



Feedback from Families to Advocacy Survey

June 2020

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Consultation Process

In order to ensure that our advocacy and campaigns activities accurately reflects the lived experiences and priorities for change of the families we represent, consultation was carried out via an online survey sent out to member families alongside the organisation’s quarterly newsletter. Three follow-up posts via Facebook were also sent to reach the broader permanent care and adoption community who may not yet be members. These posts reached 386 people. The survey was also circulated to placement agencies for distribution to their clients. The survey was open for responses from 18 to 29 June 2020.

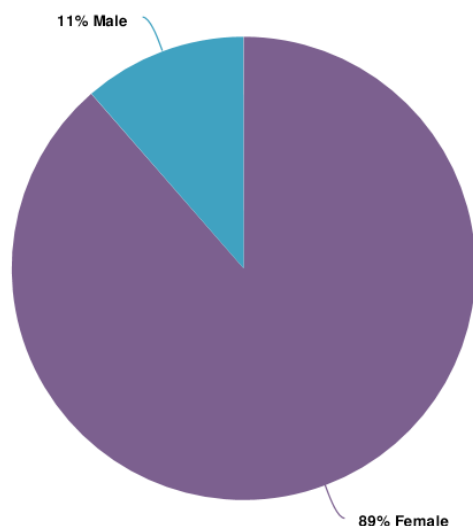
Alongside demographic data, respondents were asked to give feedback on the issues they would like addressed through advocacy, how they felt change could be enabled, and whether they would be willing to participate in advocacy activities.

The findings were also compared against responses to the PCA Families member engagement survey in 2019, which included feedback from 302 respondents. Advocacy related themes that emerged in the membership engagement survey were similar to those that emerged in this most recent survey.

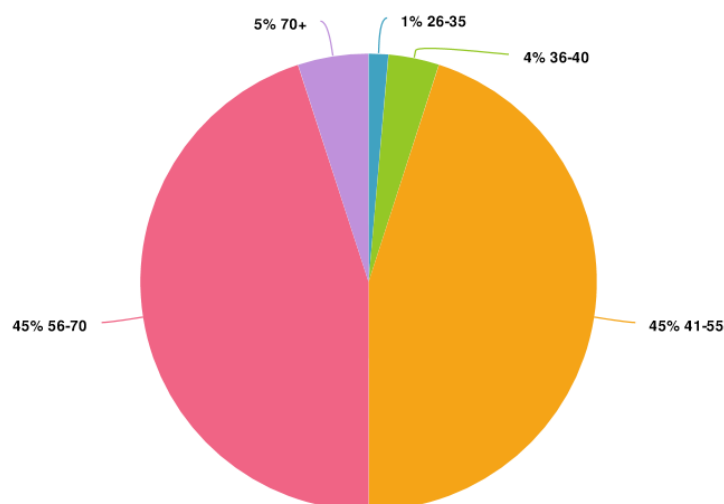
Survey Respondents

The survey was completed by 139 respondents, with one further respondent completing the survey only partially.

