



# Online Safety Foster Carer Survey 2016

This document provides an overview of the responses given by Foster Carers to questions in relation to the key issues, concerns and challenges they experience supporting Online Safety for the Children and Young people for whom they care. This is supported by background information together with associated commentary from Guardian Saints in relation to the issues raised.

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## 1 Foreword

It is the right of every child to be protected and safeguarded during their childhood. The landscape, however, in which such safeguarding needs to occur has changed beyond recognition in the past twenty years. The internet and all related technologies introduce new terrains with hidden dangers – particularly for those who are young and thus likely to be more vulnerable.

This survey gives a flavour of the kinds of concerns that foster carers have to cope with on a daily basis. From the research, to date, we know that when moving into adolescence children are more likely to become more vulnerable online. This is due to the fact that adolescence is a time for experimentation, searching for one's own identity and taking risks but with poorly developed critical thinking skills that help you think about consequences. As this survey points out, of the 93,000 children in care, 58% of them fall into the 11 to 17 year old age band. This means that 53,940 young people who will have suffered some form of abuse and harm prior to being fostered need very special care and protection and it is their foster carers who are charged with this responsibility.

For me, one of the key messages that comes from this survey is that foster carers cannot, and should not be expected to safeguard children in their charge from harm online on their own. The organisations who recruit foster parents have a duty of care to the children they place with them and to the carers themselves to ensure that robust safeguards are in place. Currently the situation seems to be one that is ad hoc and lacking a comprehensive approach to this issue – one that encompasses sound over-riding policies from which appropriate guidelines are drawn up, adequate training is provided and appropriate support is available.

This survey provides a useful stepping stone that highlights the issues of online safety for those caring for our most vulnerable children. It conveys the voices of this hugely valuable group who wish to enable the children in their charge to be given a chance to live safely - their words must not go unheeded.

**Tink Palmer MBE**  
**CEO**  
**Marie Collins Foundation**

June 2017



**The  
Marie Collins  
Foundation**

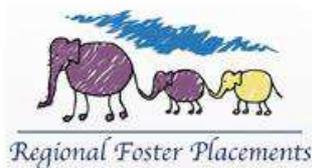
*Meeting the needs of  
children abused online*

## 2 Introduction

This document provides an overview of responses given by Foster Carers to a survey conducted by Guardian Saints during 2016. The purpose of the survey was to ascertain the key issues Foster Carers encounter in relation to Online Safety and to highlight areas where they felt additional help could be provided to support them in keeping the young people, for whom they were responsible, safe online.

The survey questionnaire was piloted initially with a number of the Independent Fostering Agencies we work with then exposed more widely and distributed via a number of channels. The respondent population consists mainly of Foster Carers working with Independent Fostering Agencies and includes large and small agencies, which are a mix of commercial and charitable organisations. Whilst a smaller proportion of responses are from Local Authority Carers, we feel that the results are a fair indicator for the Foster Carer population as a whole.

At outset, we made it clear that when the results were published they would not be attributed to any individual or organisation. However, several participating organisations have given Guardian Saints permission to say they contributed to the exercise and we take this opportunity to thank them for their support. Those organisations are:



### 3 Background

In 2015, we conducted a survey responded to by both Local Authorities (LAs) and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) collecting basic information in relation to their general approach and what they felt the key issues were with regard to Online Safety for Looked After Children and Young People. In reality, the purpose of that survey was to affirm what we felt we already knew. A summary of the key findings of that exercise are as follows:

- Virtually all respondents indicated increasing concern over the dangers posed via the internet to children
- Most organisations said that children in care were more susceptible to those dangers
- In terms of the risks posed by social media sites, in order of concern, these were:
  - Cyber Bullying
  - Sexual Grooming
  - Access to inappropriate material
  - Sexting
  - Location Tracking
- The device felt to pose most risk was the 'Smart Phone' with tablets, games consoles and PC/Laptops some way behind
- We asked if organisations had a specific online safety policy, 60% said they did with the rest stating it formed part of general safeguarding policies
- Confirmation was sought that, where in place, those policies dictated safe practice by carers (e.g. parental controls), most said they did, although some not
- Where policies dictated that controls were to be put in place, this was mainly at device level rather than ISP or Router Level
- Very few organisations physically checked that controls had been implemented, most asked carers to confirm, although some carried out no checks at all
- Finally, we asked if it was felt that to drive a consistent approach, detailed specific guidance should be driven 'from the top' (e.g. Government, Ofsted). Most IFAs were in favour whereas a smaller percentage of Local Authorities agreed

The statistical details of this exercise and associated commentary from Guardian Saints were shared initially with the Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Services who participated as well as the UK Safer Internet Council, who kindly provided a foreword for the report we produced as a result. Details of those who participated and 'who said what' remain confidential, however, this was subsequently socialised more widely with other organisations, including Ofsted, to make them aware of the issues raised. A copy of this report can be made available by contacting us.

Since producing this original report, Guardian Saints have continued to work with those responsible for safeguarding looked after children, mainly Independent Fostering Agencies, providing help with practice and policy setting regarding online safety as well as delivering awareness and 'hands on' training directly to both Foster Carers and Supervising Social Workers.

We also continue to liaise and lobby relevant organisations to provide additional services and features to assist Foster Carers to maintain a safer online environment for the children and young people for whom they care. Therefore, we felt it would be helpful to conduct a further survey to highlight the key issues for this specific group of 'parents'. In sharing the results, we hope to provide a wider understanding of the particular challenges that Foster Carers face.

## 4 Context and Landscape

So why might the needs of Foster Carers differ from other parents? Those who work in any capacity with 'children in care'<sup>1</sup> will know the answer to this question. However, for those that don't (and whom) those that do rely on to provide facilities to protect those children e.g. Technology Providers, Internet Service Providers, Internet Presences (e.g. Google, Facebook etc), it is helpful to provide a degree of background and context.

On many occasions, Edward Timpson (Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families) has referred to Looked After Children as 'the most vulnerable children in our society'.

