the extent to which children believe they have been able to express their views and whether or not they have been influential in the final decision.

Impacts on children are not limited to one cause.

These cases might involve domestic violence or abuse, making safety a priority for children and their fears may continue after the divorce. Parents may experience depression or misuse alcohol

¹ DCA. Separate Representation of Children, 2006

² Neale, B. & Smart, C. (2001) Good To Talk? Young Voice

³ CAFCASS 'Annual Report (2005/2006)

⁴ Rogers & Pryor 1998 'Divorce & Separation: The Outcomes for Children.' York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

post separation, while poverty is a common experience. The law is not always able to solve these social problems.

Ongoing conflict between parents is a significant cause of distress for children while hostile erratic parenting or having a parent with a psychiatric disorder are also risk factors.⁵ It is clear that the CAFCASS worker, however well meaning and efficient cannot affect all the multiple influences on the child and that assessing levels of satisfaction with the service will inevitably be tinged with other factors.

Judging satisfaction in the context of their distress.

Children may be experiencing significant levels of distress which should not be underestimated. We should consider the evidence from Buchanan et al that children going through Court Welfare cases show considerably more distress at the time of the proceedings than can be expected in the general population (more than twice the abnormal and borderline levels), and that children, especially boys, show even more distress when assessed a year later. The percentage of boys with emotional and behavioural distress had increased to 62% a year later from 52% at the start of proceedings – this level after 12 months is more than three times the level that can be expected in the general population.

The work by Buchanan et al also showed not surprisingly that there was a relationship between high levels of stress in the parent and children's distress. When domestic violence was an issue the children involved had a score more than three times higher than the general population.⁶ The scores for children in this study of Court Welfare cases mirrored levels of distress seen in children in care proceedings.

A study by Trinder et al of families in Contact Order cases examined children's adjustment using the same standardised measure (SDQ). Children experiencing Contact Order proceedings also showed significantly raised levels of maladjustment.⁷

These studies, using the same standardised measures, are important reminders that large numbers of children may experience severe and ongoing distress at a time of family break up and beyond. This is the context in which CAFCASS is working. This may be true for children even if their family is not using the court system and there are messages for other services in contact with families and children. Support is required for children adjusting to major life changes.

⁵ Kelly J.B. (2000) Children's Adjustment in Conflicted Marriage & Divorce: a decade review of research. *Journal of The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*. Vol. 39, no 39,

⁶ Buchanan, A., Hunt, J., Bretherton, H., Bream, V. (2001). 'Families in Conflict' Nuffield Foundation, Policy Press.

⁷ Trinder, L., Connolly, J., Kellett, J. and Notley, C. (2005) A Profile of Applicants and Respondents in Contact Cases in Essex

Method

Two questionnaires were carried out by Viewpoint on behalf of CAFCASS. The views were gathered through CASI (Computer Assisted Self completion system). The study was divided into two parts, one for under 12s and one for 12 and over. (There are three young people aged 12 and over who answered the younger version due to ability levels as well as three aged 12.)

The aim of the questionnaire was to evaluate the experience that children and young people had of their CAFCASS worker and to what extent they were satisfied with the service they received. Twenty young people in Leeds who had experience of family court proceedings developed and piloted the questionnaire. They supported this method as a safe and enjoyable way of sharing their views of the service they received. CAFCASS practitioners were consulted. 104 service users completed the questionnaires, initially recruited via letters to those whose cases had closed – and later via posters, leaflets and being asked by practitioners. The data was passed to youth charity Young Voice for analysis.

This chapter sets out the information from the 104 children consulted about their CAFCASS worker. It provides an insight into what information children received from the service and analyses factors that contributed to their levels of satisfaction. These findings will accompany further consultation findings by Young Voice from CAFCASS workers.

Due to differences in questioning the data has been analysed separately by the two age categories and comparisons shown only where questions converge.

Limitations of the questionnaire

Children were asked whether they had received certain types of help from their worker but we do not know if they required this particular form of help or not. This meant that many people who did not need certain types of help would have appeared to answer 'no' as well as those who did not think that service had been delivered well. In future surveys we recommend changing this. In fact the question was structured so that they were expected to select the help they had received. There was no negative option. In future surveys we recommend changing this.

Limitations of the dataset

CAFCASS workers were encouraged to invite their clients to participate in this survey, it is possible that those who did so were in good relationships with the children on their case list and that they felt confident doing so. They are also possibly the more energetic and efficient case workers. This may have an influence on the findings.

The sample

Gender:

48% Female 52% Male (U12)

52% Female 48% Male (12+)

Figure 1

Age breakdown: 12 and under (includes three older respondents)

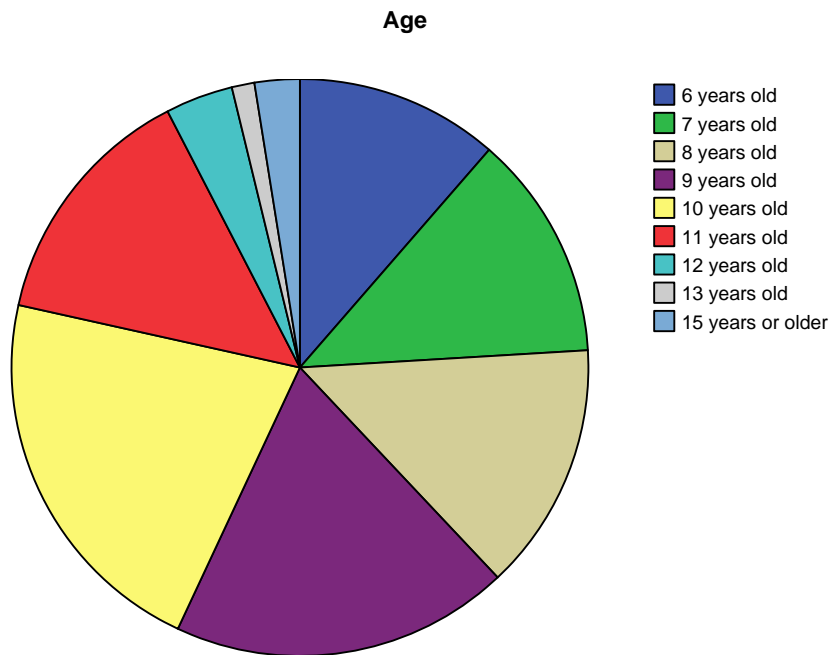


Figure 2

Age - U12 group

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	6 years old	9	11.4
	7 years old	10	12.7
	8 years old	11	13.9
	9 years old	15	19.0
	10 years old	17	21.5
	11 years old	11	13.9
	12 years old	3	3.8
	13 years old	1	1.3
	15 years old	2	2.5
	Total	79	100%

Figure 3

Ethnicity - U12 group

	Frequency	Valid %
Another Background	3	3.8
Asian	14	17.7
Black	1	1.3
Mixed Background	3	3.8
White	58	73.4
	79	100.0

Because the sample does not allow breakdown into tiny groups we have concentrated on one question on ethnicity which divides into broad groups:

Figure 4
12+ Age breakdown

	Frequency	Valid Percent
12 years old	9	36.0
13 years old	5	20.0
14 years old	8	32.0
15 years old	2	8.0
17 years old	1	4.0
Total	25	100.0

Figure 5
12+ Ethnicity

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Another Background	1	4.0
Asian or Asian British	3	12.0
Black or Black British	2	8.0
White or White British	19	76.0
Total	25	100.0

Physical disability U12:

(Is it more difficult for you to see, hear, move around, talk or learn things, than it is for other children?)

13 individuals said 'yes' and 'sometimes' it was difficult for them (16.4%).

In the questionnaire for those aged 12 and above there were further questions on difficulties:

Figure 6
12+ Physical disability

	Frequency	Valid Percent
No	24	96.0
Yes	1	4.0
Total	25	100.0

Figure 7
12+ Learning difficulty

	Frequency	Valid Percent
No	21	84.0
Yes	4	16.0
Total	25	100.0

These respondents were formed into a group to compare their satisfaction with the mainstream sample.

KEY MESSAGES

Judging young people's satisfaction with the CAFCASS service presents a number of difficulties. Divorce is not a one time event but a process, with a long period of adjustment to follow.