Graph 1: Gender of Respondents



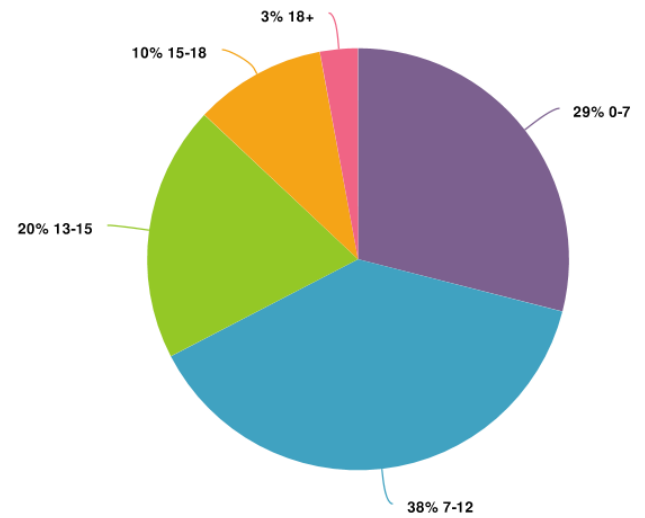
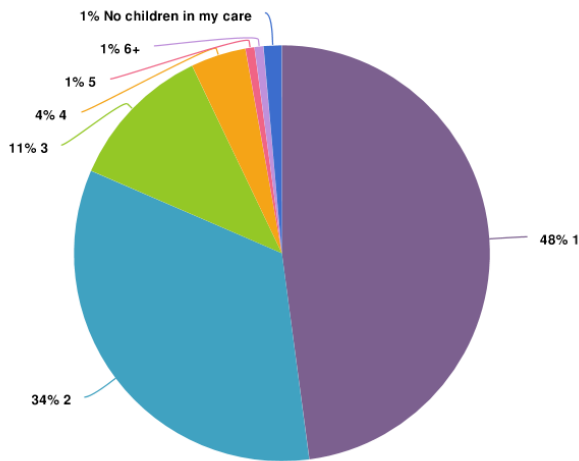
Graph 2: Age of Respondents



A total of 89% of participants identified as female and the remaining 11% male. The majority of respondents were aged between 41 – 70 years (90%).

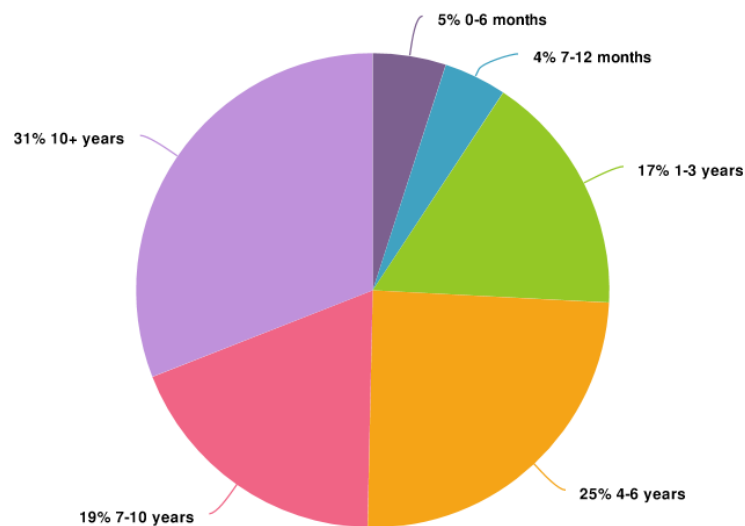
Graph 3: Number of Children in Respondents Care

Graph 4: Age of Children



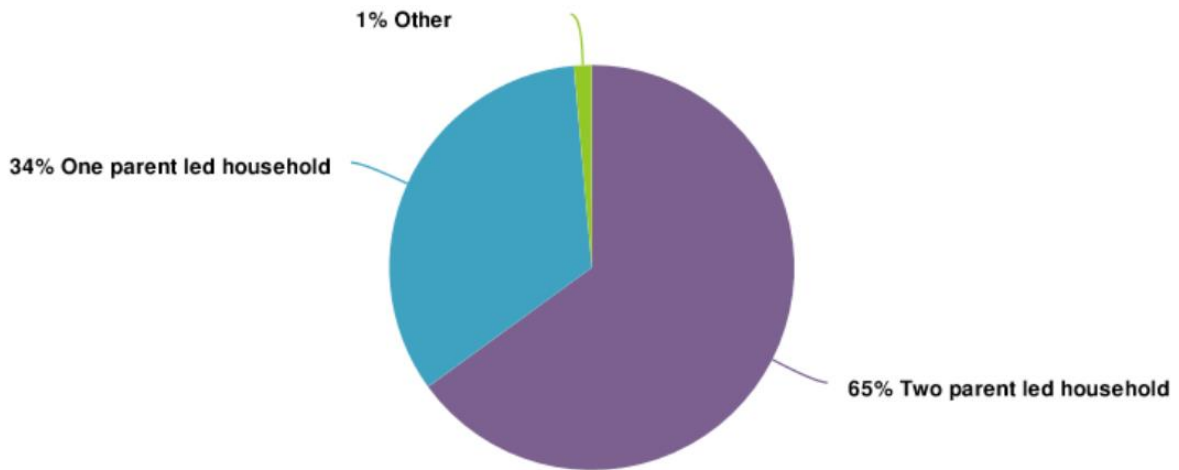
The majority of respondents have one child in their care (48%), a total of 34% of respondents have two children in their care, followed by 11% of respondents with three children in their care. The majority of respondents had children in the early childhood or primary school years under the age of 12 (67%).