From figures compiled in 2015 the number of children in care in the UK was over 93,000<sup>2</sup>. The numbers continue to rise annually. Data published by the Department of Education shows that as at March 2016 there were 70,440<sup>3</sup> looked after children in England, 74% percent of whom were cared for in Foster placements. In the same report, the gender of those children was split 56% male, 44% female and the age profile has continued to change in the number and proportion of children over 10 increasing from 56% in 2012 to 62% in 2016. In terms of ethnicity, the majority of children in care are 'White British', compared to those with dual heritage, 'Black or Black British', comprising 9% and 7% of children in care.

It is estimated that over 60%<sup>3</sup> of children in this context are looked after due to abuse and neglect. A report published by the Children's Commissioner in 2012<sup>4</sup> indicates 20-35% of children who are sexually exploited are children in care.

The foregoing is intended to provide an indication of the scale of the problem as well as qualify why looked after children might be considered the 'most vulnerable' as a group. Their background and the reason they were placed into care in the first place clearly has an impact, however, the issue can be further complicated by their 'looked-after status'. This broadly breaks down as follows:

1. Care Order made by courts in accordance with the 1989 Children's Act
2. Voluntary accommodation arrangements in accordance with the 1989 Children's Act
3. Placement Order (where a court order allows local authority to place a child for adoption)

For those who fall into 1 above, parental responsibility rests with the Local Authority (which according to a House of Commons Briefing Paper from 2015 represents 65% of the total) whereas for those under voluntary arrangements (27% of the total) the local authority does not hold parental responsibility, which remains with the child/s parent/s or another adult who holds parental responsibility.

Foster Carers do not hold Parental Responsibility (although may have some authority delegated to them) but on a day to day basis are responsible for safeguarding the child in their care. However, decisions that they make can be undermined by whoever holds parental responsibility. Whilst no quantifiable data exists, Guardian Saints have been told by both Foster Carers and Independent Fostering Agencies that this happens all too often.

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<sup>1</sup> This term refers to all children being looked after by a Local Authority, which includes those subject to care orders under the Children Act 1989 (S.31) as well as those looked after on voluntary basis via an agreement with their parents.

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://corambaaf.org.uk/res/statuk>

<sup>3</sup> See: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/556331/SFR41\\_2016\\_Text.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/556331/SFR41_2016_Text.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See: [https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Accelerated\\_Report\\_for\\_the\\_Secretary\\_of\\_State\\_for\\_Education.pdf](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Accelerated_Report_for_the_Secretary_of_State_for_Education.pdf)

It is evident that there are not enough Foster Carers available to support the number of placements required. Where Local Authorities do not have enough 'in house' Carers available they rely on IFAs to supply and manage Foster Carers therefore 'effectively' outsourcing that care, whilst Parental Responsibility remains with the Local Authority (where a Care order is in place) or otherwise as described above.

Both Local Authorities and IFAs continue to try and identify, recruit and train new Foster Carers. One estimate provided by the Fostering Network in 2016<sup>5</sup> indicates that some 7600 new 'Foster Families' needed to be recruited in the following 12 months.

Being a Foster Carer is a difficult job which at the same time can be extremely rewarding. Foster Carers, many of whom have their own children, welcome young people into their home and are required to support them and keep them safe. Foster Carers may need to apply various levels of controls in terms of online safety for children with different individual issues, safeguarding requirements (dependant on their background) and of varying ages.

As parents with parental responsibility/control, we provide our children with devices, on which we can apply parental controls and set appropriate boundaries. The children being placed may already have devices which can connect to the internet and may be used to a different set of boundaries.

Some real-life examples of these challenges were drawn out during research commissioned by Internet Matters<sup>6</sup> and undertaken by Opinion Leader (See section 'Keeping foster children safe' – starting on Page 34.). Guardian Saints are pleased to have been able to facilitate the Foster Carer interviews that took place as part of this.

Whilst significant changes have been made in areas such as the application of parental controls at ISP level by default, these are not always flexible or consistent enough for Foster Carers to put in place robust online safety measures for looked after children and monitor activity effectively.

Guardian Saints recognises the technology exists, whether it be at ISP, Router or device level but are often told by Foster Carers the functionality available is too complicated for them to implement as effectively as they would like and children have a better understanding of such things than they do.

This may be partially attributable to the demographic of Foster Carers themselves. Details extracted from a report published in 2015<sup>7</sup> resulting from a study by Birmingham City University, indicate that the majority of the existing Foster Carer population was over 50 years of age (50%), with nearly 17% being over 60, albeit this trend was shown to be shifting to lower ages for Foster Carers currently being recruited.

Certainly, Guardian Saints experience of working with Foster Carers does indicate they are of an older generation and are less confident in the use of technology than their younger counterparts.

In conclusion, therefore, Guardian Saints feel that Foster Carers require additional help both in terms of technology awareness and its flexibility to support online safety for the children and young people for whom they care.

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/all-about-fostering/fostering-statistics>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.guardiansaints.com/internet-matters-research-report>

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.bcu.ac.uk/Download/Asset/c35c05c0-cdc8-e511-80ce-005056831842>

## 5 Online Safety – Carer Survey 2016

### 5.1 Purpose of Survey

We are aware from the work we do with Independent Fostering Agencies that online safety for children and young people was becoming an increasing concern and being given much attention both in terms of policy setting and training. From personal experience and feedback received at the awareness and 'hands on' training sessions we provide to Foster Carers, we felt we had a good understanding of the key issues and challenges they faced.

However, we felt it important to both qualify and quantify the scale and nature of the problem.

### 5.2 Methodology

There are in the region of 350 IFAs; these range from smaller organisations with some 5/6 fostering households to larger national organisations with many hundreds of fostering households. These are a mix of both charitable and commercial organisations.

Initially, we ran a 'pilot' with 3 IFAs, which enabled us to 'fine tune' the questions we asked based on the responses given.