Children's levels of distress have been shown to remain high for many months after the divorce or separation and have also been shown to be linked strongly with the parents' levels of malaise. Impacts on children are not limited to one cause and safety fears may escalate, parental depression may increase and various other adverse factors such as poverty might develop post divorce. Therefore it is difficult to disentangle the impact of the brief intervention by the service, particularly as CAFCASS is working with families at the more contested end of the spectrum where conflict may continue after separation.

Nevertheless this small study aimed to collect data on the levels of satisfaction among young clients. The questions were developed by CAFCASS with a group of young people and the data was captured by Viewpoint using a computer assisted method. The data from 104 respondents was passed to the charity Young Voice for analysis.

Two questionnaires were carried out by Viewpoint on behalf of CAFCASS – these were targeted at two age groups – under 12 (U12) and over 12 (12+). Some questions differed.

Limitations

The method of data capture and the nature of the questions had some limitations and we have made some suggestions about changing these in the future. The sample is small and it is occasionally limiting what can be inferred when groups are broken down.

Practitioners appear to have little dedicated time or opportunity to carry out this evaluation and therefore those who did so may not be entirely representative.

The youngest age questioned was 6 years old and the oldest was 15 with the majority falling between nine and 11 years old.

While there were several respondents from Asian backgrounds, very few were from Black backgrounds (3 in total).

The data was divided by Young Voice into three areas:

- **Communication,**
- **Relationship with the worker and experience of the service,**
- **The process.**

SUMMARY: Communication

- Although 94% of the under twelve age group said the CAFCASS Worker (CW) had explained their role to them either 'completely' or 'mostly,' some did not *understand* fully. Girls tended to be more tentative about saying they had completely understood, they preferred to qualify their response: 46% of girls said they 'mostly understood' or did 'not really' understand. The few who did not understand at all were male (but numbers are small.)
- 13% of U12s need more help to understand the worker's role fully.
- Children and young people with special needs or language difficulties need extra help to fully understand the role of the CAFCASS worker, but almost 60% did understand 'completely'.
- The majority of young respondents of all ages feel that they had enough time to talk
- Although less likely to be given a contact phone number, U12's are more likely to make use of it if given one.
- Clients aged 12+ do not generally find the leaflet helpful. Younger clients like the leaflet.
- Young clients generally thought the meeting place was a good place to meet.
- Clients aged 12+ are more likely to say it was possible to meet in private.

SUMMARY: Relationship with the worker and experience of the service

Young people say they helped to express their views but are they listened to?

- Despite very high percentages of young clients feeling that their CW understands their needs, and helped them make their views heard,

only:

- One fifth were helped to feel safe
- Only one in seven was helped to have access to 'special people in my life.' Girls were even less likely to achieve this.
- Fewer than one in three was helped to live where they wanted.
- Around one fifth felt that the worker had helped the family talk to one another.
- Less than one fifth felt the worker helped them to be listened to.
- 7 individuals said they were not helped at all by their CAFCASS worker, 4 of these were over age 12 and 3 were under 12 (7% in all).

- Gender patterns

A slightly larger proportion of males say they received help in every way. There was one exception: males U12 are the least likely to be 'listened to' which is an interesting finding as two thirds of boys overall said they had been helped to say what they wanted by the CW – an even greater number than girls.

Girls are less likely than boys to say their CAFCASS worker helped them to feel safe (17% vs. 27%).

It is not clear whether these low findings on outcomes reflect limitations in the questions – we do not know for example whether the young person thought they needed this particular form of help or not. On the other hand these figures may reflect the fact that the courts are not giving enough weight to the report and the child's wishes and feelings? Some practitioners have suggested that the latter is often the case. In addition, families may not respect the child's wishes and feelings. Nevertheless it appears sad that young people are being helped by their workers to say what they wanted, and then experiencing such low levels of successful outcomes. Raising their expectations when there is such a small likelihood of the outcome reflecting their wishes is perhaps open to question.

SUMMARY: Process

As we saw in other sections, young clients rate their workers highly. Three quarters chose the band rating of between 80 -100 to show their satisfaction with the service they received. There are some groups of young people who need more support, but generally the satisfaction ratings are high for the worker and the way in which the worker undertook the work. Males under 12 are the most enthusiastic about the service and girls over 12 the least. It was worrying to find that some clients did not know how their views had been represented in the report and not enough clients knew how to make a complaint.

- Children and young people with special needs may require some help to make certain their needs are understood.
- Children and young people with special needs as well as a quarter of children under 12 and nearly one sixth of the 12+ group need extra help to fully understand the decision of the court.
- Teenagers overwhelmingly believe they should be allowed to read the reports.
- 36% of U12s felt that they were either not told at all, or not really informed about what was in the report.
- Children and young people are divided about whether they should be allowed to visit the court, be shown around or meet a magistrate.
- 14% of U12's said they were not told anything about the decision made by the court.
- Girls in the 12+ group were markedly less likely to think the court decision was a good one (56%) compared to younger girls U12 (85%).
- 78% of all the respondents rate the service very highly. But teenaged girls are the least likely to do so.
- Fewer than half knew how to make a complaint.

General

The main message emerging from this small study is that although children and young people tend to rate their worker highly and to be very satisfied with the service, they are less likely to say that they were helped in the key ways this evaluation sought to examine: To be listened to; to be safe; to see special people in their lives; to live where I wanted; or for the family to talk to each other. Outcomes are not reflecting the careful work with the young client. There are implications for the service and its work with the courts and families as well as implications for the children's rights. There is a danger their expectations could be raised unfairly if it is not possible to deliver their wishes and feelings.

Part one: Communication

- Explaining and understanding the role of the CW
- Gender differences in understanding
- Leaflets as a means of communication
- Time spent together
- Contact phone numbers
- Locations of meetings

Understanding the role of CAFCASS workers

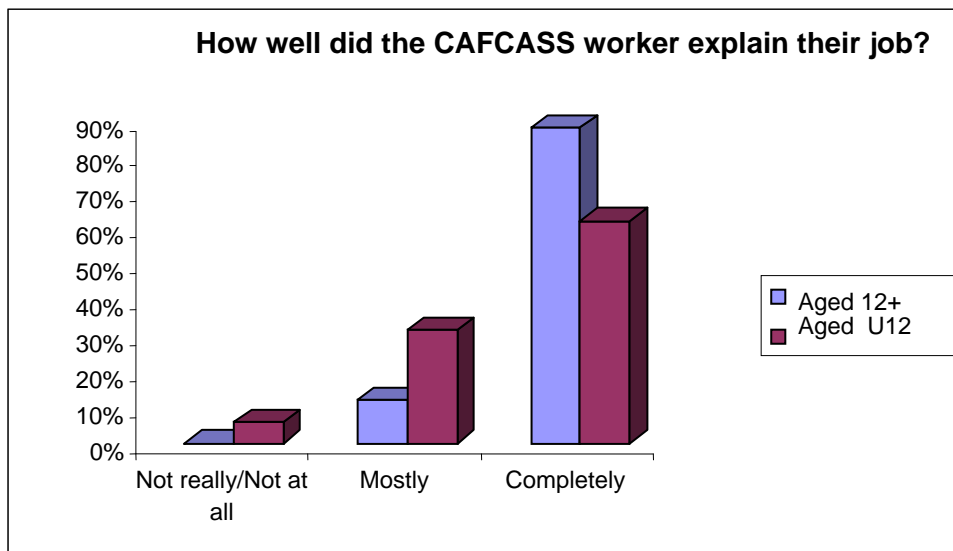
It is a challenge for any children's service to communicate the purpose of the visit, and the role of the worker. This is especially so in times of distress when gaining a child's trust is so vital.

The questionnaire hoped to discover:

1. To what extent children and young people understood the role of their CAFCASS worker,
2. How well their CAFCASS worker explained what was in the report to them,
3. Whether or not the young people thought the worker had understood their needs
4. How the children and young people experienced the service
5. How young people perceived they had been helped by the service

Chart 1

How well do practitioners explain their role to children under 12?



A great deal of effort by workers - but some may not understand.

U12

Children under 12 years of age (U12) generally reported that their CAFCASS worker (CW) had made an effort to explain their job to them with nearly two thirds (62%) saying they done so 'completely' and a further 32% felt it had been 'mostly' explained. This totals 94% who felt they had the role of the worker explained to them at least to some extent. It does suggest that those who felt it was 'mostly' but not 'completely' explained might need a little more help. Only 3%

said 'no not at all'. When we look at whether or not the U12s *understood* their CAF/CASS worker's job (62% completely understood and 3% did not understand at all).