Graph 5: Length of time respondent has been a permanent care and/or adoptive family



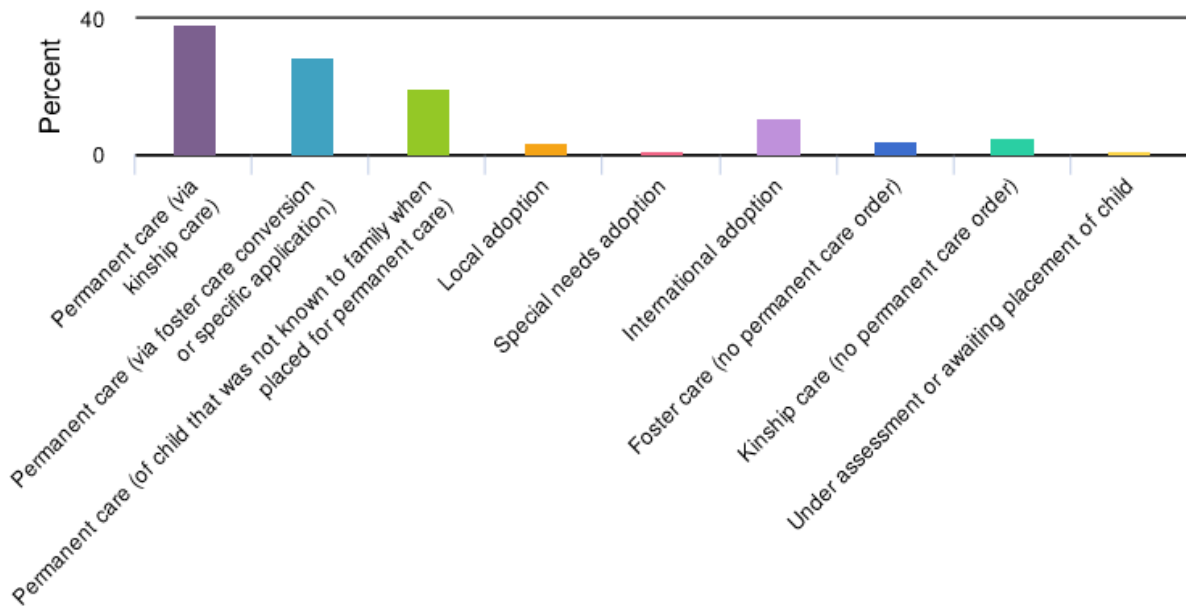
Most respondents are established permanent care, kinship and/or adoptive families. The majority have been a family for 10+ years (31%), followed by 25% for a period of 4-6 years, 19% of respondents have been a family for 7-10 years, closely followed by 17% for 1-3 years. Only 9% of respondents were new permanent care and/or adoptive families of less than one year.

Graph 6: Household type



As shown in Graph 6, most respondents are two parent led households (65%) and a total of 34% are one parent led households.