Subsequently, we contacted the remainder by email asking if they would like to participate in the survey, following this up by telephone, where we were able to do so. A range of organisations in terms of size and status agreed to participate. For those that did, Guardian Saints supplied a covering email, including a survey link, that they could send to their Foster Carers (for data protection reasons, we did not ask nor expect them to supply us with 'mailing lists'). For some agencies, we created an individual survey link so that we could produce a report of the responses their Carers gave to both inform them and allow them to take remedial action, where appropriate. However, we did not seek to collect details of individual participants as we felt this would enable them to respond more openly.

Organisations of all sizes and status participated and some of these have allowed us to indicate they supported the exercise as shown in Section 1 above. This does not represent all IFAs who took part. We would particularly like to thank Caldecott, TACT and The FCA for supporting the 'pilot' as well as 'Foster Talk' who promoted the survey in several publications as well as via social media and enabled participation from Local Authority Carers.

### 5.3 Reach

Whilst it is difficult to quantify due to the methodology we had to employ, we believe that the survey questionnaire was exposed to at least a 1000 Carers associated with a number of different organisations (both LA and IFA). A total of 348 Carers accessed the survey with 329 completing all the required responses; only fully completed responses have been used in the statistical analysis. We believe that with this level of participation, the results recorded can be considered representative.

## 5.4 Confidentiality

From the outset, we have been quite clear that all responses are confidential and would not be attributed to any organisation or individual. Some questions allowed 'free text' responses and, where used, these have been paraphrased to maintain anonymity.

## 5.5 Distribution

In the first instance this report will be made available to those organisations that contributed. It is our intent to distribute more widely as a 'call to action' to those organisations that can help protect 'the most vulnerable children' in our society today. The report will also be made available by request from the Guardian Saints website.

## 6 Survey Results

The survey was broken down into three distinct sections. We have partitioned the response data in the same way. The relevant sections are:

- About the Carer
- Technology in the home
- Carer Requirements

### 6.1 About the Carer

#### 6.1.1 Q1 – Do you foster with a Local Authority or an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)?

As indicated, our original distribution methodology was to email all IFAs asking if they would allow their Foster Carers to participate in the survey. Reliance was placed on the agencies to forward the invitation to Carers and then for them to complete the survey; we did not have the luxury of a 'captive group'. The survey was also promoted in Foster Talk magazine whose members include both Local Authority (LA) Carers and those working with IFAs.

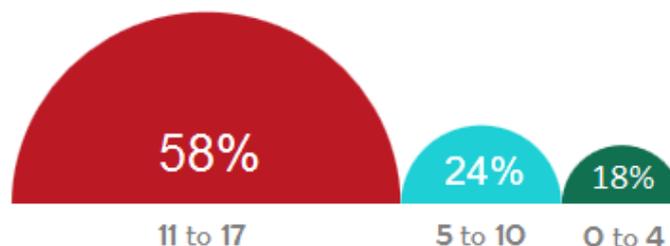
In terms of the total response population this breaks down to 93% IFA Carers and 7% LA Carers.

#### 6.1.2 Q2 - How many children do you look after currently and what are their ages?

We asked participants to indicate the number of children they currently cared for and into which age bands they fell.

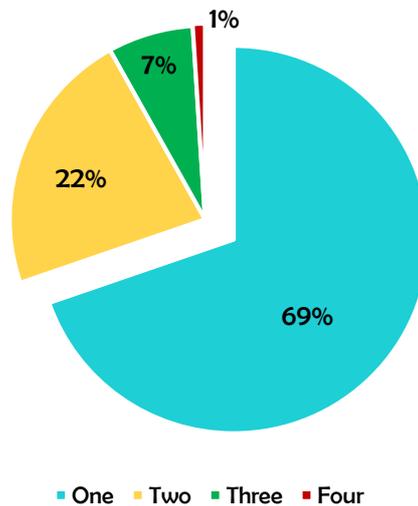
Broadly in line with National Statistics, 58% fall into the 11-17 age bracket, with those between ages 5-10 representing 24% and those aged 0-4 at 18%. As detailed in [Section 3](#), those in the lower age bands have continued to decrease, whereas the number in the higher age band has risen.

#### Young People Looked After By Age



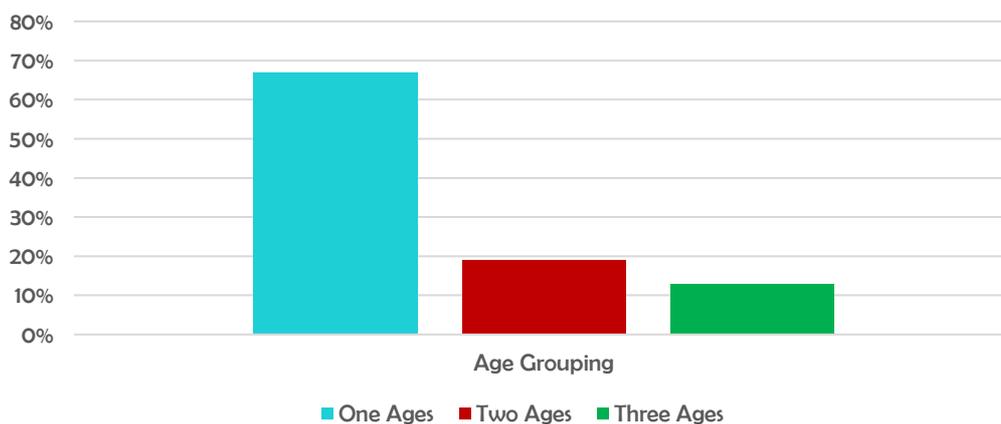
Represented in the graph below are the number of young people looked after by household. Most had a single young person in placement at the time of the response, whilst 22% had two in placement. Those with 3 or 4 young people formed a much lower group.

### Number of Young People Looked after by Household



Considering potential internet safety issues, particularly in relation to parental controls, we felt it would be prudent to analyse the number of occurrences where disparity existed across the varying age bands.