12+

The 12+ group were even more likely to say their CW had explained their job 'completely' (88%). Understanding of the role was also high: 68% (n = 17) 'completely' understood the role of their CAF/CASS worker. Only one respondent did not understand at all.

Gender

However there appears to be some variation in understanding when we look at a gender comparison among all age groups. At the extreme end of the spectrum, those few who said that their worker had not explained their role to them 'at all' were all male. But girls were more tentative, often choosing 'mostly' or 'not really' (46% combined) in contrast to boys (23%) who tended to say that they understood completely (70% vs. 57%).

Chart 2

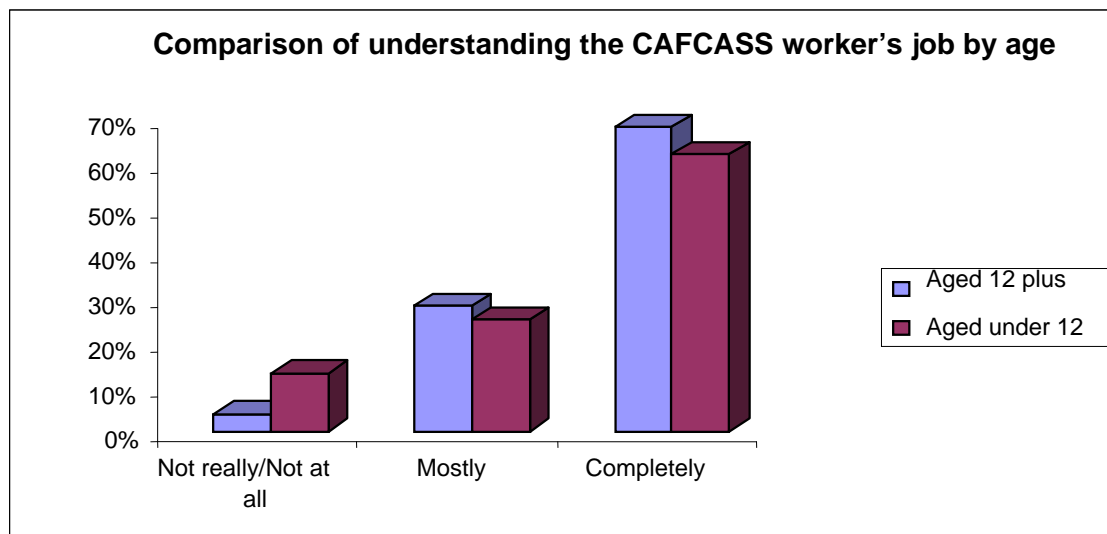
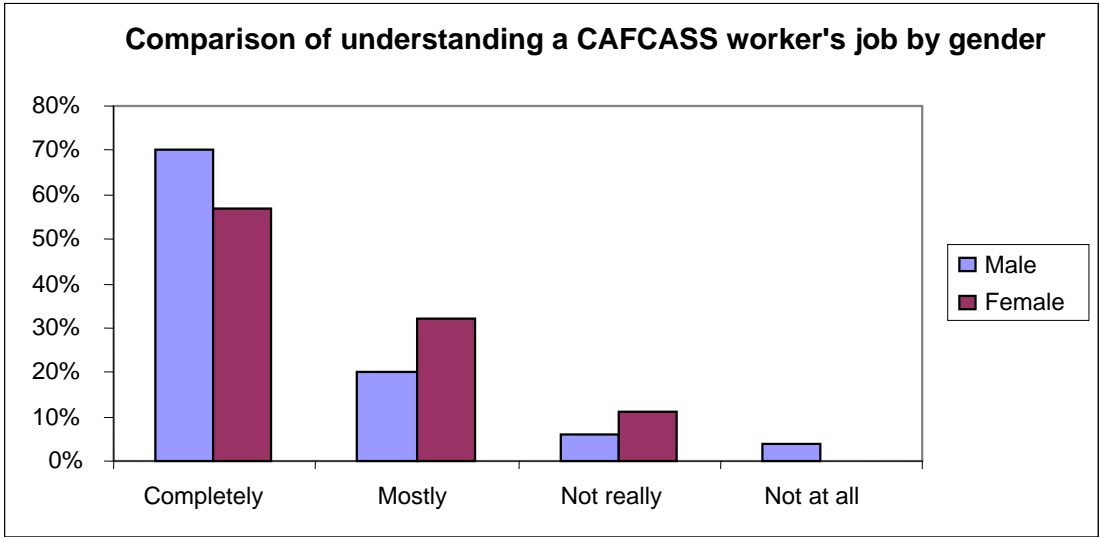


Chart 3



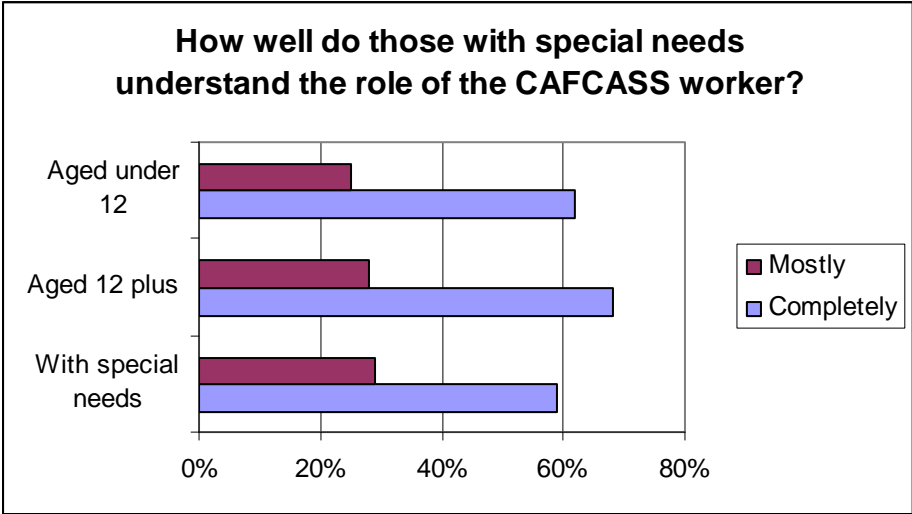
Those who have difficulties

There are 17 respondents who say they have a range of difficulties. For them it seems that understanding their worker’s role may be a little more complex: 59% of these young people said they ‘completely’ understood their worker’s role compared to 62% of U12s and 68% of 12+.

This difference all but disappears however if the responses ‘completely’ and ‘mostly’ are collapsed together: 88.2% for those with difficulties, 87.3% for U12’s and 96% for the 12+ age group.

2 of the 16 individuals said they did not really understand the role of their worker which is similar to the responses for the U12 age group. It seems that those with difficulties are not markedly disadvantaged in understanding the worker’s role and that this is being adequately explained.

Chart 4



Leaflets

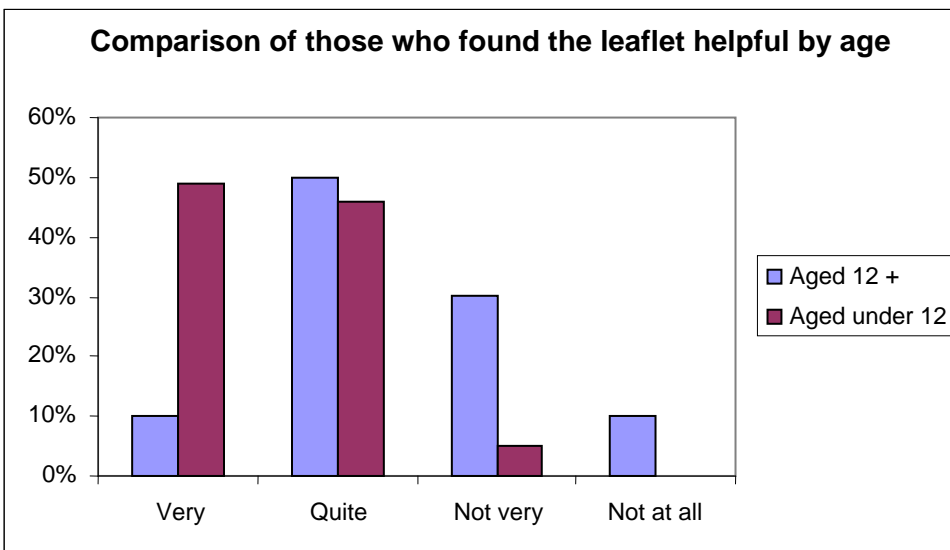
Leaflets are not universally successful with the 12+ age group while they are enthusiastically received by the U12's. It may be that children prefer to learn the information directly face to face or that the leaflets need to be redesigned for the older age group.