Graph 7: Carer Type



A total of 87% of respondents were permanent care families. Parents of children in permanent care via kinship care accounted for 38.8% of respondents, followed by parents of permanent care children via foster care conversion or specific application at 28.8%. Permanent care parents of children unknown to them at the point of placement accounted for 19.4% of respondents. Intercountry adoptive parents made up 10.8% of respondents. The remaining responses (<5% each) were from kinship carers (with no permanent care order), foster carers (with no permanent care

order), local adoptive parents, special needs adoptive parents or people under assessment or awaiting placement of a child.

Key Priorities for Action

Overall, the survey indicates that permanent care, kinship and adoptive families face significant challenges in terms of feelings of respect, support, voice, and empowerment. Survey respondents (hereafter ‘families’) identified the following areas as priorities for improvement through advocacy.

Amplifying the Voices of Families

This was identified as an important area of focus by 74.4% of families. A key issue identified by families was not feeling that their voices were being heard by decision-makers within the sector. Families reported feeling that their voices were being excluded from permanent care and adoption related processes and that there was no real understanding of the lived experiences of families. Some families also raised that delays in decision-making for Aboriginal children was of concern and that families feel powerless in addressing these issues due to the cultural sensitivities.

Increased Social Investment

While not quantified in an aggregated way in the data, families strongly identified a need for increased social investment to address a range of current unmet needs. This need is compounded by the withdrawal of support at the point of final order.

Families indicated there is a need for greater financial support to assist children with complex trauma and their families, and better access to services such as:

- early intervention and therapeutic services to support positive attachment, and address abandonment, developmental and trauma related issues
- educational support (including aides and childcare)
- health and mental health
- respite
- peer support for children and families
- emotional, parenting and specialist supports for families to better support children and young people (including specialist youth services)
- life story work programs
- training particularly focussed on supporting families to better understand how to meet their child or young persons’ needs related to:
 - Trauma and behaviour
 - Mental health
 - Adolescent years including drug and alcohol use.

Families noted a need to ensure that supports as noted above are provided as early as possible as a protective measure against future ill mental health as a result of the trauma experienced by children and young people. Concerns about placement breakdown were noted, as was the need for increased support during the adolescent years as a stage characterised by increased risk of mental health issues and placement breakdown. It is of note over 1 in 5 (20.9%) of families surveyed in PCA Families’ 2019 members survey concerningly indicated that they were only just coping, not coping at all.

Families also noted the inadequacy of having support cease at the age of 18, and identified the increase of the age of 'leaving care' as an important advocacy aim.

Improved Lived Experience for Families

This was identified as an important area of focus by 79.3% of families.

A key theme that emerged was that families' lived experiences are being negatively impacted by bureaucratic processes and distinctions. A total of 78.5% of families believed it was important for PCA Families to influence and drive public policy and service system reform as a result.

Families also noted that the system is not always child-centred and systemic delays impact on children's wellbeing and stability. Systems issues were also noted to place unnecessary stress on families, including in the context of trying to secure key documents such as birth certificates, Medicare numbers and passports.

Some families frankly noted that they would have never pursued permanent care if they knew then, what they know now. Families noted there is a need for better quality information early in the process so that families can make an informed decision about whether permanent care is right for them. Families also noted a lack of transparency in regards to the transition from foster care and kinship care to permanent care, including regarding financial support.

Families reported that the length of time taken for orders to be issued and the difficulties of navigating assessment and later court processes were significant stressors, and that streamlined processes and support to navigate court systems and participate in legal proceedings should be provided to permanent care and kinship care families.

Arbitrary distinctions between the support that families are eligible for based on the type of order rather than children's needs were noted as a key issue. Families identified that supports should be based on the needs of children and families regardless of order type, particularly due to the impact of complex trauma on families ongoing support needs.

Increased Awareness of the Issues Families Face

This was raised as an important focus area for 85.2% of families. It was reported there is a lack of awareness both by decision-makers and the general public about the issues faced by permanent care, kinship and adoptive families. Families noted a lack of understanding that issues that the child or children may be experiencing don't resolve 'overnight' once they are in a safe placement, and that the after-effects of trauma persist in the long-term, and continuing support beyond the point of an order being issued is required. Families noted that there should be equality across different carer categories, which does not currently exist.