### Age Grouping

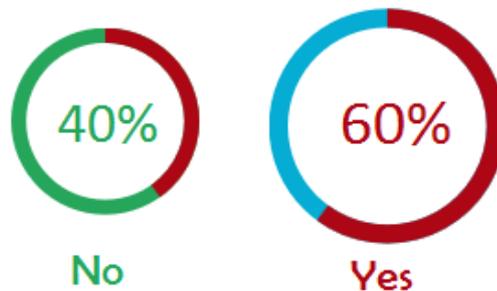


Whilst we recognise that significant improvements have been made by the ISPs, we consider that the functionality currently provided is not granular enough to enable Carers to set a range of varying controls for young people; either appropriate to their age or to known vulnerability/risk.

Based on the population survey, those caring for young people across 2 or 3 of the stated age bands is around 1/3<sup>rd</sup>, which could be viewed as the minority. However, we must consider that risk cannot be judged by age alone and must be set against the perceived vulnerability of the child in question. As such, even two young people of similar ages may have very different safeguarding needs; current ISP Parental Controls do not support this.

### 6.1.3 Q3 – Do you think a child/the children in your care know more about technology than you do?

As can be seen from the below, the majority of respondents felt that the young people for whom they cared knew more about technology than they did.



This result comes as no surprise and, as indicated above, can to an extent be attributable to the demographic of the Foster Carers themselves. The use and pace of change of technology itself over the last decade has increased exponentially.

Writing this as a fifty-something Foster carer and having left school at 17, my first experience of using a computer did not occur until I was 22 years of age. I clearly recall being intimidated by the fact that the use of a computer would form part and parcel of my everyday role. Since then, my working life has revolved around the use of technology in one form or another, the last 20 years of which has been with a software company specialising in providing online systems to large organisations.

However, to young people today the use of technology is a normal and natural part of everyday life both in educational environments and within the home, it's used for many as a primary means of communication within their peer group and beyond, they do not hold it in awe nor do they fear it in the same way as those of an older generation may and are confident and assured in the use of it from a very early age.

### 6.1.4 Q4 - What have been the key challenges for you up until now in keeping the children safe online?

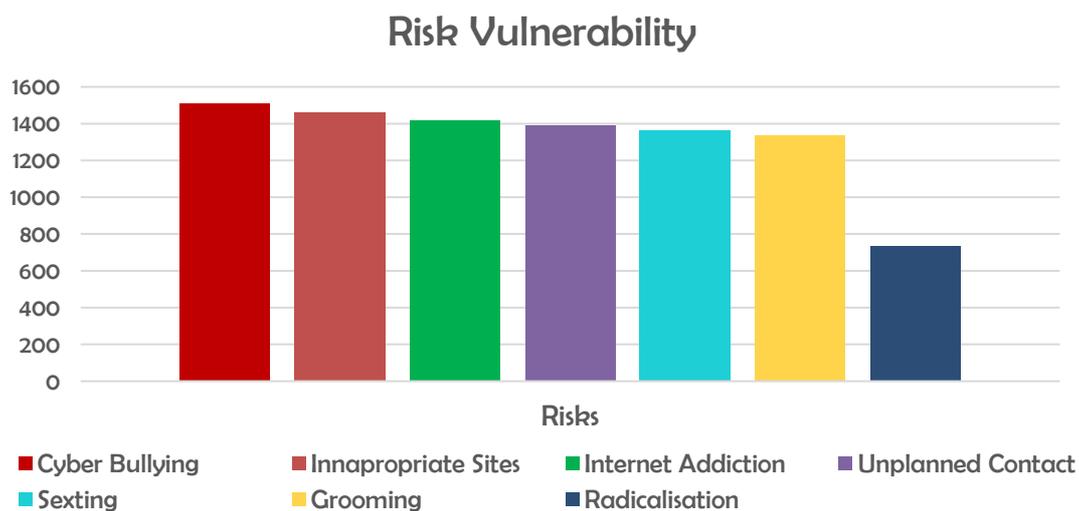
This question sought a purely free text response, which prompted variable responses. Some key themes were evident, for example, there were a number of challenges with mobile phones; lack of monitoring, phones purchased by birth parents, use of free Wi-Fi/ 'Hot Spots' etc. Another key theme is secrecy, whether it is keeping contact information secret or Internet activity. Carers do not feel that they have control of what Internet and Communications products the young people access.

## 6.1.5 Q5 - What risks do you think the children currently in your care are potentially most vulnerable to?

For this question, we asked respondents to put a series of 'risks' in an order to which they felt the young people in their care were potentially more vulnerable. The results provided are expressed as a weighted calculation, with items ranked first valued higher than the following ranks dependent upon the order each respondent selected. The score given is then a sum of all weighted rank counts.

The risks we asked respondents to rank are as follows:

- Unplanned or Inappropriate contact from birth family
- Cyber or Online Bullying
- Sexting
- Internet Addiction
- Inappropriate/illegal content (pornography, violence, drugs)
- Online Grooming
- Radicalisation



All were seen to present a risk to young people in care to some degree. Cyber Bullying was ranked slightly higher than most, with radicalisation being significantly lower.

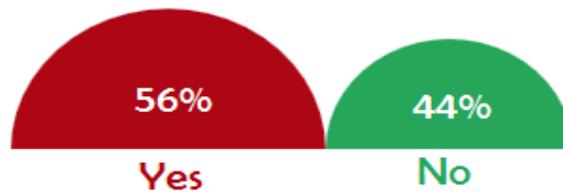
**Respondent comment:** *'I have serious concerns about all of these issues – internet addiction, inappropriate use of the internet, unplanned and inappropriate contact from family, cyber bullying and sexting – but everyone tells me this is just how teenagers behave'*

An issue particular to those in care is unplanned or inappropriate contact from birth family. Whilst significant focus is placed on cyber bullying, sexting and radicalisation, this is often overlooked.