Almost half of U12 aged respondents said that they had received a leaflet from their CAFCASS worker almost a third had not and 19% did not know if they had or not. It is possible that some children had forgotten the leaflet as they were distressed at the time.

Out of those U12 who received the leaflet, 49% found it very helpful, 46% found it quite helpful and 5% did not find it helpful.

Among the older age group those who said they'd received it (40%) were mirrored by 40% who did not receive one. 20% said they did not know. This age group were far more likely to say they did not find the leaflet very helpful (40% said it was not very or not at all helpful). Leaflets may need re-visiting with children's participation.

Chart 5



Time to talk

- The majority of young clients felt that they definitely had enough time to talk.

Under 12s

Almost three quarters (73%) of U12 respondents said that they 'definitely' had enough time to talk to their CAFCASS worker. Only 9% felt that they did not 'at all' or didn't 'really' have enough time with them.

Ages 12 and above

Almost 2/3 (n = 16) said that they 'definitely' had enough time to talk to their CAFCASS worker whilst 8% (n = 2) said that they did not.

Phone contact numbers

- Although fewer U12's received a contact number, they were more inclined than their older peers to use it.

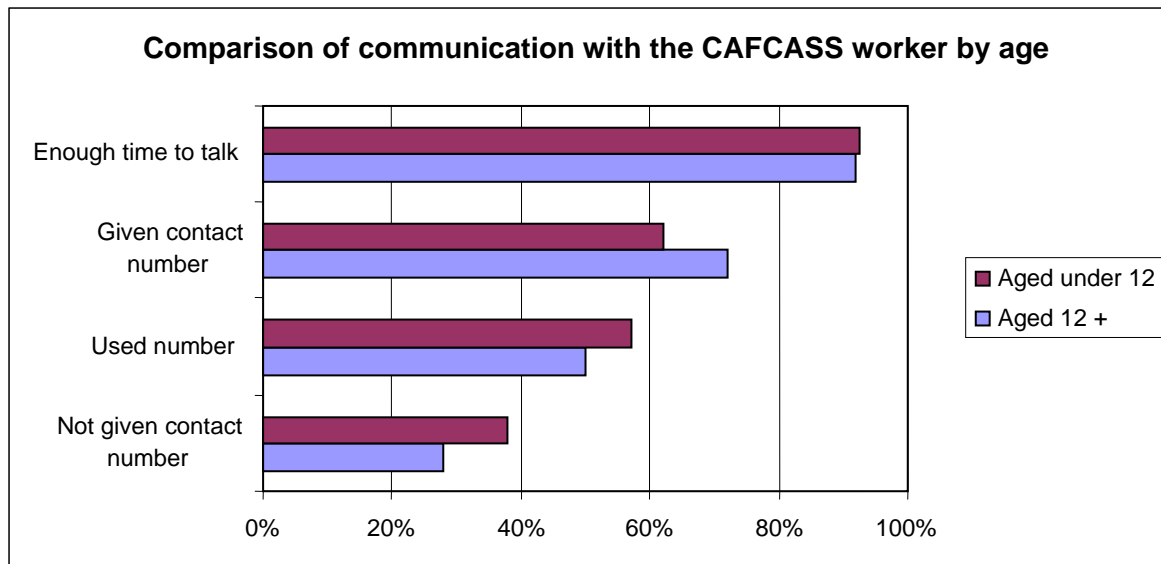
Under 12s

62% were given a contact number for their CAFCASS worker and 38% weren't. 57% used it and 43% did not. Males were more likely than females to have been given a contact number: Of those who did not: 63% were female whilst 37% were male.

12 and above

Clients in this age group were more likely to be given a contact number than the younger children, however as many as 28% did not receive this. Perhaps they did not need it or they may not have had access to a telephone. 72% received a contact number. Of these, 50% used it and 50% did not. Younger clients as we saw above were actually more likely to use it if given one. (57%)

Chart 6

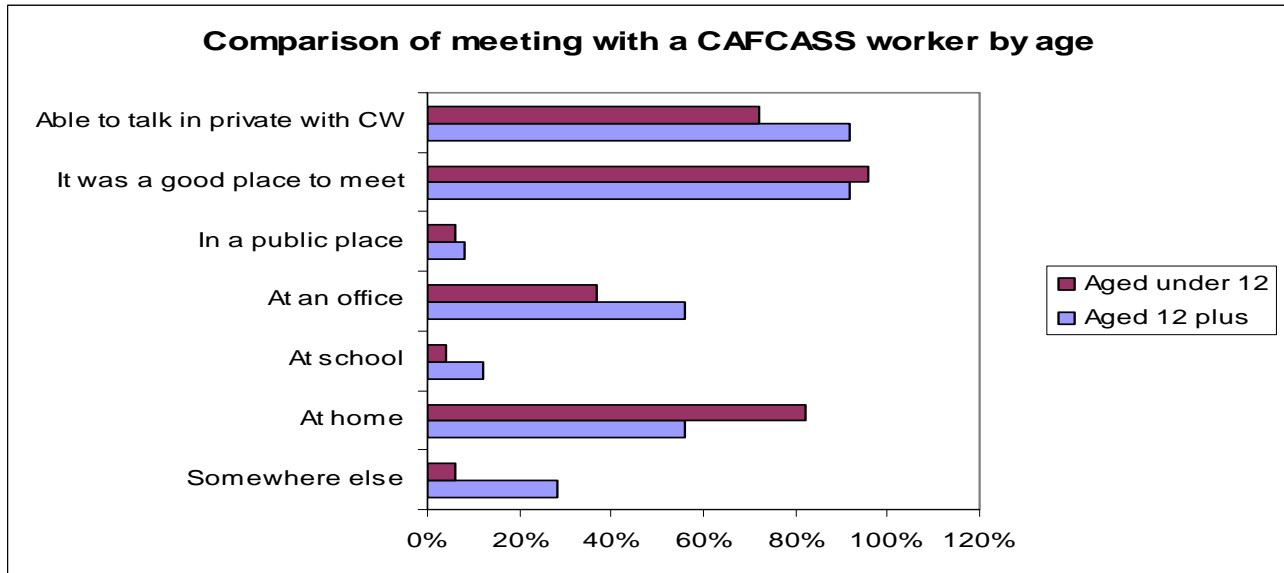


Location of meetings – ‘a good place to meet?’

The majority of children and young people met their CAFCASS worker at home with the second most common place being an office particularly for 12+. The vast majority (96%) felt that the places they met ‘were a good place to meet’. Despite the fact that most of the meetings were carried out in the home, 28% felt that they weren't able to talk to their CAFCASS worker in private. The 12+ group were not surprisingly, more likely to say they were able to meet in private.

Girls were more likely to meet their CAFCASS worker at home (90% of all females compared to 74% of all males) in contrast, males were slightly more likely to meet their CAFCASS worker 'elsewhere' or in a 'public place'.

Chart 7



SUMMARY: Communication

- U12s need more help to understand the worker’s role.
- Children and young people with special needs or language difficulties need extra help to fully understand the role of the CAFCASS worker.
- The majority feel that they had enough time to talk
- Although less likely to be given a contact phone number, U12’s are more likely to make use of it if given one.
- Clients aged 12+ do not find the leaflet helpful.
- Young clients generally thought the meeting place was a good place to meet.
- Clients aged 12+ are more likely to say it was possible to meet in private.