A further key issue that was identified was the lack of awareness by schools and educators of the unique challenges experienced by the children of permanent care, kinship, and adoptive backgrounds and that children's behaviours are influenced by experiences of trauma. Families expressed a need for schools and educators to be educated to better understand and respond to children with backgrounds of trauma.

Families also felt that the needs of birth parents were prioritised over those of children in contact arrangements. They noted a lack of acknowledgment of the re-traumatising effect this can have on children, and the immediate upheaval that contact visits can cause, which families are left to manage with minimal or no support. They expressed a need for PCA Families to advocate for an

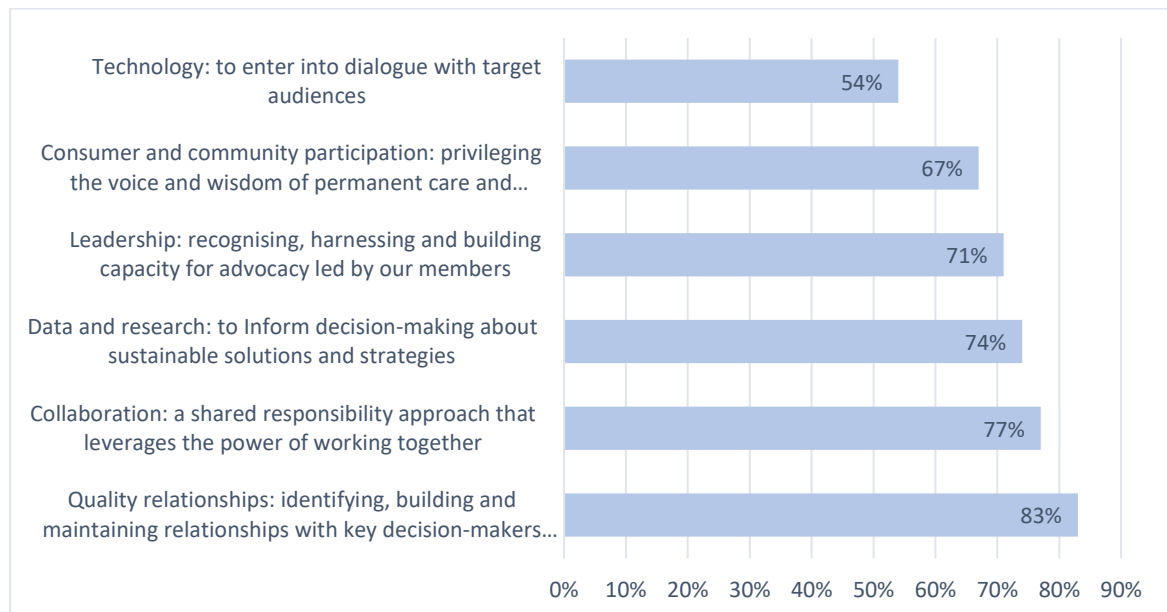
approach which puts the needs of the child at the front and centre of all decision-making regarding contact with birth parents, and beyond.

One family noted there is a need for increased awareness about the needs of children and young people searching and reunifying with their family-of-origin in the context of local and intercountry adoption. Another family noted a similar theme in the context of permanent care in terms of a lack of awareness of the impact of families having no case manager or Child Protection worker when support is needed to re-establish contact with the child’s family-of-origin.

Enablers

Families rated what they considered to be critical enablers for affecting change as per Graph 8. (Please note that respondents could select more than one response)

Graph 8: Critical enablers for change



Member Participation in Advocacy Activities

A total of 66% respondents were happy for PCA Families to contact them to participate in a range of possible advocacy activities. Graph 9 summarises the key activities families would be willing to participate in (please note respondents could select more than one option).

Graph 9: Families' willingness to participate in advocacy and campaigns