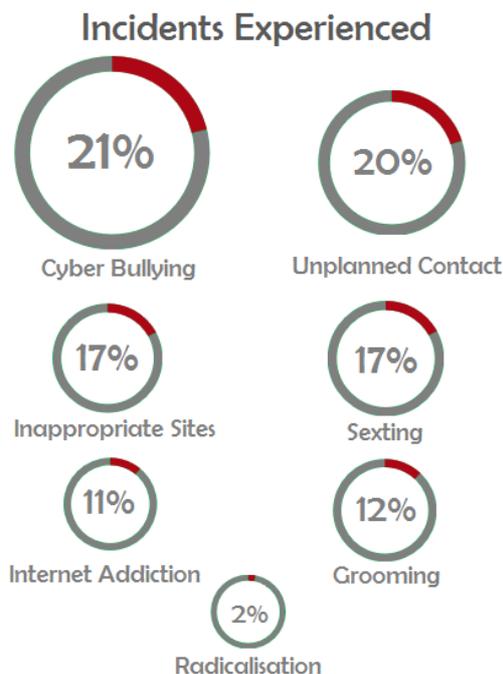
Such contact can have a hugely detrimental effect on placement stability and potentially the wellbeing of the young person themselves. Where reported, Social Media sites were seen to be the main conduits, with Facebook being cited the most often.

In addition, we asked respondents to indicate if any of those in their care had experienced any of these issues.

### Have any of the children you have looked after (either now or in the past), experienced any of these?



Where 'yes', we sought a freetext response indicating the nature of those issues. To arrive at easily consumable data, we categorised these into the broad 'risk' groupings, shown below<sup>8</sup>.



As can be seen, incidents of 'Unplanned or Inappropriate' contact from Birth Family fall only slightly behind incidents of Cyber Bullying. In this regard, care needs to be taken with respect to 'Location' Services' used by many applications and generally applied by default. Photographs taken on mobile devices, such as a phones or tablets (where location services are not disabled) and subsequently posted on social media sites, provide the capability of providing birth parents with the exact location of their child, whether it be at the Foster Home or in school.

<sup>8</sup> Where the response indicated that one or more of the issues had been experienced, these were counted separately.

### 6.1.6 Q6 - Does the Local Authority/Fostering Agency provide enough detailed guidance and training to you regarding online safety?

The core question required the respondent to indicate whether they felt they did receive enough guidance and training about online safety. The result is shown in the graph below.



We also asked if there were particular areas where it was felt more detailed training would be beneficial. This was a free text response which enabled respondents to indicate which areas they felt additional help was required. Here, 25% of respondents indicated they felt additional training/guidance would be helpful, most of whom indicated that practical help with parental control and security settings were top of their list.

Use of mobile phones to access the internet outside the home was seen to present a significant risk and therefore the ability to restrict this is also seen as priority. Given that around 64% of the young people looked after by the respondent group had 'smart phones' it is understandable that this represents a key concern.

## 6.2 Technology in the Home

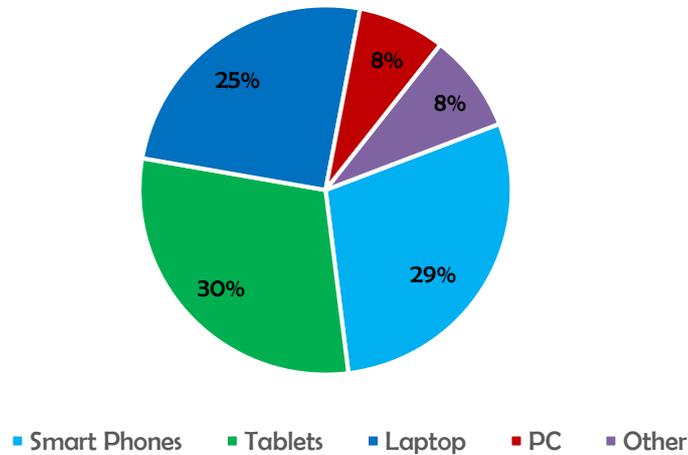
### 6.2.1 Q7 - What devices do the foster children you currently care for use/have access to?

In posing this question we set out a number of options and allowed respondents to make multiple selections upon the assumption that the young people may have access to more than one device. The options were listed as follows:

- Smartphone (e.g. iPhone, Android, Windows)
- Tablet (e.g. iPad, Galaxy Tab, Kindle Fire, Surface Pro)
- Laptop Computer
- Personal Computer
- Other

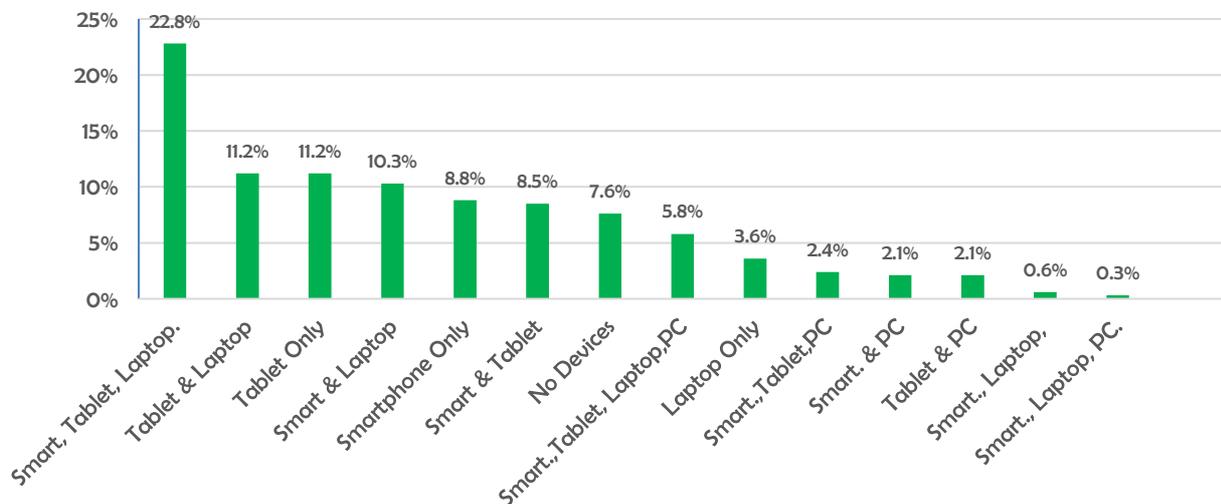
The results are represented in the following graph.