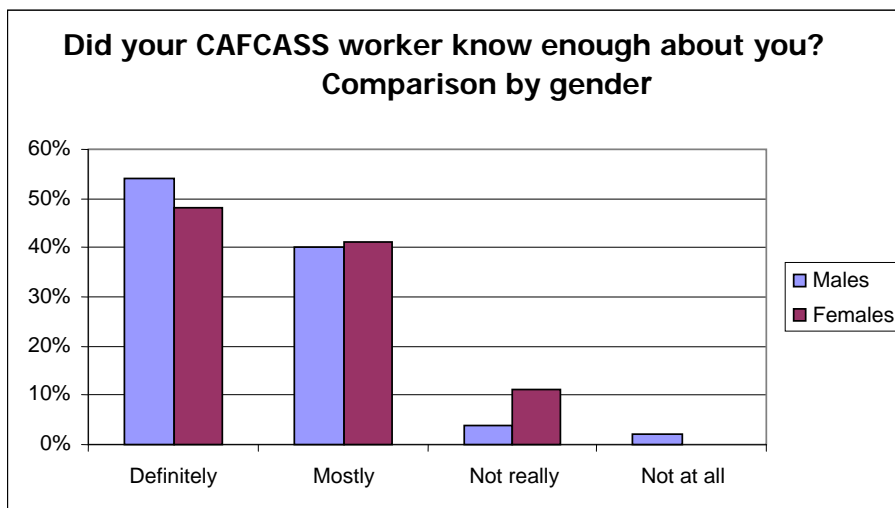
Part Two: The relationship with the worker and satisfaction with the experience

Knowing you and understanding your needs.

Did your CAFCASS worker know enough about you?

Overwhelmingly both age groups believed that their CW did know enough about them: 96% 12+ and 90% U12. This is a ringing endorsement.

Chart 8



When both age groups were considered together the results showed no gender difference with 54% and 48% saying their worker definitely knows enough about them.

High ratings for their worker, but few successful outcomes.

This study is noticeable for the high ratings young clients give their CW's, as shown in the question about knowing enough about you (chart 8) and the related question: Did your CW worker understand everything you needed? For example 94% of respondents said they felt that their worker 'definitely' or 'mostly' understood everything they needed. Additionally, CAFCASS workers are described as helping young people to express their wishes and feelings. (Chart 9). Only four individuals in the 12+ group said they were not helped by their CW at all.

Despite this the levels of responses given to questions to do with outcomes are low. Perhaps their needs for help were different to those outlined in the table below? Nevertheless it does suggest that although children and young people felt understood by their CW, their wishes and views failed to influence the decision, or the outcome did not meet their hopes for access or residence.

It may be that the court or the family did not, or could not respond positively. It seems that the work of the service and the views of the child may not be given sufficient weight. It is worth considering whether some of these high ratings for the worker and the relationship with the child reflect the emotions of a child caught in a family crisis who values having someone to talk to who listens respectfully – when parents are not doing so? Although this may be a valuable

contribution in itself, it would seem that the sharp difference between the high personal ratings for the CWs contrast pitifully with the low levels of response in the questions below.

Did your CAFCASS worker help you in the following ways?

Although as we have seen, clients stated that their worker knew enough about them and the majority felt that their worker had spent enough time with them – nevertheless satisfaction with outcomes related to help do not look very high with the exception of the statement: my worker ‘Helped me to say what I wanted’, to which nearly two thirds of boys responded ‘yes’. This may be due to a number of reasons.

1. We do not know how many children and young people needed help with any particular matter.

2. The structure of the questionnaire does not allow us an accurate measure of whether those who needed help with one of these aspects was given it.

However very few said their CW did not help them at all. (4 individuals (17%) in 12+ and 3 individuals (4%) in U12).

Respondents were asked if their CAFCASS worker helped them in the following ways;

- Helped them to say what they wanted
- Helped them to be listened to
- Helped their family to talk to each other
- Helped them live where they wanted
- Helped them to see the people they wanted
- Helped them to feel safe
- Or did not help them.

The chart (9) below illustrates responses by gender and in the following chart (10) we compare age groups.

Chart 9

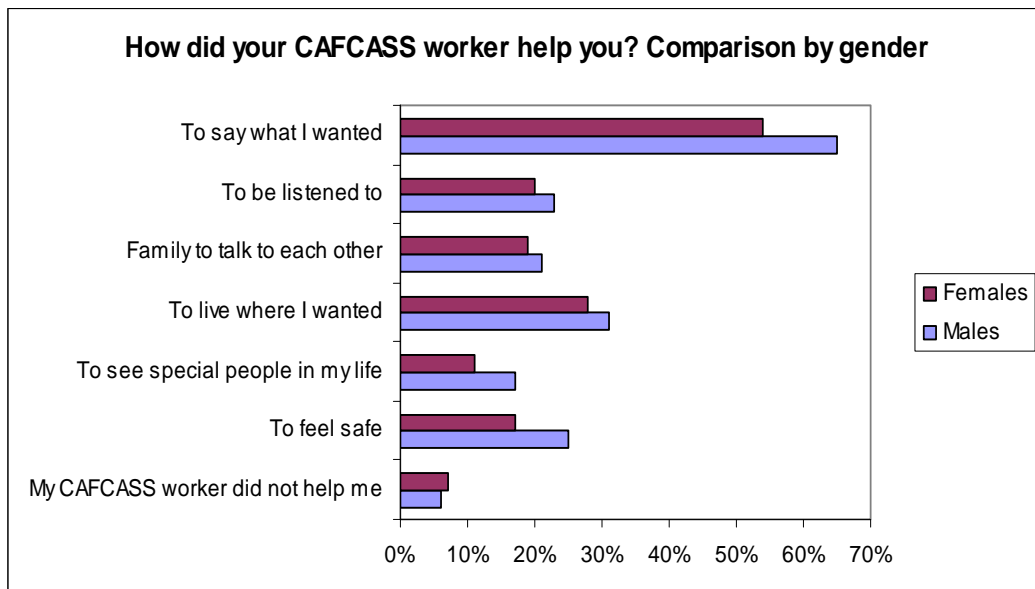
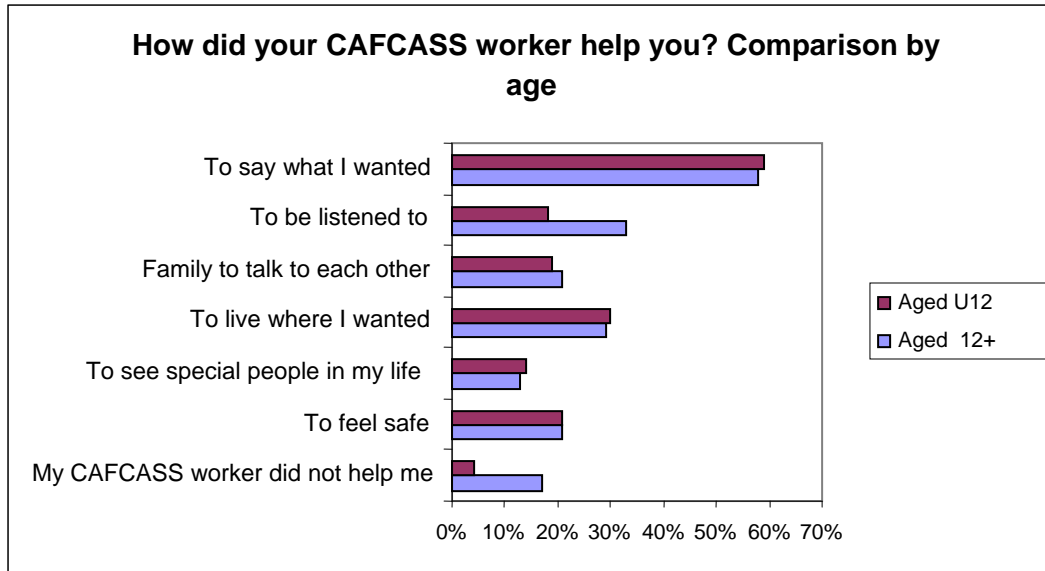


Chart 10



Being able to express your views is not the same as being 'listened to'.

- Being heard

We see in Chart 9, in which both U12 and 12+ are combined and the gender comparison explored, that boys were more likely to say that their CW had helped them to say what they wanted to. Boys are also slightly more likely to say they are listened to and certainly more likely than girls to say they feel safe.

This was not the same for the U12 group. There was a greater difference in the younger age group between boys and girls: Despite boys being helped to say what they wanted, fewer boys than girls U12 felt that their worker helped them to be 'listened to' (16% vs. 20%). The overall picture is that although children are being helped to express their views, having these views listened to is not a realistic expectation for many and may be less so for younger boys.