## What devices do the foster children you currently care for use/have access to?



In a significant number of cases, the young people possessed multiple devices. Consequently to provide the data at a more granular level, these have been segregated into more detailed groupings (e.g. Smart Phone and Tablet, Smart Phone, Tablet and Laptop and so on). For ease of consumption, the results in the graph below are shown in order of use i.e. highest first, lowest last.

### Devices Used



Smartphones and Tablets (mobile devices) are the most popular devices in use by young people. When delivering training and awareness sessions, Guardian Saints have noted Carers most often comment upon the difficulties they face when trying to apply controls for mobile devices. Some commercial products are available that provide relatively granular control over them however there are more often than not costs associated with these.

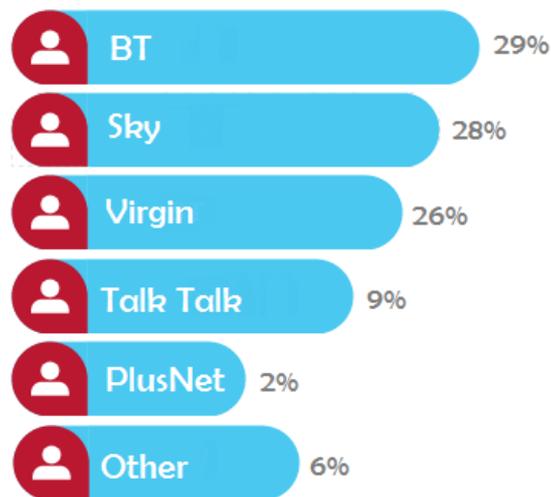
To further frustrate us mobile device operating systems are, in the main, designed for single user operation which means that to restrict application access, there is a reliance on using the inbuilt parental controls. This can be particularly challenging when the mobile device has been provided by a birth parent.

## 6.2.2 Q8 - Thinking about the technology in your home, which company provides this (Internet Service Provider (ISP))

Here we listed the main ISPs, being BT, Sky, Virgin, Talk Talk, PlusNet and provided the option to select 'other' with a free text box so respondents could supply the details. The response details are represented in the graph below.

It is worth noting that PlusNet is owned by BT, but is separated here as it is presented as an independent service.

### Internet Service Providers



BT, Sky and Virgin had a similar usage spread amongst those surveyed, with other providers falling a fair way behind.

ISPs provide a range of information (e.g. User Guides, instructional videos) to help users. However, when delivering awareness training, common feedback is that carers find setting controls on Internet Routers particularly challenging and also lack confidence regarding Parental Controls generally. Foster Carers have stated it would be a huge benefit if someone was on hand to guide them in this area. As indicated previously, many Foster Carers tend to be of an older generation and are not as familiar with technology use as some of their younger counterparts, therefore, taking them step by step through the process would enhance their learning experience and greatly boost confidence.

Guardian Saints have developed the ability to deliver this type of training for most proprietary Router's. We are also hugely grateful for BT's support in providing 'dummy accounts' to facilitate guided ISP Parental Control setting so we can support their Foster Carer customers. We hope to be able to extend this to include other ISP's in the not too distant future.

### 6.2.3 Q9 - Who would you normally talk to get online safety advice (e.g. Local Authority/Fostering Agency or Social Worker, Friends/Family, ISP, IT Company, own research)

This question allowed participants to input a free text response. Once again, we have organised these into broad categories (i.e. Fostering Agency/Local Authority, Friends/Family etc.). Where the respondent indicated they would seek help from more than a single source we have counted each separately. For example, if the response stated Fostering Agency and Family, we have scored 1 for Fostering Agency and 1 for Family, as we believed this would provide a clearer representation.



Although the responses are of interest it is somewhat difficult to draw any specific conclusions from the data collected. It is clear that Foster Carers do not rely on a single source to help them in this area. This indicates that the training and subsequent controls are not aligned to a common methodology. Children in care deserve a more structured approach to online safety to provide equality of safeguarding, regardless of where they are located.

Robust and regularly reviewed policies must be in place, supported by ongoing education to deliver those policies into practice. The approach taken needs to be consistent at every level to ensure that all parties involved in safeguarding young people are 'on message' when implementing online safety measures.

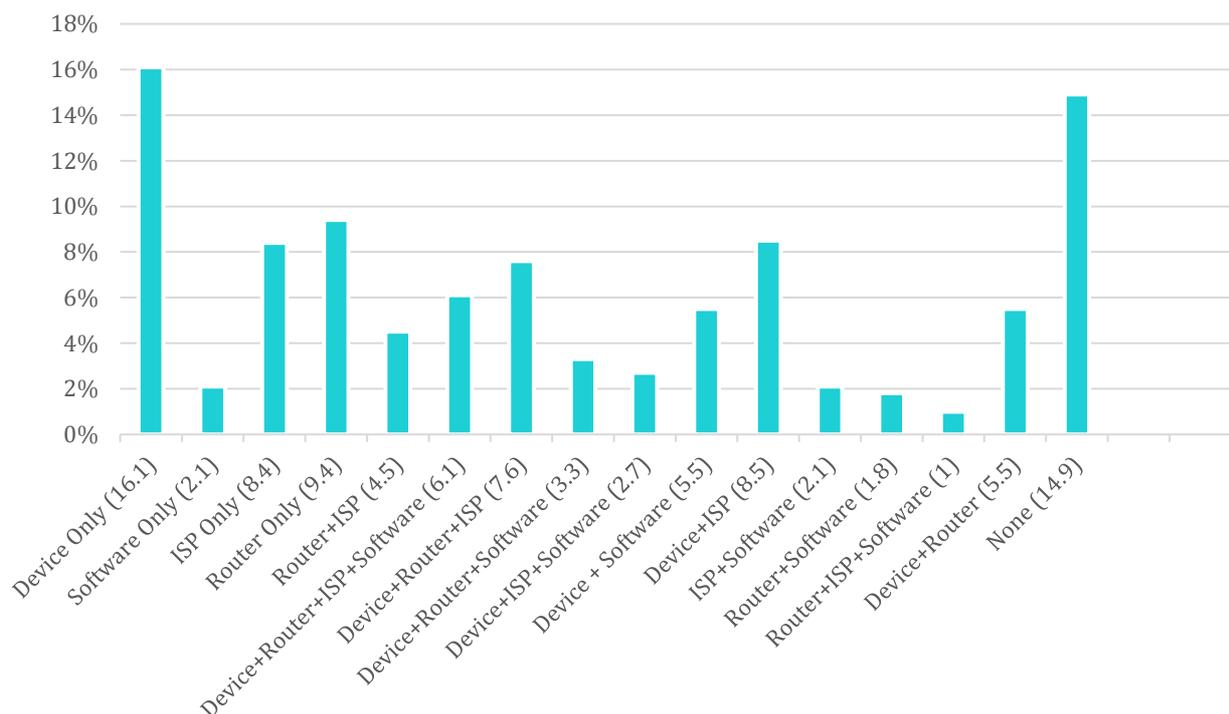
## 6.2.4 Q10 - Where have you applied Parental Controls/time restrictions?