Looking at the two age groups together, very few respondents of either gender felt that their worker had helped them 'to be listened to' (33% 12+ and 18% U12). This means that as many as 82% of the U12 sample did *not* say their worker had helped them with this. The corresponding figure for 12+ was 66.7%

Clearly two thirds of the 12+ group and the majority of the U12 group are not saying their worker helped them to be heard. This could reflect adult attitudes to the role of the worker, the court process or the inability of the worker to influence other professionals and parents to listen appropriately to children. It could also be a reflection of the complexity of the cases. Girls were slightly more likely to feel that they had been listened to than boys.

There is potential frustration for children who are helped to articulate what they want and then are not afforded a respectful hearing, if that is what this data indicates. On the other hand this may suggest that younger children equate being 'listened to' as getting their way and some work may need to be done to make it clear to them that their views will be part of an array of

opinions considered for decision making. There will need to be some thought given to ways in which they can be helped to be heard and taken seriously. The implementation of the child's right to be heard in matters affecting them (UNCRC) is growing across the UK but may take some time to become accepted practice especially domestically within distressed family settings.

- Helping the family talk to one another

Around one fifth (21% 12+ and 19% U12) felt that the worker had helped their family to talk to each other, but as many as 81% said 'No' the worker had not helped with this issue. These may be intractable situations in difficult families, but this leaves a majority of children feeling that the family still cannot talk to one another.

- Where I live

29% of 12+ and 30% of U12s said their CW had helped them to live where they wanted. This low figure may reflect the serious end of the spectrum that these cases represent. However if it is an unrealistic expectation for workers to be able to influence decisions of this type, there is a danger that children are wrongly being led to believe they might be able to have their views influence the decision. Boys were however more likely than girls to say this had been achieved (32% vs. 27%).

- Access

Access was more difficult. Only 14% of U12 and 12.5% of 12+ said their CAFCASS worker had helped them see the people they wanted to see. The percentage of children who did *not* say this is seven times greater than the number who selected this option. This is a sad finding although behind it may lie figures on violence or abuse or other barriers to access. Girls were slightly less likely than boys to get to see people they wanted to see. This suggests that the CAFCASS worker cannot influence matters very much and it would need to be explained to young clients at the outset so that they should not get their expectations up.

- Feeling safe

One fifth (21%) of both age groups said their worker had helped them to feel safe. This figure may be a low finding – or it may represent the fact that not all these clients felt unsafe to begin with. Therefore they may not have needed this type of help. Unfortunately this method of sampling does not allow this question to be explored. It does seem however that girls were less likely to feel helped to feel safe than boys as only 15% of girls said they had been helped by their worker to feel safe. Perhaps the CW cannot affect their lives enough to make them feel safe?

Within the aims of Every Child Matters (Children Act 2004) all services working with children will need to work towards helping children stay safe and there is a role for CAFCASS to influence and work closely with Safeguarding Boards, Child protection plans and other multi-agency interventions. All services are to help every child stay safe and 'steps must be taken to provide a child with a safe environment and minimise abuse and neglect.' Elaborating on this outcome, Every Child Matters sets out inspection criteria that include the target 'Children affected by repeat domestic violence are identified, protected and supported.'

It has been pointed out by practitioners that some children caught in acrimonious family situations are not emotionally safe even though violence is not present. They express concern about some private law cases where they consider some hidden problems may go undetected and children are not seen. Another difficulty emerged in conversations with practitioners: it

seems that their ability to call in or refer to other services appears to vary from one location to another.

SUMMARY: The relationship with the worker and satisfaction with the experience

- Despite very high percentages of young clients feeling that their CW understands their needs, and helped them make their views heard, only:
 - One fifth were helped to feel safe
 - Only one in seven was helped to have access to 'special people in my life.' Girls were less likely to achieve this.
 - Fewer than one in three was helped to live where they wanted.
 - Around one fifth felt that the worker had helped the family talk to one another.
 - Less than one fifth felt the worker helped them to be listened to.

- Gender patterns

A slightly larger proportion of males say they received help in every way. The exception to this is males U12 - they are the least likely to be listened to.

Girls are less likely than boys to say their CAFCASS worker helped them to feel safe (27% vs.17%).

Part three: The process

Reports

More than three quarters of children and young people had reports written about them (79% of each age group). Questions concerning reports differed slightly between the age groups.

Right to read?

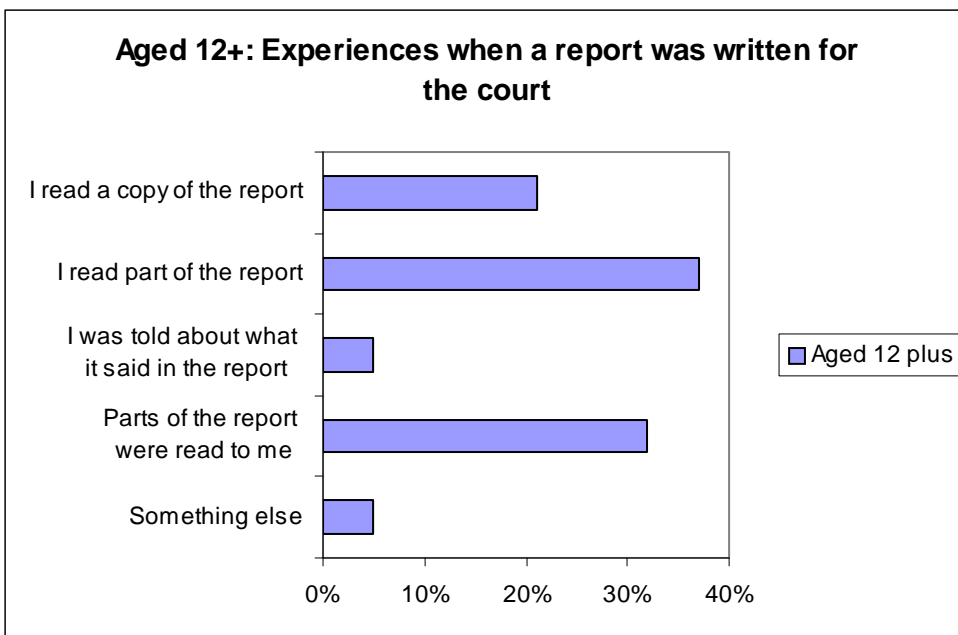
- Teenagers overwhelmingly believe they should be able to read the reports written by the CAFCASS worker.

The 12+ respondents were asked whether they thought young people should be able to read the report written by the CW. One third said 'yes definitely' and nearly two thirds said 'mostly'. Only one person said 'No.'

However, few had actually read the report. Several of them had parts of a report read to them or had been told what was in it. The most common method for 12+ was either to read parts of the report to the young person or to let them read the report themselves. This does not suggest that it was explained to them, but the questionnaire did not ask this.

How were they shown or told what was in the report?

Chart 11



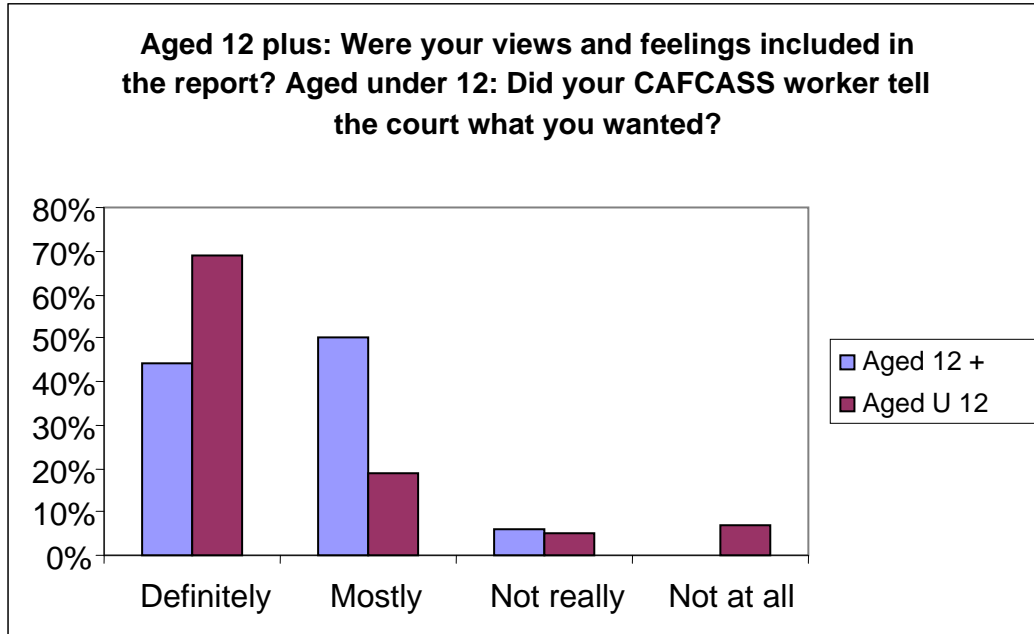
U12 Group

40% of the U12 group said they were 'definitely' told by the CAFCASS worker what was in the report while a further 24% said they were 'mostly' told. 36% said they were 'not told at all' or 'not really told' what was in the report. This represents more than a third who say they were not fully informed about the contents of the report in so far as it related to their views.