We asked respondents to indicate where they had Implemented Controls and how they had done this and set out a number of options as follows:

- Device (e.g. Smartphone, Tablet, Laptop)
- Router (The box that connects to your telephone line to provide wireless or wired Internet)
- ISP (Internet Service Provider settings such as BT Parental Controls, Sky Broadband Shield etc.)
- Software Product (e.g. Net Nanny, Symantec, McAfee)
- None (Rely upon trust and guidance to the child)

Many respondents used a combination of 'hard' controls (i.e. Device and ISP Parental Controls, Router restrictions, software etc.) with some using 'soft controls' such as time restrictions and supervised access in addition. Where respondents indicated that no 'hard' controls were in place this was where either internet access was not appropriate or not allowed or where access was strictly monitored/supervised. The graph below provides further details

### Internet Access Control



Note: Numbers do not add to 100% due to rounding.

44.1% of carers use a combination of controls for Internet Access. Using a layered approach is the most effective strategy to provide controls if they are required. When discussing this with carers, we often find reluctance to apply parental controls for a number of reasons, which have been drawn out in the responses to [Question 15 below](#).

## 6.2.5 Q11 - Have you had a conversation with children in your care and agreed appropriate internet use?

73.7% of respondents have had conversations to agree appropriate internet use. Time restrictions and limits are the most common output from these. The remaining 26.3% of respondents who have not had these conversations will include the 7.6% of carers who do not provide any Internet access for the young people in their care.

## 6.3 Carer Requirements

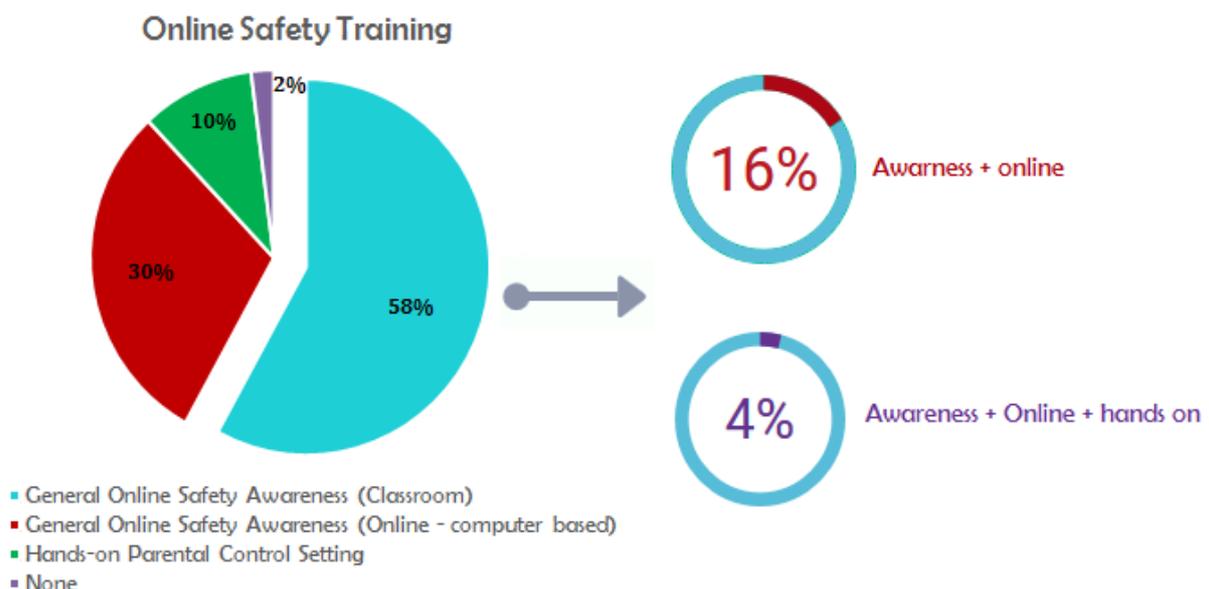
### 6.3.1 Q12 - What training is provided to you by the local authority/fostering agency?

It is our view that training in this area cannot be delivered in isolation and should be linked directly to robust policy to promote and embed sound practice. Guardian Saints do this as part of our delivery regardless of whether the IFA uses our policy service or maintains this internally.

As part of the survey we asked participants what type of training was delivered to them in terms of online safety, giving the following options:

- General Online Safety Awareness (Classroom)
- General Online Safety Awareness (Online – computer based)
- Hands on Parental Control Setting
- None

The responses are shown in the chart below. As can be seen, the majority had received General Online Safety Awareness Training (either classroom or computer based), with a much smaller group having had 'hands on' training. A further detailed analysis of the responses, shows that 16% of Carers received both awareness training 'classroom style' as well as 'online computer based' with just 4% being provided with training at all levels.