It might be incompatible with children's rights not to be told anything about whether or not their views were in the report and how they were represented, and for accuracy it would seem imperative to talk it through with the child or young person.

The Court Amendment Rules (LCD,2001a) require the CW to 'notify the child of the content of his report' in the light of the child's age and understanding. It is arguable that if a child could answer this questionnaire he or she could understand the content of the report if it was explained.

Chart 12



Questions were phrased differently for the two age groups.

12+ were asked: Were your views and feelings included in the report?

U12 were asked: Did your CAF/CASS worker tell the court what you wanted?

The 12+ group were less definite that their views were included in the report than were the U12 group, but they did indicate that their views were 'mostly' included. There was little difference between the responses of males and females.

Explanations about what would happen in court

U12s

Among U12s the worker told them about what would happen in court. 79% said they 'definitely' or 'mostly' had enough information, while 20% said they 'did not really get enough information' or they 'needed much more information'. This percentage represents 16 individuals who felt they did not receive enough or did not receive information at all.

12+

The older age group expressed similar views about being told what would happen in court: 50% said they definitely were told and 38% said it was 'mostly' explained. They were less likely to say they got no information at all – only 3 individuals did so.

Making court more friendly

Among the 12+ group only two young people actually went to court and both were glad they had done so.

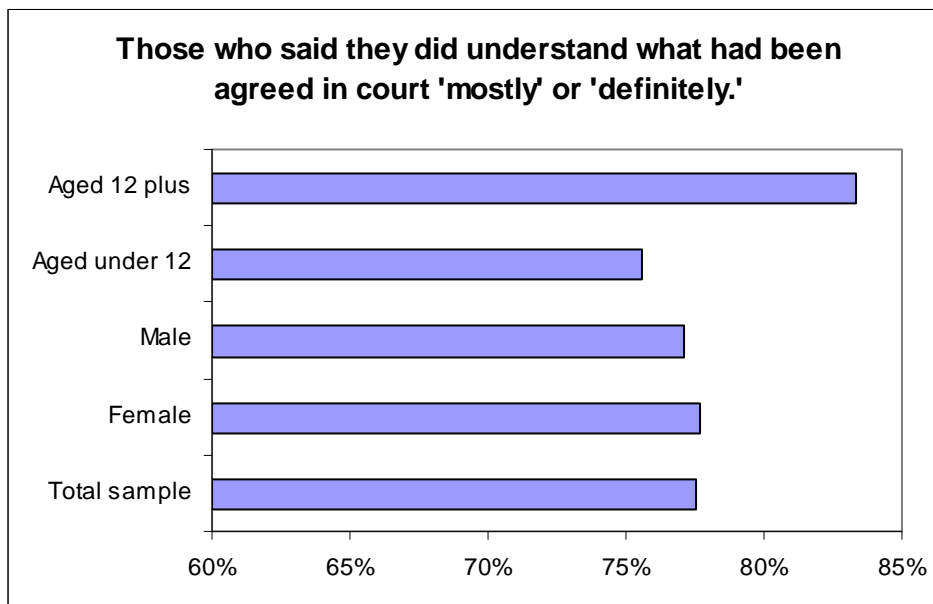
Young people 12 and above were undecided about whether or not young people should have a chance to look around the court. 63% nearly two thirds said they did not think so while 38% said they thought this should be allowed. When asked if they thought young people should be able to see the magistrate only 25% said they agreed with this while 75% said 'no'. Young people were evenly divided over whether they should be allowed to go to a court hearing with a clean 50% responding either way.

In the younger age group, 8 people said they wanted to go to court and they did go, 26 people (33%) said they wanted to go but were not asked, while 29 people (37% said they did not want to go. A further 15 (19%) were not sure. This suggests that there is a third of younger children who would like the option to be offered. Of those 8 who did go to court, 6 are definitely glad they went and one said 'mostly glad'. Only one said they were 'not really 'glad they had gone to court.

42% of the under 12's think young people should have a chance to look round court, 35% think they should have a chance to go to a court hearing and 37% think young people should have a chance to see the judge or magistrate. This suggests that younger children are more approving of the idea of showing young people around in advance. On the other hand there is one third who think young people should have none of these.

Understanding the decision made in court

Chart 13



The U12 age group are less likely to say they understand what had been agreed in court and this is obviously a challenge. Delivering complex and upsetting information verbally to young children may require developing special materials. There was little or no difference between the genders. (For a description of the views of children and young people with special or additional needs please go to page 23).

Being told the decision

63% of 12+ respondents were told the court decision by their CAFCASS worker. 79% were told what the court had decided by a parent. 25% were told by a social worker. One person was told by a sibling and one said their family had told them. Three people were told by 'someone else'. One young person answered that nobody had told them about the court decision.

U12 59% of this age group said they were told the court's decision by their CAFCASS worker, 56% were told by a parent or carer, 13% were told by a social worker; 3 were told by a sibling. 5 were told by family members, and two were told by 'someone else'. Distressingly eleven people in this age group replied that nobody told them what the court had decided.

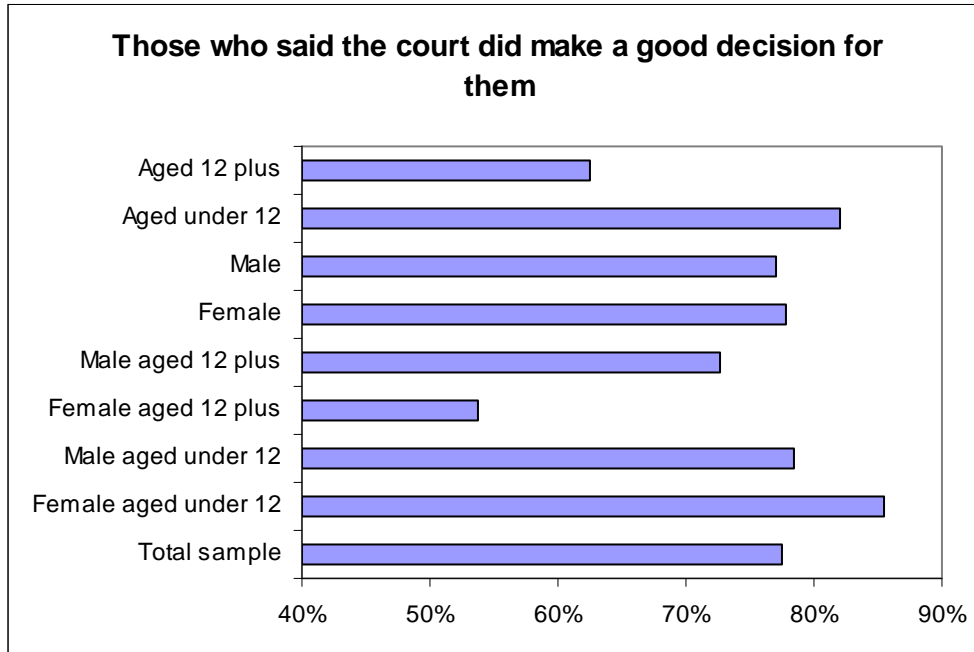
Did the court make a good decision for you?

Although three quarters of all respondents said the court made a good decision for them, there was a considerable difference between age groups when it came to this question. Of the 12+ group, 63%, and of the U12 group 82% said the court had made a good decision for them. There was no difference in the overall responses between males and females when the two age groups were combined.

Problems for teenaged girls?

However when the age groups were explored more closely it was evident that girls over 12 were the least likely to believe that the court had made a good decision for them (54%) while in contrast, an overwhelming 85% of younger girls thought the court had made a good decision.