Online safety training is generally undertaken once a year and is usually seen as mandatory. however, to paraphrase a number of respondents:

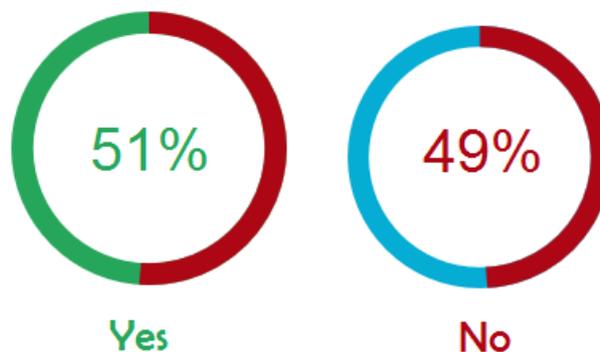
**Respondent Comment:** *'Step by step guidance is required to make individual computers safe and training on internet provider safety is what is needed'*

**Respondent Comment:** *'as there are always new dangers, new Apps and sites such as Facebook change their settings, training needs to be ongoing and updated as often as possible'*

A further suggestion called for a regular newsletter about internet safety.

### 6.3.2 Q13 - Do the Local Authority/Fostering Agency check that you have implemented online safety measures?

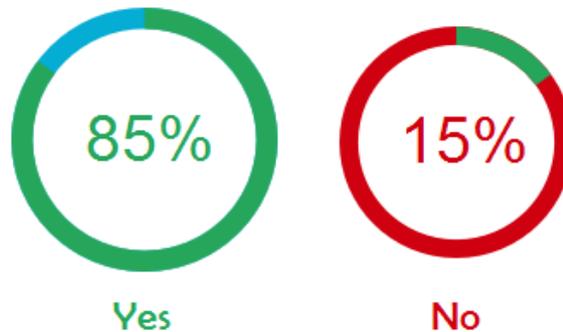
51% of carers are checked by LA or IFA to determine if appropriate online safety measures are in place.



Most of these checks are done annually but some are done as frequently as monthly. Online Safety is a core component of the safeguarding process and as a control, should continually be monitored to assess effectiveness and appropriateness.

**Respondent Comment:** *'discussed at monthly supervisions, as a Carer we are fighting a losing battle. There are so many routes to access online sites if a young person wants to. Their Family give them a phone, they get another SIM card, they use friend's devices....or even steal devices'*

### 6.3.3 Q14 – Do you have a clear understanding of how to report an incident that may occur due to a child’s access to the internet?



As the above shows, 85.5% of respondents indicated they did have an understanding of the process, the remainder did not.

Incident reporting should be enshrined in policy with a clear process that carers can follow. The process for reporting Online Safety incidents should follow the processes available for other incident reports.

Whilst 85.5% is a weighty percentage of compliance, it is a concern that 14.5% of carers would not be able to adequately report an incident, should one occur. As we have seen, looked after children and young people are considered vulnerable so Online Safety incidents do need to be treated seriously, with a robust system in place for incident reporting.

### 6.3.4 Q15 – What challenges have you had whilst providing a safe internet access environment in the home?

Here we gave respondents a number of options and allowed them to select more than one of these. Where multiple selections were made, these have been counted separately.



The responses given here highlight two distinct issues:

1. A large majority of respondents indicate that there is the need for additional guidance and/or training. Videos are available from most of the ISP's which can be found on their websites (as well as on our own <https://www.guardiansaints.com/Parental-Controls>). However, it is clear that Foster Carers are seeking further assistance in this area. Obviously lack of confidence, technical capability and guidance can result in either inappropriate controls or no controls at all being established.

**Respondent Comment:** *'Of great help would be guided sessions at home to help set up the internet and all devices to provide maximum safety for children appropriate to their specific needs'*

2. In terms of 'Convenience', one commentator stated that, although much improved in recent years, current parental controls could be considered somewhat of a 'blunt instrument' and do not support the flexibility that Foster Carers need.

Not establishing safeguards because it makes internet access too inconvenient for others merely highlights that all these factors need to be addressed to ensure that young people benefit from a safer online experience. We are actively trying to lobby the ISPs for changes.

### 6.3.5 Q16 - Do you understand your obligations as a carer under the Data Protection Act 1998?

Just over 90% of respondents indicated that they did understand those obligations

We were encouraged to note that carers have some confidence in this area. With the new General Data Protection Regulation law becoming effective in May 2018, a review of the IFA – Carer relationship is essential. The roles, responsibilities and liabilities of Data Controllers and Data Processors will change dramatically. In addition, as providers of Social Care, IFAs will require a dedicated (internal or external) Data Protection Officer with independent line reporting to the IFA Board. Updated and ongoing training is strongly advised to ensure the protection of personal and special category data and to maintain legally compliant data management practice.

## 7 About Guardian Saints

Guardian Saints was formed in 2014 by two parents and a foster carer who were becoming increasingly concerned about the dangers our now constantly online world was presenting to children.

The founders have over 25 years' experience in working for large commercial organisation in roles related to regulatory compliance, IT Security, Systems, Data Protection and Online Safety. Our day jobs revolve around protecting 'corporate assets' and we wanted to use these skills to do some genuine good.

We have focussed our attention on the most vulnerable group of children and young people in society therefore, specialising in working with individuals and organisations responsible for safeguarding young people in care. We provide a range of services to help deliver robust policy and practice with regard to.

- Online Safety
- Data Protection

Our services are made available to Local Authorities, Independent Fostering Agencies, Social Workers and Foster Carers to help them protect the children and young people for whom they care. These services include:

- Practical Guidance and Advice
- Policy development and delivery
- Education
- Awareness and 'hands on'/guided training
- Industry recognised certification

We also seek to lobby relevant organisations (i.e. Internet Service Providers, Internet Presences (e.g. Google, Facebook)) to provide additional features to help protect this particularly vulnerable group of young people.

Since formation, we have operated as a not for profit organisation, largely using our own time and money to deliver the services we offer. We will shortly be converting to a Community Interest Company, which will operate as a Social Enterprise. As part of this, we will seek to employ care leavers within the organisation