Chart 14

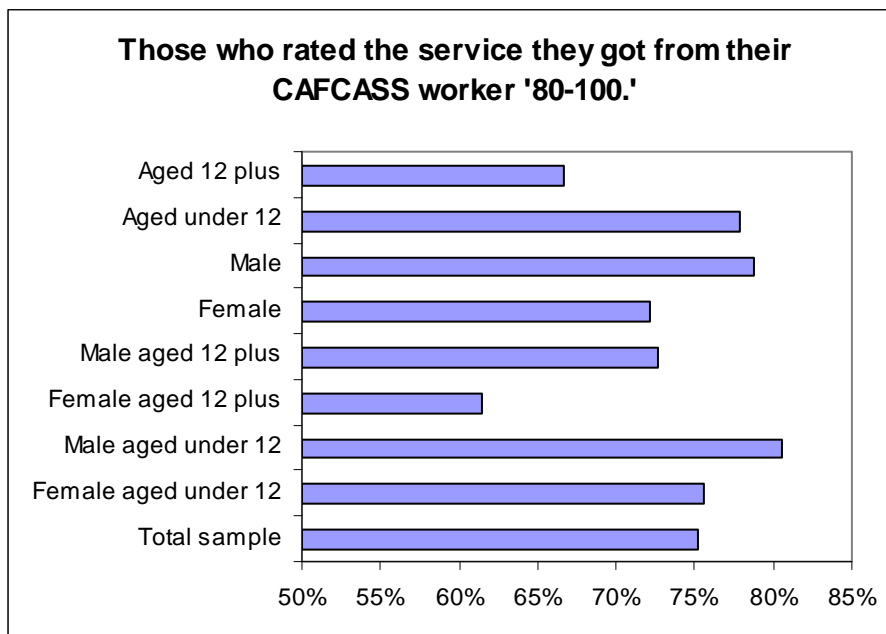


Rating the CAFCASS service overall

Young people were asked to rate the service they had received in terms of number bands to one hundred. We have selected all those who rated the service in the band 80-100. This shows that three quarters of all respondents rate the service highly.

Males under 12 are the most enthusiastic about the service and females over 12 are the least positive by a considerable amount. In general males are more likely to rate the service in this high band than females. Those with special needs responded with a figure similar to the rating given by the 12+ group: 69% chose the banding 80-100.

Chart 15



Special Needs

U12:

Only 8 people or 10% said yes to this question. 5 said they 'sometimes' had difficulties.

12+:

In the 12+ group, 3 responded that they had learning difficulties, while one had learning and physical difficulties.

- Special Needs

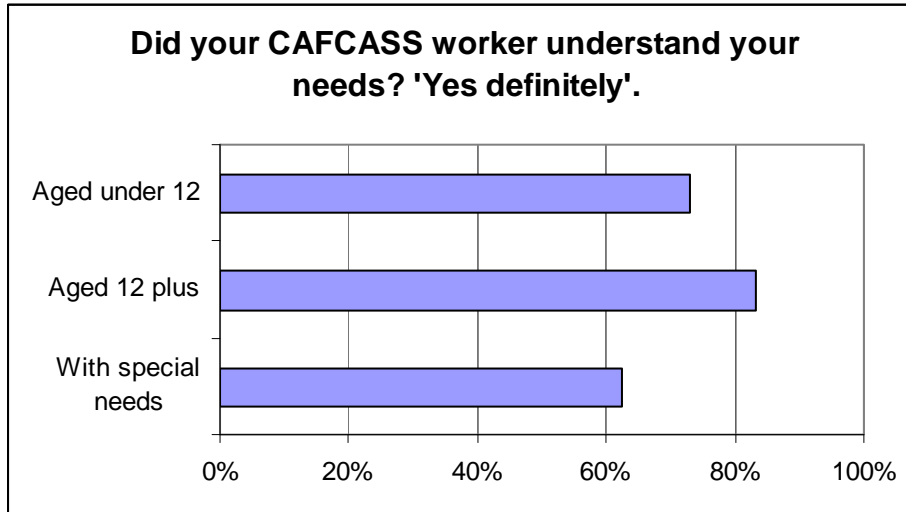
In order to form a sizeable group to explore we have added together those who said they had these difficulties 'sometimes' and those who said 'yes'. This forms a group of 17 individuals from both age groups. To consider whether or not young clients with some of these additional needs were well served, the study compared them with other groups.

- Understanding needs.

In Part one, we saw that the children and young people with special or additional needs did not always fully understand the role of the CAFCASS worker. They also may have difficulty making

their own needs known to the CW - they are less likely to be convinced that the worker definitely understood their needs. 63%, in contrast to 83% of those aged 12+ and 73% of U12's.

Chart 16



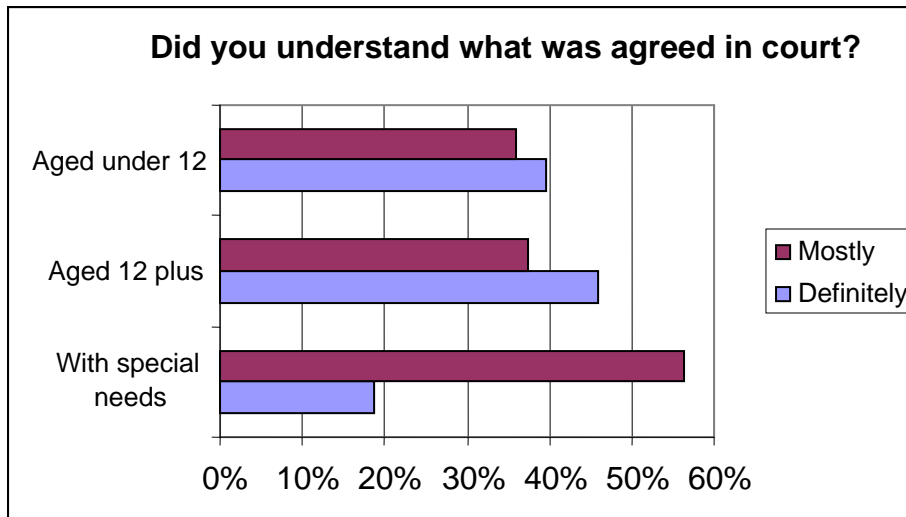
Helping those with special needs understand the court's decision

In answer to the question: Did you understand what had been agreed in court? Children and young people with special needs are less likely to say they 'definitely' understood when compared with both the U12 and 12+ age groups.

In a more tentative reply, respondents with special needs are far more likely to say that they 'mostly' understood the decision of the court than to choose the option: I 'definitely' understood the decisions agreed. 56% of those with Special Needs say they 'mostly' understood in contrast to 38% of 12+ and 36% of U12's.

4 people (1/4 of the group) said they did not really understand the decision or did not understand it at all. As numbers are small these findings should be treated as a guide only. They are not alone – we see that 17% of 12+ and 24% of U12's do not really understand the decision of the court either.

Chart 17



Additional needs and complaints

Respondents in the U12 group were asked if they had any additional needs because of their race, religion or language or if they have different abilities. 53 said they did not, 8 people said they did have additional needs while 12 said they did not know. When asked if their CAFCASS worker understood everything they needed there were only two people in this age group who said 'not at all' and another two who said 'not really'. The remainder of the group 95%, felt that their worker mostly or definitely understood everything they needed.

Respondents in the 12+ group revealed that only two individuals had additional needs. 83% of the respondents in this age group said their CW understood and respected their race, religion, language or ability needs.

Respondents were asked if they knew how to make a complaint and of the 12+ group one third said they did, while a half of the Under 12 group said they knew how to make a complaint.

SUMMARY: Process

- Children and young people with special needs may require some help to make certain their needs are understood.
- Children and young people with special needs as well as a quarter of children under 12 and nearly one sixth of the 12+ group need extra help to fully understand the decision of the court.
- Teenagers overwhelmingly believe they should be allowed to read the reports.
- 36% of U12s felt that they were either not told at all, or not really informed about what was in the report.
- Children and young people are divided about whether they should be allowed to visit the court, be shown around or meet a magistrate.
- 14% of U12's said they were not told anything about the decision made by the court.

- Girls in the 12+ group were markedly less likely to think the court decision was a good one (56%) compared to younger girls U12 (85%).
- 78% of all the respondents rate the service very highly. But teenaged girls are the least likely to do so.
- Fewer than half knew how to make a complaint.

